CHURCHES IN THE MIRROR

Developing contemporary ecclesiologies

W.J. Schoeman

EDITOR

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The **UFS Theological Explorations series** is an initiative of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State (UFS), situated in Bloemfontein, South Africa. History, both in South Africa and worldwide, has shown that solid academic research is vital for stimulating new insights and new developments, not only to achieve academic progress, but also to advance human flourishing. Through this academic series, the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS hopes to contribute to worthy causes such as these.

The university wishes the research conducted by its staff to be relevant and innovative within the South African context. In addition, the research should have an international impact and visibility and should encourage national and international collaboration. The type of research published in this series is focused on achieving these goals. Accordingly, *UFS Theological Explorations* publishes only research that is of a high academic standard, has been thoroughly peer-reviewed and makes an important academic contribution to fundamental theological issues on both national and international levels. Furthermore, we maintain that good research should not only be aimed at creating significant new academic knowledge but should also be a deliberate attempt to include various and even opposing perspectives. Finally, we believe that it is especially important that research takes into account the social context within which we generate new knowledge.

This series contains both monographs and collected works. In the case of the monographs, one or more researchers work on a particular topic and cover the subject matter extensively. In this way, the monographs make a significant contribution to original research. In the case of the collected works, a group of researchers from various theological and other disciplines work together on a particular topic. The collected works contribute new insights on the research question from different perspectives and thus advance scholarship collectively.

The Editorial Board trusts that *UFS Theological Explorations* will have a positive and lasting impact on theological agendas all over the world! A special word of appreciation to Kobus Schoeman, the editor of this volume, for his hard work and dedication in seeing this project through.

Francois Tolmie
Series editor: UFS Theological Explorations

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 4

W.J. Schoeman

Ecclesiology is the study of the church (see Schoeman 2015:65-66) and the concept of "church" may refer to a building, event, denomination, worldwide organisation, ecumenical movement/body, worship service or the local faith community, parish or congregation (see Smit 2008:70-71; Van Gelder 2000:15). Ecclesiology has two focal points; the one is the historical and doctrinal perspective on the church, and the other is the church as situated in a local context in the sense of the local practices of actual congregations (Haight & Nieman 2009:578). The ecclesiology or, more correctly, the ecclesiologies investigated in this volume mainly focus on the second aspect, namely, understanding the local congregation or parish as a community of believers.

A congregation may firstly be investigated by posing a theological question (see Schoeman 2015:72-73): What is the local missional church or congregation all about? This question may be addressed from different perspectives, but it remains essential to address it from a theological perspective. In this regard, the aim is to describe a congregation in terms of a theological understanding rather than from a sociological or organisational perspective. The first five chapters in this book focus mainly on a theological understanding of the congregation. This is done from different disciplines within the study field of theology.

Chapter 1 discusses the question of whether the church can change and still be close to the mission and vision that God has for it. This is an essential challenge in the development of a contemporary ecclesiology. A critical marker is the identity of the church and the local parish or congregation, and the chapter contributes towards the construction of such a narrative identity. It is argued that a local church's identity is a narrative identity that lives in the narratives of its members.

An essential aspect of the current discourse on the church is the development of a missional ecclesiology. Chapter 2 focuses on a missional ecclesiology "after Barth". This chapter discusses the reading of Barth's ecclesiology and the state of the missional ecclesiology in the South African context. The ecclesiology of Barth should be understood within the more significant framework of his work, and especially his doctrine of reconciliation. It is also argued that it is essential to critically engage with new theological insights and interpretations of his work to move "after Barth" in the rethinking of a missional ecclesiology for the current context.

The Biblical text is an essential source for the development of normative guidelines for an ecclesiology. In Chapter 3, the "Jesus walk" in the Gospel of Mark is used as a normative paradigm for the church since this Gospel may be regarded as a normative window on the mission of Jesus. The author shows how the nature and task of the disciples of Jesus inform the formulation of the church's mission in terms of the *missio Christi*. The narrative is told in such a way that his followers then and now are motivated to walk in his footsteps.

The context of informal settlements poses unique challenges to the development of a contextual ecclesiology. The aim of Chapter 4 is to describe and evaluate the different ecclesiologies that are found in informal settlements. It is shown that a missional ecclesiology may provide a theological framework for congregations in informal settlements if an emphasis is placed on the divinity of Christ.

Chapter 5 offers a holistic framework for the development of contemporary ecclesiologies. This chapter shows how the influence of different denominations, traditions, and contexts contributes to the development of a variety of local ecclesiologies. A discernment framework is proposed that incorporates the identity, context, and self-understanding of the congregation to describe the development of a local ecclesiology.

Congregations are, secondly, social realities and should be described and analysed through an analytical or empirical lens (see Schoeman 2015:77-80), or through addressing the question corresponding to the first empirical-descriptive task of practical theology, "What is going on?" (Osmer 2008:4-5).

Chapters 5 to 12 focus primarily on such an empirical analysis (quantitatively and qualitatively) of congregations from different denominations.

Chapter 6 begins this analysis with an empirical exploration of the missional ecclesiology of congregations in the Dutch Reformed Church. Congregational growth, congregational size, urbanisation, and the financial resources of congregations are used to explain changes in the missional praxis of congregations of the DRC.

The next chapter analyses the relationship between the maintenance of congregations and their missional focus. An integrated approach is proposed in that the movement should not be from the maintenance of congregations to a missional congregation. It is shown that the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) profile of a congregation is a valuable instrument that may be used to strike a balance between maintenance and mission in the growth of the congregation.

The next three chapters use the NCLS to analyse congregational life in different denominations in South Africa.

Chapter 8 offers a description of the health and vitality of congregations in various denominations in South Africa during 2014 and 2015. This NCLS study was undertaken amongst five South African denominations: the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NRCA), the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the United Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA) and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (SDAC). Chapter 9 describes an investigation into the connection between faith convictions and community involvement in eight congregations of the UPCSA in the Johannesburg/Tshwane conurbation. The NCLS is used to look at the growth in faith of those who attend worship and their involvement in transformative community involvement in eight local UPCSA congregations. Chapter 10 focuses on the ecclesiology and congregational life of congregations of the SDAC in the Free State. This chapter aims to give a theoretical description of the characteristics of the ecclesiology of the SDAC and empirically evaluate the congregational life of SDAC congregations in the Free State.

Chapter 11 aims to explore, from an African perspective, contemporary ecclesiological markers for the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) Free State (FS). Theoretical and empirical perspectives are used to contribute towards an understanding of contemporary ecclesiologies from an African contextual perspective. It is shown that the DRCA FS is to a great extent dependent on the white DRC for supporting its mission and diaconal ministry and that this dependency hampers the discernment of an authentic missional ministry in the DRCA FS and a movement towards becoming a more authentic African and missional church.

An entire mission station (Ebenhaeser) was moved from their land and resettled. Using a qualitative methodology, Chapter 12 describes the impact of the history on the congregation and community. It is argued that the congregation may use the history of the community to facilitate a process to become a flourishing community. The research thus illustrates the impact of history on the possible flourishing of Ebenhaeser as a community and congregation. A congregation where the leadership hermeneutically facilitates engagement with the history of their community can use its history to build a new identity that enhances social capital and hope.

The last chapter of the volume focuses on the description of innovative practices that may influence or contribute towards the development of a contemporary ecclesiology. Chapter 13 offers a case study from a UPCSA congregation that is used to argue that the developing of innovative missional congregations should be anchored in Trinitarian theology.

This volume aims to reflect critically on the study of the ecclesiology of the church and congregations from a theological and analytical perspective with an emphasis on the South African context. It attempts to map markers for the development of contemporary ecclesiologies, where

- "ecclesiology" refers to the study of the church, and, in particular, (though not exclusively) to the local congregation as a community of believers, and

- "contemporary" may be described as "belonging to or occurring in the present". The emphasis is, therefore, on the role of the church and congregations today in their local context.

The different chapters are meant as mirrors to look in and reflect on the theological and contextual relevance of denominations and congregations.

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PART 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The local church and the quality narrative identity of ecclesiology in a Ricoeurian perspective

D. Praas, C.A.M. Hermans and M. Scherer-Rath

1. Introduction

A perennial question in ecclesiology is the question of whether the actual realisation of the church in a specific time and place meets the essence of what the church should be (Rahner 1972). How can we align the actual manifestation of the church with what we understand as the purpose of the church? How can we deal with change and transformation as a local community? Are we still a community that is close to the mission and vision of what God wants us to be as sign and instrument of God's salvation? Are we changing, or do we have to change to meet the challenges of our time and context? Or do we not change, because of the anxiety that we might lose our identity?

One of the challenges of contemporary ecclesiology is how to provide answers to the challenges local church communities face in view of processes of change and transformation. How can local communities deal with experiences of change and transformation? How can they deal with the plurality of ideas in the community of what it means to be a church? We think that the concept of narrative identity of Paul Ricoeur can help us in constructing the concept of a local ecclesiology.

We develop this against the background of the Catholic Church in Germany, which is undergoing a rapid structural change. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of parishes decreased by 1982 (thus 15.5% less). Reasons for the

merging of parishes include decreasing numbers of priests and members, and a decline in financial means and cultural changes in society, such as an increase in individualisation and differentiation in society. This leads to the presumption that larger pastoral clusters are necessary to ensure appropriate pastoral care. Tomberlin and Bird (2012:16) distinguish between "survival-driven mergers" – thus mergers driven by the motive of ensuring the organisation's survival – and "mission-driven mergers", where the mergers are supposed to generate growth in the congregation. The structural changes in the Catholic Church in Germany fall within the category of "survival-driven" changes. According to Richarz (2010:197), "mergers should prevent organic death". According to Tomberlin and Bird (2012:16-19), survival-driven mergers can hardly be successful, in contradistinction to mergers which are focussed on the purpose of generating membership growth.

Research shows that the clarification of the (new) identity of the merged organisation is a factor in successful post-merging integration, and therefore for the success of a merger as a whole. Many researchers have given attention to the dynamics taking effect through this clarification of identity in post-merger integration (Tienari & Vaara 2016). A merger – from a sociological perspective, one group emerging out of two groups – never takes place between equal partners, because the power relation is usually unequal. Therefore, one can distinguish between a dominating group and a dominated group (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Monden & Lima 2002). Tomberlin and Bird (2012:129-138) confirm this also for mergers of congregations. They distinguish between a "lead church" and a "joining church". Strengthening identity, for example, takes place when the members of the joining church experience continuity. When this is not the case, the danger arises of producing (perceived) winners and losers.

As a consequence of the structural change within local churches in Germany bishops and theologians distinguish between "parish" and "congregation". While a parish is defined by the Catholic Canon law as

> a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop (CIC canon 515, § 1).

There is no binding definition of a congregation. So, a merged parish can encompass several congregations. Accordingly, the question of identity has two dimensions: On the one hand, there is the question of the identity of congregations which have up to now constituted separate, independent parishes. On the other hand, there is the question of clarifying the identity of the merged parish. In this regard, the following is true: In the case of the congregation, not everything can stay the same, but neither can the new parish simply take over the "old" congregational logic. Such endeavours will inevitably fail.

To conclude: It becomes clear that one cannot disregard the question of identity in the context of the church. Insufficient (or non-existent) active involvement with the issue of identity gives rise to problems for merged organisations, such as the involvement of different groups, increased implementation of resources to manage conflict, and complications with agreement on common goals. What are the criteria for a process strengthening the identity of a church community? How can we strengthen the quality of our identity as a community? What are the markers of a strong identity?

In this light, it is astonishing that the question of identity, although mentioned occasionally, is hardly a topic of (local) ecclesiology. In this contribution, we attempt to lay the theoretical foundations of identity development in a local church. What do we mean by identity given the problem of change over time? What are the markers for quality of identity? And how can we develop the identity of a church community? The outline of this chapter is as follows: We will first present the concept of identity by Paul Ricoeur. Based on this concept, we will then offer a concept of organisational identity for local churches. Next, we will discuss narrative identity according to Ricoeur (a quality that can be determined by four features). Finally, we will lay a theoretical foundation for diagnostics and identity development of a local church.

2.   Paul Ricoeur's concept of identity

How should one understand the identity of a local church? There are numerous, as well as confusing, proposals in the research on organisational identity (He & Brown 2013). In the field of narrative approaches alone, one can distinguish

between philosophical, sociological and psychological approaches. Given this variety, there are good reasons to resort to the concept of personal narrative identity presented by Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), for the following reasons:

- Ricoeur's concept of identity can enrich and deepen theological reflection on ecclesial identity (see 3.1);

- Narrative concepts become increasingly important in the research on organisations (see 3.2);

- Ricoeur's concept of identity has ethical implications and therefore already contains answers to the question of the quality of identity (see 4).

In his discussion of identity, Ricoeur draws on the linguistic observation that there are two main usages of the concept "identity": "on one side, identity as sameness (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*); on the other, identity as selfhood (Latin *ipse*, German: *Selbstheit*, French *ipséité*)" (Ricoeur 1992:116). Sameness implies consistency, "perseverance over time, as Kant said" (Ricoeur 2005:209). One form of sameness is perhaps the qualitative identity of uninterrupted continuity from the beginning to the end of development, for example, in the growth of a tree. Sameness, the *idem*-identity, stands for the answer to the question of "what?" (Ricoeur 1992:118); namely, to the question of "What am I?" In this case, the distinctive features and personal characteristics of a person are relevant. Selfhood, on the other hand, refers "to being identical to oneself" (Ricoeur 2005:209). The paradigm for selfhood is the notion of promise, because "to keep a promise is to sustain oneself within the identity of one who today speaks and tomorrow will do" (Ricoeur 1999a:50). Selfhood essentially distinguishes itself through ethical responsibility; it shows what the person stands for (Ricoeur 2008:249). In understanding selfhood, the question "Who am I?" (Ricoeur 1992:118) is answered. Selfhood realises itself in the decision about options for action since the person can say, "I stand for this!" In this way, the notion of selfhood secures the person's capacity to act, because the person can act differently than he/she has always acted before, without losing his/her self or identity. Creativity, freedom, and change can therefore be associated with the notion of selfhood.

Ricoeur sees many possibilities of interconnectedness between sameness (*idem* identity) and selfhood (*ipse* identity)[1] and therefore proposes a dialectic relationship between these two forms of identity (Ricoeur 2005:209). He distinguishes two opposite poles in this dialectic of personal identity. On the one hand, it is conceivable that sameness and selfhood are more or less congruent. Ricoeur describes this as "character". The pole of character is discernible by the capacity to "exist in the same 'character', to outlast, to sustain" (Ricoeur 1999:206). It, therefore, distinguishes itself through perseverance (Ricoeur 1992:124). On the other hand, Ricoeur considers the possibility that the *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity may conceivably drive far apart, and this he calls "self-constancy" (Ricoeur 1992:123). Such self-constancy can be seen, for example, in staying faithful to one's given word (Ricoeur 1992:123-124). The pole of self-constancy therefore stands for change. The narrative identity always lies between the poles "character" and "self-constancy" and performs "a mediating function" (Ricoeur 1992:148).

Ricoeur refers to a second dialectic using the pair of concepts "discordance" and "concordance" within narratives. The concordant elements of a narrative represent order, coherence and regulated processes. The discordant elements threaten this order and exhibit the contingency of events; everything could also be different. The mediation of concordance and discordance takes place in the linguistic form of "discordant concordance" (Ricoeur 2005:214). Ricoeur links this dialectic of discordant concordance to personal identity in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. The personal identity is narrative because the narration in the narrative form of discordant concordance makes it possible to tell a consistent and meaningful story, despite the discordant elements in the life of a person (Ricoeur 1992:148).

Apart from this twofold dialectic, narrative attestation is another central element of Ricoeur's narrative concept of identity. For him, this notion is the password or key to "Oneself as Another" (Ricoeur 1992:289 n. 82). In his view, attestation is the crucial criterion for selfhood and "lends itself to a truth test of

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1   Here, the notions of "*ipse* identity", "selfhood" and "who identity" are used as synonyms. The same applies to the concepts of "*idem* identity", "sameness" and "what identity".

another order than the test of verification or falsification" (Ricoeur 1992:129). "Attestation is fundamentally attestation of self" (Ricoeur 1992:22). Selfhood becomes true by means of attestation (Ricoeur 1992:302). Attestation is ultimately dialogic, since attestation, and therefore ultimately also the self, needs acknowledgement and is threatened by suspicion and doubt. These considerations on attestation lead to a deeper understanding of promises and selfhood. Specifically, in promises as "a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative" (Ricoeur 1992:22) the self confirms itself as a self. The *ipse* identity as an answer to the question of the "who" therefore also consists of the attestation that "I stand for this, today and in the future. You can rely on this!"

What is the significance, however, of this understanding of identity for the identity of a local church or – more generally – of organisations? Ricoeur (1991:73, 1999a:54, 2008:247-248; see also Leichter 2012) also claims validity for his approach to narrative identity for historical communities, groups, cultures, institutions and nations. "The identity of a group, culture, people or nation is not that of an immutable substance, nor that of a fixed structure, but that, rather, of a recounted story" (Ricoeur 1995a:7). Narrative identity of institutions has to do with "the capacity to maintain themselves employing a creative fidelity to the foundational events that established them in time" (Ricoeur 1999a:54). Therefore, one can maintain: Ricoeur has at the very least established a narrative understanding of the identity of institutions, and this can be developed from his understanding of personal identity. What does this now mean for the identity of a congregation? Because the church as a whole, and a local church, do not count as an institution, a reflection-like adoption of this narrative understanding of identity for a local church is out of the question. In a theological reassurance of identity, one should rather ask whether one can show that there are good reasons for the organisation of a local church (also from a theological perspective) to view its identity from a narrative perspective.

3. The narrative identity of a congregation

3.1 Theological concepts of ecclesial identity

A narrative understanding of ecclesial identity can firstly draw on the Judean-Christian tradition (Del Agua 2000). The people of Israel constructed its identity narratively in remembrance of its history with Yahweh. The oldest credo of Israel in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 has a narrative form (Wenzel 2008:93). The Old Testament writings thereby are specifically faced with the challenge of synthesising heterogeneous experiences of concordance and discordance as described by Ricoeur. The concordance in the history of Israel consists of the covenant between Israel and God and experiences of defeats such as those of the exile as the most extreme experience forming the experiences of this discordance, challenging the concordance. Concerning biblical historiography, God's fidelity to God's people as well as the people's (or their representatives') perpetual unfaithfulness towards God, which created catastrophes, became the people's feature of identity. The meaning of the narrative and thus the Jewish tradition of mediation of discordance and concordance in the narrative continued in the Gospels. They narratively constructed Jesus' identity by telling stories which gave information about who Jesus was (Van den Hengel 1994:477-478).

To enquire about the identity of the church means more specifically to enquire about the empirical phenomenon "Catholic Church". This church, as explained by the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium 8*, is not identical to the church of Jesus Christ. Ackermann (2001:315-324) adopts such a distinction. Concerning discourse on the identity of the church, he differentiates between an externally imposed identification of the empirical phenomenon "church" and a self-identification of its identity by the church itself. One can distinguish between external identification and self-identification, but one cannot disconnect them from each other. External identification has to do with the identification of the empirical phenomenon "church" with the church of Jesus Christ. This identification is possible in so far as the church ties itself to its origin in Jesus Christ and its message of the kingdom of God (Ackermann 2001:316). Identity in the sense of self-identification denotes the "synchronic

and diachronic unity of the 'self-awareness' of the church" (own translation, Ackermann 2001:317). The way to this unity is a process whereby the church becomes "more and more identical to itself; that means it becomes that which it should be" (own translation, Ackermann 2001:320). In differentiating between the church of Jesus Christ and the empirically tangible church, Ackermann opens up a dynamic and procedural understanding of the identity of the church.

Based on the texts by the Council as well, Hünermann (1995:166-170) developed his approach of a narrative ecclesial understanding of identity. With a view to the Second Vatican Council, he represents the thesis that the Council documents such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum* have traits of a narrative of legitimacy. Because the church tells of its history, it unveils its identity: "How can someone introduce one's identity to others? Only by telling stories from one's background. ... That is not only true for individuals but also corporations and institutions" (own translation, Ackermann 2001:168). This narrative of legitimacy, and therefore the identity of the church, becomes a crisis if this narrative's link to its origin in Jesus Christ, or this origin itself, is questioned. Hünermann, therefore, calls for a second narrative which tells the actual story of the church, proving the narrative of legitimacy. Similar to Ackermann, one also finds the idea of congruence in Hünermann. Whereas Ackermann uses the notion of the congruence of self-identification and external identification, Hünermann is concerned with the congruence of the narrative of legitimacy and the story of the church's empirical reality.

Hoffmann (2007:252-255, 2008) also opts for an explicit narrative approach. The pneumatological aspect, also included in Ackermann's work, is extended by Hoffmann in the notion of a pneumatological-narrative identity of the church. Hoffmann picks up Ricoeur's fundamental distinction between sameness and selfhood. She is interested in the question of identity in light of the two poles of continuity and change. The biblical stories, including their history of reception, represent the sameness of the church, whereas the selfhood indicates the location of the Spirit (Hoffman 2008:81). Through the working of the Spirit in the origination of the Scriptures and their reception, the sameness should never be understood as without spirit; that is, without the involvement

of the selfhood. The Spirit is, therefore "at least the guarantor of continuity as well as the creator of that which is new in the church" (own translation, Hoffman 2008:82). A pneumatological-narrative understanding of identity therefore enables the deactivation of polarisations between continuity and change and explains the connection between both these movements.

The notion of faithfulness to oneself and the Word can also be found in the contribution of Fuchs (2010). Specifically, this faithfulness leads to change and new beginnings, since "without change, there is no content-related continuity", according to the programmatic title of his essay. Proceeding from the danger of the church's loss of identity, Fuchs operates with the pair of concepts "continuity" and "discontinuity". The continuity in the proclamation of the gospel could consist of putting oneself over against the traditional majority and taking up smaller or suppressed lines of tradition (Fuchs 2010:301-303). In conclusion, Fuchs refers to the life, suffering and resurrection of Christ as incidences of radical discontinuity, yet through which specifically the divine mercy and love of God ensure continuity (Fuchs 2010:306). Here the circle of the above-mentioned narrative construction of the identity of the biblical Scriptures comes to a close.

Looking at the overall picture, certain outlines of an ecclesial understanding of identity become apparent: The identity of the church of Jesus Christ cannot be equated with the Catholic Church in its historical reality. This contribution can, however, only deal with the identity of this historical reality, because only this is empirically accessible. This identity becomes stronger the more the connection to its source and origin becomes discernible through its practice. It concerns the faithfulness of the church to itself.

If reflection on the identity of the church as a whole is not very pronounced, it is, even more, the case with the identity of the local church. In this regard, one can refer to an earlier essay by Fuchs (2001). Under the title, "Identity and Congregation", Fuchs argues for an orientation towards content and for congregations to turn away from focusing on the management of their selves. Even though Fuchs refrains from a definite definition of identity, his line of argumentation is close to the understanding of identity in the sense of a

content-related pre-given notion which emerges from a concrete authority to make decisions (Fuchs 2001:45). In this regard, Fuchs distinguishes between an identity of origin, predetermined by the congregation, and an identity of self-actualisation realising this identity of origin (Fuchs 2001:45-46). He clarifies the identity of origin and the identity of self-actualisation using the fundamental ecclesial principles of *diaconia*, martyrdom and *koinonia*. He confirms the deliberations made based on Ackermann, Hünermann and Hoffmann: In faithfulness to its identity of origin, the identity of a local church has to become apparent in its identity of self-actualisation. Here one can also see the notion of congruence between the two forms of identity. This demonstrates the crucial intersection with Ricoeur's theoretical approach to identity.

From the explanations so far, it should already have become clear: Ecclesial identity sounds similar to what Ricoeur ascribes to the selfhood of a person: faithfulness to oneself, to the word, once given, and, as an agent, to keeping the individual identity upright in this faithfulness. To concur with Fuchs: The narrative identity of a local church stands in a relation of tension between the identity of origin and the identity of self-actualisation. This tension can ultimately be ascribed to the difference between the church of Jesus Christ and the empirically tangible church. Ackermann mentions in this regard a process of unifying that comes to an end, only from an eschatological perspective, a unifying of that which the church is and what it should have been. Selfhood can then be understood as the faithfulness of a (local) church to its origin, whereas sameness entails the identity of self-actualisation.

3.2 The identity of a congregation in terms of the dialectic of perseverance and change

In Section 2, narrative identity was described as a dialectic of sameness and selfhood which usually lies between the poles of character and self-constancy. In the same way that a person would respond to the question of sameness "What am I?", and to the question of selfhood "Who am I?", it can now also be done by the local church. Thus, sameness provides information about what the local church is, whereas selfhood gives information about who the

local church is. The response to the what-question refers, among others, to aspects such as distinctive features, and is more strongly related to a continuity between past and present: organisational structures, buildings, congregational patronage, parish traditions and singularities, etc. Consistency over time more likely focuses on the consistency from past to present. The selfhood – therefore the answer to the who-question – shows what the local church stands for. It conveys the values to which they are committed and which should also be valid in the future. The consistency of selfhood over time entails keeping one's promises and is therefore focused on the future: "That is what we stand for! You can count on that (also in the future!)." The model of consistency over time enables changed action, not only through simultaneous safeguarding of the identity of the self but literally for the sake of safeguarding the identity of the self. The dialectic of sameness and selfhood of the local church is therefore a dialectic of practice of continuity (perseverance) and a practice of changing inherently.

In a local church, sameness is, therefore, more closely connected with the aspect of continuity, and selfhood more closely connected with the aspect of change, irrespective of the fact that selfhood expresses itself in faithfulness and in doing so also shows a form of permanency over time. This changed practice is, however, not arbitrary, because, for Ricoeur, selfhood is in the first instance a form of perseverance – perseverance by keeping the promise that was once given. Especially this faithfulness to the promise that was once given (selfhood) and the image of a future practice which emerges from this can lead to conflict with the accrued practice (sameness) which is in continuity with the past.

Adopting this dialectic way of viewing the personal identity of a local church enables new perspectives on the discourse regarding the loss of identity in such a church. This perspective certainly has the quality of a diagnostic instrument. Ricoeur points out that the situation of the divergence of selfhood and sameness is perceived as a loss of identity. For the narrative identity of a local church, this means that the more selfhood and sameness become separated, the more threatening this becomes for its identity. The more values, goals, messages (selfhood) and traditions, structures, practices (sameness) collapse, the more dangerous it becomes. This perspective leads to a twofold

enquiry into a discourse about a local church's loss of identity. Firstly, can the stated concern about the loss of identity ultimately, predominantly or even exclusively, be related to the sameness of the local church given the loss of buildings, traditions and (liturgical) programmes? Ultimately, these changes induce a change in sameness. Narrowing down the notion of identity to the aspect of the what-identity necessarily leads to the experience loss of identity. Secondly, have sameness and selfhood in the local church moved too far away from each other? Where pure self-constancy is the issue, identity cannot rely on anything else than on the promise of "I stand for this!" Mergers emanating from a "survival-driven" motive and not from a "mission-driven" motive tend to be at least focused on sameness (what are we as the local church?). The aspect of selfhood (who are we as the local church?) then increasingly disappears from the view. Overall, a narrative notion of the local church provides a basis for supporting a change in perspective regarding the question of identity, moving the selfhood of a local church more to the centre of attention.

3.3   How can one reconstruct narrative identity?

How can one then talk about identity beyond theoretical notions? In what form can one reconstruct the narrative identity of an organisation? Looking at research into "organisational identity" could be worthwhile here (Foreman & Whetten 2016). Since the 1980s, the notion of organisational identity has increasingly drawn the attention of researchers. Among the countless approaches, Brown distinguishes between functionalist, interpretative, psychodynamic and postmodern perspectives (Brown 2006; He & Brown 2013). In a postmodern approach, a narrative understanding of the identities of organisations is widespread (Boje 1995; He & Brown 2013; Ravasi & Canato 2013). Some scholars expressly refer to Ricoeur (Brown 2006; Chreim 2005; Humphreys & Brown 2002; Sonsino 2005). The identity of an organisation is regarded as a text constituted by narrative discourse (He & Brown 2013:10). Brown defines organisational identity as

> a discursive (rather than, for example, psychological) construct, and [it] "resides" in the collective identity stories that, for example, people tell to each other in their conversations, write into corporate histories, and encode on websites (Brown 2006:734).

Consequently, he holds the view: "I regard the identities of organizations as being constituted by the totality of collective identity-relevant narratives authored by participants" (Brown 2006:735). The narratives of organisational identities share the common factor that they proceed from the experiences of the members of the organisations. One can construct the narrative identity of an organisation through these experiences. For Ricoeur also, each experience already contains a narrative moment: "In this sense, one must speak not of the 'pre-narrative quality of experience' but of its character of being always narrative" (Ricoeur 1995b:395-396). Emphasis on the experience implies that identity – seen as the dialectic of selfhood and sameness – can never be limited to a mere collection of facts about the organisation. That would mean that one reduces identity to the aspect of sameness and dismisses the aspect of selfhood. The aspect of selfhood is revealed in the narratives of the members in the organisation: "An organisation distinguishes itself ... also by what people in the organisation do and what they experience with the organisation" (own translation, Dupont 2010:198). Regarding Brown and the research on the narrative identity of organisations, the narratives of the members of the organisation thus present access to the narrative identity of the organisation. The narrative identity virtually "lives" in their narratives. One can therefore reconstruct it from that which the members of the organisation tell about the organisation, whereby the totality of the stories is more than the sum of the individual stories. In the process, it is clear that the story of an organisation can never be compiled fully (Chreim 2005:589). It is simply impossible to collect the stories of all the members of an organisation and compile one story that would represent the story of the organisation (Dupont 2010:202).

The main impulse given by the research into organisations regarding the question of the constructability of the narrative identity of the local church is the acknowledgement that the narrative identity "lives" in the stories of the members of the organisation and can be reconstructed through these stories. This acknowledgement shows the dynamic nature of the narrative identity of a local church. Its openness, its incompleteness, manifests itself in many respects:

1. It is not fixed but constructed through narrative. This construction is time and again threatened by experienced discordance, or at least has to be newly constructed based on changing experiences (Ricoeur 2008:249).

2. It cannot be told from an end perspective (Ricoeur 1992:160). In the same way that a person cannot narratively construct his/her identity from the perspective of his/her death, it will be impossible for the local church to do so. The identity of the church is thus in a sense subject to an eschatological restriction.

3. It is not possible to collect all the stories of all members of an organisation such as the local church (Dupont 2010:202).

4. The reconstruction of this narrative identity through the totality of stories of the members can in its turn also not be completely free from interpretations of those who undertake the reconstruction (Dupont 2010:202).

This openness implies that the narrative identity of a local church is not static, but dynamic. It is subject to changes and developments. Such a dynamic understanding of identity contains a synchronic and a diachronic aspect. The synchronic dynamics present itself through the involvement of a greater number of stories of its different members. One can distinguish stories of committee members from those of people who principally participate in the worship services. People with only occasional contact would in their turn contribute other perspectives. The diachronic dynamics emerge when members of the local church have new and changed experiences in the local church and consequently tell new and changed stories, and the narrative identity is thus subject to change over time.

With this acknowledgement of the dynamics of narrative identity, the precondition has been created for generally enquiring about improving such an identity. At the same time, the way has been paved for enquiring about the quality of such an identity.

4.   The quality of identity

The conception that one cannot only describe identity but can also (qualitatively) measure it is a new approach in the research into organisational

identity (Roberts & Dutton 2009). The concept of "positive identities" serves as a generic notion for research approaches in which either the content of identity, identity-related processes or the impact of identity are positive (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar 2009:7-11). The approach followed in this contribution regarding the quality of narrative identity can be placed within the area of the positive content of narrative identity. Determining what quality ultimately needs positioning in terms of content (Fischer 2009:4). In the case of the quality of narrative identity, the embeddedness within the content is clear from the decision not to derive the features of quality from one of the existing models of quality, but to possibly extract them from the concept of narrative identity itself. It is also indicative that this study should link its presentation of the understanding of quality to the quality of narrative identity and not to the quality of organisational practice. This distinction is important because the question of the quality of the narrative identity of an organisation[2] cannot be answered by existing concepts of quality. In this respect, the features of the quality of identity are not automatically available.

In the following subsections, four features of the narrative identity of the local church will be developed. A first deduction emerges from Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. After a general description of the feature of quality, follows, in the next step, a theological assertion of the validity of this quality of narrative identity for the local church. The reification of this quality in the local church is offered in the conclusion.

4.1   Feature I: "Oriented towards an accomplished life"

Ricoeur (1992:169) distinguishes four dimensions of the self: the linguistic, the practical, the narrative and the ethical-moral dimensions. The theory of narrative identity is therefore linked to linguistic theory and action theory in conjunction with moral theory (Ricoeur 1992:170, 1995b:396-397) and

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2   The concepts of "organisational identity" and "organisational story" should be understood against the background of a narrative understanding of identity. An organisational story is never meant to be the history of the organisation, the historical tale of the organisation, but rather the story, the tale by means of which the organisation presents its identity and its relation to the world.

"is not denuded of every normative, evaluative, or prescriptive dimension" (Ricoeur 2008:249). For Ricoeur, the concept of narrative identity has profound ethical implications, not least because "[t]here is no ethically neutral narrative" (Ricoeur 1992:115). Ricoeur understands ethos in this sense as "aim" (Ricoeur 1992:170) and defines it as: "Desire for an accomplished life – with and for others – in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1999a:45). Orientation towards an accomplished life consequently refers to three aspects: to an accomplished life for the self, an accomplished life for others and an accomplished life in just institutions. Self-esteem, solicitude and justice are the ethical elements; they are the relevant "points of application" (Ricoeur 1992:197) of this orientation (Ricoeur 1992:171-202, 1999a:45-48), whereby the following is valid: "The 'good life' ... is the very object of the ethical aim" (Ricoeur 1992:172). Self-esteem is thus linked to the orientation towards an accomplished life for the self (Ricoeur 1992:192). In terms of self-esteem, the person assesses himself/herself as a subject capable of deliberate action (Ricoeur 1999a:46). Self-esteem is not egoism or "I-esteem" but is always already included in the dialogical relationship to the "you" of the second person and the "he" or "she" of the third person (Ricoeur 1992:180-181, 1999a:46).[3] Ricoeur connects the ethical element of solicitude to the sub-aspect of "with and for the other", whereby one should understand "the others" to be the people with which one can have a personal relationship. Ricoeur (1999a:46) develops the notion of "solicitude" from a fundamental premise of recognition of the other "as my likeness". For Ricoeur, friendship and solicitude are concurrent with the title of his last great work, *The Course of Recognition*. Ricoeur locates friendship in the balance and solicitude in the imbalance of the "exchange between giving and receiving" (Ricoeur 1992:188). The relationship between giving and receiving therefore forms the spectrum of solicitude in terms of the relationship between the self and the other. In contradistinction to these relationships between people, characterised by friendship and solicitude, the sub-definition "in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992:194-202) refers to the relationships with people with whom the connection exists only via institutions. Under the concept

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3   For Ricoeur (1992:194, n. 32) this even leans towards the dialectic of self-love and neighbourly love.

"institutions", Ricoeur understands "the structure of living together as this belongs to a historical community – people, nation, region and so forth" (Ricoeur 1992:194). The ideal for these relationships to "everyone" is justice, more specific compensatory justice and distributive justice (Ricoeur 1990:34-35, 1999a:46-47). Ricoeur does not, however, merely understand distributive justice in a purely economic way, but also links it to "rights and duties, obligations, advantages, responsibilities and honours" (Ricoeur 1999a:47).

From Ricoeur's understanding of institutions, it emerges that he believes that institutions should offer the accomplished life to everybody. One can therefore indicate an ethical perspective and extrapolate the first feature of quality for the identity of institutions based on the ethical implications of a narrative personal identity, as well as from the following understanding of institutions: The narrative identity (of an institution) has quality to the extent in which it is oriented towards an accomplished life; that means, to the extent in which it reflects an institution enabling an accomplished life with and for others in just institutions. The concept of institutions cannot, however, simply be transferred to the local church. Hence, the feature of being oriented towards an accomplished life, related to people and institutions, can also not simply be transferred to organisations. Rather, one has to ask whether the organisation of the local church can demonstrate that this feature forms part of its self-understanding. It, therefore, has to do with a theological perspective of the concept of "accomplished life".

Miggelbrink (2009) has proposed one. From a biblical perspective, he views the concept of accomplishment in terms of the notion of *pleroma*. Accomplishment is an accomplishment gifted by God to human beings. Paul's Letter to the Colossians speaks about the fact that God in God's fullness (*pleroma*) dwelled in the human being Jesus (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Based on the short formulation of the theological Trinity that God is love, the economic activity of divine *pleroma* appears as self-revelation of divine love. Accomplishment can therefore be understood as "a reality which ... emerges from an interaction between objectively available goods and resources on the one hand and human feeling and options for action on the other hand" (own translation, Miggelbrink 2009:162). For Miggelbrink, the experience of accomplishment implies

experiencing participation in an unfamiliar accomplishment, in divine fullness. Acknowledging the divine gift of accomplishment, which was given in advance, leads to a life of accomplishment as "responsive gift" (Miggelbrink 2009:164). A life in accomplishment is a life in awareness and in the mode of responding to this gift of divine fullness, which was given in advance. A life in fullness and accomplishment is realised through "the occurrence of the relationships of giving and receiving" (Miggelbrink 2009:247), as Miggelbrink states regarding a small publication of Ricoeur titled "Love and Justice" (Ricoeur 1990).

In light of these considerations, one is justified in proposing that orientation towards an accomplished life is a feature of the quality of the narrative identity of a local church. The narrative identity of a local church is all the more oriented towards an accomplished life to the extent in which more stories are told of how support is given in and by it to people in the actualisation of their desire to lead successful lives with others and for others in just institutions. With the concept of an accomplished life rooted in the notion of *pleroma*, one can now establish a more specific definition of this feature of quality regarding Ricoeur:

Self-esteem – an accomplished life for the self: The story of a local church with quality will reflect the various ways in which the members themselves find greater community with God and amongst one another in and through it. The conviction of such a local church as an organisation, in which the individual orientation towards an accomplished life can be realised, can be qualified as an act of self-esteem. In these stories, the fundamental liturgical principles of the congregation will probably be a locus of experience of an accomplished life.

Solicitude – an accomplished life with others and for others: Ricoeur considers "others" those with whom individuals can enter into a personal relationship. In the case of a local church, one can include its members and the people living in its area. The story of such a local church that has quality will reflect how people live in it and experience friendship and solicitude through it. This also applies to stories about the interaction with one another, the atmosphere, and the culture of togetherness. Friendship and solicitude as ways of acknowledgement of the other "as my likeness" (Ricoeur 1999a:46) are rooted in the Christian perspective of the God-likeness of human beings and the dignity arising from that.

Justice – an accomplished life in just institutions: The story of a local church with quality ultimately reaches out beyond its individual confessional, religious, territorial, and even social boundaries. This will reflect how justice for everyone is aimed at in and through it, whereby this justice is not related to economic status, but within Ricoeur's framework will also be conceived in a broader sense and will, for example, entail participation in education and social life. Stories about sustainable actions will also form part of the feature of quality, "oriented towards an accomplished life".

4.2   Feature II: "Rich"

A crucial hermeneutical concept used by Ricoeur has thus far not been mentioned, namely that of threefold mimesis. "Threefold mimesis" is a hermeneutical notion for conveying "time and narrative" and therefore deals with the understanding of texts.[4] Ricoeur's three-volume work by the same title results in the description of narrative identity (Ricoeur 2008:244-249). Mimesis I (Ricoeur 2008:54-64) is about the world of texts; a narrative prefiguration; a preconception on both the author's and the reader's sides. Mimesis II (Ricoeur 2008:64-70) is about the text itself, a configuration. In the same way as with narrative identity, a "mediating function" is also assigned to mimesis II, namely the conveyance between mimesis I and mimesis III (Ricoeur 2008:65). In mimesis III (Ricoeur 2008:70-71), which "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader" (Ricoeur 2008:71), narrative re-figuration takes place, in which the text obtains meaning for the reader or listener. Against the background of the notion of threefold mimesis, it is evident that in the appropriation of texts (mimesis III) meaning is appropriated at the same time. "Attaching meaning" refers to the linguistically conveyed competence of a person to attach discordant meaning to a discordant concordance while a meaningful story is being told. In these narratives, individual members present their relationships to the world and in this way attach meaning to it. These ways of attaching meaning form a feature

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4   On Ricoeur's extended definition of "texts", which, for example, could also include actions (and thus practice), see his early linguistic-analytical works (Ricoeur & Thompson 1981:145-167, 197-221).

of narrative identity and can therefore also be considered a feature of quality. Drawing on Ricoeur, this attachment of meaning is an act of configuration (in the act of the telling itself) as well as an act of re-figuration in the appropriation of the texts on hand, which for their part are interpreted by the particular person as meaningful. In institutions – to which narrative identity also applies – there will probably be a "canon" of common texts which may be complemented by individually meaningful texts. In the narratives, therefore, the individually meaningful texts, or – more generally – the personal sources of the members come together. One can presume that a range of different texts will form the basis of the narratives of the members. The narrative identity shown in these narratives will therefore lay bare this diversity. Here, an additional feature of quality sets in, namely one that should be called "rich". This feature of quality applies to all the meaningful texts and sources functioning in an institution and which are re-figuratively realised for the institutions by the narratives of the members. We, therefore, have to do with the sources, the inner "driving force" behind an institution. An institution with a rich narrative identity tells about the sources and roots giving meaning to that which stimulates and motivates its members.

These explanations show a clear affinity to the ecclesial fundamental principles of martyrdom, in the sense of testimony about individual convictions of faith, spiritual roots and sources. When narrative identity turns out to be true in the mode of self-attestation, the quality of the narrative identity of a local church also expresses itself to the extent in which testimony is given, in the story of its organisation, of the sources and inner motivations of its members. In the case of such a local church, such sources and texts emerging from the rich treasure of biblical narratives and the Christian tradition are important. In an ecclesial context, the church offers such "meaningful texts", the meaning of which is contextualised by the members of the local church (mimesis III). In this way, the individual convictions of faith which are available as sources and roots can also be regarded as such "texts" against whose background such a local church is experienced, interpreted and narrated. The many individual narratives thus show a rich variety of attaching meaning.

The narrative identity of a local church is, therefore, richer to the extent in which it shows intensive narration of the sources by its members, of the variety in sense-making attributed to its organisational practice, and of the many forms in which its people express and shape their faith in practice. The variety of actors with their different experiences of life and faith and their different spiritual forms of expression may then be seen in the diversity of these stories. In this way, a rich organisational story documents openness to such diversity. Especially a merger offers the opportunity for a local church to experience enrichment through the sources shaped by their members in different ecclesial locations of the same congregation. At the same time, however, the danger exists that an existing diversity may get lost; that the narrative identity, therefore, becomes poorer.

4.3   Feature III: "Shared"

The feature of the quality "rich" supports the diversity in individual sense-making and means that this is a positive element of the narrative identity of a local church. At the same time, however, one needs a complementary feature of quality for the narrative identity to gain power and energy. This feature could be endangered or at least impeded by a one-sided emphasis on the diversity brought about by the feature "rich". For the quality of narrative identity, consequently, it is also necessary that it should be "shared". Shared means that preferably many members of the organisation identify themselves with the story of the organisation and thus also with the organisation itself. The story of the organisation becomes stronger the more it is shared. Members of the organisation identify themselves with the organisation by telling its story from a "we" perspective. Such a quality can be reinforced by shared experiences of the organisational practice or by mutual exchange of experiences. Identification is not complete if it is based purely on linguistic-formal terms; it also needs inner affirmation. The members of the organisation should thus be personally convinced of the narrative identity and also demonstrate this through their conduct. This means a "fit" of the narrative identity of the organisation to the individual narrative identity. This "fit" is especially directed towards the identity of selfhood. The inherent impulse for the action of the

individual narrative attestation connects with the impulse for the action of the organisation's narrative attestation and in this way leads to action in accordance with the individual identity and that of the organisation.

From a theological perspective, the feature of the quality "shared" can be linked to the ecclesiological fundamental principle of *koinonia*. This connection is also found in Ricoeur's work because his dialectic approach of "self" and "another" qualifies the content of the "we" expressed by the "shared" identity since he explains that this "we" is constituted in a dialogical way: "The self perceives itself as another among others" (Ricoeur 1992:192). Talking about "another" implies talking about a "self": "If my identity were to lose all importance in every respect, would not the question of others also cease to matter?" (Ricoeur 1992:138-139). The story of a local church which is shared is thus also an expression of the relationship of the members of the local church with one another and is, therefore, the *koinonia* of the local church.

The narrative identity of a local church is thus shared to the extent in which it shows that the members of the local church view themselves as being part of it and not just as being part of individual congregations or groups. It reflects the positive attitude and the positive conduct of the members towards it. The organisational story of such a local church is shared to the extent in which it is told from the "we" perspective; how members of the organisation as a whole demonstrate positive conduct towards it.

4.4 Feature IV: "Adequate"

A final feature ultimately emerges from Ricoeur's notion of attestation. In the attestation "That is what we stand for!", the connection between narrative identity and practice takes place: "Attestation can be viewed as an action compliant with the interpretation of practice by the narrative" (own translation, Dupont 2010:173). Attestation, therefore, has to be verified in practice; the organisational practice must indeed be reflected in its story. This relation between the organisation's story – therefore its identity – and the organisational practice can be described as a qualitative relation and can be characterised as "adequate".

"Adequate", however, differs from "identical". A complete congruence between narrative identity and practice will even be problematic, since the issue of selfhood of narrative identity, which stands for change, then seems to fade. If narrative identity is adequate, the organisation does not predominantly expound its identity in the sense of the desired organisation, thus turning its story into a fictional story. Adequate narrative identity is also not a general story which could be the story of several organisations. According to Dupont (2010:125-126), the mission statement of organisations is an example of such a general text adhered to, not reflecting the essence of an organisation. To be adequate, the story of an organisation should therefore be genuine and concrete. On the other hand, this feature of quality serves as a corrective for the "shared" and "rich" features of quality. The telling of a shared and rich story of an organisation should not cause it to not be adequate in terms of practice.

In contradistinction to the other three features of quality, the feature of this quality cannot be traced back to a specific theological category. This is, however, not essential. Since one can apply Ricoeur's concept of identity to the organisation of a local church, the mode of attestation obtains great significance in the concept of its identity. This then results in the "adequate" feature of quality as the identity of such a local church.

The narrative identity of a local church is adequate to the extent to which it truly and realistically reflects its essence. The story should not be exchangeable; it should not be the story of many random communities of congregations or a purely desired community of congregations. A narrative identity has the potential to change, since it always also includes narrative elements of practice with more experiences of an accomplished life, motivating such a vision of realising a better practice within real-life situations. Narrative identity is adequate to the extent that the image of the desired reality of such a local church can already be experienced concretely. Ultimately, the story of an organisation is adequate to the extent that it is formulated as attestation and makes clear what the local church stands for.

5. Conclusion: Perspectives for practice–oriented research into the improvement of quality

The identity of a local church is a narrative identity. It "lives" in the narratives of its members. It is a narrative identity in the sense indicated by Ricoeur since in the stories the experiences of discordance and concordance are brought together narratively in the narrative form of discordant concordance. The narrative identity responds to the questions of who and what a local church is. In this response, the dialectic of sameness and selfhood becomes apparent in the intermediate zone between the two poles of character and self-constancy, of perseverance and change. In terms of ecclesial identity, selfhood is connected to faithfulness to the origin. The identity is all the more prominent to the extent in which a local church demonstrates character, namely by demonstrating in an observable and tangible way its faithfulness to its origin, values and goals in its selfhood (thus, formulated more simply, in its practical fundamental principles). One may presume that the perspective on selfhood, in comparison to the perspective on sameness, is less well developed. This could explain concerns about loss of identity. The narrative identity of a local church is dynamic; it is subject to change. Identities can develop positively; they could become identities with more quality. This means that they are more oriented towards an accomplished life, and are richer, more shared and more adequate.

The question of identity was raised in the context of transformational processes in the context of mergers. The concept of the quality of narrative identity proposed here offers a basis for the development of an instrument for actively engaging the question of identity. It moves the attention from the issue of sameness to the question of selfhood, to the values, the "inner" programme of the church. In the process, this concept of quality also has the potential to promote the development of survival-driven mergers in mission-oriented organisations.

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Chapter 2

Missional ecclesiology "after Barth"?

M. Laubscher

1.   Introduction

This chapter attempts to trace the different ways the South African discourse on missional ecclesiology is specifically "after Barth". Barth is often (mistakenly) quoted and honoured for his role in and contribution to the emergence of the *missio Dei*, and maybe a thorough introduction and audit are long overdue in this regard. How should we understand Barth's "reception" within the current discussion on the mission of the church? What does it mean to say our missional ecclesiology and theology is "after Barth"? (This intended pun may imply various levels of interpretation and meaning that may just take both the reading of Barth and the doing of missional theology in our context a step or two forward.) Not only will the state of the discourses on reading Barth's ecclesiology and doing missional theology/ecclesiology in South Africa today be updated, but also the exploration of the creative tensions, questions and shared convictions within this two partly overlapping spheres.

2.   The state of the South African discourse on missional ecclesiology

Given the vast and diverse stream of literature in the field of missional ecclesiology, the best way of entering the field is probably through a critical engagement with the most recent publication on the subject in our midst. Editors Coenie Burger, Frederick Marais and Danie Mouton surely need to be congratulated for their initiative in producing *Cultivating Missional Change – The Future of Missional Churches and Missional Theology* (2017). It is a comprehensive book, consisting of 27 articles, with contributions from various denominations and geographical locations, in which they not only take stock

of what happened thus far with the movement as such but also discern what is to be expected from it in the years ahead. Its sensitivity for both the local South African context and the international global developments is indeed extremely attractive for our purposes.

The first and foremost impression that unavoidably confronts one – by either this work, or the broader field, or its critics – is the great claims that they make. This book is based on a conference held at Stellenbosch in 2015, and in one of the articles, Coenie Burger (2017a:252) shares his first impression (of a series of seven) of that conference: "We are sensing a new, surprising movement of God's Spirit, awakening Christians all over the world and calling them to become part of God's mission in the world." Colleague Frederick Marais (2017:65) strengthens this view in his article with, "It is my privilege to share some observations of an extraordinary movement that I believe is unprecedented in the South African church history." A few pages further on, Marais (2017:70) specifies this further (with the back-up of other colleagues in the field), with a claim of "the missional movement as a possible fifth wave in the development of mission in South Africa". Of course, there is something new and significant in its emergence, but then the critical question is in what ways and regard do they represent this as meaningful and significant. Is the actual power of this movement not precisely because of a great irony at work here, namely that it is new in its actual rediscovery and re-emergence? Thus, this ecclesial and theological development is surely more than just a fad, a mere trend, or flavour of the month, and thus not to be ignored by colleagues, yet on the other hand also not something out of the blue, totally strange and unfamiliar to the church.

Interestingly enough, in another recent work, Darryl Guder (2015:63) mentions that the term "missional" is no neologism as it was already recorded in 1907 in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but that its usage rapidly increased over the last few years. The hidden assumptions, in this case, are clear, because even if we learned a new term and buzzword the last couple of years, and even if we can assign 1998 as the date for the inauguration of the missional movement (Guder 2017:52), the theology behind it was already present and influential for more than just a few years. There are numerous examples to cite in this

regard. In his introduction, discussion and overview of ecclesiology at the end of the twentieth century, Daniel Migliore (2004:262-269) summarises this by connecting the call of the church to communion (based on the Trinitarian renaissance of the twentieth century) to the call of the church to mission (based on the emergence of the *missio Dei* concept during the twentieth century). In short, behind these new, important, significant terminology and concepts like "missional ecclesiology" lie major and quite significant theological developments that not only span many decades but also capture most of the spirit of that phase. Craig Ott (2016:xiv) mentions that the Copernican revolution in understanding the mission of the church already occurred in 1952 at the International Missionary Council (IMC) conference in Willingen, Germany. In short, both claims – that the new developments are only a fad and therefore have to be ignored, and that such developments represent a completely new phase or era – should be rejected. We need to engage, but then with a broad and informed historical consciousness and theological insight.

Secondly, a crucial part in the argument about the first impressions noted above is the idea that our world has changed forever and that we need new ecclesiologies for the new world and context we find ourselves in. Again, the critical question is where, when and how did our world actually change? In this regard, the book has a certain ambivalence, because Burger (2017a, 2017b) does not actually address this issue in the seven reasons he provides in the chapter "Why We Need the Missional Conversation in South Africa Now", nor in the other chapter, "Impressions: What We Heard at the Conference and What it Tells Us About the Way Forward". This is a bit of a surprise, especially in light of Newbigin's (1986:1) famous question: "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?" In short, there is no way that one can understand the emergence of missional ecclesiology without a growing awareness of the shift from Christendom towards post-Christendom.

Now in all fairness, it is not as if this particular articulation is not present in this work, but rather that it comes only from Stephan Paas (2017:230-250) in his contribution on The Netherlands regarding a highly secularised European

environment. This is an extremely important perspective which cannot be ignored in the state of the discourse regarding missional ecclesiology in South Africa today. The shift from Christendom to post-Christendom is not the only shift we are familiar with in the world today, and even more specifically in the current South Africa landscape. The post-prefix can indeed be applied to many different transformations we have experienced in the past couple of years and decades in South Africa, like post-apartheid, post-colonial, post-modern, and post-enlightenment. In short, this awareness of a "post-" South African context is telling, especially as Paas (2017:237) indicates in his very insightful contribution that unawareness of this often results in the longing and return for Christendom – and then translated into "the *Ur* model of European ecclesiology ... the *Volkskirche* (folk church)". And to problematise the complexity even further, we should take note of Guder's words:

> The "marketing" of the Christian faith has emerged as perhaps the dominant reaction to the end of Christendom and the perceived need to regain territory. The partnership of church and state has effectively been replaced by the partnership of church and marketplace (Guder 2015:37).

That this discussion is still very much characterised as a white, male, middle-class discussion, should concern at least some of us (Kiefert 2017:81).

Thirdly, a great strength of the work, especially when compared to other streams of literature in the field, is that for the authors, missional ecclesiology, "strangely enough", has the aim of working within and towards the worth and value of the ecumenical church. In this regard, Burger (2017b:30) articulates: "The missional movement can bring new energy into the ecumenical movement." And again later on: "It will help if we can stay in touch with one another" (Burger 2017a:262).[1] There is clearly amongst them conscious awareness of

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1   It is actually quite remarkable to see how ecumenically matured some of the voices in this field have presented themselves. Besides the very welcome addition by editor Craig Ott in bringing the views of five different ecclesial traditions into conversation in *The Mission of the Church* – which surely deserves our recognition and appraisal for both form and content – one can also refer to especially the work of Stephen Bevans (2014, 2015, 2016) who engages almost on a continuous basis both missiology and ecclesiology in various different ecclesial traditions.

and sensitivity against any flat and simplistic understanding of the slogan often heard in this field, namely "the church is not an end in itself". Horton (2016:337-338) comments specifically on this trend that not only works with a very limited and reductionist paradigm of the missional church but also in the process opts for false choices regarding who and what the (missional) church supposedly is to be or not. This is of course of particular importance, because often the other mantra in the field, namely "the shift from maintenance to mission", is interpreted along the lines indicated above. Such either-or reasoning will not only not suffice; even if we understand that our approach should be both and mutually inclusive and implied, the deeper theological reasoning behind and within it does not always come to the fore. We need to see how the different sets of marks of the church are complementary, because, as Migliore correctly states, "Without the Reformation set, the Nicene marks could be interpreted triumphantly or moralistically; without the Nicene set, the Reformation marks could be interpreted schismatically" (Migliore 2004:273). Guder (2015:85) intensifies these creative tensions with his proposal of reading the Nicene marks in backward order, starting with "I believe in the *apostolic* … church" and thus seeing the rest of the other marks in the light and perspective of this basic point of orientation.

Fourthly, is it not strange how this book (and many others; with some exceptions here and there, as will be heard shortly) on the one hand stresses the importance of the emergence of *missio Dei* as a concept, but then, on the other hand, not consciously connects and explores some crucial insights and developments in Trinitarian thinking regarding the conceptualisation (and re-naming) of the *missio Dei* as a concept? There are at least four critical remarks we need to take note of as we ponder this question. First, here and there in this book (as well as in numerous other articles or books), people do reference the work of John G. Flett (2010) regarding the origin and emergence of the concept *missio Dei*, but then without either picking up or citing one of his main insights, namely that not only is it incorrect to claim Karl Barth as the father of the term *missio Dei* (as David Bosh [1996:389-393] did), but also, and even more importantly, to take note that the one who did so (Karl Hartenstein), and especially his followers, used the concept actually as a facade to hide particular

natural theological convictions.[2] Secondly, a particular way to address these sensitivities is actually to see and explore the potential in translating *missio Dei* into *missio Trinitatis* (Venter 2004:757-758).[3] Thirdly, not only will this shift sensitise us for a more potential *taxis* within the Trinity (Bevans 2016:120-121), but the different Trinitarian ontologies may also inform and deepen the church's missional identity in the world (Tan 2004).[4] Fourthly, such a dynamic intersubjective awareness in terms of who *this* God is sensitises and stimulates us for much deeper and differentiated relationships in the post-South African context referred to earlier (Venter 2012). In short, space permits going deeper into this matter, but it is clear that this shift from *missio Dei* to *missio Trinitatis*

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2   See the following important quotations in Flett's work:

"As to the concept's origins, the received connection between Willengen, Hartenstein, and Barth can no longer be sustained. Hartenstein did not bring the doctrine of the Trinity to Willengen. Barth's 1932 essay had no immediate impact on the conference" (Flett 2010:161).

"*Missio Dei*'s 'Trinitarianism' developed at an express distance from Christology" (Flett 2010:198).

"The *missio ecclesiae* is not the *missio Dei*. Mission cannot be something the community possesses, for it is not the community in isolation" (Flett 2010:291).

Other important pages to consult in this regard are the following: 12, 15, 17, 28, 36, 75, 77, 86, 101, 105, 107, 122, 123, 135, 161, 163, 166, 173, 198, 204 and 229.

3   Rian Venter already captured this critical question more than a decade ago when he asked:

"The question could be raised whether there is not a need to speak consistently of *Missio Trinitatis*. ... The history of the effect of the term discloses, however, some ambiguity: It has expanded the scope of mission, but simultaneously relativized the importance of the church, especially with reference to the existence to other religions. A thorough rethinking of the *Missio Dei* as explicitly *Missio Trinitatis* may be overdue" (Venter 2004:757-758).

4   In his article, Tan, on the one hand, seeks a Trinitarian ontology for missions (as the title states), but, on the other hand, actually provides a critique of the current dominance of social trinitarianism in general. He argues that knowledge of also some other models or paradigms – he uses these terms interchangeably – like the processional, linguistic and dispositional models/paradigms, leads us to a deeper understanding of the church's role in God's mission. It is not that he is against social trinitarianism *per se*, but rather that we should caution against limiting our missional ecclesiologies to only its dynamics.

sensitises and empowers us concerning crucial issues like power, justice and alterity, and by implication to face its history of involvement and participation in colonialism and apartheid, as the church becomes more open and hospitable for God's particular mission in the world.

Lastly, not only trying to bring most of the above to a fitting conclusion but also addressing the elephant in the room by being critical yet constructive, we should ask if we still need the concept missional ecclesiology, especially in light of the notion of the *missio Trinitatis*. Does it not contradict or at least endanger the idea and insights we gained in coining the terms *missio Dei/missio Trinitatis*? I am aware that the challenge is still how to "move from a church with a mission to a missional church" (Guder 1998:6), but then we should also hear and recall the insights of Flett (2010:8) who says that "*Missio Dei* is a trope. It satisfies an instinct that missionary witness properly belongs to the life of the church without offering any concrete determination of that act." Not only should we sense the importance of the insight that mission belongs to God (as pointed out above), as well as the need for a sophisticated *taxis* and theological grammar and Trinitarian vocabulary in naming and describing how God achieves this, but surely we should also realise the importance of differentiating between and describing the *taxis*, order, grammar and vocabulary of the relationship between God and his church. A hard reading of Rahner's rule is precisely what is not on the cards here when we seek and draw straight lines from the one to the other; we rather need a softer reading with differentiation and a sophisticated *taxis* allowing (or, actually, even seeking) for our full participation in this missional movement (Allen 2016:19-20). Barth (1963:12) captured the gist of the above well when he famously said in his USA lecture-series: "Theoanthropology" would probably express better who and what is at stake here, with the provision that this should never be confused with "anthropotheology."

With these insights, we now turn towards Barth's missional ecclesiology to see in what way he may help us in taking the issue of missional ecclesiology in South Africa today to an even deeper level in the last part of this chapter.

3. Barth's missional ecclesiology?

The most significant point of entry into this section of our discussion is probably by revealing that Barth actually – in the technical sense – does not "have" an ecclesiology or even a *missional* ecclesiology. It is not a case that it is absent or does not feature in his *Church (!) Dogmatics*, but rather that his ecclesiology is always embedded or implied in the bigger scheme of things. It is about the church, but never about it *per se* or on the foreground. (Even when we eventually get the impression that now it is actually about the church, at last, it is still content-wise expressed in such a way that it references and reflects – in other words: *witnesses* – to a bigger frame of reference.) In short, in what follows now we offer five preferred key insights on the theme, and slowly but surely they will reveal the particular way we might go after Barth's (missional) theology.

First, since he does not "have" an ecclesiology in the technical sense, we can immediately sense one of the other key ideas in Barth's theology, namely that it was always dynamic, changing, on the move. The way he thought about the church, and for that matter about any other doctrine, was never done or finished.[5] That he was truly a contextual theologian, listening to revelation

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5 Towards the end of his career, during his USA-lectures, he famously phrased it as follows:

"His [the theologian's] only possible procedure every day, in fact every hour, is to begin anew at the beginning. ... In theological science, continuation always means 'beginning once again at the beginning'" (Barth 1963:165).

However, take note that this idea was already there in volume 1, part 2 of the *Church Dogmatics*:

"The focal point and foundation themselves determine that in dogmatics strictly speaking there are no comprehensive views, no final conclusions and results. There is only the investigation and teaching which take place in the act of dogmatic work and which, strictly speaking, must continually begin again at the beginning in every point" (Barth 1956:868).

as it speaks in new situations, can indeed be seen by how he often changed, readjusted, altered, and developed his theology.[6] In his very good book on

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6   The most important work dealing with Barth as a very particular kind of contextual theologian, is still the work of Timothy Gorringe (1999). While there are often no references to the particulars of the context in Barth's writings, it is quite clear, actual and revealing when we keep the context in mind in which Barth wrote. (Do not be fooled by the Swiss media who was fond of referring to him as "Jerome in his cell" working on his *Church Dogmatics*. His *Church Dogmatics* was by no means unaware or even estranged from the world he lived in.) How *theologically* attuned he was to take his context serious, especially concerned with the church's task of proclamation, was recently wonderfully explored by the work of Angela Dienhart Hancock (2013). Exactly during that time when Hitler came to power and Barth said (in)famously that we need to do theology and only theology "as if nothing had happened", he announced his emergency classes in homiletics (besides the work of Hancock 2013, see also Laubscher 2017). In short, for Barth theology was in essence a contextual matter, because of God's interest and turn towards us, and precisely in following this particular order, we discover how to be contextual *as theologians*. (Put differently: Theology was for Barth thinking following God's living and actual Word in a particular situation; God's Word as a free bird in full flight, and not as a bird in a cage. Our primary task is first of all *to listen to it*, and only then to speak and proclaim it.) Therefore, it comes as no surprise to see how Barth actually changed his mind on certain subjects throughout his career. Informed by God's living Word, witnessing to it by his theology (Hauerwas 2001:141-204), he is often accused of being inconsistent or contradicting himself on certain matters or doctrines. Probably the most well-known reference in this regard is the controversy and conflict with Emil Brunner (and later on also with Reinhold Niebuhr) during the East-West drama, who accused him of "quietism" when they expected again to hear a loud and clear "Nein!" from him – which shows how Barth's attentive listening to the living Word implied no possession or implementation of a (theological) principle or even a system (Busch 1976:354-357, 360-362). (Barth's *theological* reasoning in this regard was indeed correct, but by no means "done" or "final", because there were particular gaps in his reasoning where we can indeed go with Barth beyond Barth; see Laubscher 2007:235-237.) That his theological reasoning implied a continuous re-thinking of what was at stake in this regard, was recently well documented by Dirkie Smit (2014:62-65) with regard to Barth's "shifting" interpretation and use of the Heidelberg Catechism during his career. In sum: Barth's theology was not only thoroughly contextual, but also – more importantly – always on the move, thus leaving us with both a distinctive continuity and discontinuity in his work. Bruce McCormack (2008) regards Barth in this regard as both *orthodox and modern*, which he surely was on the one hand, but on the other – taking our cue from the above – one could also opt for George Hunsinger's (2015) description of Barth as *evangelical, catholic and reformed*. This dynamic movement in

Barth's ecclesiology, Kimlyn Bender (2013) has shown how Barth's thoughts changed and developed in some crucial aspects over four decades. In his early phase, he struggled intensely with Neo-Protestantism and its church concept. The critique against the church even intensifies from the first to the second edition of the Romans commentary (Bender 2013:25).[7] Bender (2013:29) shows how the church is for Barth in this phase "the highest attempt to domesticate God". On the one hand, he succeeded in stressing the radical *diastasis* between time and eternity – guarding against any direct identification between the church in history and the kingdom of God – but, on the other hand, it also came at a price: There is hardly any room for the incarnation and consequently a fully developed Christology (Bender 2013:34-35). In this early phase, Barth could only see the church in terms of sinfulness, making any true account of ecclesiology an impossibility.[8] Hereafter, slowly but surely, Barth moved towards viewing the church in more positive terms as he shifted from the dominant eschatological time-eternity dialectic towards a more dominant

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Barth's theology is well captured in the wordplay of the Afrikaans's "weer-spreek" ["saying again/contra-dict", pun intended!]. This means, Barth "says" it "again", but without echoing or contradicting himself. What is primarily at stake here – as will become clearer in the rest of the chapter – is Barth's fine sensitivity and awareness for who *this* God is we are attuned to in doing theology (within a particular context). *The Word is* not only alive, but *quite loquacious*, speaking eloquently and radiantly for himself (Willimon 2006:143-166). That it is *the Word* means he *will speak* through it. Therefore, Barth (1956:797) regards the church as a *listening* church, implying that the primary function of *Dogmatics* is to "invite and guide the church … to listen afresh to the Word of God". "[Scripture as witness to divine revelation] repeats itself in such a way that it can again be apprehended" (Barth 1956:458).

7   Bender puts it as follows: "The greatest difference between the editions is seen in the fact that Barth replaces the concepts 'tribulation', 'guilt', and 'hope' in the first commentary with 'The Tribulation of the Church', 'The Guilt of the Church', and 'The Hope of the Church', marking Barth's recognition not only of the church's failure, but also of its promise and necessity, as will be seen below" (Bender 2013:25).

8   According to Bender: "This sharp division between the visible and the invisible church gave Barth's ecclesiology a Platonic and docetic tendency that came dangerously close to divorcing the true church from history altogether, and it was the corresponding ecclesiology to a Christology that stressed the division rather than the relation between revelation and the historical person of Jesus, a radical distinction that made a true incarnation extremely problematic" (Bender 2013:59).

Chalcedonian Christological dialectic (Bender 2013:64). In this transition from *Romans* through *Göttingen Dogmatics* towards the ecclesiology of the *Church Dogmatics*, Bender correctly offers the following rough sketch as a broad outline of Barth's thought:

> 1) [T]hat the church's ministry is established by and united with that of Christ, but is not itself a continuation of Christ's work nor independent of it, and 2) that the church's own prescribed task is marked not by cooperation in Christ's *manus triplex* but by witness to Christ's complete and sole fulfilment of this office. What Barth has failed to provide, however [for the moment – ML], is an account of how Christ's and the church's agency interact and complement one another (Bender 2013:78).

In short, Barth's actual ecclesiology came more and more to the fore as he worked towards his doctrine of reconciliation where he would give – amongst others! – his mature ("fully developed") Christology (and soteriology, etc.). His missional ecclesiology lies towards the end of his career, and for theological reasons, it is important to see how he worked towards it.

Secondly, another way of phrasing the above idea of Barth not "having" an ecclesiology, would be to point towards and reference the great symphonic architecture where ecclesiology ebbs and flows within the broader form and structure of the doctrine of reconciliation, volume IV of the *Church Dogmatics*. At age sixty-five he started with it and it would eventually cover almost a third of his *Church Dogmatics* (almost 3 000 pages out of the 9 185), but not before he had "seen" the plan in a dream one night at 2 a.m. and put it down on paper hastily the next morning (Busch 1976:377). To summarise and give a brief description of the highly complicated structure always ends up being quite a mouthful (Busch 1976:377-378), and therefore the following sketch provides a more accessible overview:

Table 2.1 Form and content of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation

Volume	IV/1	IV/2	IV/3
Title	The Lord as Servant	The Servant as Lord	Jesus Christ, the True Witness
The aspect of the doctrine	Divine grace in Jesus Christ	Human being in Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ the mediator
Christology	§59: Obedience of the Son of God	§64: Exaltation of the Son of Man	§69: Glory of the Mediator
- Nature	Divine	Human	[union]
- State	Humiliation	Exaltation	[union]
- Office	Priest	King	Prophet
Doctrine of sin	§60: Pride	§65: Sloth	§70: Falsehood
- Result	Fall	Misery	Condemnation
Soteriology	§61: Justification	§66: Sanctification	§71: Vocation
Work of the Spirit in the Church	§62: Gathering of the community	§67: Upbuilding of the community	§72: Sending of the community
Work of the Spirit in the Christian	§63: Faith	§68: Love	§73: Hope
IV/4: Ethics of Reconciliation[9]	§75: Baptism	§74, 76-78 [Lord's Prayer]	[Lord's Supper]

The above sketch is of extreme importance in understanding the particulars of what Barth is saying, because of the intricate way in which his thoughts are interrelated and continuously presuppose one another (Smit 2009:341). The deepest underlying assumption here is that Jesus Christ – and everything else that is now included and part of the revelation of his reconciliation – should at all times be conceived as dynamic, eventful and actual. The three distinctive parts are inseparable and should again not be seen in any order as if they build upon each other, but rather as two simultaneous intertwined movements (IV/1-2) that will speak and reveal (IV/3) its unity. Paul T. Nimmo (2017:111)

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9   The *Ethics of Reconciliation* is incomplete. We only have fragments on Baptism and some parts of the Lord's Prayer. The section on Baptism (§75) was the last official publication by Barth. Of all the fragments he had on the ethics of reconciliation, he thought that this part on baptism called for separate publication at the time (Barth 1969:ix). The rest of the other fragments (§:74, 76-78) was posthumously published in 1981 under the title of the *Christian Life* and it only covered the first two petitions of the Lord's Prayer; he never started with the part on the Lord's Supper.

is thus spot on in his excellent introduction to Barth when he comments on the above sketch that instead of working *through* each part-volume and its doctrines, it is rather better to work in turn through each doctrine *across* the three part-volumes, thereby *reuniting* the doctrines. Keeping in mind that the prophetic office does not add any new content to what is already completely fulfilled in priestly and kingly offices as it witnesses to the True Witness who reveals and speaks his-story as once and for all. In short, the sending of the community in §72 thus becomes "an intrinsic and all-encompassing description of the nature of the church as such – rather than being the description of one of its specific activities among others" (Reichel 2017:237).

Thirdly, to grasp how deep this actual turn towards the world is in Barth's theology, we also need to take note of the significant moves Barth made in his doctrine of election which eventually became explicitly clear in the above. Barth radicalised the Christological concentration in his work to argue that election is not about election *per se*, the determination of the individual to either heaven or hell, but rather about the self-determination of God and humanity being there for each other. In election, God reveals first and foremost the actuality of him being this God – who is for us – so that we, in turn, correspond to election of being for our Lord and thus our fellow human beings. This typical double movement in Barth's work is here actualised in Christ not only being the traditional object of election (the one who is elected) but also now it's subject (the one who elects) (Bender 2013:67). With election no longer found in other later and subsequent doctrines like creation, providence, or even redemption (where some other figure or idea is used in determining the content and form of God's mission with election), but deep and early in the doctrine of God, we sense that election determines the Christian community so that it can exist analogously to the ways of this Lord. The "eventual" sending of the community is no longer a second, additional and derived act following upon the former gathering and upbuilding of the community; our mere being and existence are actualised – through our gathering and upbuilding – in being (com)missioned by and according to his love of humanity. In short, what is foundational in Barth's doctrine of election reaches its apex in the way that his

ecclesiology (with other doctrines) are synthetised and revealed in the doctrine of reconciliation.

To see how actual and dynamic Barth thought about the above, we need to highlight and comment on his deliberate move not to think and speak of the church as a church anymore, but rather of a Christian community who is gathered, nurtured and commissioned by God's Spirit (see again the headings of §62, 67 and 72). In the 1930s, Barth already sensed some cracks appearing in Christendom, and thus in the following decades he deliberately replaced the church as a general, abstract, static and powerful institution with the concrete, particular, vulnerable and open apostolic community (Barth 1954:15-16; Guder 2015:7). There was (still!) the driving motive in his thought that the church cannot possess or claim the Spirit, but rather that it is in constant need of its power, working and renewal in its midst (Bender 2013:104). What constitutes the church is not the idea of being a voluntary society of good religious people, but rather that they are constantly and eventfully gathered and nourished by Word and Spirit, commissioned for a very peculiar life of the corresponding witness to its Lord. Thus, the Christian community cannot be but a missional ecclesiology.

Fourthly, we now need to comment on that word or concept that more and more became a guiding and key concept in Barth's ecclesiology. As earlier indicated, Barth initially struggled to see the church – and with that also God's incarnation in Christ – positively and constructively. However, in light of the key moves made in the doctrine of election, he succeeded in addressing the critical question as to how Christ and church could interact and complement each other. However, before we name and reflect on this concept, let us also refer to another qualification in Barth's thought that came here to the fore. For Barth it was always a case about "God for us", and where it was initially about "*God* for us", it shifted in the later years towards "God *for us*". It was always about both, but then getting and knowing the order. There is this irreversible order between Christ and his people so that Christ's person and work cannot be substituted by the church, because Christ precedes the church not only chronologically, but also theologically, logically and ontologically (Bender 2013:104). The guiding concepts that came all the more to the fore in Barth's

theology were that of "correspondence", "witness", "analogy of faith and not of being", and "being obedient". The missional community is thus to be conscious of neither contradicting nor replacing its Lord but *corresponding* to him. Though it remains "within and part of the sinful world, and thereby living in the contradiction of sin, it nevertheless displays the eschatological sign of corresponding obedience to its Lord, Jesus Christ" (Bender 2013:105). There is in Barth's thought and theology still no way that the medium of revelation and revelation itself is equitable or contained in the other. It is only a witness that is actualised in and through the working of the Spirit.

A matter of asymmetry still consists in the way correspondence develops and works in his thought. God in and through his witness speaks to us, continuously, and in this fulfilled covenant relationship we as church listen, hear and obey and then correspondingly witness to what we have heard. What was always implicit in the simultaneous up and down movement within the "priestly" (CD IV/1) and "kingly" (CD IV/2) offices, now becomes explicit in the "prophetic" office (CD IV/3) that moves forward in the present, revealing how he, the One Word of God who speaks for himself, not only justifies and sanctifies but also calls and claims us in his movement/sending towards the end of history. It is no coincidence then that Barth would hereafter develop his ethics of reconciliation under the guiding concept of "invocation" which responds and corresponds to God's call to us to be his witnesses in this world.

Lastly, what is, on the one hand, a relativising of the church, is an actualisation for a proper turn and deeper sending into the world. It is precisely in the "emptiness" of the prophetic office which does not add new content to the *manus triplex* that we see the inherent turn to the world in the fulfilled priestly and kingly offices. The key role of the prophetic office is thus to continuously speak and witness what is inherently already turned to the world in what happened once and for all in Christ's cross and resurrection. In this way, Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and its implicit missional ecclesiology shows how Christ is not only the centre of the church but actually of the world. It is precisely for this reason that Barth could describe and see the church as lost without the world because it only exists as long as it is inherently turned to the

world. On this point, Barth received much criticism (Jonker 2008:53-62), but as John Webster correctly points out:

> Thereby the church is redefined as a community whose task is not that of making affective Jesus' reality but of attesting its inherent effectiveness. ... The move Barth is making here at one and the same time relativizes and establishes the activity of Christian witness. "Relativizes", because it asserts the entire adequacy of Jesus' own self-declaration; "establishes", because the willed form of that self-declaration includes its echo in human declaration (Webster 1998:143, 144).

There is thus in Barth's missional ecclesiology no natural human capacity we possess to complement, supplement, continue, replace, complete, even fulfil or exchange divine activity, but only an analogous relationship of the corresponding activity in and through the prophetic witness which redirects us towards being anew attentive and obedient to what was once and for all fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

4.   In conclusion: (Our) missional ecclesiology "after Barth"?

There are indeed various ways in which a South African missional ecclesiology could be "after Barth". The first possibility is that we have heard what Barth had said, but we are "after Barth" in the sense of having moved on, beyond him, as in being over and past Barth. However, in light of what we have heard from Barth, and the way his theology informs our reading and response to the current landscape, we should doubt if this is indeed the way to go. The second possibility would be to go "after Barth" in the sense of merely repeating and echoing him and be "true Barthians". However, as we have seen in Barth's work, there is a major difference between mere repetition and actual witness and correspondence in Barth's theology, so that being "after Barth" in the sense of following him slavishly would not mean being a true Barthian. Barth does not like Barthians who obstruct theology's contextual – timely and temporary – significance, namely that we should hear the Lord anew, witnessing to us so that we can witness, too. Therefore, in our reading of both Barth's missional ecclesiology in his mature doctrine of reconciliation, and our reflections on the current South African discourse on missional ecclesiology,

it has hopefully become clear that there is also another way we could go "after Barth", allowing a critical engagement with new theological discourses which correspond and witness to some of his key insights, continuing anew a particular line of thought.

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Chapter 3

The "Jesus walk" as a normative paradigm for the church:
The *missio Christi* in Mark

S. Joubert

1.   From *missio Dei* to *missio Christi*

It has become customary in theological circles to ground the missional nature of the church in the Trinity. In this regard, David Bosch, together with Lesslie Newbigin, probably had the biggest impact on the development of a so-called "missional theology" during the second half of the twentieth century.[1] Bosch, in particular, uses the term *missio Dei,* which he defines as

> God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news in that God is a God-for-people (cited in Joubert 2014:382).

According to Bosch, mission (*missio ecclesiae*), on the other hand, presents the church's missionary activity. Since God is on a mission to reclaim his creation, his people are full-time missionaries. "Mission is essentially *ecclesia,* but ecclesiology does not precede missiology" (Bosch 1993:372). It is, therefore, not possible to have a church without a mission, or a mission without a church.

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[1]   Bevans & Schroeder (2009:69) write that, "[A]after the twentieth century, any missiology can be done only as a footnote to the work of David Bosch." See also Newbigin's formative contribution on missional theology in Laing and Weston (2012).

Amidst all the theological gains of understanding the role of the Trinity in the mission of the church, the person and mission of Jesus in the formation of New Testament ecclesiology/ies is largely ignored (Studebaker 2008:219).[2] At most, the New Testament is read through the lens of the *kenosis* of Christ.[3] The fact that the Gospels do not focus on *ekklesia* (apart from a few references to this term for church in the Gospel of Matthew), but on the kingdom of God, is probably the biggest inhibiting factor for more detailed and nuanced approaches to the *missio Christi* (Ubeivolc 2016:210*ff.*). Hence, our intentional shift to the mission of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark is selected for this purpose, because

> the evangelist's portrait of Jesus' messiahship has less to do with Christological status than with Christological mission, as Mark emphasizes Jesus' role within the world-altering schema of God's coming kingdom (Henderson 2006:13).

To gain a better understanding of the church from the perspective of the mission of Jesus, Mark's Gospel will serve as a normative window into the nature of a new group that took shape around his person and mission. Indeed, as Bazzell (2015:26-27) observes, such an approach could become somewhat Platonist by nature if it mainly focuses on "theological motifs: for example, images of the Church, marks of the Church, and so forth", only to draw abstract conclusions for the concrete life and operation of the church. Such an abstract approach to ecclesiology, apart from not engaging with concrete ecclesial realities, could lead to an idealist understanding of the church. On the other hand, to merely study different expressions of the contemporary church could again turn into a pragmatic venture without any theological roots in the Bible. Bazzell correctly states that the task of any church theory

> consists of facing contemporary contexts and challenges (exegesis of culture) and the basis of New Testament statements of the church (exegesis of Scripture) to formulate an understanding of church, where identity, mission and place of the church is determined

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2 Under the radar of other fields of research, New Testament scholars have done important work in this regard (see, for example, Alexeev, Karakolis, Luz & Niebuhr 2007; Byers 2017; Harrison & Dvorak 2012; Thompson 2014).

3 The worldwide impact of Donald MacKinnon's perspectives on the *kenosis* of Christ must be mentioned in this regard (see for example, Keuss 2010; McDowell 2016).

(criteria) and therein initiate actions within their local context (new practice) (Bazzell 2015:30).

In this regard, Bazzell's so-called New Testament statements, or, more correctly, the nature and task of the discipleship group of Jesus as narrated in Mark, will inform our consideration of the mission of the church in line with the *missio Christi*.[4]

2.   *Metanoia* as the boundary–crossing call of Jesus

The author of Mark summarises the teaching of Jesus at the onset of his Gospel in terms of the programmatic statement that the kingdom of God is on hand (Mark 1:15). This is an event of such epic proportions that it calls for *metanoia,* which means a change of mind or a conversion. *Metanoia*, as the existential experience of, and commitment to God's new rule, is the only legitimate response to the boundary-crossing call of Jesus into a new life of followership in God's kingdom. Repentance, in the traditional sense of the word, as a moral turnabout by sinners, based on their fear of eternal punishment, does not encompass or truly describe what Jesus' "*metanoetic* imperative/call/invitation" implies in this regard, namely a radical change of identity and life orientation. Sanford (cited in Grant 2011:103) speaks of *metanoia* as being a "turning about" caused by being sorry for what we have done. Although this might be slightly too strong, he is correct in understanding this turning about as the reversal of one's self and one's life. It is about seeing the world in a new light because one's thinking has been irrevocably transformed (Avanesian & Hennig 2017).

Through the transformation of the status of those who adhere to the call of Jesus from outsiders to insiders, the act/process of *metanoia* also introduces a new way of life in his presence as the beloved Son of God (Mark 1:9-11; 9:2-8), the Messiah (1:1; 8:31), and the Son of Man (2:10; 8:31; 9:31). It is

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4   In order not to get trapped somewhere in the looking glass when focusing on Mark, we need a bifocal vision. This entails knowing that objective meanings are not bottled up inside the text waiting passively on us to be discovered with the aid of our "refined" theological tools. At the same time, we need to respect the boundaries and codes inherent in the text so as not to merely see there whatever we want to see there.

not surprising that Jesus calls the content of this message *euaggelion*, good news, as he is simultaneously the embodiment of this *euaggelion*. In other words, Jesus is the kingdom come!

Metanoia is transformative on both the personal and the social level. It simultaneously reshapes individuals' identity using their transformation and their socio-religious relocation into the new community of Jesus followers. Mark is careful not to identify this movement as the church. However, he does allude to the fact

> that the Church is to be a sign of the presence of God's kingdom, and a symbol of hope for its future fullness. To enter God's kingdom is to acknowledge the sovereignty of the God of Israel (who is the Father of Jesus) and to follow the way of Jesus (Harrington 2001:4).

Therefore, *metanoia* is also fundamentally missional. It is the perpetual mimesis/imitation/adoration of Jesus by all who follow him through the embodiment, retelling and remodelling of his narratives. *Metanoia* is mimetically contagious, a good contagion at that, which is caused by the followers of Jesus who constantly share the abundance from God's kingdom table with others around them (Joubert 2013:122).

To be part of the Jesus group is to know the high cost of *metanoia*. In the words of Thomas Moore:

> Jesus asks for a deep shift in worldview … One of the most difficult things to do is to change the way you imagine your place in life. Nothing is more challenging. On the other hand, once this takes place, nothing could be more vitalizing. Truly, it's as if you are born a second time. Your eyes open to a different world … *Metanoia* comes at a great cost. You are to give up an understanding of life that has been in place for a long time (Moore 2009:29).

This shift or change of mind is based on the direct encounter with and personal knowing of Jesus. Since the kingdom of God defines his mission, Jesus' followers actively participate in his "Christological demonstration of God's power at work to reclaim the world from a present evil age" (Henderson 2006:13). The narrative of his life and death, his suffering and victory, is also theirs. As servants of Jesus, they share in his mission.

3.   The call of Jesus as a call to relational discipleship

The word *mathētēs* (disciple) occurs forty times in Mark (and always in the plural), as well as with

> a possessive that distinguishes Jesus' disciples from others, the crowd, or the disciples of John the Baptist (2:18; 6:29), or the Pharisees (2:18). The Gospel of Mark tells us not only who Jesus is and what God has done through him, but also what it means to respond to the good news in becoming his disciple (Garland 2015:389).

Therefore, the call to *metanoia* is immediately followed by Jesus' call to individuals to follow him (Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-17; 8:34; 10:17-31). His call should not be confused with the *modus operandi* of Jewish rabbis, since, during their time, they never called people to become their disciples (Hengel 2005:32). Students chose their rabbis to instruct them in the Torah. The primary loyalty of disciples was to the law; therefore, they could leave one rabbi in favour of another if they deemed the latter to be a better teacher of the law (Garland 2015:386).

Jesus' call is highly relational and deeply personal (if not entirely Christological!). The call is to follow him (with the term *akoulstheō*, "to follow", occurring eighteen times in Mark), and not to study the Torah under him. Jesus always extends this call to individuals who fall outside the inner core of ethnic Israel represented by Judaea and Jerusalem; hence, his disciples are "socially insignificant people from an insignificant corner of provincial Galilee" (Brower 2007:68). Because Jesus does not seek out disciples in synagogues or other religious settings, but in the midst of life next to the fishing waters (Mark 1:16-20) and in toll booths (2:13-17), they have to leave behind dubious, even ritually unclean occupations to follow him. They do not invite Jesus into their heart and life; he calls them into his!

Within the framework of the first-century Mediterranean world, with its pivotal values of honour and shame, and one that is demarcated in terms of power, social status and gender, Jesus counterpoises his disciples to the rest of the Jews (4:34; 6:7, 30) and, in particular, those influential religious groups such as the Pharisees and the scribes (3:20-30). Being a disciple of Jesus is

not about performance (tasks, programmes, activities), but about relational knowledge and obedient trust. In other words, disciples are called to be in the presence of Jesus. They follow him to worship him as the Messiah (1:1), to abide in his presence as the glorious Son of God (1:1,1-13; 9:2-7; 14:61-64; 15;39), and to faithfully embrace his route as the suffering Son of Man.

The primary missional aim of Jesus for his followers is for them to be in his presence, as well as in community with other disciples. Having them with him is the reason for his calling and for them being who they are! The disciples' previous attachment to their possessions, their land, their occupations and their religious rituals is now replaced by a life-changing relationship with Jesus. Obedience to his call entails leaving everything behind without knowing the outcome. But it is never about the results, in any case, since this relationship with Jesus surpasses all would-be advantages or perceived outcomes for the disciples. However, it is not always as easy as a mere call to follow, since would-be disciples sometimes have to sell all their possessions and give them to the poor before following Jesus, as the rich young man hears in Mark 10:21. Only then will he have a treasure in heaven.

Over against the rich young man who cannot adhere to the call of Jesus (10:17-27), the Twelve and Peter, in particular, as his spokespersons, represent a contrasting response to the challenge of Jesus in 10:21. They have left their possessions and their entire former life behind to follow Jesus (10:28-31). As a result, they hear that they will indeed receive what the rich young man sought, namely eternal life, but also hundredfold rewards in this time such as houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields and persecution(!). In other words,

> [T]he gaining of a new family (brothers, sisters, mothers [see Rom. 16:13], children [see Philem. 10]), and hospitality (houses and lands) already now in the present time/age is a foretaste of the greater family in the age to come (Stein 2008:474).

Whatever is sacrificed or lost in the disciples' decision to follow Jesus will be replaced by a hundredfold new gain even now. Yet, the cup of Jesus, which is filled with suffering and humiliation, is also on the table for the disciples, as James and John hear soon afterwards. When they seem to ignore the previous

teaching of Jesus that they have to take up their cross and follow him (Mark 8:34-38) by boldly asking for the best seats in the eternal kingdom of God, one to the left and one to the right of Jesus (10:38-40), he addresses their self-serving arrogance by telling them that they will also have to drink his cup and be baptised with his baptism. First, a cross and then a crown; then, a life of suffering and persecution awaits the disciples before eternal life in glory.

4. Part of the new *familia Christi*

The collective nature of discipleship is evident throughout the Gospel of Mark. As part of his new vineyard (12:1-11), as sheep in the flock of God (6:34; 14:27), and as partakers of his new covenant inaugurated as the Passover (14:24), the disciples, despite their moral limitations such as fear (4:40; 9:5-6), incomprehension of Jesus' true identity and teaching (4:34; 6:51-52; 8:17-18), and their arrogance (9:33-37; 10:35-45), are called into community with each other. In Mark 3:31-35, the metaphor of family is used to describe how Jesus' call to total allegiance to him should be embodied among the disciples. This happens shortly after Jesus is "diagnosed" by his biological family as being out of his mind (3:21) and ostracised by the influential scribes from Jerusalem as being Beelzebul-possessed (3:22). The scribes frame him as a disgraceful individual and as someone who brings public shame upon the honourable name of their religion.[5] In response, Mary and the brothers of Jesus show up at Peter's house in Capernaum to remove him from the public arena, to reduce any further loss of honour for their family within the collectivist culture of the day where individuals' honour mainly depends on the affirmation of the claim of honour by the larger socio-religious group to which they belong. Jesus responds by leaving them outside the house as "outsiders", for not being open to the will of God and his true identity. He states that his real mother, brothers and sister are those inside the house around him. The natural family is relativised in favour of the new spiritual family of Jesus where he is also symbolically and physically located "in spatial terms, both in the house and

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5   "Honor is consistently identified as the single most important value or 'good' in the ancient world. The cultural centrality of honor serves, in turn, to explain much about Jesus' interactions with his antagonists in the Gospel narratives" (Hellerman 2000:213).

at the centre of the crowd of followers who are seated around him" (Barton 1994:80). In this instance, he is perfectly at home among members of the *familia Christi* who have put obedience to God's will first; relations with one's biological family are superseded by relations with Jesus and others, and his followers are transformed "from earthly to heavenly and from temporary to permanent siblings" (Mills 2011:28).

In the new people of God, Jesus not only reconstitutes the basis of relations but also turns ordinary household spaces into new spaces for spiritual community formation. The *familia Christi* does not need formally designated religious spaces for their gatherings. In ordinary households, as new places of teaching as well as for social and communal interaction, the religious order of the scribes and other religious leaders is overturned and transformed. In this instance, the will of God is enacted time and time again as increasingly more people open their homes to Jesus (see Mark 5:38; 7:17; 9:28, 33; 10:10). Struthers Malbon rightly observes that, by the end of the Gospel of Mark, "a house is no longer a family dwelling, but has become a gathering place for the new community, replacing the rejected synagogue" (cited in Barton 1994:81).

5.   New identities and new roles for Jesus' followers

In Mark's so-called discipleship catechism (Mark 8:22-10:22), where the focus is on the suffering of Jesus and corresponding discipleship of the cross, the disciples have to learn the basics of following Jesus (see 8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:42-45). Three paradoxes address their misunderstanding of Jesus' mission and their inflated ideas of what it means to follow him (Deppe 2015:160):"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it" (Mark 8:25);[6] "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last" (9:35); and "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (10:43).

5.1 Cross-bearers (Mark 8:34-38)

In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus emphasises a new identity, as well as a corresponding new role for his disciples, namely that of cross-bearing, when he mentions that

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6   Scriptural quotations in this chapter are taken from the Greek; author's own translations.

"[i]f anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34). Since the cross lies at the heart of Mark's Christology, it is not strange to hear that the cross will also define what it means to be one of his followers. This teaching immediately follows Jesus' sharing his first of three passion predictions where he, as the Son of Man, links himself indivisibly with suffering and the cross (8:31).[7] Since "there can be no Christianity without the cross, so too there can be no genuine discipleship without suffering" (Ferreira 2010:273). Any understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus without the cross, coupled with the self-sacrifice and humiliation it entails, is out of the question. Jesus voluntarily carries his cross to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). This same route of self-denial and humility must be a daily reality in the lives of his followers. Discipleship is about disregarding oneself, not self-promotion nor status-seeking. It is about taking up one's cross and following Jesus (8:34). At the same time, the disciples are instructed not to be ashamed of Jesus as their cross-bearing Messiah (8:38). They undoubtedly know that the act of carrying a cross publicly signals a very dishonourable, violent and humiliating death penalty. Cross-bearers are dead people walking! As extremely brutal forms of execution, accompanied by various forms of torture that often preceded the actual crucifixion, "including scourging, burning with or without pitch and heated plates (*laminae*), crucifixions were reserved for enemies of Rome, as well as for low-life criminals and slaves" (Cook 2014:418, 423). Similarly, disciples must be willing to lose their lives for the sake of Jesus (Mark 8:35). Ernest Best (cited in Henderson 2006:8) states that "the nature of discipleship becomes apparent only in the light of the cross, and not in the light of Jesus' mighty acts".

5.2 Servants (diakonoi, Mark 9:33–37)

After Jesus' second prediction of his suffering and death (9:31), and a second failure of the Twelve to understand his teaching in this regard (9:32), they have a discussion among themselves en route to Capernaum as to who is the greatest. Since the disciples did not perceive the connection between the suffering of

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7   Nel (2017) correctly notes that in these three announcements of his suffering and death, the term "Son of Man" is used by Jesus as a mode of idiolectical self-reference.

Jesus and their status or roles, the issue of public honour or greatness, Jesus now addresses this, telling them that, if they want to be first, they should be last of all and the servant or *diakonos* of all (9:35). Jesus subverts the assumptions of culture (as well as the expectations of the disciples) regarding status and roles in the kingdom of God by deliberately choosing the role of servant for his disciples. He then takes a child and lets him/her stand in the midst of the Twelve, not so much to make the child a visual example of being last of all in the world of adults

> as much as he is making himself an example of being last of all, servant of all, by receiving into his arms even a child. It is the servant, not the child, who occupies the last position; and it takes a servant to receive a child. Indeed, to receive a child is to serve the child (Gundry 1993:519).

The pattern of Jesus' mission is also the pattern for the disciples' mission. As he serves others, even children, so they have to serve others in their capacity as disciples and leaders in the church. In other words, as servants of the Servant of God, they are also servants of others. By practically receiving children and others who have no power or elevated social status, they receive Jesus and the Father (Mark 9:37). In this way, they are actively part of the *missio Christi*; they attain greatness in God's eyes, even though it contradicts common-sense knowledge in the world of their day, where service or *diakonia* is the opposite of happiness.[8]

5.3   Slaves (douloi, Mark 10:42-45)

After a third occasion of Jesus predicting that he will suffer and then be raised from the dead (10:33-34), yet another instruction about discipleship follows in 10:35-45. The connection is clear by now, namely that Jesus' call to suffer is paradigmatic for the disciples as well.

> Jesus is both the basis for and the pattern of discipleship. His death is the salvific ransom (10:45), the covenant-making sacrifice (14:24), the index of commitment for his disciples (e.g., 8:34), and the servant-pattern that they are to follow (10:43-45). In fact, Mark

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8   Plato (Gorgias 491e) even asks: "How can one be happy when he has to serve someone?"

makes Jesus the only adequate "model of discipleship" (Hurtado 1996:25).

Still, the disciples do not understand the nature and content of Jesus' mission, as the request of James and John for the two most important positions in his eternal glory illustrates (Mark 10:35-40). In response to this question and the other disciples' anger (10:41), probably because James and John obtained the best seats in God's kingdom ahead of them, Jesus repeats his earlier point that the greatest among them should be their servant (10:43). Their lust for power and their obsession with status and control over others are no different from the rulers and power mongers of the day, who literally lord it over others (10:42). Thus, Jesus now has an even lower role for them to embody, namely that of slaves: "Whoever wants to be first among you is to be slave of all" (10:44).

> The very nature of Jesus' power, as well as the power he imparts to others derives not from self-promotion but from self-sacrifice, from a disposition to serve rather than to be served (Mark 9:35; 10:42-45) (Henderson 2006:17).

Following Jesus is never about positions of power, but about sacrifice to the extent of losing all social status and personal honour. It is about actively embracing the degrading posture of slaves rather than that of powerful slaveholders, prevalent throughout the Roman Empire at that time. Slaves were at the bottom of the scale of all human beings. With their cringing postures, averted eyes, hurried movements and silenced tongues, they were denied the most basic forms of human dignity and respect. Now the disciples are to identify with and take up the roles of slaves. Slavery and servanthood were cultural realities in the world of Jesus and his disciples; however, whereas servants mostly performed household duties, slaves were more vulnerable. "Slaves have no right of command, no rights to determine how, when or what to do" (Dickson, cited in Foday-Khabenje 2016:40-41). Now, the disciples of Jesus have to follow suit.

6. Doing "the Jesus walk"

In the first-century world where posture, movement, and gesture served as visible indications of a person's identity and status, and the ideal male always

walked "slowly, with total control, his head and shoulders upright and confident, metaphorically towering over those beneath him" (O'Sullivan 2011:21), Jesus constantly deviates from this cultural norm. He is always on the move (see Mark 1:9, 12, 14, 21, 29, 35; 2:13, 23). The adverbs *euthus* and *eutheōs* (both meaning "immediately") occur over forty times throughout the Gospel, signifying that urgency is the order of the day in his ministry.

> To the first readers, it would have communicated the opposite of a graceful, quiet or relaxed gait indicative of honourable males in the ancient Mediterranean world. Hurriedness was usually associated with people of low public status, but also with the gait of slaves, since it was expected of them to go about fast; hence the Roman expression *servus currens*, the running slave! (Joubert 2017:4).

Not only the words of Jesus but also his purposeful walk to heal, save, feed and set free, as well his final deed of self-sacrifice on the cross communicate that he is the divine slave of God.

"The Jesus walk" is purposeful. He hurries about to bring the kingdom of God to the demon-possessed (Mark 1:21-28), the unclean (1:40-45), the sick (1:30-35; 10:46-52), the lost (2:13-14), the fearful (4:35-41; 6:45-52), the dead (5:35-43), the hungry (6:30-44), non-Israelites (7:31-37), women and children (7:24-30; 10:13-16), and so forth. Jesus also hurries towards the cross to sacrifice himself on behalf of all (8:27-10:52). In exemplary fashion, he now leads the way before his disciples en route to Jerusalem to drink his cup of suffering and to fulfil his mission. At the institution of the Lord's Supper on the Thursday evening, shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be the "sacrificial lamb" when he sacrifices his own body and blood on the cross for many (14:22-24). Although Jesus suffers a shameful death on the cross on Easter Friday, he is raised from the dead on the Sunday. At the empty tomb, a mysterious young man dressed in a white robe (16:1-7) tells the women that, just as Jesus went before the disciples to Jerusalem (10:32), the risen Jesus is again going on the road before them to Galilee.

"The Jesus walk" is not an escape route towards a "spiritual bunker" far away from the dangers of the world; it is a missional road back to Galilee.[9] The baton has now been passed on to the disciples, with Jesus not merely "a step ahead" of his failing disciples, but "a journey ahead" (Garland 2015:559). Their challenge is to keep following the risen Jesus who has completed his mission. Since hurriedness and urgency have been part and parcel of "the Jesus walk" en route to the cross, his disciples have to follow suit. They have to emulate his walk as participants in the *missio Christi* towards the needy, the lost, the hungry, the outcast. They have to transform their surroundings by proclaiming the kingdom of God, as new wine is being poured into new wineskins (Mark 2:11-14).

7. Mark as a normative narrative for walking in the footsteps of Jesus here and now

"The kind of leadership observed in many churches today often tends to be influenced by society rather than by Christ" (Foday-Khabenje 2016:40). Therefore, the urgent call for the church is to realign with the *missio Christi*, the mission of Christ. Even though *ekklesia* is not explicitly the focus in this instance, the Markan disciples, as the new *familia Christi*, serve as a normative window into the calling and mission of the church of God. Members of this new family owe their sole loyalty to Jesus, both there and here. At the same time, this family is always walking with Jesus, even though he is a journey ahead!

Just as Mark paints a compelling normative picture for the first followers of Jesus regarding the life-changing implications of the call to follow him, the church nowadays has to be constantly drawn into this narrative world. This entails more than a neutral invitation; the church has to be nudged, urged and led to not only become part of, but also embody Mark's narrative in relevant, yet hermeneutically responsible ways. Present-day communities of faith have to embrace the radical nature of *metanoia* embedded in the call of Jesus by renouncing allegiance to all other kingdoms. They have to understand that

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9   "The enigmatic route of Jesus is now that of his followers … Mark does not express his identity in terms of a new glorified body, but in terms of his character and identity as the risen Jesus who continues to go before his disciples to Galilee" (Joubert 2017:7).

metanoia leads to an entirely new symbolic universe, a new identity, new significant others, new roles and a new mission. By entering into the kingdom of God (as a new symbolic universe), individual believers should embrace a new identity as children in the *familia Christi*. In this new family, love for God and others guides all actions, decisions and behaviour.

Jesus' disciples know that they are not merely volunteering in local churches. They know that in their new roles as cross-bearers, servants and slaves of Christ, they have surrendered their "privilege of choice". Their identity is now exclusively caught up in Jesus as their Lord. Believers faithfully follow in his footsteps by surrendering themselves in selfless service to him and others. Within the turbulent, rapidly changing landscape of the third millennium, this entails walking not in front of, but besides others, shoulder to shoulder. It implies sharing life, connecting, and helping others to belong, believe and become, in that order (Helland 2013:33-34).

Since the Jesus walk has to be lived, walked and talked, authenticity, integrity and relationships are critically important. Therefore, disciples constantly befriend unbelievers, outcasts, nobodies, somebodies, people with different sexual orientations, the poor, and so forth. They embrace the Jesus life joyfully by constantly immersing themselves in service to others, knowing that

> it is one thing to have a heart for the poor, it is another to use their bathrooms ... Only bottom-up relationships built on respect and reciprocity have any chance of making a different world (Sweet 2008:192).

The presence of Jesus, his relational immanence, becomes visible in the lives and deeds of his followers. As Gerard Rossé points out: "For the most ancient post-Easter community there did not exist only a past and a future of Jesus, but also the *presence* of Jesus as the Risen one" (cited in Schreiner 2016:149). The same holds for the contemporary church. The *familia Christi* is still the visible presence of Jesus, as believers actively partake in the *missio Christi*.

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Ecclesiologies of congregations in informal settlements: An evaluation

P. Verster

1. Introduction

There are many different congregations in informal settlements. Regarding the identity of the congregation, the purpose or calling of the congregation, as well as the ministry of the congregation, they have different ecclesiologies. The church faces many challenges in informal settlements and how these should be addressed calls for new approaches. In many instances, the congregations need each other to address these challenges. The future of the church in these areas is of paramount importance.

Can different ecclesiologies be linked to finding common ground to address challenges in informal settlements and the circumstances in informal settlement areas? How can the concept of the missional church enhance a new ecclesiology to empower inhabitants of informal settlements?

2. The challenges for communities in informal settlements

Living in informal settlements is extremely challenging. These challenges touch every aspect of life in these situations. One of the greatest difficulties revolves around space, and finding spaces in informal settlements can be very challenging (Verster 2012:28, 31ff.). Why is this? And how does space in general influence the lives of people?

Space is an important aspect of human life. Space defines our environment. Space can be positive and negative. While new implications are being drawn from spaces in urban environments which are more positive towards urbanisation, it is also all the more relevant to challenge the spaces urbanisation supplies.

Jenkins writes:

> These seem spaces built not for citizens but for transient labour, mobile capital, private transportation, and public refuse. The critics fear in them an unsustainable pattern of inhabitation that not only drives economic and environmental degradation but deracinates the social and ecological relations needed to turn things around. They seem neighbourless neighbourhoods (Jenkins 2009:541).

Van Schalkwyk explains that "space" and "place" are linked (see Tuan 1977:3-7, cited in Van Schalkwyk 2014:s.p.). The perspective is that "space" means movement from one place to another whereas place is static. Furthermore, she explains that space has "temporal insinuations", whereas place has "physical insinuations", and that space is "multidimensional, while place is topical". Davey explains how urbanisation in Africa has developed and how economic issues and displacement play an important role:

> Urban living can be an ordeal of survival–much urbanization in Africa is not accompanied by comparable economic growth – and an informal economic sector sustains many who live hand to mouth (Davey 2008:29).

Communities in informal settlements are often unstructured and frequently settled in an unsatisfactory layout of spaces. Roads, housing structures, education and medical facilities are often inadequate. Water and electricity supplies are sometimes available, but often inadequate. Shops are not well stocked and inhabitants have to make use of expensive spaza shops or carry their shopping over long distances. Sewage management is often totally inadequate. Nell (2014:s.p.) refers to issues in this regard where the influx of people makes it difficult to manage the provision of infrastructure and services. This leads to communities experiencing much stress. Very few of those who live in informal areas are economically well-off. In truth, poverty is rampant, unemployment is often widespread, and many inhabitants live under the breadline. Due to

urbanisation, communities are not socially intact. Inhabitants of these areas come from different communities and have to form new social fellowships. This lack of cohesion leads to many social problems, especially among the youth. Alcoholism, drug abuse and crime are ever-present realities. Illnesses such as HIV and Aids are challenging the resources of the medical personnel. Women and children are often abused.

Kruidenier observes:

> Most of the people are either unemployed or work once or twice a week. Children do not go to school, because there is no transport available to nearby schools. In addition, children are often left alone for days as the mothers go in search for jobs. Children as young as four years are expected to look after their siblings; their younger siblings, therefore, become their responsibility. This shows the grim reality of these women's everyday lives and demonstrates the poverty-ridden plight of so many women and their children (Kruidenier 2015:s.p.).

Van Schalkwyk (2014:s.p.) refers also to the struggle to survive. The detrimental environment leads to much apathy concerning the environment and the plight of the people in general. Sometimes this leads to service boycotts and uprisings. Also, Kistner (2014:s.p.) explains how the inadequate management of public service leads to unacceptable situations of relations in labour and government. The challenge of the infrastructural and the infrapoliticaI is thus not resolved. "Service delivery protests" are therefore also not only something regarding service delivery but also of a political nature. Much is to be desired concerning the relationship between citizenry and government, especially in areas with these many challenges. De Beer (2014:s.p.) points out that there is often a struggle for political space. Society is not whole and some societies experience the problem of informal settlements situated near or next to formal areas. This leads to much tension. Evictions of "illegal" inhabitants also often lead to protests.

The conclusion is that informal settlements experience extreme circumstances and that the challenges – both in development and human conditions – are huge. These extreme circumstances call for engagement on many

levels; intensive interventions are needed and the challenge for churches remains acute.

There are many congregations in these areas. The challenge of relating the Christian gospel to African traditional religions is also a reality. In many instances, the community is divided between these different congregations. Bishops, pastors and *sangomas* are sometimes visited by the same people, often for healing. The question then remains as to what kind of ecclesiology can be positive for the development, enhancement and enrichment of the people living in these situations. Can the congregations be identified in the community by living *koinonia*, reaching out to the poor and sick, and engaging the root causes of social and economic want?

Congregations in general, also those with universally accepted confessions, struggle with many issues. Members are poor and, therefore, the congregations are poor, except for the few who have outside sponsors. Financial restraints hamper the service of the community. AICs can exist using their own income, but congregations that have to pay their leaders struggle much. Although some mainline churches have buildings in the informal areas, most are far off and difficult to reach. Most congregations have limited structures. Corrugated iron structures house many of them. The huge challenge of leadership in these areas calls for new approaches. Theological training of bishops, pastors and ministers is often limited, which leads to many instances of theological misrepresentations. Theological challenges such as prosperity gospel, syncretism, fundamentalism, and shallow theological ethical interpretations are also present.

3. Ecclesiologies in informal settlements

Presently church involvement in communities is regarded from the perspective of translation, indigenisation, inculturation or contextualisation (Antonio 2006; Bosch 1991:390ff.; Skreslet 2012:94-95). So-called "mainline" churches usually regard their involvement in communities from the perspective of translation and indigenisation. This means that communities are approached from the perspective of the "mother" church trying to reach out to the communities by forming congregations from their vantage point. Churches

of communities that want to be independent usually use inculturation and contextualisation as their way of involvement through congregations in communities.

Mwambazambi explains the implications of indigenous African ecclesiologies:

> So, the partial failure of Protestant, Catholic and evangelical churches in Africa to provide adequate answers to the spiritual and physical needs of their members has obviously contributed to the creation of new spiritual communities that do meet the aspirations of African believers and, consequently, encourage the conversion of their members. It's clear that the AICs are doing "mission in an African way" and that the mainline churches can learn from them. They are obviously meeting the real needs of people in the African context at the grassroots level (Mwambazambi 2011:s.p.).

The interpretative approach is often taken from the perspective of post- and decolonialism, phenomenology, ecumenism or genitive theologies (Pears 2010:8ff.). How churches get involved in communities differs according to their historical and theological developments. Regarding the involvement in informal settlements, different church traditions tend to get involved in different ways.

"Mainline" churches tend to be involved in informal areas by a high ecclesiology, often by distance ministry. These congregations have specifically structured ecclesiologies. The church service is often the emphatic way of dealing with the community. Such congregations are characterised by a strong theological and clerical structure. For instance, missiologically the Roman Catholic Church regards the church as an extension of the Church of Rome under the rule of the Pope. The unity is thus found in the one church, the mystical body of Christ. In some instances, it is also regarded as the continuation of the incarnation (Dulles 2007:329). The cathedral serves as the physical sign of the one church. For the ministry in informal settlements, this remains important. In many instances, the church does reach out to the community, but the emphasis is on the one church, present in the unity of faith (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:4-6; McBrien 1980:676). Furthermore, the eucharist is the sign of the presence of the church in the

community. Through the eucharist, the unity with Christ in faith and the one church is proclaimed with the assurance of the coming of the kingdom (McBrien 1980:589).

Protestant mainline churches tend to emphasise confessions as the essence of the one church. The true mark of the church is where the Word is preached in truth and the sacraments are administered in truth in the congregation (McGrath 2001:208). Missiologically, it is often stated that congregations should be independent by being self-supporting, self-expanding and self-governing entities (Kritzinger *et al.* 1994:6-9). Buildings are, however, also important for the worship of God. Protestant congregations reach out to the community and emphasise that the church should be present with the poor (Bosch 1991:350).

Pentecostal churches emphasise the aspect of experience. Communities are challenged to live in the Spirit. Although often unstructured, the theology is generally fundamentalistic. This may lead to differentiated implications. Leadership may also be seated in one pastor. Challenges in communities are, however, approached from a spiritual view and often much positive work is done to empower communities. The congregations are therefore regarded as free in the Spirit and the relevant ecclesiology is thus an ecclesiology of freedom in the Spirit. While empowering the community, the emphasis is placed on the experience of the individual. For some, it has much spiritual importance, but for others, it leads to uncertainty in their plight in the informal areas. Concerning Pentecostal churches, Molobi (2014:s.p.) points out that they have many different experiences of how to be a church in the community. Sometimes churches in the black townships boast large membership, but there are also smaller home churches with fewer members – often serving especially the poor. Members are requested to visit cell groups regularly. In these cell groups, a more personal relationship is enhanced.

> They pray and eat together and cultivate a certain degree of social cohesion. Cell group for many is a regular meeting of some members' circle of acquaintances. Therefore, as a rule, they have to be 12-20 in number and if they grow larger they will separate into a new cell group. They meet once a week, mostly on Wednesdays. Their social

network makes it easier to get through the day in modern urban life. Even those with few social contacts are in the fellowship of the like-minded at least once a week (Berger & Redding 2010, cited in Molobi 2014:5).

The value of the person is emphasised and high moral ethics is expected, especially regarding issues such as pornography, abortion, and aspects of sexual orientation. Worship is lively and spiritual to attract many people. Emphasis is laid on realistic interpretations of the Bible. Preaching is also lively and meant to touch the heart. Furthermore, the community is expected to see the new life in all aspects of church life.

Indigenous churches in the community occupy and meet in small structures as congregations and emphasise inculturation. Joyful celebration in the Spirit is very important (Oduro, Pretorius, Nuusbaum & Born 2008:90ff.). Song, music and dance are the ways of dealing with the challenges of life. Healing is often the main way of satisfying the needs of the community. The indigenous culture of communities is also held in high regard. Furthermore, syncretism may be present when preaching the gospel and the indigenous culture is regarded on similar levels (Odoro *et al.* 2008:99ff.). The ecclesiology is one of the structures of the offices with much emphasis on the leaders as the full representatives of Christ and even in some cases becoming Christ for the current situation. Mwambazambi emphasises the meaning of African ecclesiologies as follows:

> African ecclesiology has a key role to play in deflecting a destructive and anti-social globalisation without God and its main role is to incarnate and to diffuse the divine truths, which reveal to humans the essential values of life and their worth as human beings (Mwambazambi 2011:s.p.).

House churches tend to emphasise community in small, linked communities. These congregations call upon members to be part of these communities, but with influence in the larger community.

The question is whether it is possible to find an ecclesiology benefiting a wide spectrum of congregations so that they can become involved in the informal areas. A new suggestion is the concept of the missional church. It is now

necessary to engage this concept to see its positive and negative influence on society.

4. The missional church as a possible common ground for influence in communities in informal settlements

The essence of the notion of the missional church comes from the *missio Trinitatis*. The Triune God sends forth the church to be his community in the world. Is the notion of the missional church a Western concept? Although the theological enterprise of the gospel in our culture, which Newbigin (1989:184ff.) introduced, was originally aimed at the churches in the West, the concept of the missional church was also developed for other communities. The main issues are as follows:

- The Triune God sends forth the church in the world to accomplish the mission of God in the world.

- The church contextualises the gospel in the communities she serves.

- Communities are empowered through *kerugma, diakonia, koinonia* and *marturia* to become new in Christ.

- In Christ, the church influences the culture and worldview of communities so that they become more Christlike in their congregations.

- The church is fully inculturated and contextualised in the congregations.

In this regard, reference can be made to Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011:26-29), who emphasise that reference to biblical and theological themes in the conversation about the missional church may be made to Trinitarian missiology, namely that God is a missionary God, to the reign of God as already and not yet, and to the *missio Dei* as the way to understand mission. In this vein, Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011:30) write:

> This represented a dramatic shift away from what had been primarily a church-centric view of missions based on a high Christology, one that became operational through the church's obedience to the Great Commission. It shifted the rationale for mission to God's initiative and the agency for mission to God's activity through the Spirit in the church in relation to the world.

This view must be engaged critically.

For all churches, the Scriptural reference to 1 Peter 2:4-10 is important. In the interpretation of this text, it is important to consider the following. The structure of the text is of importance. The line of thought develops from the emphasis on the stone as God's intervention becoming the cornerstone to the people of God accepting the stone, Jesus Christ, as the true Lord who calls them to be a holy and chosen people. Schreiner (2003:116) emphasises that they are recipients of God's grace and have to acknowledge his mercy in Christ. Flemming (2015:98-99) explains that the church is regarded here as chosen and holy, not to be in tension with the church's mission in the world, but to reach out to the world in its congregations. It does not mean a retreat from the world or a crusade against the world, but that the church should be in the world bringing about justice and sanctification to the world by being holy and the special possession of God. Flemming (2015:99) regards the role of the church as being God's bridge to the world and in that sense being holy – not for its own sake, but for the sake of the world. Like the priests in the past, the congregation should play a mediatory role. God wants all people to live in abundance, and thus the congregation should not keep the salvation for itself but be a spiritual sacrifice by living in such a way that the whole world can become God's people. Krodel (1995:51) explains how the glory belonging to Israel as people of God is now attributed to the church. The congregation needs to glorify God in the world by mighty acts in word and deed. Its holiness is highlighted by the metaphor in verses 9-10 (Krodel 1995:51). Reicke (1978:93) also emphasises that the congregation who is called by God and who tasted that God is good must step out into a hostile world to proclaim the goodness of God so that the world will acknowledge the wonders of God's presence. Although Michaels (1988:97) also regards the people of God as holy in the light of the references to Israel and that they influence society at large, he emphasises that there is a clear difference between believers and unbelievers. Believers, however, must conduct such a life that unbelievers change to become believers (Michaels 1988:113). Marshall (1991:75) also refers to the fact that Christians are holy people because they belong to God in a way that no other people belong, but that this must be visible in their lives. Goppelt (1978:154)

concludes that the eschatological aspect of the life of the congregation before God is of all importance. The structure thus builds up to the wonder of a people belonging to God in a very special sense for the sake of others.

Regarding the Book of Acts, Niemandt (2010:s.p.) explains the task of the missional church in the living congregations as follows:

- The first aspect Niemandt mentions is discernment. Different issues are important such as how to exist in a world with all its multicultural challenges. He also emphasises the vital role of the Spirit, because the Spirit makes evaluation of the situation possible, and also how to wait on God. The Spirit is thus the authentic presences of God with the church in the congregations.

- Secondly, Niemandt emphasises transformational preaching. This is how the identity of the church may be established. Through the Spirit the Word of God becomes alive and the Spirit-led missional congregation is enabled to understand the Word of God anew. In the interaction with the Word, new possibilities of existence become relevant. The church thus becomes a living reality of God's revelation. Accordingly, preaching in Acts brought about total new situations.

- Niemandt also mentions that conflict is not absent when the church becomes missional. This can be detrimental, but the missional church should seek ways and means to develop new insights for resolving conflict and tensions in the congregations in a way that enhances the relations and brings about new possibilities.

- Finally, he mentions that the church should invite people to be at home, even when they are strangers. Walls should be broken down. Especially those on the fringes of society should be welcomed in the congregation if it wishes to be missional.

How can the concept of the missional church be beneficial to the debate on the churches' involvement? In the development of the missional church, the question must be asked: Can the AICs also be missional? Indigenous churches need also to become more and more Christlike. An inculturated church needs to also be transformed in the image of Christ.

Christopher Wright explains the essence of the church and mission well:

> God's calling and election of Abraham was not merely so that he should be saved and become the spiritual father of those who will finally be among the redeemed in the new creation (the elect, in another sense). It was rather, and more explicitly, that he and his people should be the instrument through which God who would gather that multinational multitude that no man or woman can number. Election is of course in the light of the whole Bible, election unto salvation. But it is first of all election into mission (Wright 2006:264).

Keeping this in mind, a missional ecclesiology for the informal settlements should have the following markers: The glory of Christ the Lord, the glory of the Father and community in the Spirit. A missional church should still accept a high Christology. Glorifying Christ as one with God should remain the essence of the congregations of the church. Furthermore, servanthood will make it possible for the church to engage with people in challenging situations. However, a congregation can only bring about a new situation in informal settlement areas if it lives from the power of the Spirit and proclaims Christ as Lord in the Spirit.

Secondly, the notion of the *missio Trinitatis* defines the church as the church of God. Honouring the Father is essential for it to be relevant in the world. Buys explains the implications of honouring God in poverty:

> It is clear that the biblical concepts of peace, justice, mercy and love combine in a Christian response to poverty and care for the needy. Each of these terms (and especially all of them together) reflects the character of God. The poor often live lives that break God's heart and should break ours as well. A God-centred approach to alleviating poverty should reflect a pursuit for social justice, with lovingkindness and merciful compassion. Only in the context of pursuing peace will the poor really be helped to become responsible stewards in God's creation themselves (Buys 2013:89).

Thirdly, there must be community in the Holy Spirit. The notion of a missional church implies that congregations must be communities of love, living for Christ in the Spirit, since the Spirit links the members of the congregation to one another to live in the presence of Christ and God the Father.

5. Presence of new life in informal settlements

Only by being present in the communities and bringing about new life can the church be relevant. Even in challenging circumstances, the church can bring about new possibilities through compassion and love. The "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom must always be proclaimed. A missional church should already now be a haven of peace in a community, but it should also point to the future of the new life of the coming kingdom of God. The congregations must challenge the community to be truly human and live like people in the image of God. They must, however, always be acknowledged as new people before the Father through the Spirit and in Christ. Jenkins describes the attitude needed in the congregation as follows:

> Practicing homelessness and making place already cohere in common ecclesial practices. Perhaps the most significant Christian spatial production happens in its practical responses on behalf of those without a place – the homeless, refugees, and others deprived of belonging (Jenkins 2009:551).

Niemandt (2015:97) emphasises yet another aspect. A congregation should move beyond its walls to the larger world. The notion of the *missio Dei* has implications not only for the church itself but also for the total environment. He believes that the congregations should move outside to see what God is doing in the world. In that way the church can become a new community, reflecting on the larger context in which it finds itself. The very existence of the church is thus aimed at being missional in the total world (Niemandt 2015:98). He then explains the essence of the missional church as follows:

> We need a theology of the poor and marginalized. It is a fundamental task of the church's mission to break down the walls that divide, dehumanize, discriminate, alienate, exclude, and marginalize. The walls are broken down where the church listens and discerns, receives the marginalized and allows their stories to crack open the dominant discourses (Niemandt 2015:99).

How should this then be done in the environment of informal settlements? Special attention should be given to the challenges for the missional church in the informal settlements in the city. Davey offers a view on regenerating the city in general:

> Maybe in theological terms we need to embody those moments as we look for a transfigured, not a regenerated city. If we read Revelation 21 as a moment of urban transfiguration we glimpse a city that refuses to be ordered on the imperial or colonial template, it is not a city dominated by an iconic building but one of movement, openness, greenery and water, where wealth is found in public places, and the diversity of its population (Davey 2008:46).

Kruidenier (2015:s.p.) calls for *ubuntu* to be practised in the city with all its challenges. Especially women mention that "love and compassion from each other are experienced in the church community". Women can indeed be vehicles of such a new community.

Van Schalkwyk (2014:s.p.) also alludes that the informal settlement areas can be spaces of renewal and that one can find spaces that reflect respect and innovation. In such instances, inhabitants show their resilience by creating spaces of well-being and hope, even in dire circumstances. Furthermore, Nel (2014:s.p.) refers to the renewal that one finds when communities themselves change situations and improve their lives. Interestingly, he refers to a Sweet Home settlement where they have an impartial community committee who reached out to many political parties and helped empower the communities. He also mentions job creation and other informal economical and entrepreneurial activities that existed but were also continued and enhanced.

Molobi mentions another important aspect:

> In a squatter camp, for example, a theme of freedom from mental slavery is relevant. Youth need to be instructed to go beyond perpetual dependency and be rid of the idea that they should be used by a knob. Calling for the teaching of Jesus as seriously as those of Marx, Slovo and Mandela and in practice caring for the poor is important (Molobi 2014:s.p.).

How should the missional church in the congregations then be present in the community in informal areas?

- The relation to God is essential. In particular, the living Triune God is the God of mission. In this regard, a missional church should accept its role as the people of God in congregations sent by him into the world.

Furthermore, a missional church should always regard its existence as sustained by the grace of God.

- It is important to realise that Jesus Christ as verily God is also incarnated in the church to bring about new life. His presence in the church in the congregations thus makes it possible to be a church for the most humble of people.

- Furthermore, congregations of the incarnated Christ are present in the world to bring about renewal here and now, but also to encounter all people to convert to become new and to receive eternal life in Jesus Christ.

- A missional congregation should also become the church with the poor and despised because it follows the Lord who himself was despised for their sake.

- Such a congregation becomes a living witness to the salvation, regeneration and empowerment of the Lord Jesus Christ in a world of utter desolation.

- A congregation should also witness to the wonders of the Lord by being present in the deepest needs of the people: food, shelter and clothing, but also in the valley of death.

- Finally, a congregation is the church of the new future with God. Waiting on the Lord the church thus seeks renewal of all society with the knowledge that it is only possible in Christ.

6. Conclusion

Emphasis on the divinity of Christ brings about a new model of congregational involvement. By honouring him the glory of God is acknowledged. The church then becomes the community of total new life in its congregations. A missional church can reach out to all in confessing the true Lordship of Christ. Churches with different approaches can become missional even if they differ regarding the ways and means how to do so. However, in this world of desolation, the church should always be the body of the living Christ. In that sense, the needy can become witnesses to God's grace.

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Chapter 5

Developing contemporary ecclesiologies

W.J. Schoeman

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1.   Introduction

The church needs to constantly look in the mirror and ask at least the following two questions: Who are we (an identity question)? and what are we doing (a question about relevance)? The way a church interprets her identity and relevance is a hermeneutical activity where there is a "critical correlational dialogue between the story of God (the Triune story), the world (context) and the promise of the eschatological kingdom to come" (Meylahn 2012:39). This creates a dynamic space of interaction and interpretation in doing theology "to break out of the boxes of the past, while yet taking the tradition seriously and in some senses as normative" (De Gruchy 2011:9). This is a creative process of taking the tradition seriously, but also a committed enterprise in listening to the context.

The first question relates to the identity of the church and the second question to the relevant and contextual ministry of the church. This may imply that the first question is more theological and the second more empirical, but an essential argument of this research is that both questions are theological, at least from a practical theological perspective, and that they are both of critical importance, albeit for different reasons. To state it differently, in the reflection on and development of a practical theological ecclesiology, attention should be paid to both theoretical and empirical perspectives.

The formation of the faith community after Pentecost in Jerusalem provides interesting information about the early church:

> Everyone around was in awe – all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People, in general, liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved (The Message, Acts 2:43-47).

It is not possible to describe in full detail and with certainty the beginning of the early church, but the growth of several Christian communities alongside each other can be noted, with some in harmony and others in conflict. Neither was this process linear nor monochrome (Gooder 2008:9). The church in the first Christian century was as varied as today, and there is not a single model for reflection available either in the New Testament or the first century. The lack of a single model or blueprint from the early church poses a challenge for ecclesiologists (Gooder 2008:24) and underlines the necessity to develop a contemporary ecclesiology in each unique situation. Although the world may be different from that of the first century, after more than two thousand years, churches and congregations are still playing an important role in society and should therefore not be ignored. The Christian faith is constituted within community; community with the Triune God, but also community with fellow-believers within a particular social environment. This community is organised in social places of worship where it can be celebrated and practised with each other. Faith communities are part of society and important generators of cohesion, networks, and social capital in the society (De Roest & Stoppels 2011:19-23). This is important for both church and society.

The study of ecclesiology is significant for at least three reasons. First, the academic study of ecclesiology poses a unique challenge to theology by asking questions about its relevance (Kärkkäinen 2002:7). These questions are being asked through the study of the church and congregations. Ecclesiology thus lies on the critical interaction between theology, church, and society, and the challenge is to develop a theological reflection on church and society that enhances the study field of ecclesiology but also theology.

Secondly, there is a growing interest in ecclesiology due to the ecumenical movement, the growth of Christianity outside the West and also as a consequence of the rise of non-traditional forms of congregations and churches (Kärkkäinen 2002:7-8). Within the broader sub-Saharan and South African context, it is thus important to develop and rethink ecclesiology from an ecumenical and contextual perspective.

Thirdly, an important task of theology is to make sense of what is happening in Christian life and also in churches (Kärkkäinen 2002:9). Contemporary society poses new and unique questions, and this requires a place and community where Christians may struggle and reflect on life and its challenges. The church could be such a place, and it is necessary to reflect on the role of the church in this regard.

Contributing to the development of contemporary ecclesiologies, this chapter aims to reflect on the following three aspects:

1. What is ecclesiology about? The difference between an ecclesiology from above and an ecclesiology from below will be explored. The place of congregational studies within the study field of ecclesiology needs to be explained.

2. Are there different ecclesiologies? What is the role of different traditions and denominations in the development of different ecclesiologies? The aim is to develop a comparative ecclesiology or ecclesiologies.

3. Lastly, a framework for the development of contemporary ecclesiologies shall be presented. The role, the context, the self-understanding of the congregation, and the essence or identity of the church play a role in the development of a local ecclesiology from below. A process of discernment is used to develop a contemporary ecclesiology.

2.   The study field of ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is, in the broad sense of the word, the study of the church. The church may be described as a visible community of Christians coming together for worship, prayer, communal sharing, instruction, reflection, and mission. In this instance, "church" refers to the congregation or the local parish, but

"church" may also be understood in other ways. It may refer to a wide range of interpretations and meanings such as the building, an event, a denomination, a worldwide organisation, an ecumenical movement or body, worship service or the local faith community (see Smit 2008:70-71; Van Gelder 2000:14). The word "church" thus has different meanings and should be used in a nuanced manner.

Furthermore, the term "ecclesiology" may be defined as "the discipline that is concerned with a comparative, critical, and constructive reflection on the dominant paradigms of the identity of the church" (Avis 2018:3). The study of the church as a social institution and as a historical phenomenon with a complex history and traditions may be seen as the interacting dimensions that constitute the study field of ecclesiology (Mannion, Gerhard & Mudge 2008:3). It is thus clear that ecclesiology is a complex concept with a variety of meanings attached to it.

According to Schoeman (2015:66), the study field of ecclesiology is divided into a general ecclesiology and the study of faith communities within congregational studies as a subdiscipline of practical theology. In line with this, ecclesiology aims at describing two fields of study: The one is the historical and doctrinal origin of the church (general ecclesiology), and the other is the church as it is situated in a local context, with the focus on the local practices of actual congregations (the focus of congregational studies). This is a vibrant study field as there is, on the one hand, the intention to preserve the character of the church and congregations and, on the other hand, the intention to adapt to new and challenging circumstances (Haight & Nieman 2009:578). There is thus a normative side to the study of the church, but there is also the challenge to the church to become inculturated in the everyday lives of believers. In summary, the first focus of ecclesiology is primarily the study field of the academic discipline of a general ecclesiology (a systematic and historical discipline within theology), and the second is the study field of congregational studies within the field of practical theology as a discipline.

In describing the church and doing analysis, two strategies may be followed – one is to do it from "above" and the second is from "below". An ecclesiology

from above begins with the understanding that the church is based upon the authority of the Word or classical confessions (Haight & Nieman 2009:579). This implies a more deductive methodology in the study of ecclesiology. An ecclesiology from below "begins historically with a historical account of the genesis of the church, beginning with the ministry of Jesus" (Haight & Nieman 2009:579). Such an ecclesiology begins with history but continues to attend to the existential historical community of believers. An ecclesiology from below does not reduce its understanding to only a historical or sociological interpretation of the church as the church is not only a social organisation (Haight & Nieman 2009:580-581). An ecclesiology from below is more inductive in its focus. The expectation is that a general ecclesiology will work more deductively from above and that congregational studies will work more inductively from below.

The study of the church, from both a general ecclesiological and congregational studies perspective, has a theological and empirical character as this constitutes for the church a dual relationship with the Triune God and the world as its context. "On the one hand, the church cannot be understood exclusively in theological terms; on the other, it cannot be understood in exclusively empirical, historical, or worldly terms" (Haight & Nieman 2009:582). Such a theological and empirical component holds for both general ecclesiology and congregational studies.

What is the relationship between general ecclesiology and congregational studies? The congregation as the local faith community is the main focus of congregational studies, but it may be assumed that the congregation is also a significant point of interest for a general ecclesiology. As already indicated, the church exists of many forms, but people experience the church most directly and existentially within the local community of believers, and this should also be of interest for the broader study field of ecclesiology. A general ecclesiology may describe or provide a framework for the formal nature and mission of the church. "What makes the church truly church consists in God's power within it as channelled to it through God's creative power revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced as God's Spirit" (Haight & Nieman 2009:584). This informs and guides the congregation, but congregational studies are essential to determine

the credibility of the theological position of the church; "it is the antidote to theological reductionism" (Haight & Nieman 2009:585). Congregational studies thus have to answer the following important question: What happens on the ground level in a faith community? This question is answered through a theological and empirical analysis. Theological reflection is vital for congregational studies to determine the distinctive role of congregations as the church in the world (Haight & Nieman 2009:589) and empirical research is essential for congregational studies, because it "provides a credibility test for theological reflection about the church, helping even ecclesiology done from below to be more grounded and realistic" (Haight & Nieman 2009:591). The focus should be on practices within the congregation (Haight & Nieman 2009:592), but also on actions that are socially embedded and meaningful for the participants in congregational life (Haight & Nieman 2009:593) since the members are involved in the society daily through their everyday life.

The ecclesiology of this research project mainly focuses on the understanding of the local congregation as a community of believers, but there is also a reflection from a general ecclesiological perspective; in both instances, it requires a theological reflection and an empirical analysis.

3.   One or different ecclesiologies?

Is it possible to speak of one ecclesiology or to have a single ecclesiological model? The diversity in terms of traditions, denominations, and congregations makes it difficult to refer to or describe one or a uniform ecclesiology. Different ecclesiologies may be seen as unavoidable, historically and at present, as a result of the plurality of ways of being church, and as a result of ongoing renewal as the time moves on. It may also happen that unique forms of the church occur within the kingdom as different congregations or faith communities develop (Healy 2008:122). A great variety of congregations can be found in different contexts; therefore, the focus of this research project lies within the field of comparative ecclesiology, reflecting on different ecclesiologies. Comparative ecclesiology describes the church in terms of the various levels of pluralism, that is currently found in society (Haight 2008:387). A denominational ecclesiology would peruse the study of the church with a specific ecclesial tradition while

a comparative ecclesiology transcends this and look for comparisons and descriptions crossing the boundaries of denominations and traditions.

Haight (2008:388-390) argues that the historical or empirical development of the church and congregations provides a perspective to explain the understanding of a comparative ecclesiology. The earliest church developed and functioned differently in different political and cultural contexts and grew into different Greek and Roman congregations, to give but one example. The Protestant Reformation changed the form of a united Western church and led to the development of different ecclesiologies. With an emphasis on the local congregation and guided by the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, the church is called to listen and respond to the Word of God in all times and all places (Van der Borght 2008:187-188). Such a response to different times and places gives rise to the development of different local ecclesiologies.

The ecumenical movement during the twentieth century contributed to the further development of a comparative and differentiated ecclesiology. For churches to understand one another, they need to compare and describe their different ecclesiologies. Dulles' models of the church are an example of a comparative ecclesiology according to systematic types or models (Rhoads 2008:224). The Reformation and the ecumenical movement, to name two historical movements, and different contexts led to the development of diversity in the formation of congregations and a more complex understanding of the concept "ecclesiology".

What are the key characteristics of a comparative ecclesiology? Haight (2008:390-391) identifies the following as markers:

- A historical consciousness acknowledges that churches and congregations are found within a specific time, place, and culture.

- This bond to history attaches to all human knowledge, and hence to theological expression, an acknowledgement that there is more truth in all domains that can be attained from a particular perspective (Haight 2008:390).

- A positive appreciation exists for pluralism in the multiplicity and diversity of different churches. It is not about the tolerance of diversity, but an appreciation for differences and the other.

- A "whole-part" distinction – the term "church" refers to the whole church, but also to all the parts that contain the "whole church". "It follows that no single church exhausts in itself all the possible qualities of what it may mean to be 'church'" (Haight 2008:391). This also holds for different congregations.

- Religious pluralism points to the fact that the Christian religion is one among many other religions. This opens a wider dialogue with other religions and emphasises the comparative nature of ecclesiology.

- Comparative ecclesiology develops a particular ecclesial identity. The aim is not to overcome the denominational identity, but to expand the sources of reflection and understanding and apply it to a specific church or congregation.

An important characteristic of a comparative ecclesiology is that it could be seen as an ecclesiology that develops from below (Haight & Nieman 2009:595). The focus is on the influence of the local context and the interpretation of the confessional tradition from a local perspective. The development of a missional ecclesiology may illustrate this point (see Burger 2017:281-293). The question from a missional perspective is, "What is the Triune God doing in this local context and how should the congregation see her calling and ministry in the light of the *missio Dei*?" Each congregation would respond differently to answering this question.

4.   A framework for developing contemporary ecclesiologies

This section aims to describe the elements of a contemporary ecclesiology and to provide a possible framework for the development of contemporary ecclesiologies. "Contemporary" may be described as "belonging to or occurring in the present", and the emphasis is, therefore, on the role of a congregation in a concrete local context. Hawksley describes a concrete ecclesiology as an ecclesiology "from below that is empirical rather than doctrinal, real rather than ideal, concrete rather than abstract, local rather than universal" (Hawksley 2012:33). This involves a process of redefining the role, task, and position of the

congregation within society and the local context. In doing so, the following four interrelated aspects of the church and more specifically the congregation should be in interaction with each other:
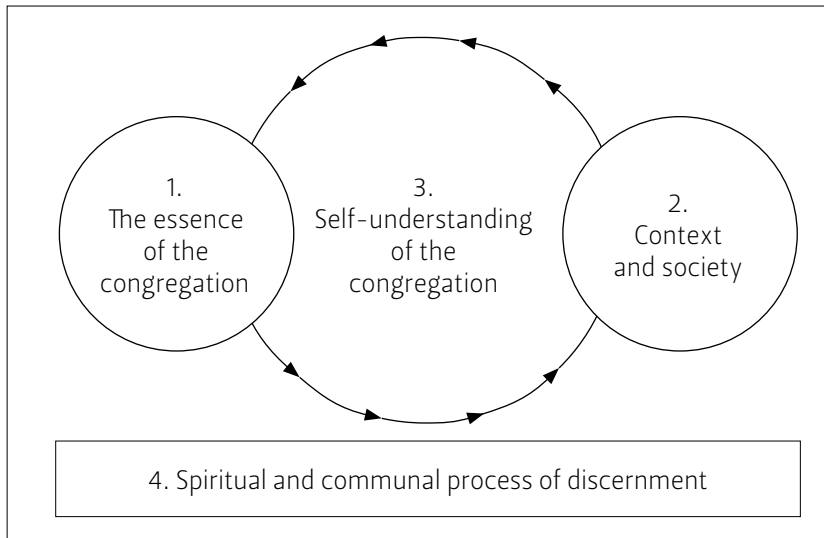
Figure 5.1   Development of contemporary ecclesiologies

4.1   *The essence of the congregation*

The essence of the congregation has to do with its theological character or theological conceptualisation. The guiding question is: What are the essential or defining aspects of a congregation? The answer to this question constitutes the identity of the congregation (see Burger 1999:55-63 and Van Gelder 2000:101-126). The congregational identity may be in terms of a description in more general terms within a confessional tradition (the creeds or confessions of a denomination), or a congregation may define its theological essence in its unique way, for example, as the family of God or the body of Christ. This is understood and articulated in terms of a faith relationship with the Triune God.

Furthermore, the church and the congregation are "God's presence in the world through the Spirit. This makes the church as a spiritual community, unique" (Van Gelder 2000:25). To describe the theological character of a congregation is of critical importance for the congregation as this distinguishes

it from other social institutions; it is not a social club or a welfare organisation. Each congregation has a unique theological understanding of its identity as being a church in the world.

4.2   Congregational context

Every congregation is also founded within a particular context and this contextual environment indicates its interrelatedness and connectedness to its social and physical surroundings. The concept of "ecology" may be used to describe this interaction between congregation and community. Ecology is a biological concept that refers to the interaction that biological species have with their environment and the formation of interdependent ecosystems (see Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley & McKinney 1998:40, 2001:36-40, 310-321). Hendriks (2004:40) uses this word to describe the way congregations interact with society, people, organisations, and cultures. As open systems, congregations interact with the local population and environment. "Together, these populations and environments give shape to ecosystems or ecologies. Ecologies differ according to their geographical location, degree of urbanisation, regional economic situation, political culture, religious diversity, etc." (Brouwer 2009:59). There is a dynamic interaction between congregation and context; "Communities of faith, therefore, form a religious population within ecology that is continually changing and evolving" (Brouwer 2009:59). The study of the congregational ecology thus forms an essential part of the development of a contemporary ecclesiology.

4.3   Self-understanding of the congregation

The "essence" and "context" inform the self-understanding of the congregation, therefore, there is a dynamic interaction between the two concepts. The self-understanding of a congregation is a vital aspect in developing an ecclesiology from below as it is not prescriptive from above as required in a hierarchal or autocratic process. Such a self-understanding of a congregation may be described as a theology lived and experienced in the faith community; "lived religion focuses on individuals and groups as they engage in rituals and practices" (Ward 2017:63). The focus is on the way the faith community is

doing theology as part of its calling and ministry (see Schoeman 2015:74-76). Lived theology is reflected in the being and ministry of the congregation and its members within the congregational life and their engagement with the community. The self-understanding of a congregation is informed by a process of discernment, the fourth element in the development of a contemporary ecclesiology.

4.4 Spiritual and communal process of discernment

The task of the church and congregations is to think theologically and hermeneutically within an open system perspective (Meylahn 2012:47). The interactive task may be seen as a process of discernment by doing theology, listening to different voices in the community, and by proclaiming the traces of God's involvement in this world about what is happening in this particular local community (Meylahn 2012:48). An important aspect of congregational life is thus that congregations should be communities of discernment. Guiding a congregation and making decisions is not an individual process, but a collective hermeneutical process, done collectively by the leadership of the congregation (Van Gelder 2007:98). Discernment is a critical aspect of congregational leadership as it is more than management or the planning and completing of projects. "Discernment is a communicative action characterized by a certain quality of discourse and intent and can be identified, described and evaluated in the process of leadership, especially in meetings" (Smit 2001:9). The process of discernment

> means that part of the challenge facing Christian leaders today is learning to engage diverse perceptions of reality by drawing on a variety of methods that can inform the discernment and decision-making process (Van Gelder 2007:97).

It is important to let God be part of the conversation and

> this is done through accessing the teaching of Scripture and theologically reflecting on it as well as allowing God to function as an acting subject through the presence of the Spirit of God working amid the community (Van Gelder 2007:99).

In congregational life, discernment is thus spiritual practice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the process of discernment should be an integrated and holistic process where theory and practice should not be separated or marginalised, but a way should be found to "reintegrate theological knowledge (*theoria*) with practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and for these to be shaped by personal and communal formation (*habitus*)" (Van Gelder 2007:100). Such an integrated process of discernment may be seen as a liturgical process and to do this

> the following are needed: (1) an integral presence and deliberate utilisation of the church's unique sources of wisdom and guidance (e.g., Scripture and tradition) throughout the meeting and (2) open space for a more conscious experience of God's presence and guidance (Smit 2001:35).

Liturgy and worship should, therefore, be seen as an integral part of the congregation's communal process of discernment.

5.   Conclusion

Congregational studies and congregations need to pay attention to the development of contemporary ecclesiologies from below. Beginning with the local congregation may prevent the implementation of an ecclesiology from above that is seen as a blueprint or a prescriptive model that is be implemented regardless of the local context or challenges. The proposed framework guides a congregation not to work independently, but to develop a self-understanding in interaction with their confession and tradition, informed by the local context. A carefully constructed process of spiritual and communal discernment listens to all the relevant voices. Meylahn (2012:56) uses the metaphor of a dance movement to describe the journey, not as a linear process, but as a dynamic route of listening and engaging with different voices. Ecclesiologists could be seen as pilgrims and cartographers discovering new routes along the way (Hawksley 2012:226), in discerning a relevant and contextual ecclesiology.

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PART 2

EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

An empirical exploration of the missional ecclesiology of congregations in the Dutch Reformed Church

W.J. Schoeman

1. Introduction

A significant shift and development in the last decade or two was the emphasis placed on a missional ecclesiology as a consequence of the interest in the missional church (Niemandt 2012). This development was identified as a significant emerging trend

> where congregations are not primarily sending missionaries to some or other mission field, but where the congregation itself is sent to its local context, where its members live and work from day-to-day (Van Niekerk 2014:4).

The local congregation and her ministry thus moved into focus as a result of the emphasis that was placed on the missional church (Burger 2017). In this regard, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) is no exception; it made an important choice at the general synod level to adopt a missional ecclesiology (Niemandt 2010). This choice influenced the church as a denomination, but also had consequences for the congregations of the DRC, and this is the specific focus of this chapter. The following question is therefore important: What is the influence of a missional ecclesiology on the ministry of congregations in the DRC?

In analysing a congregation, it is necessary to work with a practical-theological ecclesiology, in this case from a missional perspective, and therefore a theological and analytical framework is needed to do a congregational analysis (Nel & Schoeman 2015:89-94). The ministry of the congregation, from a missional perspective, will be the theoretical framework that will be used in this instance. From an analytical perspective, the aim is to analyse some of the aspects of congregational life from a quantitative methodological perspective. The specific research question is: Is it possible to use congregational growth, congregational size, urbanisation and the financial resources of a congregation as variables to explain changes in the missional praxis of congregations in the DRC?

Two congregational *Church Mirror* surveys (2010 and 2014) were undertaken in the DRC and these surveys are used as an empirical and analytical case study to explore the interaction between the missional orientation of the congregation as an indicator and the identified variables (growth, size, urbanisation, and financial resources). The envisaged outcome is to develop a strategic design to indicate specific markers regarding the changes needed in a congregational ecclesiology to have a relevant missional ministry in a congregation.

2. Methodology of the research

A quantitative empirical methodology is used to describe the ministry of the congregation (see Hermans & Schoeman 2015). The empirical data used in this chapter come from the 2010 and 2014 *Church Mirror* surveys.[1] The data come from the congregational survey that enquired about the functioning and ministry of the local congregation. The questionnaire asked about different aspects of the congregation and was completed by the leadership and administrative staff of the congregation. It was a postal administrated survey and questionnaires were sent to all the congregations of the DRC during August and September of 2010 and 2014. In 2010, questionnaires were sent to 1 146 congregations and 671 (58.6%) were returned and captured. In 2014, questionnaires were sent to 1 127 congregations and 704 (62.5%)

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1   See Schoeman (2011) for a more detailed description of the *Church Mirror* surveys and their methodology.

were returned and captured. This was a good response and the answers and conclusions may thus be seen as significant.

3.   The missional orientation of congregations

A missional perspective is used as a theoretical framework to understand and describe a congregation and her ministry. A missional ecclesiology has its foundation in the mission of the Triune God into this world (Niemandt 2012), and from this foundation, a local faith community would develop its identity and ministry as an instrument in the continuous coming of the kingdom (See Bosch 1991; Burger 1999; Nel 2015).

> Mission is understood as ultimately proceeding from the Trinitarian God. The ecclesiology functioning in this backdrop is an understanding that God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, sent the church. The classical formulation of *missio Dei* affirms that mission is God's way of sending forth (Niemandt 2010:399).

The following paragraph gives a theoretical and conceptual operationalisation of the concepts "missionary", "outreach" and "missional" that were used in this study.

The mission or calling of a missional congregation is not a task or function of a congregation but is fundamentally embedded in its identity. Van Gelder (2000:28-32) distinguishes between the task and identity of a congregation. A missionary task is done by a few members, a commission or committee of the congregation, usually working outside the borders of the congregation as a project or programme of the congregation. Within the conceptual understanding of this empirical analysis an outreach orientation could be situated somewhere between the missional identity, on the one hand, and the missionary task of a congregation, on the other hand.

In the two surveys, congregations were asked to position themselves in terms of their understanding of their missional orientation in the congregation. Table 6.1 reflects the responses in this regard.

Table 6.1   The missional orientation of the congregation

Orientation of congregation	2010	2014	
	%	N	%
1. Missionary	37.2	205	30.0
2. Outreach	26.8	224	32.8
3. Missional	36.0	254	37.2
Total	**100.0**	**683**	**100.0**

As the data show, there is a decrease in the missionary orientation (from 37.2% in 2010 to 30.0% in 2014) and a growth (from 36.0% to 37.2%) in the missional orientation of congregations. Most of the congregations position themselves as having a missional orientation as part of their congregational identity. The growth from 2010 to 2014 in an outreach orientation may also be an indication in this direction that there is a movement towards a more missional orientation in the congregation.

4.   The possible impact of a missional orientation on congregational ministry

Four variables in the two surveys were selected to describe or explain the variance within the missional orientation of the congregation as an indicator (see Table 6.1):

- the regional (rural or urban) location of the congregation;
- the size of the congregation;
- the resources available to the congregation (material, human, and relational); and
- congregational growth.

This section employs a quantitative empirical lens to describe the relationship between the variables and the role they play regarding the missional orientation as an indicator.[2] The main focus falls on describing these as key indicators

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2   The different variables are reported in cross tables and the gamma-value is used as an indicator of association (see Babbie & Mouton 2001:462-464). All the associations that are used are on a significant level of 0.05 or less (see Babbie & Mouton 2001:481).

in the analysis of congregations. This may contribute to the identification of strategic missional practices for congregations.

4.1 The region of congregations

Congregations may be located in more rural of more urban environments and this aspect thus addresses the influence of urbanisation on the missional ministry of the congregation. The South African society does not escape the processes and influences of urbanisation and this may also differ from region to region (See Hendriks 2012; Nel & Schoeman 2015). The total South African population is subjected to a process of urbanisation and there is a constant increase in the urban population and a decrease in the rural population. The relevant issue in this regard is thus the influence of the difference between a rural or urban context on the ministry and the functioning of a congregation.

The *Church Mirror* surveys use the following as criteria as a guideline in making a distinction between congregations in different contexts:

- Rural – congregations in small towns where there are four or fewer DRC-ministers;

- Town – congregations where more than four DRC-ministers are working in bigger towns; and

- Urban – congregations situated in urban areas in suburbs (houses, townhouses and flats), surrounding areas and the inner city.

The majority of DRC-congregations are located in rural contexts (see Table 6.2). There was not a big movement between rural, town and urban congregations between 2010 and 2014; the situation stayed more or less the same.

Table 6.2   The region of the congregation

Region of congregation	2010	2014	
	%	N	%
1. Rural	46.1	329	46.9
2. Town	14.5	102	14.6
3. Urban	39.5	270	38.5
Total	**100.0**	**701**	**701**

Table 6.6 shows the influence of urbanisation on the missional ministry of the different congregations. Congregations in more rural contexts favour a missionary orientation while urban congregations tend to have a more missional orientation towards the ministry.

4.2 The size of congregations

The size of a congregation has an important influence on its capacity and ability to do certain things, minister to its members and serve the community. The quality of relationships and the role of the leadership are also influenced by the size of a congregation.

The following typology was used to describe the variation in congregational size (Johnson 2001:15):

- Family congregations are small congregations (less than 50 members in worship). Such a congregation consists of one group of tightly knit families with matriarchs or patriarchs in the centre and the pastor functioning as the chaplain. There are part-time staff with limited functions in such a family congregation.

- Pastoral congregations are bigger (51–150 members in worship) and have a large group centring on the pastor with friendship circles. The pastor is thus the hub of the congregation.

- Programme congregations (151–350 members in worship) have a third of its membership in small groups and centres around skilled and empowered staff or lay leaders. Programmes and committees play an important role in the organisation of such a congregation. The pastor functions as an executive and the church council could be described as board members functioning as managers of the different programmes.

- Corporate congregations are large congregations consisting of a great variety of groups (more than 350 members in worship). The pastor functions as a chief executive officer and the full-time staff are in charge of the different programme areas. They have virtual autonomy and oversee almost independent organisations. The church council could be described as a board of directors.

The above-mentioned typology uses members in worship as a guideline, but in the DRC context, this needed to be adapted to use the total membership of a congregation as a guideline (see Table 6.3). Family congregations increased from 2010 to 2014, and this may be a result of the decline in membership of the DRC (see Schoeman 2014). The majority of congregations in the DRC (35.4%) may be classified as pastoral size congregations.

Table 6.3   Congregational size

Size of congregation	2010	2014	
	%	N	%
1. Family congregations (<300 members)	19.9	181	25,8
2. Pastoral congregations (301–800 members)	39.1	248	35.4
3. Programme congregations (801–1 500 members)	23.6	162	23.1
4. Corporate congregations (1 501+ members)	17.4	110	15.7
Total	**100.0**	**701**	**100.0**

Table 6.7 shows the role played by congregational size in the missional orientation of the congregation. Most of the smaller congregations (family and pastoral congregations) tend to have a stronger missionary orientation, while bigger congregation (programme and corporate congregations) lean towards a more missional orientation. A critical question to be raised is whether smaller congregations can be more missional in their orientation.

4.3   The resources of congregations

Resources are, to a great extent, the building material of a congregation. "Resources are sometimes hard and countable, but they are also sometimes soft and relational" (Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley & McKinney 1998:132). Congregations have access to material resources (property and financial), human resources (members, leaders, full-time and part-time employees) and relational resources (experience, knowledge and networks). "Large congregations may have more resources than small congregations, but small congregations may have the capacity to mobilize and use their resources better than large congregations" (Hendriks 2004:175). The question to raise

regarding the resources of congregations is: In what way do congregations use and utilise their available resources in enhancing a missional ministry?

In this research, a choice was made to focus on the financial position of congregations as a resource. It may be problematic to do so because congregational resources are more comprehensive, but financial resources could be seen as a "foundational resource" (Ammerman *et al.* 1998:141). Finances are an important or even an essential recourse for congregations and the sustainable existence of a congregation may depend on the financial resources available for the congregational ministry. Most of the growing congregations (74%) in the Presbyterian Church (USA) have a growing financial base while only 26% of the non-growing congregations reported a growing financial base (Bruce & Woolever 2012:2). This is an illustration of the relative importance of financial resources as an indicator in congregational life.

In the study, congregations were asked to indicate if they have an increasing, stable or shrinking financial base (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4   The financial position of the congregation

Financial position of congregations	2010	2014	
	%	N	%
1. Increasing	18.9	84	12.0
2. Stable	51.6	373	53.5
3. Shrinking	29.5	241	34.5
Total	**100.0**	**698**	**100.0**

As is evident, there was a decrease in congregations with an increasing financial base and an increase in congregations with a shrinking financial position. A majority of congregations (53.5%) have a stable financial position, and this increased from 2010 to 2014. This may change, since unstable economic circumstances may have an influence over time.

Table 6.8 shows how the availability of financial resources influences the missional orientation of a congregation. Missional congregations experienced growth in such financial positions and missionary congregations a decline. This

may indicate that a missional orientation enhances and contributes towards a better financial position.

4.4   The growth of congregations

What is the influence of a missional orientation on the growth of a congregation? To help answer this question, the congregation was asked whether she was growing or in a phase or period of decline. This question thus concerns the direction a congregation is moving. The focus of a congregation might be on maintaining the current direction or position of the congregation "keeping in the faith those born into it and perpetuating forms that relate to their needs", or the focus may be on growth "that seeks to bring into committed belief and belonging those born outside of the Christian community, by developing forms that are meaningful to their needs" (Ward 2006:22). Congregations functioning within a framework of maintenance find it difficult to grow and are characterised by

> an inward, self-absorbed focus of ministry, demonstrating a lack of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of others outside the church. They no longer have any vision or sense of urgency in fulfilling the Great Commission (Lindstrom 2006:30).

Growing congregations, on the other hand, may be seen as "having broad purposes, members attracted by social opportunities, and a responsive approach to the local environment" (Moore 2011:57). Congregational growth could be understood in terms of quantitative growth (an increase of membership, attendance of activities or even financial growth). However, congregational growth is also about qualitative growth, for example, in terms of committed service, loyalty towards the community of believers and trust in God's promises. The focus of this empirical exploration was more towards a quantitative understanding of congregational growth.

Table 6.5 shows the results of the surveys regarding the direction the congregation is moving. A majority of congregations (an increase from 49.8% in 2010 to 61.6% in 2014) are busy with maintenance and a declining number of congregations (less than 40% in 2014) are growing. From a quantitative

perspective, this may point to an increase in the difficult circumstances congregations are experiencing.

Table 6.5   The direction the congregation is moving

Direction congregation is moving	2010	2014	
	%	N	%
1. Maintenance	49.8	429	61.6
2. Growing	50.2	267	38.4
Total	**100.0**	**686**	**100.0**

Table 6.9 shows the relationship between a missional orientation and congregational growth. Congregations with a strong focus on maintenance also have a strong missionary preference. Growing congregations focus on a missional orientation in their identity and ministry.

5.   An analytical reflection on the influence of a missional orientation on congregations

As a first and general remark, it is important to note that the DRC had an overall decline in membership over the last decade (see Schoeman 2014) and this is most probably reflected in the decline in the financial position of congregations and the increase in smaller family-size congregations. This has an impact on the availability of resources, both human and financial, in congregations. But what are the implications on the identity and ministry of congregations? Congregations have a choice of opting for maintenance as a general strategy to cope with the decrease in financial and human resources. The choice for a missional strategy is one of the choices that congregations have.

Congregations may favour a stable financial position, focusing on the status quo and short-term survival. A critical question may then be asked about the relevance of the congregation and its missional identity. Or may a focus on the missional identity help a congregation to grow even when human and financial recourses are declining?

The empirical data from the two surveys may assist in the choice of a strategy. The discussion of the influence of the four variables on the missional orientation

of the congregation helps us in this regard. By comparing the different gamma-values it is possible to see that a missional orientation has a significant influence on the possibility for congregations to grow (Table 6. 9, gamma: 0.461). The financial position (Table 6.8, gamma: 0.229) and size (Table 6.7, gamma: 0.266) of the congregation play a lesser role than missional orientation. It is not possible to determine the direction of the association, but missionary congregations are mostly busy with maintenance and are struggling to grow. A missional orientation, on the other hand, has a more positive influence on a congregation.

Certain trends from 2010 to 2014 in DRC congregations may help to highlight the role of a missional orientation in congregations and their ministry.[3] There was a slight decrease in the importance of a growing financial position for congregations with a missional orientation; more congregations opted for the middle ground with an outreach orientation as a compromise between missionary and missional approaches (see Table 6.8). The same holds for congregations that opted for a maintenance position (see Table 6.9). Over the period 2010 to 2014, rural congregations moved towards a more missionary position and urban congregations towards a more missional stance (see Table 6.6). The influence of congregational size stayed more or less the same (see Table 6.7).

The following statements may be made in reflecting on the empirical findings: Congregations with a strong missional identity or strategy are doing better than congregations that see mission as an aspect or task (a missionary orientation) of the congregation. This is the case for both the 2010 and 2014 surveys. Secondly, congregations in a maintenance mode are not doing good. In general terms, missional congregations have a growing tendency, also in terms of its financial resources. A missional orientation could thus enhance the ministry of the congregation and motivate them to move beyond maintenance.

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3   The different gamma-values were used in the comparison between 2010 and 2014.

Table 6.6 Missional orientation of the congregation and region, 2014 (as a percentage)

Region	Missional orientation			N	Chi–square	Degrees of freedom	Significance	Gamma
	Missionary	**Outreach**	**Missional**					
Rural	36.4	33.2	30.4	316	17.75	4	0.0014	.227
Town	30.0	32.0	38.0	100				
Urban	22.7	31.8	45.5	264				2010: .194

Table 6.7 Missional orientation of the congregation and the congregational size, 2014 (as a percentage)

Size	Missional orientation			N	Chi–square	Degrees of freedom	Significance	Gamma
	Missionary	**Outreach**	**Missional**					
Family	38.8	31.8	29.4	170	41.73	6	0.0000	.266
Pastoral	33.9	36.8	29.3	242				
Program	24.5	34.6	40.9	159				
Corporate	16.5	22.9	60.6	109				2010: .263

Table 6.8 Missional orientation of the congregation and financial position, 2014 (as a percentage)

Financial position	Missional orientation			N	Chi–square	Degrees of freedom	Significance	Gamma
	Missionary	**Outreach**	**Missional**					
Increasing	19.3	28.9	51.8	83	17.54	4	0.0015	.229
Stable	27.7	33.4	39.9	365				
Shrinking	38.0	32.3	29.7	229				2010: .264

Table 6.9 Missional orientation of the congregation and congregational direction, 2014 (as a percentage)

Direction	Missional orientation			N	Chi–square	Degrees of freedom	Significance	Gamma
	Missionary	**Outreach**	**Missional**					
Maintenance	38.2	35.3	26.5	411	56.21	2	0.000	.461
Growing	17.7	28.7	53.6	265				2010: .558

6.   Conclusion

The chapter started with the question: What is, from a theoretical perspective, the impact of a missional orientation on a congregational ministry? The empirical analysis points towards the significant role that a missional orientation plays in the ministry of congregations. These empirical markers contribute to the development of an ecclesiology from below.

As an important limitation, it is necessary to remark that the research findings presented here are from a case study of DRC congregations and that an empirical lens within a specific context was used, so care should be taken not to overgeneralise the results presented here. The aim is only to point to certain markers within these limitations.

In this regard, the development of a missional identity, as a marker in the development of an ecclesiology, plays an important role. A missional orientation assists a congregation to grow and has a positive effect on the congregational ministry. DRC congregations find themselves within a context of differentiation and subjectification that are challenging the formation of a missional community of believers (see Schoeman 2012). The formation and development of a missional identity is an important marker for and contributor towards congregational growth.

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From maintenance to mission? Maintaining mission – towards an integrated approach

I.A. Nell

1.   Introduction

Congregational studies is still a relatively new discipline in the field of practical theology (Nieman 2012:133, cited in Miller-McLemore 2012:133). Despite its newness, several approaches have already been developed to the study of the field. Most of these normally work with four forms of analysis of congregations, namely a context, identity, process and source analysis (see Hendriks 2004; Hopewell 1987).

A recent development in this field of congregational studies is the so-called "missional approach". This approach has a close association with the field of missiology, to the extent that the boundaries between practical theology and missiology are sometimes blurred. This movement gained popularity towards the end of the twentieth century as one that proposes a missional lifestyle. The concept is based on *missio Dei* (the mission of God) and, according to Bosch (1991:420), gained ground upon Karl Barth's emphasis of *actio Dei* (action of God), according to which all missional activities originate from God himself. God is therefore the primary agent in the world, but also in the church. Newbigin (1989) concurs with Barth's ideas and opines that every Christian is sent by Jesus with the gospel to people in the surrounding culture, for the sake of the kingdom of God: "The Church is sent into the world to continue that which he came to do, in the power of the same Spirit, reconciling people to God" (Newbegin 1989:230).

2.   Terminological elucidation

In light of what was said in the previous paragraph on the concept "missional", it is nevertheless necessary to obtain greater clarity on it. In a very insightful study, Saayman (2010:5) points out that "missional" is increasingly replacing the concept of "missionary" in academic discourse. However, he finds no clear etymological difference between the terms, as both derive from the word "mission". He further points out that the term "'mission" and the derivative "missionary" are not used in the New Testament, with the result that no one can appeal to Scripture to decide which of the two terms to use (Saayman 2010:6). In addition, both terms have a turbulent history in light of their connection to the colonial expansion of the Western world into Third World countries. The intertwinement of mission and colonialism further brought the terms in disfavour. The use of the word "missional" is, according to Saayman (2010:9-13), a fairly recent development, and it was used for the first time in the mid-nineties in research undertaken by the Gospel and Culture Network, which means it has a very specific Western, North Atlantic and postmodern cultural context as background. It is, therefore, used specifically in the North Atlantic context where it originated, mainly as a result of the work of Leslie Newbegin and David Bosch.

> It is meant to respond in the first place to missional needs in American and European cultures deeply influenced by postmodernism. It is therefore not meant to be simply a synonym for missionary and is part of a thoroughly contextual North Atlantic or Western missiology (Saayman 2010:13).

In this regard, Saayman (2010:15-16) cautions churches in the Third World and specifically in the South African context should they decide to use the term "missional" instead of "missionary". First, in his opinion, the term cannot simply be transplanted to a new context, as the term "missional" developed in a process of contextualisation in the North Atlantic context. Secondly, should we want to use the concept in South Africa, Saayman argues that we would have to recontextualise and indigenise it thoroughly. This brings us to the South African adoption of the concept.

3.   Being a missional church in the South African context

The missional movement of the North Atlantic context blew to South Africa in the form of the South African Partnership for Missional Churches, the origin of which can be traced to 2004 with the first of several visits by Prof. Pat Keiffert to our country (Communitas 2006). The first meetings mostly took place with the churches from the Reformed tradition, and more specifically with the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Niemandt and Claassen (2012:2-4) use the following heading in an article to spell out the essence of this movement: "Van Instandhouding na Gestuurdheid – Die Buitelyne van 'n Missionale Teologie" (From maintenance to mission – the perimeters of a missional theology). They believe that the time in which we find ourselves is experiencing a paradigm shift and they describe this as a move from maintenance to mission (Niemandt & Claassen 2012:2). They explain various aspects of a missional theology and place it centrally in the *ecclesia semper reformanda* character of reformed theology. They concur with David Bosch's emphasis on the sending God and show how this point of departure has a radical influence on the practice of congregational ministry. Congregations, therefore, have to learn to discern where the Trinity is active and joins God there.

This new movement undoubtedly had (and still has) a great influence within the vital sphere of the reformed churches in South Africa, and on the DR churches, especially. In a report to the General Synod of October 2013, a document served titled Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the Dutch Reformed Church (General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church 2013). In this document, the slogan "maintenance to mission" is used anew and Niemandt and Meiring, the compilers of the report, write: "The church's primary focus is on the world to which God has sent it, and not in the first place on itself or its survival" (General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church 2013:6). In my opinion, this concise summary of the missional project "from maintenance to mission" rests on several presuppositions that may pose potential dangers for the continuing ecclesiological development in (especially) the DRC.

4.   Potential dangers

This section discusses the potential dangers mentioned above and identified as:

- a dualistic epistemology;

- a one-sided interpretation of the Trinity;

- amnesia relating to historicity and contextuality;

- different types of being a church; and

- the "new thought" in the missional movement.

4.1   A dualistic epistemology

The first danger concerns what I like to call a "dualistic epistemology", in which there is thought in "either … or" categories and knowledge is classified accordingly. According to Rohr (2011:146-147), dualistic thought is a well-practised pattern, according to which we know things based on comparisons. The moment we start to compare things, we could conclude that one is better than the other; we then decide between the two and out of necessity choose the one above the other – also known as black–white thought. We find this epistemology, especially concerning theories on congregations found in recent discourses on being a church in the DRC. So, for example, there was a time when the thinking was that there should be a shift away from the so-called shepherd-flock model to the body of Christ model, with the idea that the former is wrong and unusable. For a time, this was the thought pattern in the ministry of the DRC, and several new practices took place based on the shift in thinking that did not hold good outcomes for the church. In light of the latter, the danger of a dualistic thought pattern is very clear when it comes to the shift from the focus of "maintenance to mission". By way of comparison, the first is not good, there should be a shift away from it and it should be left behind. The thought pattern is either the one or the other, and a choice necessarily has to be made. This in comparison to non-dualistic thought, which works with the one *and* the other. We need both; in the bipolar tension between the two, new and creative forms of being church originate and not in the exclusion of the one at the expense of the other. No church can exist without maintenance and no church can grow without mission.

4.2   A one-sided interpretation of the Trinity

A second danger relates to the problematic use of the concept *missio Dei* in the missional movement. Flett (2010:36), in a chapter titled "The Problem that is *missio Dei*", points to the fact that the concept *missio Dei* lacks coherence and is fraught with ambiguities. His main point of critique is that *missio Dei* claims to provide a Trinitarian framework for concepts that do not draw on that doctrine. The apparent logical homogeny of the concept submerges often radically discordant positions. This produces a range of positions consolidated under the designation *missio Dei,* which, when placed alongside each other, exist in irreconcilable tension. We need to take note of this critique when we use the *missio Dei* concept, and for that matter the concept "mission" as well, and make sure that it does not become a kind of blanket concept covering whatever we want to promote or read into it.

4.3   Amnesia

A third danger is what may be called "amnesia" and relates to historicity and contextuality. Vosloo (2015) reacts to the DRC framework document mentioned earlier and argues that the document states that the church learnt from history that one can only be the church of God through discipleship and sacrifice, which is according to him a strong statement. However, he finds it disappointing that a sense of the history, which he articulates as a historical consciousness, is absent in the majority of the document. He avers that much of the missional movement is without reference to the ambivalent history associated with the term "mission" in our country and the ambiguous role of "mission" and "missionaries" in South Africa's painful socio-political past, not in the least in light of the theological justification of segregation and apartheid. Vosloo (2015:3) states: "My point is rather that the mission history of the DRC ... deserves to be acknowledged and taken into account if the DRC wants to reflect on the missional nature and calling of the church 'through learning from history' and 'within the South African context.'"

This so-called amnesia may be a danger in the way of the missional movement if attention is not paid to the full story of the DRC's missionary work and the role it played in the development of apartheid.

4.4 Different types of being a church

A fourth danger relates to the possibility that exists that only one form or type of being a church is, perhaps unwittingly, propagated above other types in the missional movement. Erwich (2013:143) discusses a five-fold way in which congregations can be typified, namely, a community of language; a community of memory; a community of inquiry; a community of mutual care; and a community of mission. The missional movement concentrates only on the last type and with the statement "maintenance to mission" even intentionally wants to move away from the other types. This necessarily leads to an attenuation in the ecclesiological discourse of the DRC. In my opinion, one can only develop an appreciation for the church as a community of mission when one understands the complexity of the first four types of being church.

4.5 The "new thought" in the missional movement

A fifth danger relates to the emphasis in the framework document on "new" in its reflection on being church. According to Vosloo (2015:4), the reformed churches must be always open to new thought and forms of being church, and this is an important point in the document. He points out that "new" functions as an important hermeneutic key in the document, with headings such as "New Insights on our Understanding of God", "New Insights into the Church", "New Insights into the Kingdom of God", "New Insights on Incarnation", "New Insights Regarding our Context: The World", "New Insights on Congregations", "New Insights into Being servants to the Community", "New Insight on Faith Formation Within the Church", "New Insights Regarding the Offices of The Church", "New Insights on Church Planting", "New Insights into the Liturgy of a Missional Church", etc.

The problem Vosloo (2015:5) has with the concept "new" concerns what he describes as the so-called modern-time regime, which in turn relates to a shift in our understanding of the structure of Western temporality. According to some theorists, this modern-time regime originated in the era of the French Revolution and ended somewhere during the 1980s. According to these scholars, the characteristic of the modern-time regime is that time is divided and that a discontinuity develops between the past and the present. In this way,

the past loses its power as a source of orientation and action in the present. The emphasis is on "new beginnings" and a break with the past. Hence, history is not the teacher for life anymore, but the things and forms of the past must rather be creatively destroyed. We should not be bothered by the past, as this may place possible obstacles in the way of innovation of new constructs. To forget the past, rather than remembering it, becomes the most effective strategy to grow and flourish. According to Vosloo (2015:5), this fits in well with the capitalistic logic in which products must be destroyed for the economy to continue to grow. Therefore, he challenges discourses that work with the concept "new" without placing them in the "messiness" of the past that break with the past and destroy existing forms and practices in the name of creativity to fit in with the present. In this regard, Barnard makes the following comments on the missional movement within the Dutch context:

> After eight years we have discovered that nothing has come of these ideals. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands consists of spectacularly waning communities … Particularly in the years that the church claimed a new missional identity, she did not even come close to retain her dwindling numbers. The missional project has failed, or we should give a different meaning to the word "missional" … Against the backdrop of the waning church, missional language and pretences have become laughable. We are playing in a tragicomedy … Let us agree: from now on we will no longer be "missional". We call a halt to the missional activism. We rather return to the inner chamber. The inky night. The void. The great silence. The judgment of God. There, not visible to any outsider, we bend over the Scriptures and search whether we may not again, perhaps softly, hear the foolish voice of the Gospel … Here we gather around a table and share a tiny piece of bread and take a tiny sip of wine. And then we say (and we believe it ourselves): This is a sign of the great feast of all nations, with the best food and the best wines. And we inconspicuously walk an extra mile with those who need it – the refugee, the vulnerable elderly, and the abused child. Maybe a few people might ask themselves: what is it with those Christians? Then we will have little to say. Perhaps stutter: "You know, we belong to an executed criminal, crudely hung up on a piece of wood." That is it. Let us simply be. Our God works in secret. That is his mission (Barnard 2013:13).

These identified dangers compel one to make an alternative suggestion. One such suggestion is the profile of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) developed in Australia and used widely over the past 25 years. In my opinion, this model succeeds in keeping the "maintenance" and "mission" of a congregation's life in creative tension and also offers the possibility of the continuing vitality of congregations and the church of Christ.[1]

5. A more balanced approach

In their publication *Enriching Church Life*, Press and Powell (2012) extensively discuss the theme of vitality and connect this theme particularly to how Jesus is depicted in the Gospel of John as a source of life. For the NCLS, vitality is directly connected to the influence of Jesus who came to give life to us to the full (John 10:10). The NCLS developed a congregational profile in support of congregations and their missional activities. Based on an extensive survey, the NCLS offers congregations a profile giving them insight into the vitality of the congregation in several areas. However, the investigators of the NCLS team do not pretend to regard their analysis model as the replacement of theological reflection. They rather view it as a first step on the way to a more vital and attractive congregation that realises its missional character. Besides, they do not claim that those who use the model will experience automatic growth or vitality. They try, however, to support the further development of the profile in local contexts, and the profile indicates to the congregation the great potential present among its members. This strongly relates to the method known as appreciative inquiry. The vitality of the congregation is measured by administering a questionnaire among members and visitors. These are then processed, after which the congregation receives its profile. The profile, shown in Figure 7.1, indicates the nine core qualities and their mutual relationships.

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1   The chapter that follows discusses the NCLS in more detail.
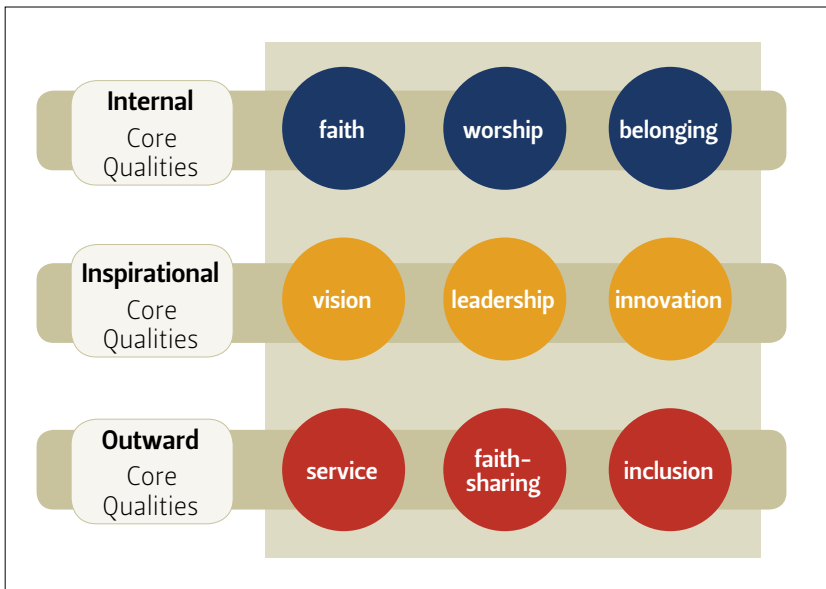
(Source: Press and Powell 2012:6)

Figure 7.1   Nine core qualities of church life

We, therefore, find that the profile consists of three dimensions. The first dimension relates to the internal core qualities and consists of a living and growing faith, vital and edifying public worship and a strong and growing realisation of belonging. The second dimension relates to the inspiration-directed core qualities and consists of involvement in a clear vision, inspiring and supporting leadership and creative and flexible innovation. The third dimension relates to the outward-directed core qualities and consists of practical and multi-coloured service, conscious and effective faith sharing and intentional and hospitable inclusion (Press & Powell 2012:7-9). The NCLS acknowledges that congregational vitality entails much more than the presentation of statistical data. At the same time, the nine core qualities, in my opinion, offer great insight into the vitality of a congregation. From a theological perspective, one can see that *koinonia* (community) plays an important role in the background and leads to a three-fold relationship, namely a relationship with God, a relationship with one another and a relationship with the (missional) context in which the congregation is active. The self-

understanding of the congregation is then based on the connection of the three relations of faith, community and faith sharing, which are all of fundamental importance for the vitality of the congregation. This means that one cannot function at the expense of the others.

In the profile that each participating congregation receives, the NCLS indicates, in a so-called "circle of strength", the power and vitality of each congregation. The circle is mostly presented in the form of a chain of pearls from large to small (see Figure 7.2). The pearls represent the core qualities and are represented from "strong" to "not as strong" based on the scores emanating from the questionnaires. A high score on one core quality is often connected to a high score on another quality. The model, therefore, offers the opportunity to discern the core qualities of local congregations and to support them in their further development (Erwich 2013:49).
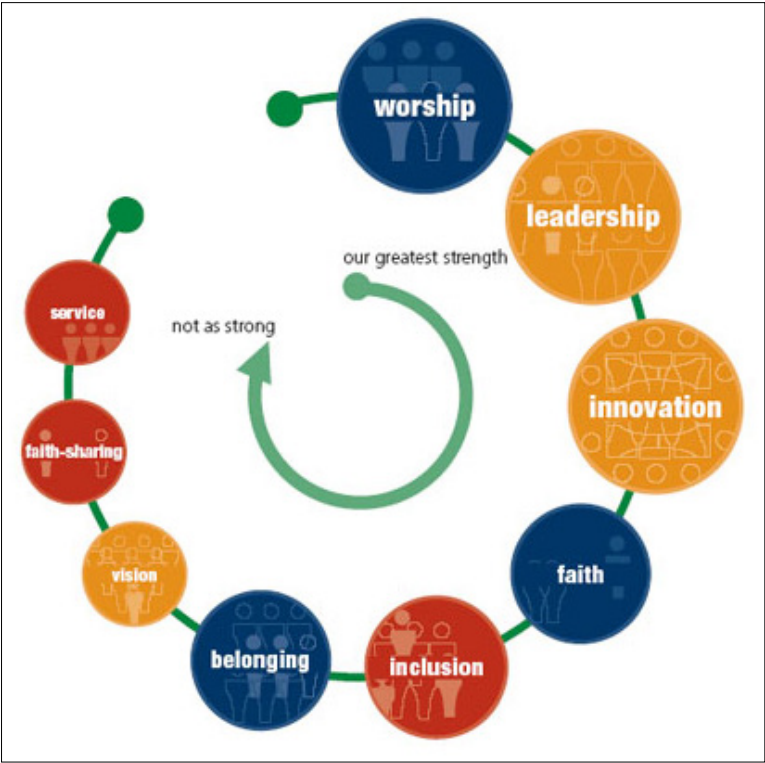
(Source: Erwich 2013:48)

Figure 7.2   The "circle of strength" model

In this regard, the relation between the core qualities is a core question. The question can rightly be posed whether and how the core qualities are connected. Based on complex statistical analysis, the NCLS determined that different core qualities correlate to a large extent with one another. For the argument I pose for greater balance between maintenance and mission, it is interesting to see how the NCLS isolated these mutual stronger relationships in the following four divisions:

a. A living and growing faith.

b. Sharing of faith (conscious and effective faith sharing).

c. Involvement with a clear vision.

d. Inspiring and supporting leadership.

Press and Powell (2012:96-104) explain some of these relationships as follows.

- *With a living and growing faith*, the relation with effective faith sharing is conspicuous. It appears that when members of a congregation grow in their faith, they want to share this with others. Consequently, it appears that there is a strong relationship between the personal faith of church members and the vision of a congregation. Where there is strong personal faith, this is closely connected to a positive vision of the congregation.

- *With a strong and growing realisation of community*, it is conspicuous that if leaders support and stimulate the members of the congregation based on their talents, this factor stands in strong relation to the growing realisation that one belongs to the congregation. This factor is likewise strongly connected to a consciousness of dedication to the vision of the congregation.

- *With inspiring and supporting leadership,* one notices a clear relationship between this factor and the vision factor. In a congregation where a clear culture of supporting leadership exists, one finds a larger extent of dedication to the vision of the congregation. Both core qualities influence the ownership of the work of the congregation by the church members in a positive way. In this regard, the congregation does not have registered colleagues, as such, but willing members, and together with the increase in ownership goes a stronger realisation of community.

- *With conscious and effective faith sharing,* it is clear that the sharing of faith consists of superior indicators that are connected. From the NCLS investigation, it appears that one finds a strong culture of the conscious sharing of personal faith in a congregation where members experience growth in their faith and are aware of a strong connection with the community. The sharing of faith also strongly accompanies ownership of the vision of the congregation. Further, their investigations confirm that edifying and inspiring celebration and gatherings promote the integration of new life.

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that this model has some advantages (Erwich 2013:152):

- Firstly, we are dealing here with a more balanced approach to being a church that attempts to keep the relationship between the internal core qualities (read maintenance) and external core qualities (read mission) in creative tension with one another. The one set of qualities is just as important as the other, and it is therefore not a case of "either … or", but of "and … and". What is, however, clear from the NCLS model, is that the inspiration-directed core qualities, namely vision, inspiring and supporting leadership, and creative and flexible innovation, are the glue that keeps all the processes together. The leadership of a congregation therefore has a specific responsibility to ensure that the balance is maintained.

- Secondly, the NCLS profile contributes to the concrete congregational tale by functioning as a mirror in which the stronger and less strong points of the congregation are addressed. Aspects of the congregation's ministry that demand attention and revitalisation are therefore seen appreciatively.

- Thirdly, the NCLS profile has a certain flexibility, which means that it can fit in with processes of edifying the congregation in different and diverse congregations. Therefore, in many cases, the profile offers a supplementary analysis for congregations.

- Fourthly, the NCLS profile can act in a supporting way on policy development in a local congregation. In this regard, it plays a role as a bridge between the outcomes of the profile and the inputs to policy formation.

The retranslation of the profile into the local culture of the congregation is here a prerequisite for good results.

As with all models and profiles, this one also contains a few limitations, and in concurrence with Erwich (2013:152), I highlight the following two:

▪ As far as a theological perspective and a sound ecclesiology is concerned, the profiles appear to be fairly "thin". They are too generic and suggest adaptability and usability in any random denomination. From experience, we know that there are great denominational differences with long traditions behind them, which cannot all simply be treated alike.

▪ The NCLS profile, in any case in its current format, does not sufficiently help a congregation to read its cultural context and is geared too one-sidedly on the internal appreciation by the members of their group. However, it is well known that the NCLS has also worked with profiles in which the cultural context was addressed more extensively.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was not to try to discredit the missional movement or to reflect negatively on any persons or followers thereof. This movement has presented many positive initiatives and ministries. It offered a whole new dynamic to missionary work. My argument is merely that the description of the movement as "maintenance to mission" and as part of a theoretical framework places various obstacles in the way of a full deployment. Therefore, I find the suggestion of the NCLS profile very valuable for a balance between maintenance and mission. This is the reason for my suggestion in the title of the chapter of "maintaining mission", where the focus falls on "inclusion". In this regard, I concur with the suggestion by Johannes N.J. Kritzinger, who wrote the following in a collection on ministry formation:

> What we need as an underlying ethos for everything we do in ministerial formation is a spirituality of inclusion, reaching out to people who are different, thinking them into our lives as part of our world; a way of life that does not say (or even think); "the coloureds have a gangsterism problem", "the Afrikaners have a racism problem", or "the poor black communities have a xenophobic

problem", etc. Instead, it will say: "we have a gangsterism problem in some of our townships", "we have a racism problem in some of our communities" (Kritzinger 2012:47).

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Chapter 8

The South African Church Life Survey 2014: An exploration of congregational health

W.J. Schoeman

1. Introduction

Congregations are a space and place where the believers come together to experience and practise their faith. Individual members play a significant role in the formation of a congregation and the life and ministry of a congregation. Congregations are also living communities of believers grounded in society and involved in the local community. The vitality or decline in congregational life has, therefore, a significant influence on an individual and communal level, and this necessitates the need for studying and analysing congregational life and vitality. The letters to the seven congregations in the Book of Revelation is like a vitality assessment for them; the same exhortation concludes all seven assessments: "Let those who have ears to hear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev. 2:7, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)" (Wenrich 2016:4). Congregations should, as part of a spiritual and critical evaluation and discernment process, thus listen and assess their vitality. Such an evaluation and discernment of congregational health could be done from different perspectives, but "approaches that focus on congregational life share an underlying expectation in that if congregations strengthen their practices, behaviours, or attitudes, they will become more vital" (Bobbitt 2014:468). The assessment of congregational life and vitality, from an empirical perspective, is the focus of this chapter.

There are various examples of congregational surveys focusing on congregational health. To name only three: The Natural Church Development has

eight quality characteristics (Schwarz 1996),[1] the US Congregational Life Survey lists ten strengths (Bruce & Woolever 2004),[2] and the National Congregational Life Survey has nine core qualities of healthy churches (Powell *et al.* 2012).[3] The various approaches and survey instruments are not different and share some commonalities. Linda Bobbitt offers the following important summary on the study of congregational vitality:

> A review of vital congregation literature reveals striking similarities in the practices or attitudes associated with vital congregations. Common characteristics of vital congregations include spirituality and an ability to help people grow in faith, a clear sense of mission and excitement about the future, inspirational worship with a sense of God's presence, hospitality, a sense of community, belonging and generosity among members, and an ability to share faith beyond the congregation through word and deed. Vital congregations are described as having inspiring, emotionally intelligent leadership and strong administrative structures/practices. Vital congregations typically have programs like small groups and strong children/ youth ministry. Some researchers describe vital congregations as collaborative and connected to the larger faith community both within the denomination and ecumenically. Still, others describe vital congregations as intentional, authentic, and practicing (Bobbitt 2014:468).

It was decided to explore and use the NCLS as an instrument to assess congregational health in the South African context. This survey evaluates congregational vitality by listening to the voice of the attender validly and

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1   Schwarz (1996:22-37) identifies the following eight quality characteristics of healthy churches: (1) empowering leadership, (2) gift-orientated ministry, (3) passionate spirituality, (4) functional structures, (5) inspiring worship service, (6) holistic small groups, (7) need-orientated evangelism, (8) loving relationships.

2   Bruce and Woolever (2004:9-10) identify the following ten strengths of the upper 20% of growing American congregations: (1) spirituality and faith development, (2) meaningful worship services, (3) participation in congregational activities, (4) a sense of belonging to the congregation, (5) caring for children and the youth in the congregation, (6) community development, (7) sharing faith with others, (8) welcoming new people, (9) empowering congregational leadership, and (10) a vision for the congregation's future.

3   The nine core qualities are explained later in this chapter.

reliably (see Hermans & Schoeman 2015). The NCLS methodology has a proven track record and has been used in different contexts and denominations with success. The following discussion intends to develop this argument further by critically discussing the 2014 NCLS pilot project.

2.　The National Church Life Survey

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative research instrument that helps to understand and evaluate congregational vitality and was developed in Australia. The five-yearly NCLS has been used as a regular snapshot of the life and health of Australian churches since 1991 (see Kaldor, Castle & Dixon 2002). It was developed to assist congregations in identifying and building on their strengths. The survey provides an overview of congregational life for denominational and congregational leaders to use as part of a strategic planning process. In 2001, an International Church Life Survey (ICLS) was conducted (2001 ICLS), which included churches from Australia, New Zealand, UK, and the USA (see Bruce & Woolever 2010).

The NCLS is a church-based survey completed by individual congregations from different denominations. A vital characteristic of the NCLS is that it listens to the voices of members of the congregation as the survey is completed by the attenders attending a worship service in a congregation (Erwich 2012:73). All attenders (15 years and older) of a worship service are requested to complete a hard copy of the Attender Survey Questionnaire, usually after the service (Pepper, Sterland & Powell 2015:9). This is not a representative voice of the whole congregation, but an essential voice of key informants, to listen to as they provide reliable information about congregational life from an attender perspective (Hermans & Schoeman 2015:60). This is an important strength of the NCLS since it provides the congregational leadership with an attender perspective on congregational health.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) became part of this research in 2006, and the Attender Survey was done in both 2006 (see Schoeman 2010) and 2010 (see Schoeman 2015) using the 2001 ICLS instrument (from the Presbyterian Church USA) in a representative random sample of DRC congregations.

The two surveys in the DRC provided valuable information to the DRC as denomination and also to the respective congregations. A South African NCLS pilot project was planned for 2014, and the aim was to involve more denominations than just the DRC. The SA-NCLS pilot project intended to test the suitability of the NCLS in the South Africa church context by using the Australian NCLS survey instrument (2011) to take a snapshot of the health and vitality of congregations in various denominations in South Africa during 2014 and 2015. This pilot study was undertaken amongst five South African denominations: The DRC, the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NRCA), the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the United Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC).

3.   Methodology

For the pilot project, congregations from the above mentioned five denominations took part. A simple random sample of 10% of DRC and NRCA congregations were respectively taken:

- DRC: 1 127 congregations; 113 in sample; 93 returned (82.3%).
- NRCA: 308 congregations; 31 in a sample; 25 returned (80.6%).

Congregations from the following denominations were also invited to be part of the pilot project:

- URCSA congregations from the Western Cape province – five congregations.
- UPCSA congregations from Gauteng province – eight congregations.
- SDAC congregations from the Free State province – ten congregations.

The attender questionnaires were completed in the different congregations and then digitally captured and emailed to the NCLS Australia. The individual congregational reports were compiled by the NCLS Australia and mailed back. The reports (Church Life Profile) was then printed and provided to each congregation. Various workshops were conducted to inform the leadership of the denominations and congregations about the information provided in the

Church Life Profile. Each congregation then had the opportunity to reflect on their congregational vitality and life as part of a strategic planning process.

Table 8.1   Denominations in the SA-NCLS pilot study

Denomination	Number of congregations	Number of participants
DRC	93	14 610
URCSA (Western Province)	5	673
NRCA	25	2 130
UPCSA (Gauteng)	8	1 206
SDAC (Free State)	10	219
Total	**141**	**18 838**

In the following section, the findings of the pilot study are used to give a preliminary description and evaluation of congregational life in the South African context.[4]

4.   A demographical description of the participants

The following is a brief description of the demographic profile of the attenders that completed the survey: Most of the participants (42%) are 60 years or older, female (57%), and married for the first time (59%). The majority possess a post-school qualification (54%) and are employed (55%).[5] This demographic profile should be seen within the South African context, in this case, that of an older and more privileged section of the South African population.

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4   See elsewhere in this volume for an analysis of the SDAC and UPCSA. It is also important to note that in describing and analysing the results as "All SA, 2014" there is a strong bias towards the DRC as it comprises 77.6% of the participants.

5   See Tables 8.2 to 8.6 for more detailed information.

Table 8.2 Age of the attenders (in percentages)

Age groups	All SA, 2014
15–19 years	8
20–29 years	7
30–39 years	10
40–49 years	18
50–59 years	17
60–69 years	20
70–79 years	16
80+ years	6

Table 8.3 Gender of the attenders (in percentages)

Gender	All SA, 2014
Female	57
Male	43

Table 8.4 Marital status of the attenders (in percentages)

Marital status	All SA, 2014
Never married	15
In first marriage	59
Remarried	9
In a de facto relationship	2
Separated or divorced	6
Widowed	10

Table 8.5 Education of the attenders (in percentages)

Highest educational qualification	All SA, 2014
Primary/secondary school	47
Trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma	25
University degree	29

Table 8.6   Employment status of the attenders (in percentages)

Employment status	All SA, 2014
Employed	55
Full-time home duties/family responsibilities	8
Unemployed	2
Retired	28

5.   The core qualities of congregational life

In the framework used by the NCLS, congregational vitality and growth are complex concepts and may be described from different perspectives and not only defined in terms of a single idea or factor. The nine core qualities discussed later in this section illustrate this perspective. Furthermore, congregational life is further relational and may refer to growth in terms of three crucial relationships: with God, each other, and society (Erwich 2013:33). Against the background of the three relationships, some questions are asked regarding each relationship in an attempt to describe congregational life. The first part focuses on the relationship with the Triune God: Who are we? The responses aim to describe the identity of the congregation, the faith of the members, and their worship practices. The second part focuses on the calling or direction of the congregation: Where to? The role of the leadership and their vision for the congregation are regarded as indicators of this aspect. The third part focuses on engagement with the "Other" in society. The responses in this part reflect on the congregation as an instrument in the coming of the kingdom of God and are about service ministry and the discipleship of membership in the society.

Using the above framework as a guide, the NCLS identified nine core qualities over 20 years that are central to the life of a vital congregation. The relationship with God, each other and the community "underpin the thinking behind the measures of church vitality'" (Powell *et al.* 2012:8). The nine core qualities are grouped into three areas of congregational life: internal, inspirational, and outward core qualities. The following is a short description of the nine core qualities and the empirical findings from the SA-NCLS pilot study regarding each of the qualities.

5.1   Internal core qualities

A faith community is constituted by a confession of belief in the Triune God shared and confessed by the members amongst themselves. The confession and the expression thereof in practices constitute the *identity* of a community of believers. The relationship with the Triune God is practised through private and public rituals. In the private devotional life of the believer, this would manifest in Bible reading and prayer. In the public domain, the worship service would be the most important weekly event to express and celebrate this relationship with the Triune God. The internal core qualities refer to the relationship between the attenders and God (their faith), their relationship with each other, and the role of the worship service. The focus in this regard is on the inner life of the congregation and describes the foundational aspects of the faith community and its membership (Powell *et al.* 2012:7).

The following three aspects (regarding the relevant indicators within each core quality) focus on the internal core qualities:

- *Faith that is alive and growing:* The role that the local congregation, other congregations, or private activities play in the growing faith of the attender. The emphasis is on private devotional activities like prayer, Bible reading, or meditation. The importance of God in the daily life of the attender.

- *Worship – vital and nurturing:* The experience of inspiration, joy, God's presence, understanding of God, challenges to act during a worship service are asked about. The helpfulness of the preaching toward the life of the attender. Music and singing as an important part of the worship.

- *A strong and growing sense of belonging:* The experience of a growing sense of belonging in the local congregation. The role of the denomination in the sense of belonging. Regular participation in activities of the congregation: small groups, outreach activities and community service. The length of time the attender attends this congregation and partakes in its activities.

Table 8.7   Internal core qualities (in percentages)

Internal core qualities	DRC	NRCA	All SA	All Australia
Alive and growing faith				
Much growth in faith mainly through local church	40	51	41	25
Spend time in private devotional activity most days	72	73	71	48
Vital and nurturing worship				
Always experience inspiration in worship	42	53	44	26
Always find preaching very helpful	48	59	50	32
Strong and growing belonging				
Sense of belonging is strong and growing	47	54	49	48
Attend church services weekly or more often	63	63	63	82

A few remarks may be made on the findings of the pilot study regarding the internal core qualities shown in Table 8.7. The local congregation plays an important role in the growth of the faith of the attenders. They spend almost daily time in private devotional activities, and, in the context of the study, the emphasis that the attenders place on private religious activities is noteworthy. Attenders experience the worship as inspirational and the preaching as very helpful. They have a strong and growing sense of belonging in the congregation. They have a reasonably good attendance of the worship services, but this is not so strong as in the case of the Australian attenders. In comparison with the Australian attenders, it is clear the South African attenders place a stronger emphasis on the different internal core qualities. The only exception is the lower weekly attendance of the worship services.

5.2   Inspirational core qualities

The inspirational core qualities concern the leadership within and direction of the congregation. This quality focuses on the *calling* of the congregation and the ways and means to facilitate the vision. Vision and leadership are instrumental and pivotal in developing the internal life and external interaction of the congregation. Innovation is needed to adapt to a changing context. The inspirational core qualities facilitate change and transformation within the congregation. The following are indicators used to identify this quality:

▪ *The vision of the congregation:* Awareness and commitment to the vision, goals, and direction of the congregation. Confidence that the congregation may achieve it. The leaders are focused on the future directions of the congregation.

▪ *Inspiring and empowering leadership of the congregation:* The congregation's leaders encourage the members to find and use their gifts and skills. The leaders take the ideas of the people into account. The leaders inspire, communicate, and build on the strengths of the congregation.

▪ *Innovation that is imaginative and flexible:* There is a willingness to try new things, and the leaders encourage innovation in the congregation. An openness to change in the worship style of the congregation is evident.

Table 8.8   Inspirational core qualities (in percentages)

Inspirational core qualities	DRC	NRCA	All SA	All Australia
Clear and owned vision				
Aware and strongly committed to local church's vision	28	30	29	32
Unaware of any clear vision, goals or direction	24	24	26	30
Inspiring and empowering leadership				
Leaders at local church encourage gifts and skills to a great extent	25	29	26	21
Leaders at local church inspire us to action	69	74	70	64
Imaginative and flexible innovation				
Congregation is always willing to try new things	31	35	31	18
Leaders here encourage innovation	75	79	74	67

Referring to the inspirational core qualities in Table 8.8, the findings indicate that the attenders are not so sure about the vision of the congregation and their commitment towards the vision. They experience it at a lower level than their Australian counterparts. The leaders encourage them to use their gifts and skills, and they inspire them to action. They are further positive about trying new things and the fact that the leaders promote innovation. The findings indicate that leadership plays a decisive role and that the attenders are positive about innovation in the congregation, but their commitment towards a clear

vision needs an improvement. This may be an indication of a difference in expectations between the leadership and the attenders.

5.3   Outward core qualities

The outward core qualities look at the broader impact that the congregation is making in terms of the kingdom of God. In this instance, the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and the great commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) are important markers to evaluate the external interaction of the congregation with society and the local community. Essential concepts that guide outward qualities are diakonia, evangelisation, and hospitality. The outward core qualities focus on the interaction between the congregation and the community and broader society (Powell *et al.* 2012:7) and refer, in the context of this research project, to the following indicators:

- *Service:* Attenders as informally helping others: lent or donated money, care for the sick or people in crisis, contacted a politician about an issue. They are involved in community service, social justice or welfare activities connected to the congregation. Attenders may be Involved with community groups that are not connected to the congregation.

- *Faith-sharing:* A willingness to invite others to a worship service in the congregation. Involvement in evangelistic or outreach activities. A readiness to share their faith with others.

- *Inclusion: intentional and welcoming:* Follow up on someone who is drifting away from the congregation. Seek out and welcome people they know who are new. Make new friends in the congregation.

Table 8.9 Outward core qualities (in percentages)

Outward core qualities	DRC	NRCA	All SA	All Australia
Practical and diverse service				
Involvement in church-based welfare or justice service activities	23	25	24	25
Attenders who helped others in three or more ways	44	42	44	57
Willing and effective faith sharing				
Invited someone to church in the last 12 months	36	44	38	35
Attenders involved regularly in outreach or evangelistic activity	8	10	9	18
Intentional and welcoming inclusion				
Attenders certain to follow up someone drifting	10	13	11	11
Attenders always personally welcome new people	9	10	10	16

As shown in Table 8.9, the service aspect of the South African attenders is lower than that of the Australians and they do not help "others" in the same way as their Australian counterparts do. They are more willing to share their faith but are not regularly involved in outreach or evangelistic activity. They are also, to a lesser extent, prepared to welcome new people in the congregation. The general tendency is that South African attenders are involved and participate in the outward activities of the congregation; however, this also to a lesser extent than their Australian counterparts.

6.   Attendance measures and change

Growth in attendance and membership, as a quantitative measure, may be seen an indicator of congregational health. Numerical growth is indicated by a larger inflow than outflow in the congregation (more members joining the congregation than leaving). Inflow is measured in terms of the following indicators:

- "Switchers" are people arriving from other denominations than the current denomination that the congregation is associated with. "Transfers" are from the same denomination as the current congregation, over the past five years.

- "Retaining young people (15 to 19 years)" refers to people who were attending this congregation five years ago. They have been members of this congregation for the last five years.

- "Newcomers" are attenders who were not attending any church or denomination five years ago and are now attending this congregation. Some of them do not have a previous church background or are returning to the congregation after an absence of several years.

- "Visitors" are people who said they were visiting the worship service of the congregation during the week that the survey was done.

Table 8.10 shows the inflow of people to the congregation.

Table 8.10 Attendance measure (in percentages)

Inflow of people	DRC	NRCA	All SA	All Australia
Young people (aged 15–19) at your church				
Young people who have been attending more than five years	5	3	5	3
Young people who have been attending five years or less	3	2	3	2
Newcomers to church				
Newcomers returning after an absence of several years	2	2	2	3
Newcomers who never regularly attended	1	1	1	2
Church attendance history				
Total newcomers in the last five years	2	3	3	6
Switchers from another denomination in the last five years	2	1	3	10
Transfers from same denomination in the last five years	22	23	21	14
Long-term attenders: attended here for more than five years	72	72	72	66
Visitors from other churches	1	1	1	3
Visitors who do not regularly go to church	0	0	1	1

As shown in the data, most of the attenders (72%) have a long-term involvement with the congregations. The congregations are also not growing through newcomers that are either returning to the congregation or through people that were never part of a faith community. The only significant movement is

through transfers from the same denomination to these congregations (21%). There is, from a numerical or quantitative perspective, not much change in the attendance measures of congregational life. This is an indication that more emphasis should be placed on the core qualities of congregational life than numerical changes.

7. Report to the congregation and denominations

A noteworthy component of the NCLS is the feedback of the survey results that are given to each congregation as a customised report, the Church Life Profile (CLP).[6] The CLP is not a prescriptive manual or strategy that a congregation should implement, but a tool to use a part of a process of discernment. The focus of the profile is on the strengths of a congregation and relies on "appreciative inquiry" as a framework to interpret and reflect on the report (Erwich 2012:77).[7] The CLP outlines a unique statistical description for each congregation that completed the survey and is a starting point for a congregation to reflect on their vitality (Powell *et al.* 2012:viii). In using the CLP, congregations need to make a contextual interpretation of the survey results (Erwich 2012:80). This evaluation contributes towards the development of a local and relevant ecclesiology from below.

The "circle of strength" is a visual presentation of the nine core qualities in relationship with each other for a particular congregation or denomination. Figure 8.1 illustrates the relationship between the nine core qualities for the DRC in 2014.

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6   The CLP is also available for denominations as a report on congregational life within the denomination.

7   See Brady, Jacka and Powell (2012:34) and Schoeman and Van den Berg (2011).
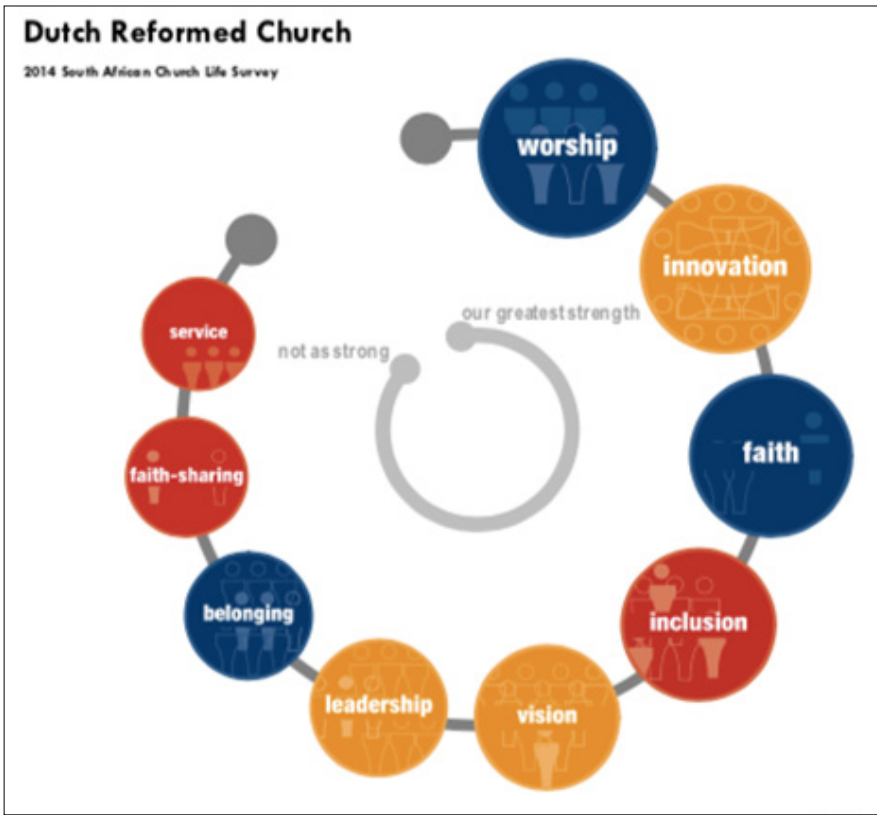
(Source: CLP of DRC 2014)

Figure 8.1   The "circle of strength" model: DRC, 2014

This figure and the above discussion of the nine core qualities of the DRC may be used to make some critical remarks regarding the congregational life of DRC congregations. The internal core qualities play an essential role in the religious life of the attenders and the congregation. There is a tendency to more private expressions of their religion. DRC congregations might see themselves as private enclaves and encourage the individualisation of the religion of their attenders.

> More than half of South Africans have very limited interaction at social gatherings, communal gatherings, religious gatherings, and also within their private homes. These findings underscore the continued segregated nature of the private lives of South Africans (Hofmeyr & Govender 2015:13).

The negative side of the internal core qualities may be that the congregation is not as involved in the society as it should be.

The circle of strength indicates that amongst the inspirational core qualities, innovation is a strong point, but that vision and leadership could improve. Critical questions in this regard could be: What type of vision and leadership is needed within the SA context? What is needed in a post-apartheid and post-colonial society? What about the violence, racism and need for reconciliation? The outward core qualities of faith sharing and service indicate that there is a need to serve the Other and the community in a better way. The circle of strength thus provides the denomination and congregation with a summary of the nine core qualities and helps to identify areas of growth for them.

8.   Conclusion – challenges for congregational research

Some of the limitations of this pilot study should be noted. Pepper *et al.* state the following concerning the denominational results:

> In relation to self-selection by churches, it is conceivable that there may be some biases in relation to church health, given that evaluating their church's health is the reason that churches participate. For example, vibrant churches may well be more likely to participate than those that are in decline. On the other hand, some churches that know they are in trouble may be motivated to participate in helping equip themselves with tools for planning for the future (Pepper *et al.* 2015:13).

In the case of the DRC and the NRCA, a random sample was used, but the remarks of Pepper *et al.* hold for the "All SA" category in this study. This pilot study is not representative of South African congregational life but only presents a snapshot of the congregational life of specific mainline congregations in South Africa.

The value of the NCLS research lies in its relevance for congregations. The survey results are part of an open and flexible process that may be used by congregations to develop a vision and strategy to evaluate and enhance congregational health (Erwich 2012:80). The leadership's attitude towards the results and their use in the congregation play a vital role in determining the

value of the survey. More research needs to be done on the impact and use of the CLP in the congregation and by the leadership.

Concern about the NCLS research is that it was developed within a social sciences perspective and within the use of a social methodology. There needs to be sensitivity towards the development of a practical-theological framework to understand congregational health more holistically (see Erwich 2012:81). The NCLS methodology thus needs to be developed further as part of the development of a practical theological ecclesiology.

As illustrated by the nine core qualities, congregational health and vitality are complex issues which need to be explored further. A longer-term question could be: How can a congregation be assisted in developing as a missional congregation? (see Erwich 2012:83). The pilot study intends to evaluate and promote such a view within the South African context, and the missional perspective may assist congregations to be more involved in their local contexts. In the context of this volume, it is important to note that the NCLS research may enhance the development of a contemporary ecclesiology from below.

> Local churches are not forced into a preconceived church model but are stimulated to connect to their own ecclesiological identity. Better than many a church model NCLS research shows how different dimensions of church life can be connected. In this way, churches are stimulated to build on research data in a flexible way without restraining the process from the start. Every local church can take her own responsibility in the desired way (Erwich 2012:81).

Congregational vitality is the by-product of two activities: doing faithful ministry over a long time and the movement of the Holy Spirit; and this divine-human partnership is the impulse that makes ministry both natural and supernatural (Wenrich 2016:11). The results from the NCLS are a reliable contextual voice in the development of a practical theological ecclesiology.

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An investigation into the connection between faith convictions and community involvement in eight congregations in the Johannesburg/Tshwane conurbation

A.R. Tucker

1. Introduction

This study primarily attempts to assess whether or not there may be a correlation between the growth in faith of those who attend worship and their involvement in transformative community involvement in eight local Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) congregations. It is based upon the empirical results of a National Church Life Survey (NCLS) attenders survey conducted as a pilot scheme, in 2015, in these congregations, and the subsequent statistical analysis of some of the results. A total of 1 206 attenders completed the survey. The congregations who completed the survey are all based within the Johannesburg-West Rand-Midrand-Pretoria conurbation. One is in a township (comprising Tswana, Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu, and Venda speakers) with a population of 115 802 and a density of 81 72.93 per km² (Frith 2011). The others are in the residential suburbs or wealthy urban areas, with population densities of 2 000 to 1 500 km², and one of 570/km².

2. My assumptions concerning the research

2.1 The role of Christian congregations in community transformation

I assume that Christian congregations have a vital role to play in community transformation. Churches are held in high regard in South African society and have a high level of trust. They also span ethnic, cultural and socio-economic divides (Eigelaar-Meets, Gomulia & Geldenhuys 2010:54). This means that they can have meaningful involvement with the country's transformation agenda, provided that they embrace their missional identity.

2.2 The missional faith-convictions that transform communities

Thistelton (2000:223) describes faith as "a polymorphous concept", and maintains that any attempt at an abstract definition encounters contexts which will not match any single meaning or "essence" of the term. Yet I think that in the particular missional practical theological context, a working definition of the faith involved is needed to be developed. In my research on the connection between faith in eight congregations and transforming communities, I have chosen to develop a definition concerning faith beginning with Bryant Myers' transformational development concept. Myers describes this as

> the process that helps people to discover their true identity as children of God and to recover their true vocation as faithful and productive stewards of gifts from God for the well-being of all (Myers 1999:200).

Thus, transformational development is seeking beneficial constructive change materially, socially, and spiritually. Gorlorwulu and Rahschulte (2010:200) propose that such transformational development requires the holistic faith described by the Bible. Such holistic faith flows out of a deep, motivational conviction (which I call a missional "faith-conviction") that embraces the *missio Dei*. Missional faith convictions are "the truly missional energy of the church" (Frost 2011:loc. 265). They result in actions being intentional and "an expression of identity, knowledge, and conviction through bodily action" (Cahalan 2010:99). Faith-convictions, in general, are so primary and essential

that the apostle Paul could write, "Everything that does not come from faith is sin"[1] (Rom 14:23). Moo (1996:863), Dunn (1998:828), and Schreiner (1998:738) all see this as a general maxim inferring that only actions that are motivated by such faith-convictions glorify God.

A missional faith-conviction is characterised by the conviction that God's promise to Abraham that through him he would bless all the nations of the earth also applies to his spiritual heirs (Gen. 12:2, 3; Gal. 3:29). It is the conviction that as they share their faith by life and word, that the blessing is imparted to those who respond by choosing to live in complete dependence upon God (Schreiner 1998:238). If such a conviction is to be actualised. it must also be accompanied by a faith that trusts, in the face of overwhelming distress, human wickedness, corruption and greed, unjust institutional structures, anger and hurt that God can and will move mountains and do the impossible and inconceivable, or else it will never lead to any action whatsoever (see Caputo 2006:88; Wilkins 2008:17, n. 20). Lastly, it shares God's compassion and concern for the poor and social justice, as indicated in James 2:14-26. As Tasker rightly comments on this verse:

> Faith which has not within itself, as an integral element in its composition, the power and the desire to meet the infinite pathos of human life with something of the infinite pity which God has shown to man in Jesus Christ, is not faith at all (Tasker 1957:64).

2.3 The greater the involvement of attenders in the community the greater the transformative potential

I suggest that the greater the involvement of worshippers in their local community, the greater would be the transformational impact, as a result of the congregation through their faith-actions becoming the salt of the earth and a light upon the hill (Matt. 5:14-16). This pericope "points to the penetrating power of the gospel and of people who are transformed by it"

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1   Paul's point is not that one has to exercise faith in every individual action that one performs; it refers to those actions God commands that we do (Schreiner 1998:738, n. 24). See also Schreiner's (1998: 738ff.) discussion and Augustine (*On the Grace of Christ* 1.27: xxvi). Rom 14:23 [UBS4]) πᾶν δὲ ὃ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν.

(Morris 1992:n.p.). It concerns the responsibility of Christ's followers. Jesus promises that if they act as salt and light they will beneficially influence society. Salt's power is due to its intrinsic difference from the medium into which it is put and light only lights up darkness when it is visible (Tasker 1961:63-64). Acting as salt and light thus necessarily means opposing corruption as they interpenetrate society as "a kind of moral antiseptic" (Tasker 1961:63-64). This is not an option but what Jesus expects of all who have faith in him (Tasker 1961:63-64).

3. Descriptive analysis of the empirical findings of the survey

Table 9.1 shows the average percentages for each action for the total number of attenders completing the survey in the eight UPCSA congregations. Figure 9.1 shows the age profile of these congregations. Figure 9.2 shows the number of attendees completing the survey in each congregation.

Table 9.1 Faith and community involvement averages for eight participating congregations

	Percentage of worshippers who ...	%
A	Are growing in their faith through participation in activities of their congregation	25
B	Who spend time every day or most days in private prayer, Bible reading or meditation.	83
C	Always or usually experience inspiration during services	60
D	Always or usually experience God's presence during services	62
E	Are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	38
F	Feel at ease talking about their faith and seek opportunities to do so	21
G	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	9
H	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	7
I	Are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	28

(Source: Data provided by the NCLS analysis of the 2015 South African attender survey)
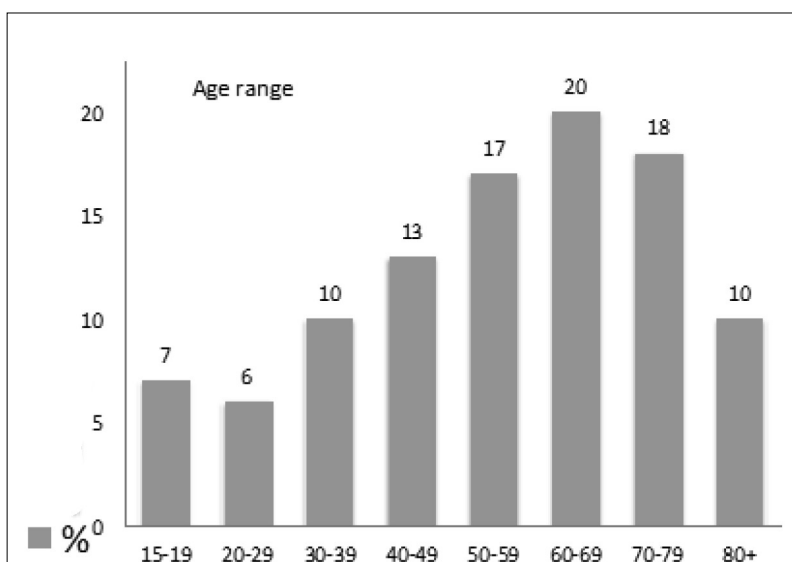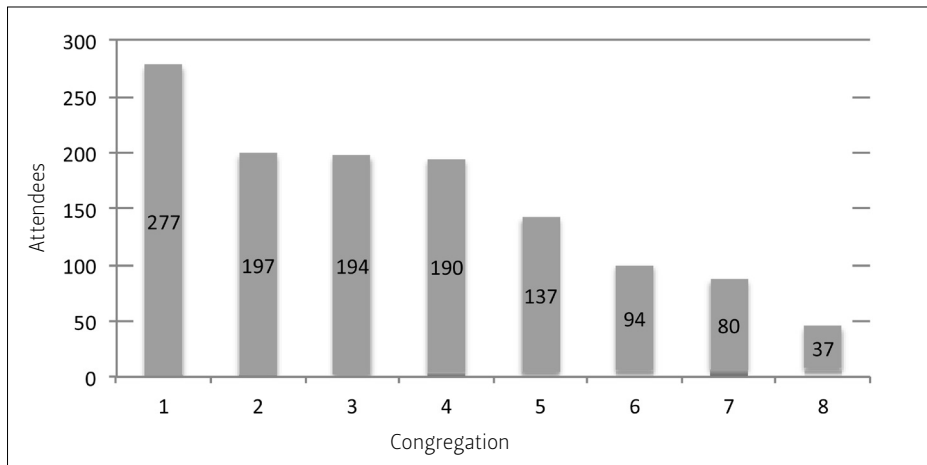
(Source: Data provided by the NCLS analysis of the 2015 South African attender survey)

Figure 9.1 Age profile of eight congregations

The average (or mean) age of the attenders in the eight congregations who completed the survey was 54 years; the median[2] was also 54, and the age range was from 41 to 64, giving a skewness value of -0.5 (Figure 9.1). One congregation had an average of 44 years, whilst three had average ages in the 50–51 range.

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2   The "median" is the "middle" value in a number set, in which half the numbers are above the median and half are below. While the average and median can be the same or nearly the same, they are different if more of the data values are clustered toward one end of their range and/or if there are a few extreme values. In statistical terminology, this is called skewness. In this case, the average can be significantly influenced by the few values, making it not very representative of the majority of the values in the data set. Under these circumstances, median gives a better representation of central tendency than average.

Figure 9.2   Number of attendees completing the survey in each congregation

The average number of attenders per congregation was 150, the median was 164, giving a skewness value of 0.1, and the range was from 37 to 277. The number of attenders who completed the survey gives a fair estimate of the size of each congregation, measured by the number of worshippers at each morning service. This often bears little relationship to the number of official members, which in the UPCSA tends to be much larger than those who gather for worship each Sunday, sometimes by as much as a factor of three. The skewness values concerning age and the number of attenders prove normal univariate distribution and are therefore statistically acceptable, and thus validate the results.[3]

4.   Correlational analysis of data from the survey

4.1   Introduction

A correlation is a single number that describes the degree of relationship between two variables. Correlation implies a connection between variables but does not signify that one causes the other. Causation, as a valid hermeneutical

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3   The values for asymmetry and kurtosis between –2 and +2 are considered acceptable in order to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery 2010).

assumption, can only be truly decided by a judicious interpretation of the circumstances. A correlation coefficient is mathematically denoted as, *corr (xy)* = z, where x and y are the two variables and z is the statistically calculated coefficient, showing the relationship between the two variables.

The Correl function in the Window's Excel program was used to calculate the correlation coefficients. The key determinative marker of the strength of a correlation is called a correlation coefficient. The Excel function uses the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to calculate the correlation coefficient for two sets of values.[4] If the value of the coefficient is close to +1, this indicates a strong positive correlation, and if r is close to -1, this indicates a strong negative (or aka inverse) correlation (ExcelFunctions.net). Any correlation greater than +/-0.8 is generally described as strong, whereas a correlation less than +/-0.5 is generally described as weak, which means it is probably non-existent. Thus, a value near zero means that there is a random, nonlinear relationship between the two variables.

The interpretation of the coefficient values can vary based upon the type of data being examined. Thus, a study utilising scientific data may require a stronger correlation than a study using social science data (Roberts & Roberts 2016:n.p.). For our practical theological/sociological study a correlation of above 0.5, even though it is less than 0.8, is a fairly positive relationship (Trochim 2006:n.p.).

4.2 Principles of interpretation of correlational analysis used in this chapter

The NCLS survey analysis report back only shows the top three values that attenders reported they most valued as aspects of their congregational vision

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4   The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for two sets of values, x and y, is given by the formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2 (y - \bar{y})^2}{\sqrt{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2 \ \sum (y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Where x and y are the sample means of the two arrays of values and r is the calculated coefficient (ExcelFunctions.net).

and life. I have chosen to use the percentage of attenders who reported as one of the aspects they valued, in this top-three selection, 1) either wider community care or an emphasis on social justice (G), or 2) reaching those who do not attend church as an aspect of the church that they most value (H) as indicative of missional faith convictions.

5.   Research findings

5.1   The relationship between missional convictions and missional actions

Table 9.2 shows data regarding the relationship between missional convictions and missional actions.

Table 9.2   Community involvement, faith sharing and conviction

Activity (%)	Conviction (%)	Correlation coefficiant
Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	EG: 0.4732
Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	FH: 0.9553
Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	EH: 0.8787
Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	FG: 0.4500
Conviction (%)	**Conviction (%)**	
Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	GH: 0.6001

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

The data show that some 30% of attenders are involved in some group activity outside the church (E) and 17% feel at ease sharing their faith and look for opportunities to do so (F). What is perhaps more revealing is that the missional faith conviction of reaching the unchurched may be assessed as having played a role in motivating the missional action of faith sharing for 33% of those who engage in this missional action, since there is an extremely high correlation (*corr(FH)* = 0.9553) between the conviction and action. The missional faith conviction valuing wider community care and social justice may be assessed as having played a role for 24% of those who are involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church since there is some correlation between the appropriate action and the conviction *corr(EG)* = 0.4732. The difference in the strengths of these correlations would appear to suggest that more who actively seek to share their faith are impelled by a missional faith conviction than those who are involved in the community. There is also a strong connection between those who feel at ease talking about their faith and those who are involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church, *corr(EH)* = 0.8787.

This is also a hangover from the evangelical versus liberal conversion versus social welfare controversy (Frost 2011:loc353), that influenced those over 55, and somewhat reflects the basic evangelical nature of the eight congregations. This was a very pertinent issue in pre-1994 South Africa in the former Presbyterian Church of South Africa before it merged to become the UPCSA when many congregations refused to have anything to do with "liberal" social justice issues. Then lastly, this may be interpreted as evidence that reaching the unchurched is the most motivational faith conviction for transformational development.

It is interesting to note that there is a correlation between those who have a conviction as regards faith sharing with those who have one concerning community involvement, *corr(GH)* = 0.6001. Perhaps this signifies that a growing faith sees both faith sharing and justice as complementary actions both being equally enjoined by the Scriptures – again emphasising the theme of salt and light.

5.2 The relationship between professed growth in faith and worship

Table 9.3 shows data regarding the relationship between professed growth in faith and worship.

Table 9.3 Relationship between the means of grace and growth in faith

Means of Grace (%)	Growth in Faith (%)	Correlation coeficiant
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	Who reported are growing in faith	AB: −0.1697
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	Who reported are growing in faith	AC: 0.9403
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	Who reported are growing in faith	AD: 0.9403
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or bible study groups	Who reported are growing in faith	AI: 0.1472

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

Table 9.3 compares the correlations between two worship actions (C and D), private devotions (B) and involvement in small groups (I) with the reported growth in faith (A) by the attenders. These actions are grouped, since they are all commonly included within what is called, "the means of grace". These are actions through which God promises to channel more grace to those who worthily participate in them (Grudem 1994:950). As Bass comments, "Those who participate in (these) practices are formed in particular ways of thinking about and living in the world." These practices or actions are

> The means of grace by which the presence of God is palpably experienced. In the midst of engagement in these practices, a community comes to such an immediate experience of the grace and mercy and power of God … So through these ways of being in the world, communities and individuals are transformed in response to God's active presence (Conner 2011:59).

Surprisingly there is no connection between personal devotions and a professed growth in faith (*corr(AB)* = -0.1697) or with those involved in small groups (*corr(AI)* = 0.147). Whilst there is a very strong positive correlation between

those who report they are growing in their faith and those who report they usually experience inspiration and God's presence during worship services (*corr(AC, AD)* = 0.9403, 0.9403 resp.) This connection is exactly what Woolever and Bruce (2004:17) have discovered is the case from an analysis of the results of their research using the Congregational Life Survey (an offshoot of the NCLS) in more than 2 000 congregations in the United States in 2001. It seems that the type of worship experience that is connected with growing faith is one which the attenders find both inspiring and experience the presence of God. There is a very strong correlation between those who find the worship services inspirational (C) and those who experience God's presence (D) in worship (*corr(CD)* = 0.8916; see Table 1). I interpret experiencing inspiration as being stirred and inspired with significant hope and faith (Callahan 1983:25), and also motivated to desire to be transformed into Christ's image as a result of the worship and preaching. I furthermore interpret experiencing God's presence in the sense that Root (2014:10) gives to it, as a perceived existential encounter with the divine reality. I also interpret this connectivity to show that worship which is both inspirational and where God's presence is experienced has led to a growth in the faith of the worshippers. I support this from a sociological, theological and biblical hermeneutic concerning worship (Bass 2008:29).

"Worship may be defined as that action where *together* people celebrate salvation in worship, sacraments, hymn, music, dancing, symbols and share in communion (or koinonia) with God and one another" (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:60). It is promised in Joel 2:28-32 that the different groups of people on whom the Spirit is poured will open God's presence to each other for each other. In this community, the Spirit energises a process of mutual illumination, strengthening, edification, deliverance and enlivenment of individuals by each other resulting in joy and the glorifying of God in worship and praise (Welker 1994:151, 156). As a result, worshippers are summoned to a dynamic transforming friendship with God that leads to an ever greater sharing in the Triune life (Leupp 2008:103), a perfecting of the divine image within them, increasing awareness of their identity in Christ and a desire to share that life with others in order to bless them. However, whilst there is then good evidence that where worship is both inspiring and where God's presence facilitates

the grace of God is implanting faith-convictions in the worshippers, has it implanted "missional" faith-convictions?

5.3   Growth in faith has not led to faith sharing or missional convictions

Table 9.4 shows data regarding the relationship between spiritual growth, convictions and involvement in the community.

Table 9.4   Relationship between spiritual growth, convictions and involvement in the community

Spiritual growth (%)	Conviction (%)	Correlation coefficiant
Who reported growing in faith	Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	AG: 0.1239
Who reported growing in faith	Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	AH:0.4312
Who reported growing in faith	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	AE:0.4977
Who reported growing in faith	Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	AF: 0.3688

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

Thirty-eight per cent of attenders, as an average for the eight congregations, report that they have grown in faith. The question is, "Has this resulted in a holistic, mature biblical faith in which mission is seen as the primary purpose of the congregation?" In line with my assumptions (see Section 2.3), I see faith as only being fully developed, and thus holistically biblical, when it produces the conviction that the primary purpose of the congregation is both to be involved in the community (G) and to share the gospel with the unchurched (H). I must stress that it is not every attender's role to be involved in the community or to share their faith, but from the missional perspective, it is expected that every member has the conviction that these are the congregation's primary purpose.

The correlations (see Table 9.4) suggest that growth in faith has only produced the missional action of regular involvement in some form of community activity outside the church (*corr(AE)* = 0.4977) and is not related to the action of faith sharing or missional convictions. There is no connection between growth in faith and those who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities to do so, or with the development of the faith convictions of valuing community care or social justice or reaching those who do not attend church as one of the top three values in the congregation. Thus the survey has revealed that most attenders do not have a mature missional faith, since only 23% value wider community care or an emphasis on social justice (G), and only 10% reaching those who do not attend church as an aspect of the church that they most value (H). It is interesting that 30% are involved in the community outside the church and that 17% feel at ease sharing their faith and take opportunities to do so. This would lead one to suspect that other motivations for these actions, besides missional faith convictions, must be at work. Perhaps the majority of the attenders have an imperfect concept of missional rather than coming from a deeper theological understanding of the concept of God's mission as the *missio Dei* of the Triune God and motivated by a deep passion for mission.

5.4   Worship has developed a desire to reach those who do not attend church

Table 9.5 shows data regarding worship and personal devotions and missional faith convictions.

Table 9.5   Worship and personal devotions and missional faith convictions

Worship and personal devotions (%)	Conviction (%)	Correlation coeficiant
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	BG: -0.4491
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	BH:-0.8025
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	CG: 0.1219
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	CH: 0.5426
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	DG: 0.1219
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	DH: 0.5426

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

Worship appears to have helped develop the missional faith conviction that reaching the unchurched is one of the most valued aspects of a congregation since there is a correlation between the corporate worship experience (*corr(CH)* = 0.5426, *corr(DH)* = 0.5426) and this conviction (see Table 9.5). There is no correlation between the worship experience and those who report that community care or an emphasis on social justice is personally the most valued aspect for them (*corr(CG)* = 0.1219, *corr(DG)* = 0.1219). The reason for this discrepancy could be that many do not see such community involvement as a missional activity and are motivated to be involved by non-missional factors. This might mean that they are salt and light without realising it, or

else reject such an idea altogether. In this respect, whilst they are engaged in a missional activity, its impulse was not missional since as Bosch (1980:18) concludes, "Mission takes place where the church (serves the world) with reference to unbelief, exploitation, discrimination and violence ... with reference to salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation and righteousness".

Table 9.6 shows data regarding the relationship between community development, personal devotion, and worship.

Table 9.6   Relationship between community involvement, personal devotions and worship

Faith & Worship (%)	Community involvement (%)	Correlation Coefficiant
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	BE: –0.8436
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	BF: –0.7201
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	CE: 0.7297
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	CF: 0.4588
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	DE: 0.5704
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	DF: 0.4589

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

It is interesting to note that there is connectivity between the worship experience and the missional actions of community involvement (*corr(CE)* = 0.7297)*, corr(DE)* = 0.5704) and faith sharing *corr(CF)* = 0.4588, *corr(DF)* = 0.4598; see Table 9.6). This may be because congregants are motivated by a desire to

grow the size of their congregation by attracting or inviting in the unchurched or because of a concern for the welfare of the unchurched, either here or hereafter. The former motivation cannot be classed as a missional faith-conviction, since, as Bosch (1995:33) writes: "Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion, it is alerting people to the universal reign of God in Christ".

I, however, interpret this connectivity between a faith conviction and worship as demonstrating that worship has developed this faith conviction. I support this conclusion from the theological and biblical hermeneutic which indicates that as God's people worship they find not only their identity as his people but also as a kingdom of missional priests who would be a channel of his grace to the nations (Exod. 19:4-6). Brueggemann (1997:498) comments that the aforementioned pericope picks up the missiological blessing theme conferred on Abraham's descendants in Genesis 12:3. This should lead, as Miyamoto (2008:161) emphasises, to the transforming power of worship creating a missional congregation.

5.5 Regular personal devotion has been inimical to missional faith convictions and actions

There is an inverse correlation between the 83% who regularly spend time in personal devotions (B) and those who value the missional faith convictions of community involvement (E) and reaching the unchurched (H), (Table 9.4: *corr(BG)* = -0.4491, *corr(BH)* = -0.8025). There is also a strong inverse correlation between those who regularly spend time in personal devotions and community involvement (E), (Table 9.5: *corr(BE)* = -0.8436), and those who feel at ease talking about their faith and seek opportunities to do so (F), (Table 9.6: *corr(BF)* = -0.7201). This would suggest that commitment to private devotions has hindered growth in faith, as measured by missional actions and convictions. This result is surprising, since many, including Bonhoeffer (1957:152), Stott (1972:243ff.), Hughes (1990:244ff.), Grudem (1994:950) and Mathis (2016:41ff.), connect regular commitment to personal devotions as a means of grace by which Christians grow in faith. Dunn (1988:623) supports this contention from an exegesis of Romans 10:17. He

interprets ῥῆμα in this verse, to mean that faith grows by hearing "the word of which Christ is both content and author". Instead, my findings support Woolever and Bruce's (2004:17) contention that the common assertion that private devotional activities produce more growth in faith than attendance at worship services is incorrect. They report that their research conducted in 434 congregations representing five "denominational families (*sic*)" selected from Congregational Life Surveys conducted in the United States (Woolever & Bruce, 2004:123, 128) has exposed this belief a "myth" (*sic*).

I would suggest that the reason for this is maybe that most who have regular personal devotions are mostly concerned with acquiring grace for their own needs and not for mission. They are also seeing in the Scriptures their preconceptions. They need the missionally focused input from others, which worship may powerfully provide. A further reason for this inverse correlation between missional faith convictions and actions and personal devotions may be that there is a good correlation between greater age and commitment to personal devotions.

5.6 The lack of effectiveness of small groups in developing faith and missional faith convictions

Table 9.7 shows data regarding the relationship between small-group involvement, community involvement, faith sharing and faith convictions.

Table 9.7   Relationship between small-group involvement, community
involvement, faith sharing and faith convictions

Small group involvement (%)	Action or conviction (%)	Correlation coeficiant
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	IG: -0.4491
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	IF:-0.8025
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	IG: 0.1219
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	IH: 0.5426
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Who reported that they are growing in faith	IA:0.1472
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	IE:0.0181

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

Surprisingly, given my previous research, there is no connection between reported growth in faith (A) and involvement in small groups (I). The correlation between these two is (*corr(AI)* = 0.1472). In 2004, I conducted a two-phase quantitative statistical study involving 27 congregations and 16 of their small groups of many denominations, in the Western Cape. The rigorous statistical analysis of the quantitative data gathered concluded that there was a strong correlation between growth in faith and involvement in small groups (Vos, Nel, Tucker & Smit 2004:129ff.). It found that 87% of those involved in a small group (known at the time as a cell group, which included Bible study, prayer and ministry to each other) believed that small-group attendance had made growth in faith more important to them. This new finding might cast doubt on the effectiveness of small groups in general, be related to the conditions and context of the particular geographic region (Gauteng-Pretoria

area), or be a reflection of the management of the small groups in the eight congregations surveyed.

Given the above results, it is not surprising that there was no connection between those involved in small groups (I) and involvement in missional actions (E and F) or the development of faith convictions (G and H). The correlations are (*corr(IE)* = 0.0181; *corr(IF)* = -0.8025*; corr(IG)* = 0.1219; *corr(IH)* = 0.5426).

This finding again differs from the claims that small groups are very effective in producing missional faith actions and convictions.[5] It is also contrary to the results of a previous research project (see Vos *et al.* 2004:127ff.) into cell groups in the Western Cape which concluded, from using Callahan's (1990:11) indices for congregational vitality,[6] that the cell groups sampled were very effective in encouraging their members in the missional proclamation. Yet many have questioned the effectiveness of small groups in a missional proclamation. As far back as 1989, Olson conducted a study of 762 attenders at five Baptist churches in suburban Minneapolis which concluded that those congregations with the highest number of church friends per member "showed attendance decline or stasis" (Olson 1989:432). Then Wuthnow (1994:332), who conducted an in-depth extensive study concerning small groups in the United Church commented that "friendships (in small groups) may also hinder the recruitment of newcomers". Walker (2014:106) believes that this is a relevant finding even 20 years later, having no problem with applying it to his recent research into the missional failure of "Fresh Expressions" in the United Kingdom.

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5 See for instance: Evangelism in a small group is primarily a team effort backing up the individual (Comiskey 1998:79ff.) and encouraging each other to reach unbelievers through strategising, prayer and envisioning (Neighbour 1990:225). It involves friendship that attracts newcomers (Beckham 1995:30; Cho 1981:58; Finnell 1995:21; George 1994:69), building relationships with unbelievers (Beckham 1995:30; Neighbour 1990:242). At the heart of this small group evangelism is the group acting and planning evangelism together. In theory everyone in the group gets involved, using their particular giftings to create community, to care and serve the unbeliever.

6 Callahan's (1990:10-11) indices involve using the ratios between members, constituents and persons served in mission to determine how effective a church is in mission.

One reason for this lack of growth in faith and no connectivity with developing faith actions or convictions may be that after a decade or so, many in small groups may have lost their enthusiasm for their missional purpose and reverted to becoming no more than inward-looking social groups that study the Bible or pray for the sick (Tucker 2016:1-2). This inward focusing is inimical to growth in faith in any way. "A closed society no longer has any future. It kills the hope for the life of those who stand on the periphery and then finally destroys itself" (Moltmann 1978:35). If a group does not have mission as a goal it can easily become self-centred and cliquish.

5.7 The age factor

Table 9.8 shows data regarding the relationship between the age of a congregation and its convictions and actions.

Table 9.8 Relationship between the age of a congregation and its convictions and actions

Action & conviction	Age (J) correlation coeffciant
Who reported are growing in faith	AJ: 0.0378
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	BJ: 0.7802
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	CJ: –0.1264
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	DJ: –0.1316
Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	EJ: –0.3057
Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	FJ: –0.8339
Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	GJ: –0.5583
Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	HJ: –0.7680
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	IJ: 0.1098

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

The subsections that follow discuss the three main findings of the study regarding the age factor.

An inverse relationship between age and missional faith convictions

There is a strong inverse relationship between age and those who report that reaching those who do not attend church is one of the most valued aspects of their congregation, (*corr(HJ)* = -0.7680). Also, there is an inverse relationship between age and those who report that wider community care or an emphasis on social justice is one of the most valued aspects of their congregation (*corr(GJ)* = -0.5583). This means that the older the average age of a congregation, the less likely they are to have faith convictions that lead to community involvement.

An inverse correlation between age and the missional action

There is an inverse correlation between age and the missional action of talking about their faith (*corr(FJ)* = -0.8339), the missional convictions of seeing reaching the unchurched as one of the most valued aspects of the congregation (*corr(HJ)* = -0.7680), and seeing wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one the aspects of the most valued aspects of the congregation (*corr(GJ)* = -0.5583; Table 9.8).

Another reason for this finding may be that the prevailing ministry paradigm among those over 55, who constitute 50% of the attendees, has too much focus on the reception and possession of grace as the primary end of human action in the church (Root 2014:236*ff.*). When the purpose of the church becomes the continuous reception, preservation, and cultivation of Christ's benefits in our lives, then the distribution of these benefits through ecclesial practices becomes the church's primary vocation (Johnson 2011:224). Witnessing and proclaiming God's Word to those outside the church then becomes secondary.

A positive correlation between age and commitment to private devotions

There is a strong correlation between age and 50% who spend time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation, every day or most days (*corr(BJ)* = 0.7802). This indicates that the older the average age of a congregation, the more

committed are the attenders to private devotions. This is explicable from my experience, in that regular commitment to personal devotions used to be much encouraged in UPCSA congregations, due to the traditional strong pietistic and reformed emphasis. Of course, there may be other factors, such as the fact that many older people are retired and can design their schedules to include a regular devotional life, which many younger people probably find very difficult to do.

5.8 The size factor

Table 9.9 shows data regarding the relationship between the size of a congregation and its convictions and actions.

Table 9.9 Relationship between the size of a congregation and its convictions and actions

Conviction and Action	Size Correlation Coeficiant
Who reported are growing in faith	AK: 0.5197
Who spent time in private prayer, Bible reading, meditation: Every day/most days	BK: 0.1796
Who have a vital and nurturing worship: always or usually experience inspiration	CK: 0.5187
Who always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services	DK: −0.1316
Who are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church	EK: −0.2823
Who feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities	FK: −0.4206
Who report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	GK: −0.1368
Who report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	HK: −0.3113
Who are involved in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	IK: 0.1907
Average age of worshippers	JK: 0.4148

(Source: Author's correlational analysis of data provided by the NCLS from the 2015 South African attender survey)

The following subsections discuss the two main findings regarding the size factor.

Larger congregations have experienced greater growth in faith

There is a correlation between the size of a congregation and those who reported growing in faith (*corr(AK)* = 0.5197). This means those in the larger congregations have experienced greater growth in faith.

Attenders in larger congregations have experienced greater inspiration

There is a positive relationship between those who have always or usually experienced inspiration in worship and the size of a congregation (*corr(CK)* = 0.5187). This needs to be investigated further.

6.   Summary of conclusions

6.1   The majority of congregations face the danger of irreversible decline

The evidence suggests the imminence of irreversible decline in at least four of the congregations, whilst three more are entering the average age category (above 50) for which this conclusion may be drawn. This may be made more probable for two reasons. First of all, the number of attenders within seven of the pilot scheme congregations falls within the range of 70 to 200 worshippers. According to Hendriks (2004:40ff.), this is the size of a pastor-centred congregation. This type of congregation expects its needs to be met through a personal relationship with the pastor. Many pastors in this size of congregation experience great frustration and even burnout trying to meet all these expectations and are unable to lead the congregation into becoming missional. Secondly, this tendency to an inward focus is reinforced by the average age (54) of the attenders who completed the survey. This supports the contention that those over 50 are less likely to be involved in missional actions, or have missional faith-convictions, and they find it more difficult

to be salt and light because they cannot connect with younger generational groups (Gibbs & Coffey 2001:12; Hendriks 1999:91).

6.2 Worship services have been influential in growing the faith of attenders and in encouraging community involvement

There is a strong positive correlation between those who report they are growing in their faith and those who report they usually experience inspiration and God's presence during worship services. For many attenders, this growth in faith has produced a regular involvement in some form of community activity outside the church. This influence has been more evident in larger congregations and may be linked to the finding that attenders in larger congregations have experienced greater inspiration than in smaller congregations.

6.3 Worship services have been much less influential in developing missional faith convictions

Worship appears to have helped develop the missional faith conviction that reaching the unchurched is one of the most valued aspects of a congregation for the 10% that have this conviction. Yet for the majority of attenders, worship has not resulted in a growth of faith in the area of missional actions and convictions. In general, whilst 38% have professed growth in faith, most (83-90%) still have not developed missional faith convictions or actions.

6.4 Commitment to personal devotions and small groups have produced no growth in faith nor missional faith convictions

There is an inverse connection between commitment to personal devotions and a professed growth in faith. This may be linked to the finding that the older the average age of a congregation, the more committed are the attenders to private devotions. There is no connection between involvement in small groups and growth in faith and the development of missional faith convictions.

7. Suggested interventions

The research reveals that the most significant linkage is between worship and growth in faith. Furthermore, it reveals the high correlation between missional faith convictions and missional faith actions. This highlights the importance of developing heartfelt passionate missional convictions in the congregation. This is the key to developing missional congregations. The research seems to suggest that inspiring worship where the presence of Christ is experienced primarily produces such convictions. The secret to changing the heart is by allowing the attenders to meet the God of all grace in the worship service. As a result, I make the following comments which may also be taken as suggestions.

7.1 Intentionally use the influence of worship to develop missional faith convictions

The study discovered the surpassing power and importance that worship has had in attendees growing faith, becoming involved in missional outreach and, for some, developing missional faith-convictions. This is probably the most important finding of the exercise and means that attending to this area may well be the answer, by God's grace, to facing the prospect of decline, indicated by age demographics. The congregations do not need to submissively face the prospect of decline, since it is precisely in situations fraught with death and despair that God often chooses to work to bring new life. Frost (2006:287) comments that worship by itself does not form people to be a more missional community.

Then how may we utilise the impact of worship more effectively to increase this percentage? I suggest that only a verbalised vision emerging from the congregation, of itself, as a result of the songs that are sung, the Scriptures that are studied, the stories that are told, the prayers that are prayed, and inspiring experiences of encountering God when we worship, will mould a corporate commitment to becoming a missional community. Worship needs to be framed within the context of mission to truly glorify God and produce missional congregations that do likewise.

7.2   Transforming small groups and using personal devotions

The evidence of other research than this concerning small groups is that they can be very effective in promoting growth in faith in all its aspects, including the development of mission faith convictions. Surely God promises that being exposed to the Word in fellowship with other Christians and personal devotions will produce missional faith convictions if the Bible is read from its missional perspective.

I would then recommend revitalising small groups using a project advocated by the Southern African Partnership of Missional Churches since 2004. It is a shared journey of spiritual formation and discernment shaped by communal spiritual practices. The goal of the three-year journey of spiritual discernment is to free congregations from a narrow focus on the maintenance of Christendom to being innovative missional churches in their specific time and location (Keifert 2006:17). It involves firstly dwelling in the world, which is a practice that helps believers discern that their everyday encounters with others are missional opportunities for conveying God's peace to those with whom they interact. Then, secondly, plunging into new cultural contexts by deliberately crossing a congregation's cultural boundaries. Lastly, by dwelling in the Word, which is the practice of repeated communal listening to a passage of Scripture over long periods to enable a Christian community to undertake its decisions and actions in line with the biblical meta-narrative (Keifert 2006:163). Research in 110 DRC congregations that has been part of the scheme concluded that it has had a profound positive effect on the missional identity and practice of participating congregations (Nel 2013:1).

So, I close with a few words of hope.

> God is no more God than when God is identified with the perishing Jesus, giving God's very being to death, death cannot hold God. God enters time through realities of ex nihilo, through barren wombs (Gen 20) and the cries of slavery (Exod 3:9), but when the eternal enters through death (the impossible), death is taken into the eternal and life bursts forth (Root 2014:146).

Thus, age, congregational size, inward-looking personal devotions, small groups, or deficient missional faith do not need to prevent congregations from becoming effectively missional. We have a God who can do the impossible.

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Ecclesiology and congregational life: Congregations of the SDAC in the Free State

M.T.S. Venter and W.J. Schoeman

1. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) is a worldwide church and, as reported during the 2015 Kwa-Zulu-Natal Free State Conference (KNFC), has a membership of more than eighteen million members (KNFC 2015:55). Adventists keep the seventh day as the Sabbath (Saturday) and expect Jesus to come soon for the second time. The church has a structure of governance with several organisational levels, leading from the individual member to the worldwide church organisation. The membership of each of these levels periodically meets for business sessions or constituency meetings (SDAC 2010:29). The Bible is the primary creed of the SDAC and they confess twenty-eight fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Bible. The fundamental beliefs constitute the understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture for the church. The church is seen as the bride of Christ, the supreme object of his regard, and it is expected from the church, in all its functions, to represent the order and the character of God (SDAC 2010:24). This confessional framework and structure inform the ecclesiology of the Adventists.

This chapter aims to give a theoretical description of the characteristics of the ecclesiology of the SDAC and empirically evaluate the congregational life of the SDAC with specific reference to SDAC congregations in the Free State.

2. Characteristics of the ecclesiology of the SDAC – a theoretical description

The SDAC operates within a specific ecclesiological framework and congregations are in three relationships: with God, with each other, and with the community. The congregation's relationship and identification with its context (community environment) are of vital importance and a congregation should interact within its ecological context as well as the ecclesiological framework of the church. This ecclesiological framework and the context of the congregations should be in interaction with each other. The ecclesiology of the church presents guidelines as to what is expected of the formation of its congregations.

This section discusses different aspects of SDAC ecclesiology. An understanding of these aspects is important as it reveals the congregational life of the SDAC members. These aspects influence the thinking and actions of the members of the church at large as well as the members in the local congregations in the Free State and will provide a better understanding of their beliefs, lifestyle, and biblical worldview.[1]

2.1 Remnant ecclesiology

Rodríguez (2009:21) has indicated that the Adventist ecclesiology is profoundly a remnant ecclesiology and was always deeply missional. For early Adventists, the remnant character meant "a positive argument for their uniqueness in the history of salvation as God's faithful remnant participating indispensably in his final rescue mission" (Damsteegt 1988:244). Donkor (2011:26) states that the identity of the SDAC as the remnant as found in Revelation 12:17 and its mission are two inseparable concepts. Adventism is defined in the self-perception of the church as the remnant as described in Revelation. The remnant conceptualises a specific ecclesiological understanding with a clear mission – the proclamation of three closely-related messages symbolised by the three angels (Rev. 14:6-14). Furthermore, the remnant's final mission is

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1   Some of the aspects discussed in this section were presented by Seventh-day Adventist scholars as papers at a 2014 meeting of The Adventist Society for Religious Studies in San Diego, California, on ecclesiology in doctrine and practice.

to gather all of God's scattered people, and under the banner of the truth of the distinct messages of the three angels. Adventists confess that indeed "our mission is fuelled by the seriousness with which we have taken biblical truth and its relevance for the last days" (Rodriques 2009:21). For the understanding of Adventist ecclesiology, it cannot be ignored that the Adventist movement regarded itself from its beginnings as the remnant mentioned above and that this concept placed the movement within a prophetic history that defined its nature against the rest of Christianity and formed a distinct missiology. The SDAC thus has an apocalyptic focus and identifies its nature and activities in terms of the end-time remnant as described in the Book of Revelation as foundational to the being of the church (Rodriques 2006b:2-3).

2.2 Relevancy in the world

Rodríguez (2006b:1) indicates the important challenge of the SDAC in maintaining its vitality and relevance in a world that is continually changing. Relevancy in the world implies that the presence of the church is vital as it satisfies the needs within society and its members. It is important to realise that Paul's strategy was to make the gospel culturally relevant to every group he attempted to reach without compromising its faith (Burrill 1998:35). The church's theology must thus be uncompromisingly biblical, but its methodology should be predominantly cultural (Burrill 1998:36). Burrill declares that the Adventist mission has been nurtured by both Matthew 24:14 (to preach the gospel to the whole world) and by the Great Commission. The *parousia* was the spark that ignited the Adventist mission for over one hundred and fifty years (Burrill 1998:48).

2.3 Unity of the church

Rodríguez (2006b:1-2) points out that because of the growth of the Adventist Church, it should allow an opportunity to reinforce its unity. In a religious movement distinguished by ethnic, national, and cultural diverseness, it likely that further diversification will take place. In this regard, it is essential to pinpoint the elements that make up the movement's bond of unity in Christ, to maintain the unity that characterises the SDAC. The central elements

are found in the church's ecclesiology, specifically in its common identity, message, and mission. These need to be reconfirmed through contemplation and inspection in the context of its diversity. Rodriques submits that a clearly expressed Adventist ecclesiology is vital to properly interconnect with other Christian and non-Christian communities. Dederen (2000:562) perceptively comments, "This bond of unity is not found in the ecclesiastical organisation of the church but in the preaching of the Word of God." He points out that such a unity exceeds the divisive elements of race, class, and gender (Gal. 3:28). Rodríguez (2006a:8) declares that history is clear that the visible unity of the church was compromised by the introduction of radical theological and doctrinal diversity into the church and that the Adventist movement is in a sense a revolt against the fragmentation of the Christian world.

2.4   An eschatological outlook

Rodríguez (2006b:2-3) describes Adventism as an eschatological movement that will play a significant role within the closing chapters of the cosmic conflict. The church's self-understanding is related to its eschatological expectations. Any attempt to free its ecclesiology from its eschatological moorings will have to define the first or ignore the second. Such displacement would not be able to produce an ecclesiology that is Adventist in thinking, orientation, and worldview. The role of the church within the cosmic conflict and its particular role at the final confrontation are of paramount importance in its ecclesiology. Donkor (2011:29) indicates that the eschatological outlook of Adventist remnant ecclesiology causes Adventist scholars to pay attention to developments regarding worship and spiritualism, in both the secular and religious worlds. Winkle (2014:3) indicates that Seventh-Day Adventism has never engaged ecclesiology with as much fervour as it has eschatology. It is interesting to note that of the various metaphors for the church (e.g. corporal, familial, agricultural, architectural), the ecclesiological image of the church as a temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), while not ignored, has never found a similar level of interest as Adventism's eschatological interest in the heavenly temple has.

2.5   Importance of evangelism

Holdsworth (2014:2) states that Adventists are admonished by Christ's end-time prophecies in the New Testament to spread the gospel. While fulfilling Christ's call, Adventists are compelled by Matthew 25 to care for the nations, as they care for Christ – providing food, water, clothing, shelter, healthcare and human rights to whom they preach the gospel, while they await Christ's coming and God's final judgment. The members must fulfil their responsibility and be actively working members (Damsteegt 1988:257). Rodríguez (2006a:15-17) states that the church is organised for service and its mission is to carry the gospel into the world. Although the church is God's agency, the effectiveness of its mission is in the hands of God. The church is never left to itself in the fulfilment of its mission.

The SDAC promotes the authority of Scripture, the believer's baptism, separation of church and state, religious liberty, a deep concern for the Great Commission, and the conviction that the church, built as closely as possible according to the guidelines of the New Testament, transcends national boundaries and local cultures. For them, the church, whatever else it might be, is a community of baptised believers, rooted in the Scriptures and unrestricted in their missionary concern by territorial limitations (Dederen 2000:576). The SDAC perceives themselves as a worldwide family of believers. These ecclesiological aspects influence the core beliefs, worldview, and interaction within the congregation and the community. This Adventist framework informs the role and ministry of the local congregation.

The key question then is: How do the SDAC congregations in the Free State look like? The empirical data will be used to enlighten the SDAC ecclesiology.

3.   The NCLS results of the SDAC congregations in the Free State – an empirical evaluation

In light of the characteristics of the SDAC ecclesiology that have been discussed, this section aims to listen to the voice of the attendees and evaluate this within the context of the Free State SDAC congregations. A guiding principle of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is that it seeks to identify

the strengths of the congregations, and not simply to focus on weaknesses. The strengths of the congregations are the springboards to improve and further develop the ministry of the congregation. Where there are weaknesses, they can best be addressed by extending what is done that works well (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:2).

The eleven Free State SDAC congregations are mostly small rural congregations. They are mainly white Afrikaans congregations except for two English multicultural congregations and one Afrikaans coloured congregation. These congregations are influenced by the depopulation of the white community in the Free State. Many young people attend higher education institutions in larger centres and are not involved in the local community. This fact is supported by the average age of the SDAC attendees in the Free State of 44 years and 10 months.

The SDAC in the Free State is facing major challenges because of the changing environment, not only in the Free State but also in the South African context. A changing virtual, socio-political and economic environment poses unique challenges to the church. The position and role of religion are not the same as they were ten or twenty years ago (Schoeman 2015:104). The depopulation of the white community in the Free State had a major effect on, not only the number of members but also the attitudes and perceptions of the members. This changing environment is not always taken into consideration when the effectiveness of the church in its environment is evaluated. Congregations and the church at large tend to compare past performances and ministers to present performances and ministers without considering the changing environment. This situation often causes despondency in congregations and discourages many ministers.

The NCLS attender questionnaires were sent to the eleven SDAC congregations in the Free State. This was accompanied by a letter of support from the president of the KwaZulu Natal-Free State Conference that was sent to the pastors and leaders of all the Free State congregations. Ten of the eleven congregations participated and 219 adult attendees, 15 years and older completed the questionnaires. NCLS Research in Australia then processed and

returned the data. The data were compared with all South African churches, 18 838 questionnaires and 141 congregations.

This section aims to listen to the voice of the attendees and how they experience church life in the Free State environment. The empirical results from this survey will give insight in the congregational life of the SDAC in the Free State and will help to "explore and rethink the identity and role" of the SDAC within the Free State context (Schoeman 2015:104). This quantitative, empirical local research process will help the Free State congregations to find their strong and weak connections reliably and credibly within the global and local context (Schoeman 2010:114).

3.1   A description of attendees

Table 10.1   The attendees

Attendees	SDACFS (%)	ALL SA (%)
Gender		
Female	57	57
Male	43	43
Marital Status		
Never married	29	15
In first marriage	44	59
Remarried	12	9
Attendees who perform leadership and ministry roles		
Worship services (teaching/preaching, music etc.)	37	11
Children's ministry/youth ministry role	17	7
Social group leadership	5	3
Management/admin/committee/task force member	17	15
Involved in activities of the congregations		
Small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups	44	27
Evangelistic or outreach activities	37	9
Community service, social justice or welfare activities	24	24
Financial giving		
Regularly give 10% or more of net income	65	14

Each congregation is a community of people from many different backgrounds and circumstances. Looking at who goes to church also reveals the extent to which the church is connecting with the many elements of South African society. The high percentage of 57% of females in the Free State church, 14 percentage points higher than their male counterparts is significant. These percentages are the same for the All South African church. This seems to be a trend in most of the conservative denominations in South Africa. Also significant is the stability in marriage as 44% Adventists are in their first marriage and 59% in the All South African church.

The members of the Free State Church are very involved with church activities as 59% reported regular involvement. 23% say this church should give greater attention to building a strong sense of community within the congregation in the next six months. What is significant in this section is the financial giving of the members. They report that 65% of the members regularly give 10% or more of their net income to the church. They are 51 percentage points higher than the All South African church of 14%. This may be because Adventists are admonished to give 10% tithe plus offerings to support the church. These figures show that they are very committed to giving their tithes and offerings.

3.2 The vitality of the SDAC congregations in the Free State

This section looks in detail at the vitality of the SDAC in the Free State region. It investigates attendees' responses to questions about each of the nine core qualities. The main focus is to use the nine core qualities to explain and highlight the unique ecclesiology of the SDAC as explained previously. The nine core qualities are divided into three sections namely the internal core qualities (faith, worship and belonging), the inspirational core qualities (vision, leadership, innovation), and the outward core qualities (service, faith sharing and inclusion).

Internal core qualities

Table 10.2 reflects the survey results relating to internal core qualities.

Table 10.2   Internal core qualities

Internal core qualities	SDACFS (%)	All SA (%)
Alive and growing faith		
Much growth in faith mainly through the local church	42	41
Spend time in private devotional activity most days	79	71
Vital and nurturing worship		
Always experience inspiration in worship	42	44
Always find preaching very helpful	51	50
Strong and growing belonging		
Sense of belonging is strong and growing	68	49
Attend church services weekly or more often	80	63

Faith

Faith is the answer of the human heart to the love of God as revealed on the cross. According to the data, the Free State SDAC are experiencing their growth in faith in the church and are not as likely to join small groups. This correlates with the All South African church as the percentage of both samples are very much the same; one point difference in the growth of faith through the church and a four-point difference in choosing small groups. This means that the South African Christians at large mainly experience their growth in faith through their church. Seventy-nine per cent of the Free State Adventists say that they are committed to everyday private prayer, Bible reading and meditation. This correlates with the general belief amongst Adventists that the SDAC is a people of the Bible. Faith features as one of the four strengths on the circle of strengths on the Free State Adventist Church profile (see Figure 10.1). Adventists are eight points higher than the All South African church's 71%. Unity is an ecclesiological characteristic of the SDAC and there is a strong intention to preserve this unity. Key elements, such as its common identity, message and mission, are present in the church's ecclesiology. Due to this, the attendance of church services is where the attendees grow their faith as a united body in Christ. Based on its ecclesiology, the attendees experience their congregation as a community of believers

Worship

Worship has to do with congregational worship such as during the worship service. Do the members experience God's presence, inspiration, awe, joy, growth in understanding of God and preaching that is helpful to everyday life? (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:14). Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 87% say that they always or usually experience inspiration during worship services and 88% always or usually experience a sense of God's presence during worship services. The worship service is rated very high by the Adventist attendees and measures well with the All South African church with two points higher in experiencing inspiration, and two points lower in experiencing God's presence. It is also rated the strongest point on the circle of strengths of the Adventist profile (Figure 10.1). The measured vitality in this section is very encouraging as worship forms the basis of the vitality of a congregation. The sermons during the worship services and the congregational singing are very helpful and important to both samples with a one-point difference in each case. Helpful sermons for the Adventists are at 51% with the All South African church figure at 50%, and music and singing at 76% and 77% respectively. It is very encouraging that the Free State SDAC attendees rated worship so high, as it seems to differ in other parts of the world. Burril (1998:224) points out that to most Adventists today, the chief religious activity is passive: listening to a sermon or seminar, which is promptly forgotten.

Belonging

Belonging is not simply a case of being present at a worship service, but of experiencing a feeling of belonging to the community of faith (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:16). Saraglou (2011:1326) remarks that belonging may be described as an element of bonding to a group, an emotional aspect of religion that facilitates experience and rituals. Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 68% experience a strong and growing sense of belonging. There is a gap of 19% between the Adventists and the All South African church. This is because 68% of the Adventists attendees feel that they have a growing sense of belonging to their congregations compared to 49% of the All South African church. This difference may be because Adventists see themselves as a family. They like

to socialise together after church and have regular congregational meals. This strengthens their sense of belonging. This bond of unity is a key element in the church's ecclesiology and this finding also refers to the remnant ecclesiology of the SDAC. Interestingly, however, the attendees rated belonging on the circle of strengths of the Adventist profile rather low compared with the other strengths (Figure 10.1). This may be because many of the members may not feel completely fulfilled even though there is a strong sense of belonging amongst them.

Inspirational core qualities

Table 10.3 reflects the survey results relating to inspirational core qualities.

Table 10.3   Inspirational core qualities

Inspirational core qualities	SDACFS (%)	All SA (%)
Clear and owned vision		
Aware and strongly committed to the local church's vision	29	29
Unaware of any clear vision, goals or direction	35	26
Inspiring and empowering leadership		
Leaders at the local church encourage gifts and skills to a great extent	31	26
Leaders at the local church inspire us to action	68	70
Imaginative and flexible innovation		
The congregation is always willing to try new things	22	31
Leaders here encourage innovation	70	74

Vision

When it comes to congregational vitality, vision is the ability of congregations to develop a clear vision that members are strongly committed to (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:18). According to the survey results, of the Free State SDAC attendees, 29% are aware of, and strongly committed to the church's vision, goals and directions, and 51% are fully confident the vision can be achieved. Although 29% of the Adventist attendees say that they are strongly committed to the church's vision, 37% are partly or not committed to the vision, and 23%

are only aware of ideas and not of any clear vision, goals or directions. This may be why many of the members are not involved in the programmes of their congregations. This is not a positive picture in the Free State congregations as evangelism is a key element in the ecclesiology of the SDAC. As Holdsworth (2014:2) pointed out, Adventists are compelled to spread the gospel by Christ's end-time prophecies in the New Testament. A clear and owned vision is also rated the lowest by the members on the circle of strengths of the Adventist profile (Figure 10.1). There are no major differences between the two groups. There seems to be a gap between the leadership and their vision and the members owning this vision. Hughes and Bellamy (2004:16) point out that research has shown that most members of congregations are mostly inward-looking and do not reach out to those beyond congregational life.

Leadership

Leadership aims, among other things, to influence individuals or groups (Gibbs 2005:25). Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 31% say that leaders encourage them to use their gifts and skills to a great extent. Also, 22% say the church should encourage people to discover and use their gifts as a priority. Furthermore, 31% say that the leaders encourage them to use their gifts and skills to a great extent, but 49% say that the leaders encourage them only to some extent or to a small extent. Only 10% believe that empowering leadership is one of their strengths. It may be that a large percentage of the members' gifts and skills are overlooked and not utilised in the congregations. Inspiring and empowering leadership may thus be largely lacking in the Free State church. Are the leadership perhaps doing the ministry by themselves rather than equipping and encouraging the members? Empowering leadership is rated third-lowest by the members on the circle of strengths on the Free State SDAC profile (Figure 10.1). There is no major difference between the Adventist sample and the All South African sample, which may indicate a general trend amongst conservative churches, except that there is a ten-point difference between the samples concerning leadership helping the congregations to identify and build on its strengths, as well as a ten-point difference concerning the issue of good and clear congregational systems. These figures are 66% and 76% respectively for the Adventists and 76% and 87% for the All South African sample.

Perhaps the Adventists rated the congregational systems lower because of a lack of knowledge of the systems or a blatant deviation from the ecclesiology of the church at large as systems are part of the SDAC ecclesiology.

Innovation

Innovation requires imagination and flexibility. Bellamy *et al.* (2006:22) state that leaders must contemplate how change can be brought about to help the congregation become more vital. To do so, a congregation needs to be open and willing to try new approaches. Relevancy is one of the key elements of the SDAC ecclesiology. Rodriquez (2006b:1) points out that maintaining its vitality and relevancy is one of the challenges that confront the SDAC in a world that is changing all the time. Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 59% believe the Free State congregations are always ready to try something new, and 65% would tend to support innovative change to the worship service they attend. The Adventist worshipers also feel that their congregations are always ready to try new things. They are impressed by the innovative ideas of the leadership. It is also rated as the fourth strength on the circle of strengths on the Adventist profile by the members (Figure 10.1). However, there is quite a difference between the two groups. The Adventist sample percentage is 59% and the All South African percentage is 74%. There is thus much room for improvement in terms of imaginative and flexible innovation by the leadership on the Adventist side. The Free State SDAC congregations and their leaders might have lost track of the importance of being relevant in their respective areas. They might be too aware of entertaining themselves instead of having an impact on their communities.

Outward core qualities

Table 10.4 reflects the survey results relating to outward core qualities.

Table 10.4   Outward core qualities

Outward core qualities	SDACFS (%)	All SA (%)
Practical and diverse service		
Involvement in church-based welfare or justice service activities	24	24
Attenders who helped others in three or more ways	52	44
Willing and effective faith–sharing		
Invited someone to church in the last 12 months	52	38
Attenders involved regularly in outreach or evangelistic activity	37	9
Intentional and welcoming inclusion		
Attenders certain to follow up someone drifting	18	11
Attenders always personally welcome new people	26	10

Service

Service is central to the mission of the church. Research has found definite links between churches having an outward focus beyond the congregation and growth of membership (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:24). Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 52% informally helped others in three or more of the listed ways in the last year, and 38% are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church. The SDAC congregations in the Free State seem to be more caring than the All South African sample with an eight-point difference. This may be because being involved in the community is a strong element in the SDAC ecclesiology. The Adventists in the Free State seem to be quite active in the community. The reality is however quite different and while 52% informally helped others in the community, only 24% were involved in church-based service activities. This means that individually attendees in the Free State are involved in community service, but not as a congregation. This is supported by the Adventist profile where service is rated second last in the circle of strengths (Figure 10.1). This is a matter of concern and attention should be given to practical and diverse service by the SDAC. This is a serious deviation from the ecclesiology of the SDAC which views evangelism as a major element of the church's ecclesiology in taking the gospel into the world. This may be

due to the survival mode many of the congregations are experiencing because of the depopulation of the white community in the Free State.

Faith-sharing

Hughes and Bellamy (2004:115-119) argue that congregations need to sow in a multiplicity of ways to reap even a moderate harvest among those who are currently beyond the life of the congregation. Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 52% invited someone to church in the past year and 90% feel at ease talking about their faith. Of the attendees, 17% think reaching those who do not attend church is an aspect of the church that they most value, and 28% believe more attention should be given to encouraging people to share their faith. 90% of the Free State Adventists feel at ease talking about their faith, but it may be that they do not talk about their faith, as it is rated low by them in the profile (Figure 10.1). Adventists are ten percentage points higher (90%) than the All South African church (80%). If the Adventists would talk about their faith, it might have wonderful consequences. The Adventists are also 14 points higher (52%) than the All South African church (38%) in their willingness to invite friends to church. The Free State Adventist Church thus has the potential to be very strong in faith sharing. The high percentage of the SDAC may be as a result of the strong emphasis on evangelism by every member in the ecclesiology of the SDAC.

Inclusion

Inclusion has to do with the successful integration of people into church life. It should be intentional in that the church seeks out new people and include and welcomes them in the programme of the congregation (Bellamy *et al.* 2006:28). Of the Free State SDAC attendees, 18% say if they knew someone was drifting away from church involvement, they are certain they would take the time to talk with them about it, and 45% say they are very likely or likely to follow up someone drifting away. Twenty-six per cent always personally welcome someone who they know is a new arrival. The Adventists rated inclusion as second strongest on the circle of strengths profile (Figure10.1). This data picture the Adventists as a very welcoming church to newcomers. They are willing to follow someone up that is drifting away (45%) and willing to welcome new

arrivals (26%). These figures are very encouraging as it portrays the SDAC as a warm and welcoming church where newcomers would probably feel welcome and have the desire to stay. This correlates with the ecclesiology of unity of the SDAC. There is quite a gap between the percentages of the Adventist Church and the All South African church. Thirty-four per cent of the SDAC say they will certainly and very likely follow up someone who drifts away against the 20% of the All South African church, a gap of 14 points. Sixty-one per cent of the SDAC and 29% of the All South African church reports that they will always and mostly seek out and welcome newcomers, a gap of 32 points.

3.3   Inflow

Table 10.5 reflects inflow to the Free State SDAC.

Table 10.5   Inflow to the Free State SDAC

Inflow	SDACFS (%)	All SA (%)
Switchers/transfers from other churches (aged 15+)	42	24
Young people who have been attending five years or more	3	5
Newcomers	5	3
Visitors	2	2

Of the attendees (aged 15+), 42% switched from another denomination or were transferred. The percentage is significantly higher than the 24% of the All South African church. This reflects the high emphasis on evangelism in the SDAC.

The figure of 3% for young people who have been attending five years or more is very low. This may be because young people move away from smaller areas to attend higher education institutions in larger centres. Many young people are thus away at school and do not worship in their home congregations anymore. The figures for newcomers and visitors are not really of any significance.

4.   A profile of the SADC in the Free State

Figure 10.1 shows the profile of ten SDAC congregations in the Free State. The circle of strengths portrays the strong points of the Free State church from their greatest strength to their not so strong points.
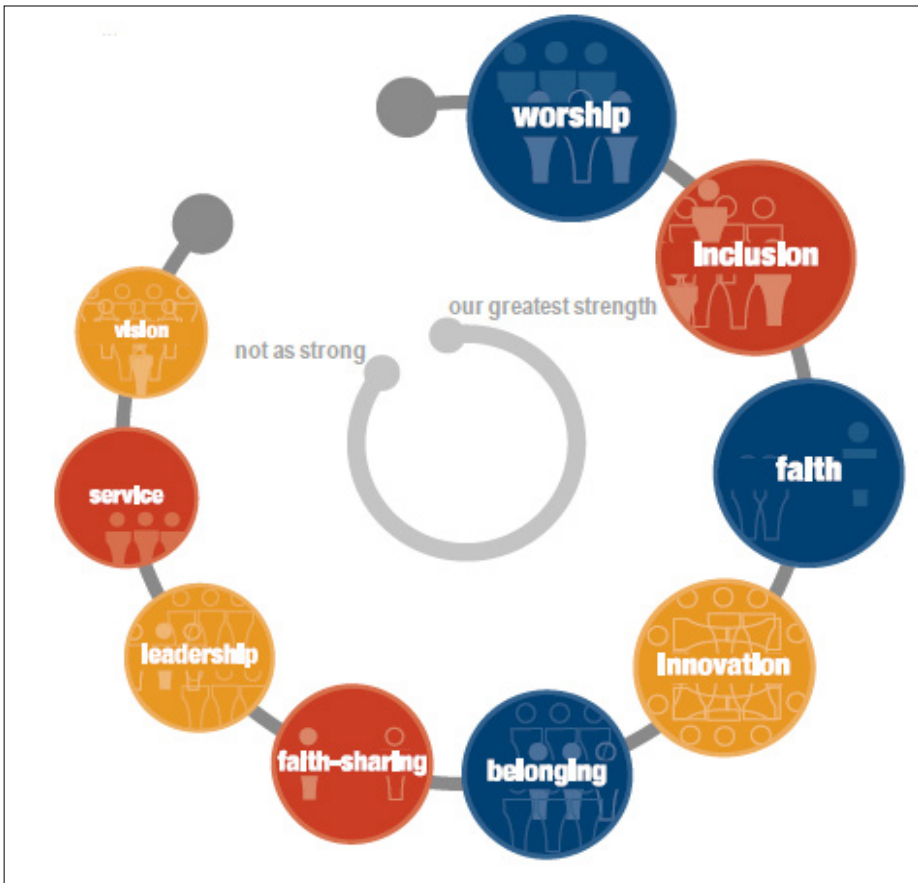
Figure 10.1 A profile of the ten SDAC congregations in the Free State

In this profile, worship, inclusion, faith and innovation are portrayed as the four greatest strengths of the church, while vision, service, leadership and faith sharing are seen as being not so strong. Much attention should thus be given to the leadership function in these congregations. Attendees are impressed by the innovation of the leadership, but it seems that there is a disconnection between the leadership and their vision, and the congregations. The leadership do not communicate their vision and plans to the congregation and it seems as if the leadership do all the work and leave the congregations behind. According to the profile, the congregations are mostly focused inwardly and the inspirational and outward core qualities are neglected. Leadership and the sharing of the gospel is the reason the church exists. Without that, the congregation becomes

a "naval-gazing institution" (Burrill 1993:36). Burrill warns that when the church loses its reason for existence, it may become a social club rather than the church of Jesus Christ (Burrill 1998:29-30).

5.   Conclusion

Two facets of church life need to be highlighted. The first is the ecclesiology of the SDAC. Congregations need to inform themselves of the ecclesiology of the church and follow the instructions and directions the church provides about church life in the congregation. If these are ignored, congregations might forget what the church's mission and relevance in the world are. The second facet to be highlighted is the ecology of the congregations. They find themselves in a certain environment and they need to be able to adapt to the needs of the community to be relevant in their situation. The Free State SDAC does not have a specific understanding that missional-healthy congregations are focused in a three-way relationship: a relationship with God, a relationship with each other, and a relationship with the community they serve. A loose understanding and connection exist with the three-way relationship, but it is not expressed. The congregations thus do not know their strengths and weaknesses.

The circle of strengths in the profile was an eye-opener to the leadership and the members of the church in the Free State. The knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses may help the leadership to utilise their strengths to be effective in meeting the needs of their members and communities. Furthermore, the leadership of the church in the Free State needs to fulfil their role in the church, inspiring and empowering their members to be missional in their mindset, to ensure that leadership is related to growth in attendance.

The members understand their God-given responsibility to be actively involved in the missional life of the congregation, in faith sharing and involvement to ensure a vital and healthy congregation but are so side-tracked by the fact that they have lost many members due to the depopulation of the white community in the Free State that they have lost sight of their responsibility. However, the church has a strong foundation of worship and has the potential to become a fully missional church.

In the NCLS research, the Free State SDAC was compared with the All South African church, which was mainly the Dutch Reformed Church. The following statement from the Dutch Reformed Church research may also be valid for the SDAC:

> Although there is an awareness in respect of the missional calling of the church and the congregation, the change is still limited and there is room for greater and more deliberate involvement of the congregation and its leadership within the community (Nel & Schoeman 2015:153).

A focus on the ecclesiological makers of the SDAC may guide its congregations to evaluate their specific calling.

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Markers for a contemporary ecclesiology: An African denominational perspective

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1.   Introduction

Ecclesiology is widely understood as a study of the Christian church in its dimensions of existence and function. Kärkkäinen (2002:7-8) argues that there is an upsurge of interest in the contemporary literature on ecclesiology and this is attributed to ecumenical movements which in their discussion of the unity of the church and related issues resuscitated the interest in the study of ecclesiology. The rapid growth of Christian faith beyond Europe and North America has put the focus on non-traditional forms of the church usually known as the free church. These kinds of churches play a crucial role in shaping the public profile of the church in Africa (De Gruchy & Chirongoma 2008:301). In Africa, this revived interest in ecclesiology can be attributed to the growing Christian faith which led to the mushrooming of churches and congregations in every sector of the community and the growing challenges in the society. These growing challenges have permeated the economic, social and political aspects of the African society and their dire consequences compel one to ask, "Where is the church or Christians when Africa is overwhelmed with such rapidly growing societal challenges amid the growing Christian faith?"

Various definitions and descriptions of the church have evolved throughout the history of the church and its interpretation of the Scripture. Differences are found in the definition, nature and the doctrine of the church (Giles 1995:3-4), but also in the understanding of the church as a community of believers, a building to worship God, a local assembly of believers, a denomination, or the

church as a global and united institution (Towns 2006:323). There is a growing difference in the description of the nature and ministry of the church due to the shifting of the gravity of Christian faith from the northern to the southern hemisphere and a different interpretation of the Scripture and experience of God. For example, churches influenced by the reformation theology of the fifteenth-century exhibit a diversity of doctrines and understanding of the nature of the church (Bosch 2000:240). This also holds for the church in Africa.

This chapter aims to explore, from an African perspective, contemporary ecclesiological markers for the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA)[1] Free State (FS).[2] The guiding research question is: In what way may theoretical and empirical perspectives contribute towards an understanding of contemporary ecclesiologies from an African contextual perspective? The purpose is to contribute to the debate on the understanding and evaluation of a church that was successfully planted in Africa by the missionaries from the northern hemisphere countries. There is a need for the indigenous leadership of the churches in Africa to take full responsibility for the theological reflection on what it means to be a member of the body of Christ in Africa (De Gruchy & Chirongoma 2008:292). The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in the Free State (DRCA FS)[3] will be used as a case study and the methodology used will be explained in the next section. The ecclesiology of the DRCA FS and the characteristics of a contemporary African ecclesiology will thereafter be discussed and used to critically reflect on the ecclesiology of the DRCA FS.

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1 The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) is one of the members in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches in South Africa, together with the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) (DRCA FS, Church Order 2003:7, Article 2).

2 One of the provinces in South Africa.

3 Initially it was called the "Dutch Reformed Mission Church in OFS" (DRC OFS). It was one of the first church established for Black Africans by the DRC in SA. However, it is now being referred to the DRC in the Free State (FS).

2.   Methodology

The empirical data used in this case study were gathered through a mixed-methods approach which used both quantitative and qualitative surveys to collect data.[4] Quantitative data were collected employing two surveys: A survey was done amongst the ministers (known as the ministers' survey), through a questionnaire that was sent to 65 ministers of whom 47 (72%) returned completed questionnaires. In the second quantitative survey, 146 questionnaires were sent to congregations (known as the congregational survey) to be completed by the church council bodies of deacons and elders (excluding the minister) on behalf of their congregations; 86 (59%) completed questionnaires were returned. The design of the questionnaires was adapted from the Dutch Reformed Church Mirror survey of 2010. The main purpose of the quantitative data was to have a broader understanding of the situation of the ministry in the congregations of the DRCA FS.

After two quantitative surveys were done and analysed, qualitative data were collected in two waves: Eight congregations of the DRCA FS within the region of the Free State province were selected; individual interviews with the ministers were firstly conducted and then focus group interviews with the congregation members were done. The main purpose of the qualitative data was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the situation in the congregations of the DRCA FS and triangulate some of the data from the surveys done. The main source of empirical data for this chapter is drawn from the congregational survey (CS), but data from the other survey, individual interviews and focus group interviews will also be used to explore the ecclesiology of the DRCA FS.

3.   The ecclesiology of the DRCA FS

The DRCA FS is a mainline denomination and mission product of the DRC in the Free State for black Africans. It is a denomination that believes in the authority of the Holy Scripture and adheres to a reformed identity. It subscribes to three general creeds, namely the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, and three reformed creeds: the Belgic Confession, the

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4   See Pali (2016:39–55) for a more in depth description of the methodology and surveys.

Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordrecht. According to *Thuto ya Bokreste* (1987:69), the DRCA FS believes that the church consists of those called by God to become a community of believers through faith in Christ. The purpose is to participate in the mission of God and eternal life prepared in Christ.

The DRCA FS uses biblical metaphors to guide its ecclesiological understanding and believes that the church is the nation or people of God (1 Pet. 2:9), which implies that as believers we are called by God, through Christ; therefore, we have a special relationship with God, and that relationship is not earned but received by faith in Christ. Furthermore, the DRCA FS believes that the church is the body of Christ and that he is the head of the church. That the church is the body of Christ implies unity and diversity; unity in the sense that as the body of Christ we are joined together, and diversity in the sense that we are all endowed with various gifts and everyone must be empowered to use his or her gift as required for the common benefit of all. Another metaphor used by the DRCA FS to develop its ecclesiology is the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:2, 25-27, Rev. 21:2), and this metaphor is used to symbolise the kind of love Christ has for his church. Lastly, the metaphor of the church as the building or temple of God symbolises sacredness and the extraordinary identity it has to God. According to this metaphor, Christ is the foundation (Matt. 21:42; 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:2) which implies that without him there is no church. Again, Christ is the builder (Matt. 16:18) who builds the church according to his desire and believers are joined together in him to build his temple (Eph. 2:22). To the DRCA, the church as building or temple of God demonstrates the firmness, unity and the organisation of the church of Christ.

The DRCA FS also believes that it is through the church that Christ makes his work and himself known in this world. To realise this, it is stipulated in the DRCA, FS Church Order (2003:58-65) how to make Christ's work known in this world through the actions of the local church or congregation. This is done by means of the public worship services held to glorify God under the guidance of Holy Spirit, the catechism classes to empower those who are yet to confess their faith in Christ and become members of the body of Christ, a pastoral care

service done through household visitation to members, catechists, those under the discipline of the church, and those vulnerable and marginalised. Lastly, the DRCA FS does mission through evangelisation and diaconal service to win the lost for Christ and help the vulnerable and marginalised in the church.

The confession, metaphors and actions of the DRCA FS provide a framework to describe the ecclesiology of the denomination. The ecclesiology of congregations needs to be discussed in more detail and this discussion will relate to the identity, mission and ministry of the DRCA congregations.

3.1 Identity of the DRCA FS congregations

The identity of the congregation is grounded in the Triune God; according to Schoeman (2015:364), the identity of a congregation is embedded in the relationship and confession of faith of the congregation in the Triune God. The relationship should be with all the three persons of the Triune God; otherwise, the relationship and its conceptual understanding will be incomplete (Giles 1995:221). However, this relationship should not end with the Triune God but should be extended to inner-self, community, and nature (Thiessen 2005:58-60). The identity in the Triune God must take precedence over the ethnic identities that often bring divisions (Gal. 3:28-29; Col. 3:11). If a congregation has its identity embedded in the Triune God, it will accrue the following benefits: unity, relationality, diversity, embracing the other, interdependence and generosity are valued (Venter 2005:340-341, 2011:13, 15-16). Venter (2004:759) also argues that following from the essence of the Triune God, congregations are to be understood as communities of believers where the aspect of relationality is important. This relationality is reflected when members are treated with love, as equals, and encouraged to take care of each other. Lastly, one learns from the Triune God that the act of love and care that exists in congregational communities should be directed to the outside world and be used to address societal injustices (Venter 2004:760).

The identity of a church and its congregations are also influenced by culture. This brings to the fore how churches understand the relationship between culture and gospel. In the New Testament, various metaphors from the culture of the then community of believers were used to depict the essence of a

church. For example, the church as a family (1 Tim. 5:1-2), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32), branches on a vine (John 15:1-8), God's house (Heb. 3:6), and the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:27). This use of cultural metaphors both complicates and enriches the essence of a church. However, the principle of the gospel should dominate the interpretation of how these cultural factors are used to portray the concept of the church.

Moreover, according to Schoeman (2015:365), the identity of the church has an impact on the practice of mission and ministry of the church. Due to a skewed conceptual identity of the church through history, churches focused on a ministry that either emphasised maintenance of the status quo for the sake of survival or on social activism for the sake of pursuing social justice and solidarity with the poor and the marginalised (Giles 1995:3, 12). Such a skewed understanding of the identity of the church influenced the ministry, especially a social ministry, to such an extent that there was a concern about the quality of the Christian faith, the integrity of the members of the church in Africa, and, consequently, the influence on the image of Africa that earned a denigrating name such as "a continent in crisis". Adeyemo (1995:13) and Van der Walt (2006:32) raised serious concerns about the poor level of influence of the Christian faith in the socio, economic and political arena. Van der Walt (2006:32) even attributes this poor social impact by the African Christian faith to the type of Christian faith Africa received from foreign missions and the lack of understanding of the implication of personal conversion and church membership. The poor social impact of the Christian churches in Africa led to numerous societal challenges which contributed to Africa be described as "a continent in crisis" or "a dark continent" (Nkurunziza 2008:58; Van der Walt 1995:1).

The discussion on the identity of the DRCA FS could start with the establishment of the DRCA FS in 1910 as the product of the mission work of the DRC. The theology and ministerial practises of the DRC and, consequently, of the DRCA FS have its historical origin in The Netherlands, and strongly adhere to the influences of the teachings of Calvin and Reformed theology. The DRCA FS is part of the DRC family of churches which were established for different races in South Africa. The DRCA FS is for the black Africans

in South Africa; in 2018 it had three white missionaries serving as ministers in the congregations of the DRCA FS, less than 40 ministers with about 120 congregations, and fewer than 100 000 members.

Furthermore, the identity of the DRCA FS can be described as that of a church that believes in the existence of the Triune God (*Buka ya Kereke* 1986:14-15, 132). It believes that God, the Father called us into his church that is saved and headed by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. However, the weakness one can detect from the practises and ministry of many churches including the DRCA FS is, as Giles (1995:22) described it, an overemphasis of the Christo-centrism of the church at the expense of other persons in the Triune God. In the DRCA FS, this contributed to an ignorance of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1-11) like healing, miracles, prophecy and speaking in tongues, the consequences of which were a passive involvement of the laity in the ministry of the church. Lastly, a poor theological understanding of the role of the Father in the Trinity led many churches, including the DRCA FS, to a lack of ecological sensitivity, which encourages good relations with the rest of creation (Venter 2005:340).

Secondly, DRCA FS membership is predominantly black Africans whose leadership is constantly struggling to integrate the influence of African cultural practices into the ministry for the purpose of indigenisation (Pali 2017:4). This has led the DRCA FS to have an ambiguous view on some cultural practices, like traditional initiation school and adoption of musical instruments in the church (Pali 2016:82, 336). Furthermore, the membership of the DRCA FS has been predominantly black since its establishment, and this raises a concern about the missional practises and conceptual understanding of the church.

Thirdly, and lastly, social factors and history influence the identity of the church. The DRCA FS practices a strong reformed Calvinistic theology with a Eurocentric influence of doctrines, liturgy and ministerial practices. Bosch (2000:240) raised a concern that reformed churches with a strong influence of the reformation era of the fifteenth century tend to overemphasise the correct formulation of doctrines and to dismiss any possibility of future doctrinal development. For the DRCA FS this a serious trap in its ministry, which

has made it blind to its creative and independent response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Since 1994, it has been fighting against any possibility of accepting the Belhar confession and has struggled with reviewing its ministry for inculturation and self-reflection. Smit (2009:425, 460) also raised a concern that reformed churches of Dutch origin (this includes the DRCA FS) have a serious challenge to contribute to the reformation of the society due to a lack of a common understanding of how to practise unity and reconciliation amongst themselves.

3.2 Mission of the DRCA FS congregations

The mission of a congregation is the consequence of how she understands her identity; the mission may be called the mandate, direction or calling of the congregation (Guder 2000:66; Schoeman 2015:365). Mission originates from the Triune God who intends to reconcile humanity with the Triune God (Van der Borght 2005:239) and is a comprehensive and contextual concept that involves the proclamation of the gospel, witness, a quest for justice, hope and peace to all spheres of life (Bosch 2000:426; Pali & Verster 2013:232). Mission is about God's involvement in this world, which could happen through engaging cultural or socio-economic issues of the world (Bosch 2000:426), and has both a spiritual and a social dimension (Bosch 2000:403; Bouwers-Du Toit 2010:263). The spiritual dimension involves the authentic proclamation of the Word of God within and beyond the borders of the congregation and the societal dimension implies a responsible involvement in the transformation of human and societal institutions in the society.

According to the empirical research done by Pali and Verster (2013:239, 241) amongst the leadership of the DRCA FS, a majority of the participants have a narrow view of mission as only the proclamation of the gospel to the world. Pali and Verster (2013:247, 250) raised a concern on the practical involvement in mission which is not satisfactory and declining rapidly. Furthermore, mission in the DRCA FS is understood as a project in a congregation and is characterised by evangelisation, preaching, house visits and Bible study for the purpose of salvation (Pali 2016:79-80). *Diakonia* and mission within the DRCA FS are distinct from each other (Pali & Verster 2013:242); hence,

the deacon is responsible for the leadership in the diaconal ministry, whereas mission is primarily attributed to the leadership of the minister, together with the church elders (DRCA Church Order 2003, Articles 46-47).

It must be noted that due to influence of white imperialism some individuals in the DRCA FS congregations have the notion of mission as the evangelisation of black people by white people, and regard it as the responsibility of the DRC[5] in the Free State to fund mission projects (Pali & Verster 2013:227-253). To summarise, in the DRCA FS, the approach to mission is a congregational project and kerygmatic: the gospel is proclaimed to non-believers for the sake of their salvation. Pali (2016:107) has observed that this proclamation of the gospel is directed mostly to black Africans of South African origin. According to the empirical research of Pali and Verster (2013:242, 244), some individuals within the DRCA FS believe that proclamation of the gospel to foreigners and people of other races should be funded by and is the responsibility of the DRC.

47% per cent of the respondents from the Congregational Survey reported that their congregations view mission as part of a congregational project, whereas 25% of the respondents mentioned that their congregations understood mission as part of their congregations' identity. 28% of the respondents (CS) assumed a balanced view of mission as a project corresponding to the identity of their congregations. In response to a question as to how the congregation reaches out in mission, 57% of the respondents mentioned "nothing". However, 30% indicated that the few activities taking place as part of mission were farm and industrial ministry, and house visits. The remaining 13% acknowledged that they were still lacking in reaching out for ministry.

3.3   Ministry of the DRCA FS congregations

The ministry of the congregation, following from its identity and mission, could be found in four areas: *leitourgia, kerugma, koinonia* and *diakonia* (Burger 1999:112, 132). A balance is needed between these activities; they are also indicators of a healthy congregational ecclesiology.

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5   Its membership consists mainly of white Afrikaans speaking people.

The first is *leitourgia* which involves liturgical aspects such as prayer, hymns and the sacraments (Burger 1999:204; Khauoe 2011:37, Schoeman 2015:366). A majority of the participants (77%) from the Congregational Survey (CS) in Pali (2016:137-138) agreed that the worship service relates well with the needs and challenges of the believers in the congregations of the DRCA FS; hence there was no need to change the approach to worship service and liturgy. One should note that in the DRCA FS the official liturgical approach to worship service still prefers a more traditional approach with strict singing from hymn book with no liturgical dance, clapping of hands or singing of choruses (DRCA FS 2016:320). This does not exclude the need for liturgical renewal.

The second ministerial activity is *kerugma,* which includes communication of the gospel through evangelism, preaching, providing literature, and theological education (Khauoe 2011:30). According to Pali (2016:137-139), a majority (87%) of the participants in the CS reported that they were satisfied with the preaching as it reflected good preparation and related well to the everyday context. Concerning Bible study, participants in the qualitative interviews indicated that it occurred in small-group discussion but not enough was done in this regard. Bible study in the congregations of the DRCA FS was not favoured; instead, continuous preaching from the reading of a portion from the Scripture was preferred (Pali 2016:144). This caused some frustrations amongst the ministers who tried to introduce Bible study for the sake of spiritual empowerment.

The third ministerial activity is *koinonia* which is about fellowship within a congregation, the relationship and bond between believers (Schoeman 2015:368). *Koinonia* is about building quality relationships amongst fellow believers to share and participate in corporate worship service, small ministry groups, educational programmes, counselling services, Bible study, and prayer meetings to build a bond of quality relationship (Khauoe 2011:34). According to *Thuto ya Bokreste* (1987:69), the DRCA FS understands church as a community of Christ-followers chosen for eternal life through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. According to qualitative interviews done by Pali (2016:145), in the congregations of the DRCA FS, the fellowship of believers is mainly practised during worship services and at ward meetings. Beyond the

worship service and ward meeting, there is no specific activity arranged for fellowship in many congregations of the DRCA FS.

The fourth ministerial activity is *diakonia*, which is about the service and action of the church in the world (Burger 1999:112; Khauoe 2011:32; Schoeman 2015:369). According to Erickson (1985:1057-1058), this service involves actions of love and compassion for both believers and non-believers, caring for the needy and suffering (Luke 10:25-37; James 1:27, 2:1-11), and condemning injustices (Mark 6:17-29; Luke 3:19-20;). In the DRCA FS, *diakonia* is used as a social ministry to address the humanitarian needs of the poor and the marginalised (DRCA Church Order 2003, Article 47). According to Pali (2016:101), the top two social challenges found in both minister and congregational surveys are poverty (96%) and HIV and AIDS (95%). The majority of the participants (65%) in the study reported that there was no strategy available to engage these social challenges. Moreover, further findings from Pali (2016:103-106) concerning diaconal ministry in the congregations of the DRCA FS were as follows: Most often social engagement in the congregations of the DRCA FS is performed on the level of a social welfare approach where the immediate needs of the receivers are met and catered for. The dominant community projects from the diaconal ministry in the congregations of the DRCA FS are food parcels (46%) and counselling programmes (21%) which address immediate needs of the recipients. Societal ministry in the congregations of the DRCA FS targets the members of the congregations first and then the non-members in society, with hardly any global impact. Concerning the involvement of ministers in the diaconal ministry of the DRCA FS, it was found that the ministers were too busy due to a lack of ministers and too many congregations or rather growing congregations that become too big for one minister. The consequence of this is that it affects their participation in social engagement and empowerment of congregation members for social ministry. For those ministers who do empowerment of lay people in the DRCA FS, the focus is more on internal ministry, leaving members of the congregation with no skills to focus on social engagement. Poor empowerment of the laypeople and lack of time by ministers to empower laypeople in diaconal ministry are the reasons why some participants in the

study described members of the DRCA FS as passive and ignorant in their duties of diaconal ministry.

4.   Markers of a contemporary African ecclesiology

The ecclesiology of the DRCA FS should be evaluated against an understanding of an African ecclesiology. Many contemporary African ecclesiologies developed through a critical interaction of the Christian faith with a contextual reading of the biblical message, the unique characteristics of the African culture and social-political challenges like political oppression and colonialisation. In many ways, contemporary African ecclesiologies challenge the classical approach of being church by taking the African context seriously. These challenges include listening to what God is telling us in the current expansion of Christian faith (Ilo 2018:620) or, if we use the understanding from Smith (2014:234, 236), addressing the questions: What drives the drawing from Scripture in the practice of African ecclesiologies? To what an extent are African ecclesiologies inclusive of the minority groups, people living with disabilities or women? How can African ecclesiologies enhance church involvement in society? Many of these contemporary African ecclesiologies are making an effort to help the church and congregations in Africa to be relevant and fulfil the mandate of the divine mission. Hence, Ilo (2018:620) states that African ecclesiologies help celebrate Christian faith in Africa as a gift and they utilise the liberating and transforming power of the gospel to engage modern challenges.

What should be the characteristics of a contemporary African ecclesiology? An African ecclesiology should firstly focus on Africanising the Christian message, worship and liturgies in the church in Africa (Mwambazambi 2011:1). Africanising of the Christian message involves independent discernment of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical interpretation of the signs of time. This discernment of the guidance of the Holy Spirit should help Africans uncover a world view and life that will lead to critical reflection, movement, continuity, and discontinuity in the practice of culture and gospel (Henry 2016:6). It should also help them to deal with the tension that exists between the received teachings, beliefs and practices of Christian faith over against the

living actual experiences of African Christians. An African ecclesiology thus involves self-theologising concerning issues of faith and ministry in Africa. Often African Christians are reluctant to theologise; instead, they prefer to borrow or adopt theology from North America and Europe. The consequence of this practice is that it does not solve the innate challenges of African Christians. Instead, it delays inculturation, indigenisation and transforming involvement of the church in the African society. Furthermore, self-theologising is authentic biblical witness to address questions raised by the culture within which one operates (Omenyo 2000:248). Africanising the liturgies for the church in Africa involves a renewal of the inherited rituals of prayer, music and worship of God. Africanising the liturgies for the church in Africa demands freedom and active participation of everyone towards a communal goal of the worship service, namely the glorification of God. In Africanising and practising the liturgies for the church in Africa, exuberance, spontaneity, free expression, and corporate reverence are fundamental.

In the case of the DRCA FS, the Africanising of the Christian message and the liturgies is still outstanding. The theological and financial dependence of the DRCA FS on the DRC (Kritzinger 2011:118) compromised the ability, independence and creative response of the DRCA FS under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this regard. According to the DRCA FS Synod (2015, Decisions of the General Synod to the District Synods), the DRCA in all regional synods, including the DRCA FS, is experiencing intense challenges and there is a need to engage external forces like modernism, postmodernism and the influence of the contemporary emerging churches. However, instead of embracing the challenges and harnessing the benefits brought by such forces, the DRCA FS adopted an approach of enclaving itself against such influences by enforcing traditional approaches to the ministry and compelling all leadership in the congregations of the DRCA FS to sign a pledge to resist and not to adopt some of the practices coming from these external influences. In the long run, this practice stifles the freedom and creativity of the congregations.

For a long time, the approach to liturgy and the worship service reflected the vestiges of an old missionary era. There is strong resistance from the leadership to review or design new liturgical approaches for the worship service. However,

the current situation in the congregations of the DRCA FS indicates that some shifts are taking place. Such shifts are initiated by ordinary members, in the form of the adoption of music instruments, singing of modern choruses instead of singing from the hymn book, and dancing while singing. Recently, there has been a gradual increase in the number of ministers who adopt new ministerial practices like mass prayer, washing the feet of others during worship and sometimes practising a healing ministry, which was not the usual practice in the DRCA FS.

The second characteristic of a contemporary ecclesiology is that it should be a black and liberation ecclesiology, which, according to Vellem (2015:651, 656, 663), is concerned with mobilising black Africans to be liberated from the Eurocentric categories of ecclesiology and the societal legacy of white imperialism that promoted a bifurcated system of knowledge, categories, and concepts encouraging a division between sacred and secular life and a division of society into civilised and uncivilised. A black ecclesiology handles white missionary ecclesiologies as racialised constructs and valorises black culture and epistemologies for the humanity of black persons. This is done through the influence of liberation theology which encourages taking the side of the marginalised and an engagement with documents such as the Kairos Document and the Belhar Confession.

Usually, a black and liberation ecclesiology is reactive and common to be found in a situation that is deliberately exploitative and oppressive to dehumanise the other. In this kind of situation, the church is viewed as a spiritual springboard (Smith 2014:229). For example, during the apartheid system in South Africa, when certain churches, business and education sectors were used by the apartheid government to propagate the ideology of apartheid, some of these societal sectors like churches from mainline churches and evangelicals grouped themselves and made statements against the apartheid system. Again, during this exploitative and oppressive situation that dehumanised and battered the humanity of the Other, the church was viewed as a psychic and social refuge for the marginalised and oppressed (Smith 2014:230). The church was the one that endeavoured to restore the dignity, authority and respect of those discriminated and censored by the

unjust system. Lastly, during this exploitative and oppressive situation, the church was viewed as a social resource (Smith 2014:232-233). During the apartheid era, churches were used as hiding places by victims of apartheid; when school buildings were scarce, churches availed their buildings to be used for classes. Sometimes churches were also used as spaces for rendering social services to the immediate community.

The first congregations of the DRCA FS were in existence since the late nineteenth century and the first synod of the DRCA FS was established in 1910 (Sarel 2013:43). Therefore, one could say that the DRCA FS survived slavery, colonialism and apartheid (Pali 2016:68). Furthermore, the DRCA FS is the product of the mission work of the DRC whose mission policy was described as driven by the ideology of apartheid encouraging a paternalistic approach and segregation of churches based on race (Dubow 2014:27; Lubbe 2001:17; Mohlamme & Qakisa 1992:231; Van der Watt 2010:2-3). To a certain extent, the DRC mission policy and white imperialists forces harmed the development of the DRCA in general. For example, in the early years of the establishment of the DRCA, white missionaries were reluctant to give independence and leadership to black ministers (Elphick 2012:225). This delayed the leadership development of black ministers. The racist paternalistic approach of some white missionaries to members of the DRCA FS also promoted a father-child relationship (Van der Watt 2010:166). This encouraged a dependency on the leadership of the white missionaries and the DRC. This is evident in many of the projects for mission and the diaconal ministry of the church which were funded and mostly led by the DRC and white missionaries in the DRCA FS (Cronjé 1982:65-66; Odendaal 1956:64-65). The missionaries did everything for the Africans; hence, many DRCA FS congregations became dependent and lacked self-reliance.

The mission policy of the DRC, which was driven by an ideology of racism and undermined the practices of African culture, contributed to low self-esteem and spiritual and cultural confusion amongst members of the DRCA FS (Buntu 2013:2). This is evident from the ambiguous standpoint of the DRCA FS on some cultural practices amongst its members and the reluctance to indigenise the ministry through the adoption of creative contextual practices in the

ministry like the liturgical dance and musical instruments from the African culture (Pali 2016:318-320, 2017:4). The consequence of the DRC's mission policy was that it produced independent churches that were exceptionally dependent, theologically and financially, on the DRC (Kritzinger 2011:118). Kritzinger (2011:118, 120) also mentions that the DRC's mission goal with the DRCA FS, in particular, was to establish an independent indigenous church which could govern itself, support itself financially, and propagate itself through mission. Regrettably, Kritzinger (2011:120) states that, due to its high standards, the DRC mission's expectations were not always realised. The result was a church that was struggling with the issue of dependency and a lack of self-reflection.

Concerning the legacy of white imperialism towards the DRCA in the Free State, there is the challenge of being free and confident to respond creatively to the tenets of the gospel. This is evident in the symbols, music, and worship approach that still imitate the condescending missionary approach to ministry in the African context. The consequence is a ministry that is mostly not relevant to and does not transform many members of the DRCA FS; hence, some members leave the church or attend other worship services at other churches to fulfil their spiritual needs

The above discussion indicates that the DRCA FS is deeply in need of self-reflection to liberate itself from the legacy of white imperialism influencing its ecclesiological practices. To understand the impact of the legacy of the white imperialism, the DRCA FS needs to do a historical analysis of its ministry and the impact of the white imperialism on Africans, and, in particular, on the DRCA as a church and the ministry of the congregations.

Lastly, during the apartheid era in South Africa, the DRCA played its role of being a refuge to those marginalised by the apartheid system. For example, when Beyers Naude was rejected by his church, because of his standpoint against apartheid, the DRCA became his second home. Furthermore, the DRCA was one of the first Dutch Reformed family of churches that opposed the apartheid system and mission policy of the DRC. Again, during the apartheid era, some

of the buildings of the DRCA were used as school buildings, centres for offering social services or hiding places for those who were victims of apartheid.

The third marker of a contemporary African ecclesiology is that a church should be involved in the civil society, which according to Nihinlola (2017:49, 51) is about the civic responsibilities of a church in the African context. To perform these civic responsibilities, members of the church should be encouraged to be activists against social ills in society. The motive of activism should be driven by the mandate of the gospel, liberation theology and a passion to be involved in politics and challenges in the community, like the exploitation of nature and the consequences of climate change. Moreover, the role of the church in civil society implies that a church must be more politically sensitive and involved in societal issues like the preservation of human rights, contributing to democracy and rule of law, and fighting against social and economic injustices. Being a Christian activist and participant in civic responsibilities is one of the enormous concerns for the church in Africa. In pursuing civic responsibilities, the victim and the perpetrator are often involved and church members need to be informed of not falling into a trap of mob justice against perpetrators or taking the law into their own hands in the pursuit of justice. Justice should be pursued through a spirit of love, peace and reconciliation, so that, ultimately, both the victim and the perpetrator may be reconciled in Christ.

According to Pali (2016:107-197), the social engagement ministry in the DRCA FS is at a social welfare level where mostly immediate needs are met. Poverty and HIV and AIDS though are main societal challenges and most congregations in the DRCA FS do not have any strategies to engage them. In the DRCA FS, members follow a more practical approach to social challenges in the society whereas ministers mostly follow more of a spiritual approach. Empowerment of the laity is often more focused on the internal issues of ministry than on helping with social involvement. In the light of the above, social activism amongst contemporary congregations of the DRCA FS is still far from being achieved.

According to De Gruchy (2016:5-6), the fourth characteristic of a contemporary ecclesiology is that it should be a prophetic ecclesiology striving for critical public engagement for conscientising the public against the injustices in society

and mobilising them to take responsible action in this regard. Furthermore, through the confession of Christ as the Lord and the embodiment of the gospel, a prophetic ecclesiology should encourage critical solidarity with the state and mobilise towards pursuing justice and nation-building. Much of this has been discussed above. For clarity may be added that much of the activism done in terms of a prophetic ecclesiology is motivated not necessarily by politics but by the confession of Christ as the Lord and the embodiment of the gospel. The passion to serve God and represent him well in this context should be the motive for challenging injustices in this world and for solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised. A prophetic ecclesiology should help develop the social conscience of the church, a striving for justice and the liberation of the oppressed. It is about the witnessing of the church today and discerning the nature of the *kairos* and appropriate response.

In the DRCA FS, a lot still needs to be done to mobilise towards a prophetic ecclesiology. This is evident from the low and poor performance in the social involvement to practise mission and *diakonia*. The contemporary relationship of the DRCA FS with the state is one of quiet diplomacy whereby no visible effort is done to confront the state concerning corruption and social injustices. But, during the apartheid era some of the DRCA ministers, including the DRCA FS, were part of the Confessing Circle that was used to facilitate a prophetic ministry by confronting injustices and racism of the apartheid regime and the mission practices of the DRC family of churches (Kritzinger 2013:3). Lastly, more than a decade ago, the DRCA FS experienced a serious conflict situation in its congregations and various structures of the church. These conflicts made the Moderamen of the DRCA FS (2015:32-33) raise the concern that if conflicts would keep increasing, the DRCA FS would lose its integrity, and the church would not be able to set an example of a church with good news to the world. Currently, the prophetic role of the DRCA FS is mostly played privately through its commissions' reports that may reflect on a biblical view on a specific challenge in a society (DRCA FS, 2011:153-156).

The fifth marker of a contemporary African ecclesiology is that it should be a missional ecclesiology. According to Niemandt (2012:1), there is growing interest in the study and development of missional ecclesiology. A missional

ecclesiology is a missional view of a church as a community of witnesses, called into being and equipped by God, and sent to the world to testify to and participate in Christ's work. It clarifies what the church is, what it has been called to be and to do, including aspects such as its nature, purpose, hopes, structure and practices. A missional ecclesiology is about participating in the life of the Trinity and about understanding mission as "joining in with the Spirit" and extending the very being of God. A missional ecclesiology emphasises an incarnational approach to the church, relationality in the community of believers, the role of the kingdom of God, discernment as the first act in mission, the *imago Dei* and creativity, the *ecclesia* and the local community, and, finally, mission and ethics. The aim of a missional ecclesiology is drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God's very life. Besides, Ilo (2018:618-619) argues that in Africa, a missional ecclesiology should strive to identify the movement of the Spirit in African Christian history. As it is commonly known, the centre of Christianity is shifting from the north to the south. Again, a missional ecclesiology in Africa should attempt to examine continuities and discontinuities with the Western theology, beliefs and practices over against African theology, beliefs and practices. Hence the debates on the gospel versus the African culture will be a continuous debate. Lastly, a missional ecclesiology in Africa should be concerned with how the structure of the church and its ministry embodies a transformative praxis for African Christians. It is the calling of the church in Africa to engage the discernment of the Holy Spirit independently to help its members to participate responsibly in engaging societal challenges.

In the early days of the DRCA FS, some white missionaries raised several concerns, one of them which was that the DRCA FS will struggle with mission work (Crafford 1982:120). To help them with this challenge, the DRCA FS together with the white missionaries, some dedicated members, and the leadership of the DRCA FS contributed financial and human resources to help grow the mission. As a result of this joint missional effort, the church grew in terms of membership and community projects. The mission of the DRCA FS was even extended to a foreign country, Lesotho. However, the contemporary situation in the DRCA FS shows that mission is now gradually declining.

Many reasons could cause this decline of missional activities, but the following will suffice: The dominance of the white missionaries and the weakness of the leadership of the DRCA FS contributed to this decline. In the development of the DRCA FS, the DRC in the Free State and the white missionaries within the DRCA FS were too willing to help the DRCA FS; to such an extent that they did almost everything for the DRCA FS in terms of mission. On the other hand, the DRCA FS was so willingly ready to seek help from the DRC in the Free State that this kind of practice paralysed creative efforts in the ministry. When the white missionaries left and the DRC reduced its financial support and human resources, the DRCA FS experienced increasing conflicts, financial decline, and a declining mission and diaconal ministry (DRCA FS 2007:109, 2015:19-24, 119). This happened because some of those in the leadership of the DRCA FS was not yet adequately developed to lead. Hence, we find some of those in leadership understanding mission as white missionaries proclaiming the gospel among black Africans and thinking that the DRC as the mother church should be responsible for funding the mission work in the DRCA (Pali & Verster 2013:240, 242). Again, there is the understanding of mission as part of the congregation's projects, and not as a consequence of the identity of the congregation (Pali 2016:80). This narrow view of mission paralysed the involvement of many of the congregations in the DRCA FS in their struggle against social injustices.

5. A critical reflection on the ecclesiological markers and the DRCA FS

As a reflection, a few critical remarks may be made in light of the identified ecclesiological markers. An important marker and challenge for the DRCA FS is the movement towards the *Africanisation* of the ministerial practices of congregations. This could entail a shift towards the renewal of the liturgy, music and worship of God in the worship service. There is a need to interact with her reformed roots and the development of contemporary practices. A next marker would be to revisit the *black and liberation ecclesiological roots* of the DRCA. During the apartheid era some of the ministers in the regional synods of the DRCA, including the DRCA FS, were part of the Confessing Circle that

confronted injustices of the apartheid regime and establishment of the separate DR churches based on race (Kritzinger 2013:3). Furthermore, from its first General Synod in 1963, held during the prime days of apartheid, the DRCA, including the DRCA FS, became one of the first DRC family of churches to oppose the establishment of separate racial churches as a practice of ethnicity within a church (Adonis 2002:18, 19; Crafford 1982:573-575). During the apartheid era, the buildings of the DRCA FS were used by those who were victims of the apartheid regime as a refuge and social resource. However, later on in the DRCA FS, the passion to fight against injustices of apartheid and to liberate the church from the influence of the Eurocentric ecclesiology became a tardy process.

Denominations and congregations are embedded in *civil society* and the local community. Van der Walt (2006:32) argues that Christianity should not be confined to the personal life of its members, but that it must empower its members to be motivated by the gospel to act as responsible agents of change against the injustices in the society. In the DRCA FS, members are more practical in their approach to social challenges in the society than the ministers who follow a more spiritual approach. In terms of community projects, the DRCA FS, in general, does try to mobilise its members through different structures of the congregation to help those in the community who are marginalised and vulnerable. However, it should be noted that recently there were some individual ministers in the congregations of the DRCA FS who endeavoured a shift to other levels, like a sustainable community project, the influencing of policy development and a focus on human development to build towards social activism and movement.

Concerning a *prophetic ecclesiology*, the church realised that during the apartheid era some individual ministers joined the Confessing Circle and used it as a vehicle to confront and oppose the practices of racism and oppression by the apartheid regime and the racial mission policy of the DRC. Hence one can say that the DRCA did play its prophetic role against apartheid, even though it may not have been critical enough. In the contemporary era, the DRCA FS is mostly silent in terms of its engagement with the state, and if it reacts, it is privately through its commissions' reports (DRCA FS 2011:153-156).

To a great extent, the DRCA FS still depends on the white DRC for its support in mission and diaconal ministry, and this kind of dependency hinders the discernment of an authentic *missional ministry*. There is not much effort to review the narrow missional approach and to begin a movement towards becoming an authentic African and missional church. Some congregations have traditional practices of mission for the youth, women and men whereby they do revival ministry to win back those who lapsed in their faith, as well as house visits and community projects to help the poor and the vulnerable. These kinds of missional practices come from the members of the congregations in the DRCA FS.

Denominations and congregations in Africa are, to a certain extent, still stuck with the theology, liturgy and ministerial practices inherited from their mother churches or their founding missionary organisations. It is in this context that the markers of a contemporary ecclesiology may contribute towards the renewal of the ministry of these churches. The shift can only be made possible if there is a discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to formulate a creative and theological response on the direction the church in African context should take.

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The Ebenhaeser congregation and community: Appreciating its history to build a new identity

M. Maritz and W.J. Schoeman

1.   Introduction

As individuals, but also in communities, people flourish when they experience feelings of happiness, peace, love and hope.[1] In flourishing communities, people experience a collective hope for the future and this hope adds to the resilience and sustainability of the community. Unfortunately, the collective history of a community can be an obstacle in its flourishing as will be explained in this chapter. In it, the focus will be on research that was done in Ebenhaeser, where an entire mission station was moved from its land and now experiences low levels of flourishment. It will be explained why and how a congregation could use its history to facilitate flourishing in the community.

The main research question of this chapter is: What is the impact of history on the possible flourishing of Ebenhaeser as a community and congregation? In answering this question, the following three aspects will be addressed:

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1   Flourishing may be described and understood in different ways, which includes at least four elements: (1) Beliefs and values that give *meaning* to life; (2) contribute towards the goals and *purpose* in life; (3) mutually care for each other and being *connected*; (4) growing and achieving higher standards and excellence in life, *personal virtue* (see Adams 2017:255).

- The historical background of the community and congregation of Ebenhaeser will be narrated, thereby aiming to describe its historical journey.

- "Appreciative Inquiry" will be used as a methodological and empirical framework to report on the impact of history on the congregation and the community.

- The notion of "social capital" will be used as a theoretical approach to explain the possible formation of a new identity through the ministry of the congregation.

The structure of the chapter reflects a congregational methodology of an empirical and theoretical framework in conversation with each other (see Schoeman 2015).

2.   The impact of history on a community and congregation

Congregations should not be separated from their historical backgrounds as it may be seen as part of the congregational culture. The same holds for the community and congregation of Ebenhaeser. A short historical review on the early life in Ebenhaeser is therefore necessary.

On the west coast of South Africa lives a community that was moved from their land in 1925. Although they were two different groups of people (the Bywoners and the Hottentot- or Louis-party[2]), they lived together on the mission station of Ebeneser that was found by the Rhenish Missionary Society between 1830 and 1832. According to Scholtz (1964:120-129), the mission station of Ebeneser went through difficult times of change, disputes, laziness and upheavals between 1834 and 1890. In 1851, the Bywoners were allowed to join the Khoi people ("Hottentots") at the station, mainly giving them grazing rights in the area. The new group consisted of coloured people, some of them released slaves from the Cape. The two groups had constant disagreements regarding education, grazing, water, and other regulatory issues. Due to severe

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2   In 1851, the Rhenish Mission allowed a new group of coloured people, mainly released slaves from the Cape, to join the Khoi people ("Hottentots") at the station. The new group was later called "Bywoners". The Khoi people formed the Hottentot- or Louis-party.

droughts, the seasonal flooding of the river, a shortage of water, insufficient knowledge, and lack of motivation, little to no sustainable income could be established by the inhabitants.

In 1890, the Rhenish missionaries withdrew from South Africa and the mission station was taken over by the Inland Missions Commission (Binnelandse Sendingkommissie) of the Dutch Reformed Church. Scholtz (1964:129) states that, at that stage, life in Ebeneser was still characterised by disputes, fighting over grazing land, dirt, brutality, alcohol abuse, the absence of trust, and immorality. In 1911, the mission station was taken over by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC). Nevertheless, it was still under the ruling of the Inland Missions Commission. Around 1920, the Inland Missions Commission, in collaboration with the government, was responsible for the initiation of the removal of the people of Ebeneser and Doornkraal to make space for white farmers in the area. In 1925, the whole community was moved from, what is today called, Lutzville, with little to no compensation. Another piece of land, nearer to the sea, was given to them. They called it Ebeneser, after their "home-land".

The DRMC for "coloured people" in Ebeneser was established and became self-reliant (with a little help from their "white" neighbouring congregations). This also initiated the name change of Ebeneser to Ebenhaeser (the name of the congregation); the village and the congregation needed to have the same name. Later, the settlement became part of the greater district municipality and governed accordingly. The old mission station rules (e.g. the rule of no alcohol allowed on the mission station) no longer applied in the new village.

3.   Appreciative Inquiry as a methodological framework

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) will be used as a methodological framework for the qualitative research that was done in Ebenhaeser as it takes the stories of the past seriously. AI is more than an investigation; it implies listening and analysing the positive stories in an attempt to create new outcomes that will have a positive and sustainable benefit for involved parties. Although reciprocal trust is vital for AI in the development of social capital, there are a few principles to consider.

> Appreciative Inquiry engages members of an organization in their own research – inquiry into the most life-giving forces in their organization, the root causes of their success, and discovery of their positive core (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2010:12).

The outcome may be described as follows:

> By discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future (Branson 2004:23).

The methodology of AI "is re-shaping the way organizations all over the world are thinking about change" (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom & Kaplan 2005:xi). In AI, chaos and a crisis become an opportunity to look for strengths that can be built upon. Schoeman and Van den Berg (2011) argue that the use of AI will enhance the understanding of the contents of "lived religion"[3] as a possible alternative to the previous structural evaluations of congregational life.[4] They agree with Branson (2004) that the use of AI promotes positive reasoning to find innovative ways to create the future, rather than problem-solving strategies.

Branson suggests five broad steps in the AI process:
- Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry;
- Inquire into stories of life-giving forces;
- Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry;
- Create shared images for a preferred future;
- Find innovative ways to create that future (Branson 2004:28).

During the research in Ebenhaeser, structured interviews were conducted according to pre-set questions. The open-ended questions asked, aimed at positive answers. Individuals as well as groups were interviewed. Participants were selected according to their leadership roles in the community, different faith groups and congregations. These leaders were identified by community members, the secretary of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa

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3   "Lived religion": A term used by Van Gelder (2007).

4   Example: SWOT analysis

(URCSA), as well as by scouting in the community. Interviews with the leaders ought to lead to positive value (according to the AI approach) and influence the social capital among community members. The stronger the social capital rating (or the higher the level of social capital), the more the flourishment in the community should be. Two group interviews were held; one with a youth group and another with a group of teachers from the local school.[5] These interviews were chosen to get a broad view across the community and to reinforce the emerging of the possible themes that surface. By using open-ended questions (any answer is possible, not a choice between yes or no) in qualitative interviews, evidence from the relationships in Ebenhaeser, emerged. Not only did these interviews give answers to the descriptive-empirical (what is going on?) questions (Osmer 2008), they also opened up the normative issues of the older people in the community. The interviews were transcribed and field notes were added to the transcriptions to enhance the relevance of the data found.

Except for interviews, the researcher attended a meeting with a research team from the University of the Free State and the local ward councillor, paid a visit to the Ebenhaeser graveyard, and investigated the physical resources (land and buildings) of URCSA Ebenhaeser. Interviews with individual leaders from different denominations and follow-up interviews were done to get more information and clarity on views.[6] The focus was on the members of URCSA because they formed the majority of the inhabitants, the people whose ancestors were moved from the mission station, and those most affected by their history.

The first buildings, previously used by the community as a church and school, are empty and not in use. These buildings remind them every day of their past. The older people in the community believe that the youth are not interested in their history and that they are ignorant about it. The youth finds it difficult

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5   The first group consisted of nine girls in Grades 10 and 11 in their second year of catechism at URCSA. The second group consisted of 17 teachers at the primary school in Ebenhaeser, of whom two were men and ten were inhabitants of the town of Ebenhaeser.

6   The leaders were chosen on the basis of their leadership role in the congregations, e.g. deacons, elders or pastors. The denominations that were interviewed are Gospel Mission, URCSA, New Apostolic Church, Gospel Mission Church of SA, AFM, Efesiërs Church.

to understand the older people's concern about the past. The empty and unused buildings, together with the assumption that the youth lack interest and knowledge about their history, do not contribute to flourishing in the community. People, especially the younger generation, are confused about their identity.[7] The adults still expect the children to have an interest in the things of the past, like farming the land for the benefit of the family. But the children have higher expectations, such as going to university and embarking on business. In the words of one of the young girls in Ebenhaeser, "We want to go higher". Are they now still part of the old Ebenhaeser or are they moving towards a new future? Is their past holding their future back? Who are they, and where are they going?

The impact of the history of Ebenhaeser on their collective flourishing demanded a literature search on the history of Ebenhaeser. Scholtz's writings on the history of Ebeneser, as well as the writings about the congregational history in their festive album, provided some knowledge. The knowledge of its history enhanced the understanding of what was going on. In the words of Osmer, this was a descriptive-empirical exercise that contributed to the interpretation of the role of collective history in the flourishing of a community.

After coding the researched data, inductive analysis was done. Certain themes emerged throughout the interviews: women, children and drugs, the history of the community, leadership in the community, the land claims and the process thereof, trust, people and organisations' willingness to co-operate, and the poverty in the community.[8] These themes had an impact on the flourishment of the community. Two themes mostly came to the fore and emerged as stumbling blocks to flourishing lives in Ebenhaeser, namely, poverty, and the history of the community. This chapter focuses on the role that history plays in a community.

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7   Indications of confusion about their identity are the high prevalence of "*children's drug problems, ill-discipline, and rudeness*" (Interview 7.2) and "*our children are succumbing to alcohol*" (Interview 7.5).

8   No pre-set concepts or ideas; from the particular to the general.

After combining the research results from the different partners in the research project, a meeting with people representing the community was held. The research team communicated and facilitated, in a positive way, the people's dreams for a flourishing Ebenhaeser.

4. The history of Ebenhaeser – findings from the empirical research

From the empirical research, it became clear that the history of Ebenhaeser plays a significant role in the collective lives of the members of the community.[9] This becomes evident in the comments about their heritage and the trust within the community. The following five themes emerged: the role of the land restitution claim, leadership in the community, differences between the generations, friction in the community, and the role of the URCSA congregation.

4.1 The role of the land restitution claim

Because of the forced movement of the inhabitants of the mission station in 1925 to the new Ebenhaeser, the community submitted a land restitution claim. The community felt that they were waiting too long for the outcome of their claim and that their leaders were not capable of handling the matter well. The community was not united in their choice of compensation: land or financial compensation. The differences between the two groups from the past (Hottentots and Bywoners) were still evident. Accusations of unfairness, conflict of interest and corruption were made against the leaders and negotiators. There were issues of mistrust. People wanted the negotiations to end and the process to be finalised so that they could "go on with their lives". Through the drawn-out settlement process of the restitution land claims, the community are constantly reminded of their history and the role it currently plays in the memory of the community.

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9   On a question about the influence of their past on the community life at the time of the research, a leader (Interview 7.8) commented: "*They fight for the past but they do not live it. They are afraid of change and of leaving their comfort zones*", and another woman (Interview 7.13) said: "*They have to look ahead. If they want to remain in the past, then they can. And then they can continue fighting. The friction is yet to comen...*".

4.2 Leadership in the community

The leadership within the community plays an important role. The division between the two groups of the past surfaces in the lack of trust between the leaders and the role the leadership is playing in the community. Trust towards each other and leaders in the community is a big concern. There is the suspicion that certain leaders attend to their own interest and not those of the community, and that the local government leaders do not speak and act in the interest of the community of Ebenhaeser. Community members also believe that leaders should be properly trained to do their jobs in the community. This might prevent corruption and insufficient functioning. Because some community leaders are part of the leadership in the congregation, there is also a need for guidance from the church. Moreover, leaders need training and mentoring in youth work. Some children are cautious in their trust and approach towards the faith leaders. The community is thus searching for sincere and honest leaders to guide them.

4.3 Differences between the generations

The differences between the generations on the history of the community influence the functioning of the community and the trust between them. This lack of trust has an impact on the youth, causing an apathy about their past. However, older people still cling to their history. The older people are afraid and worried that the "children do not know why all these things [the drive for the land claim] happen", and why it matters so much to the adults in the community. The older people still remember the times that they lived off the agricultural land, and therefore want the children to do the same. The community also has a great history of music and dance that may be used to teach the children to embrace their past and keep their heritage alive. Grade 4 learners in the local primary school are briefly introduced to the history of the settlement; however, there are no frequent repetition-lessons to ensure a significant identification with and embracement of this history. It all seems too little. The importance of their history coupled with the large "generation gap" creates tension and distrust.

4.4   *Friction in the community*

Friction in the community causes low levels of willingness to co-operate in community affairs. This results in fewer relationships between people and leads to low social capital. During visits to the settlement, it was noticed that there are empty and somewhat derelict buildings on the grounds of the URCSA. Some of the buildings were previously run as a guesthouse, but due to confusion and interference with the management, they are not in use anymore. The old church building, the previous parsonage and the old school buildings are constant physical evidence of the journey and history of this displaced community.

Because most of the inhabitants of Ebenhaeser are members of the URCSA congregation, the current empty buildings belong to the congregation, and the different leaders (that they do not trust) are members of the congregation. It comes to no surprise then that the community expect the local URCSA congregation to do something about their feelings of hopelessness, and the leaders of the congregation to do something about their collective memories. They also expect the elderly to teach children about their past. They long for the old times when they experienced well-being. In short, the adults want the community to flourish, as in the old days, and they are looking at the local congregation for help: "*Information sessions can be arranged by the church. They [the church] can host talks, distribute pamphlets about important matters, and help with the door-to-door distribution of information*" (Interview 7.18), and "*The church should become an information centre and museum*" (Interview 7.8).

The results of this empirical study clearly show an unhappy and disrupted community with little hope for the future.[10] Besides the high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse, as well as the high number of jobless people, the inhabitants of Ebenhaeser live with daily reminders of their history, a history that ought to set them free from the past. Unfortunately, these people did

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10   Some examples from the interviews: Interview 7.9: "*The people have strayed. They fight for the past but they do not live it. They are afraid of change and of leaving their comfort zones. They have a mindset of 'this is my fate*'". Interview 7.12: "*The history has left the people more poor.*"

not receive guidance in their traumatic times of change and transformation. Their old collective identity is still part of their lives, and it stops them from flourishing.

4.5   The role of the URCSA congregation

The inevitable questions arise: What happened to the role of the congregation in the lives of these people? Does the congregation facilitate the lack of trust and the brokenness of the relationships in the community? If almost all the community members are members of the URCSA congregation, why is there no collective passion to flourish in the community? Is it not the task of a faith community, like URCSA, to mentor their congregants through change and traumatic stages of their lives?

5.   Searching for a new identity: Social capital as a theoretical framework

The next step is to examine the role of social capital in building a community. Although it might seem to people that they are alone, they are always part of a family, a community, an organisation, a workgroup, a congregation or a circle of friends. They are in relationships, and relationships are part of daily life. Each person forms part of one or other relationship, and flourishing depends to a great deal on such relationships. Not only does their relationship with God give them hope, but their relationships with other people play a distinct role in their survival, resilience, and feelings of flourishment. Flourishing refers to a good life and a life worth living; a life of human and personal fullness (Volf 2015:ix). It is about individual thriving and the global common good and individuals and communities realising their dreams of flourishing (Volf 2015:2, 6). People and communities need good relationships to flourish and social capital contributes towards this interaction. The level of social capital depends on the interrelatedness of people.

Bourdieu (1985:252) argues that social capital can be any capital that is transformed or converted for use, at a certain point of time and manner, into social networks. Social capital is thus formed and reformed by the context of the individual or group. Coleman (1990:302) states that social capital is a

"social structural resource" that serves as "a capital asset for the individual", claiming that the relationships and networks between people can influence the level of social capital residing in institutions and organisations. In following this argument, the researcher agrees with Zeka (2008:121) that social capital "can contribute to the improvement of society's capacity to overcome social dilemmas ... or problems of collective action". Social capital is mainly concerned with "information, ideas and support that individuals can procure by their relationships with other people" (Zeka 2008:121). In these relationships, the continual dialogue constructs and reconstructs, through various contexts, different levels of social capital.

Mbaya (2010:368) identifies five underlying principles to social capital: "sharing, mutual obligations, trust, exchange (transactions) and recognition". When people share their lives, they build mutual obligations that build trust, because they start to exchange emotions, fears, material capital and social flourishment. In the process of benefitting from each other through trustworthy relationships, cohesion is built that will enhance social capital. It seems to be a circular process: The more the relationships grow in trust and mutuality, the more social capital is generated, the stronger the relationships function in collective output. Through these, more sharing, trust, recognition and mutual benefit are generated for individuals or organisations. This, however, entails a good understanding of each other and a committed willingness to co-operate to mutual benefit and effect. Once the collective feeling is created, social capital is established and has the potential to grow and strengthen.

Social capital is "generated through regular exchanges within networks" (Evans & Syrett 2007), where the networks, norms and trust facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit. Slangen, Van Kooten & Suchanek (2004) argue that the patterns of these interactions normally depict shared knowledge, understanding, norms, rules and expectations. These create trust, the most essential building block in social capital building. Justice, shared values and norms, empathy, social cohesion, fellowship, trustworthy interaction, charity, knowledge and unity are some of the signs of mutual trust in a community. "[N]etworks of human relationships, the core of social capital, give associations [the congregation] their meaningful purpose of existence" (Mbaya 2010:370).

The promotion of social capital, and the enhanced relationships arising from it, will lead to a new understanding, mutual involvement and enrichment of an individual and a collective identity. According to Zeka (2008:122), the identity of a community runs hand-in-hand with their social capital: When there is movement in and around their context, the level and strength of their social capital change. They, individually or collectively, may become either more confident or incompetent in their self-esteem or identity. It all depends on how they use the available social capital to embrace the change, crisis or event. Considering elements of involvement, trust, reciprocity and collective identity, a community's usage of available social capital (as a resource) will determine the reconstruction of a new level of social capital and networks. If the social capital in a community is fragile, it will have a considerable impact on the identity of the community, which will in turn impact on the flourishing of the community. Where a community can overcome their differences and lack of trust by creating strong social networks with high levels of social capital, new identities are built which will further enhance the social capital strength.

Once the goals, environment or structures in a community change, a crisis regarding their identity surfaces. People are thus challenged by change and it affects their flourishing. It makes them uncertain about their positions and keeps them from flourishing. This has a negative influence on their social capital. Individuals, as well as the collective organisation, depend greatly on the social capital in a community for their identity. Congregations in communities struggling with change and transformation will become stronger in social capital because their identity is challenged. The more radical and complicated the change is, the greater the impact on the search for a new identity.

In Zeka's study (2008:122) it was clear that new identity was formed due to the practice of good and sustainable relationships in the troubled Kumasi community. Once social capital is improved and restored, new identities are formed, which result in improved resilience. The new identity that is formed results in an ability to restore the social capital that was threatened. Once people have a new identity, they become people who can bounce back in times of crisis. Social capital thus acts as positive energy in the creation and formation

of a renewed identity. And once a new identity is acknowledged, social capital starts to enhance, and a feeling of flourishing is restored.

The congregation acts as a mutual place of association. "[N]etworks of human relationships, the core of social capital, give associations their meaningful purpose of existence" (Mbaya 2010:370). Social capital is "generated through regular exchanges within networks" (Evans 2007), where the networks, norms and trust facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit. Slangen *et al.* (2004) argue that the patterns of these interactions normally depict shared knowledge, understanding, norms, rules and expectations. These patterns create trust, the most essential building block in social capital building. Commitment, sympathy, justice, shared values and norms, empathy, social cohesion, fellowship, trustworthy interaction, charity, knowledge and unity are all signs of mutual trust in a community. Congregations may facilitate the generation and development of trust and hope in a community.

6.   Congregations building a new identity

Ammerman argues that "congregations are among the most effective generators of 'social capital', those connections of communication and trust that make the organization of a complex society possible" (Ammerman 1997:362). In the congregation, relationships of friendship are formed and these relationships create trust, care and hope. According to Ammerman, "these relationships of trust facilitate communication and coordination of activities in society and provide well-being to their participants" (Ammerman 1997:363). Social capital may thus strengthen through networks and faith relationships between different groups and this may open new opportunities for trust and identity formation. Unfortunately, new relationships and identities can only be built where the scars and wounds of the past are healed since everybody is emotionally linked to the past. Their past or history can evoke various emotional reactions, which call for a sensitivity when handling these issues in Ebenhaeser, or anywhere else. In building new relationships, the connectedness and hospitality between members of the congregation (and the community) can be used in the hermeneutical process of dealing with the past to heal the community and restore its trust. Eventually, people will start to flourish with

a new identity and hope for the future. Aspects of this process of building a new identity will be discussed in more depth below, looking in particular at remembrance, the role of the sacraments, forgiveness as a faith practice, the ministry of the congregation, and the role of the congregational leadership.

6.1   Remembrance

According to Vosloo (2015:468), it is important to responsibly practise a theology of remembrance. Not only do we need to remember the past, but we need to embrace the past as a period that God embraced and nurtured us to create our beliefs and moral orientation. When we see God as inherently part of the journey from past to present we can have a Christ-like perspective, and eventually find healing-moments from the past. Then history becomes part of the journey into the future; not a burden that divides or cripples us in living flourishing lives.

6.2   The role of the sacraments

In the Reformed tradition, two sacraments allow people to be healed from their past: baptism and Holy Communion. Both have an element of celebration. In baptism, life through Christ is celebrated with thankfulness and parents are urged to educate their children about God and his interventions in their lives. At the Lord's Table, people are called to celebrate life over death, and the fact that God gave his Son as an intervention to save them from eternal death. Holy Communion is thus a festival of eternal life – a celebration of flourishing hope. However, no celebration can be done without preceding forgiveness. Not only did Jesus wash the feet of his disciples (John 13) to show humbleness and forgiveness; he also called and taught us to forgive one another: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).[11] Be it building relationships, forgiving each other, mentoring from leaders, or celebration – it is all part of a theology of remembrance – a journey with God.

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11   Scriptural quotations in this chapter follow the *New International Version*.

6.3 Forgiveness as a faith practice

Part of faith practices entails forgiveness. Living according to the calling of the God of unconditional love involves forgiveness. In the case of Ebenhaeser, it will be necessary for the leaders of the congregation to come together and talk about their differences from the past. A platform for understanding their past differences can be constituted. New insights might flow from communication between the "traditional" two parties. It is the task of the leaders in the congregation to show and facilitate forgiveness. In cases of unresolved disputes and differences, it is expected of the congregants to forgive each other. Once they truly forgive, it will create a new trust and they will experience growth in their relationship with the other parties involved. Once the history is understood and reconciliation has been achieved, healing and new hope become evident. The experience of hope thus brings a new identity. These experiences contribute to a flourishing community and calls for a celebration.

6.4 The ministry of the congregation

The building and reconstructing of a new identity is a holistic process that involves the whole ministry of the congregation. Van Gelder (2007:147) argues that the core ministry of a congregation focuses on the people's relationship to God and others and their faith practices. He identifies worship, education/discipleship, care/fellowship, service, and witness as the practices happening in a congregation. Hirsh (2006: 41) argues that "a true encounter with God in Jesus must result in *Worship, … Discipleship, … Mission"*. Mission may include the care/fellowship, the service and witness of the people in the congregation. Where a congregation understands God's mission, congregants will realise their exact purpose in this world – especially their purpose in the local community – and practise it. Congregants must be educated and mobilised to be obedient to God's calling to share the love of Christ through relationship building, inviting others to the congregation and proclaiming salvation through Jesus Christ. As much as the proclamation of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is part of the message of the Bible, so the acceptance of forgiveness cannot go without celebration. The celebrations are ideal opportunities to build and strengthen relationships. If, for instance, the

congregation in Ebenhaeser regularly celebrates, by way of a congregational birthday party or a festival of remembrance, their "new beginning" in the current settlement (rather than muddling about the past), they would be able to share their history with the children. During such a celebration, a theology of remembrance may come alive through stories and education on how God provided and walked with them from past to present. Through stories, the knowledge gap can be bridged and the relationships between young and old may be enhanced. Through relationships, support may be gained and social capital may be grown towards better reciprocity, benefitting all generations. In Ebenhaeser, the events of the celebration can take place in the unused buildings, creating even more opportunities to strengthen the social capital in the community. As Bourdieu (1985:252) pointed out, this is when capital is converted into a social network and social capital is formed.

A congregation becomes relevant to the community in sharing the gospel of hope. People want to experience the care and love of others; they want to feel accepted and be self-reliant. A congregation that demonstrates and allows herself to be God's hands and feet in a community will grow spiritually in the love of Christ: They will be God's missionaries on earth and they will share the gospel that gives them hope. Such a creation of more hope can contribute to a flourishing community. And soon the community develops a new identity: They celebrate God's journey with them, they are people with hope, they are not ruled by their past anymore.

A congregation where faith, hope and love are visibly practised truly creates new relationships and new worlds where the love of God will reign. Through building new relationships, new social capital is raised, mentored, mended and kept in the true spirit of God's love. Through their faith practices, congregants can build new relationships that enhance their social capital and eventually creates flourishment and well-being. After many studies concerning health and faith practising behaviour, Jeff Levin of the Eastern Virginia Medical School found that faith is helpful to people in overcoming their problems (like an issue with their past) because faith practices

- create a feeling of togetherness;
- pay attention to beliefs that enhance peace, trust and understanding;

- include rituals that relieve stress;

- encourage faith and hope that leads to healing;

- imply healthy habits; and

- is all about love, the most fundamental issue of every relationship (Levin & Chatters 1998:510).

6.5   The role of congregational leadership

Who has the responsibility to take the lead in the reformulation of a congregational identity? In this regard, the role of *congregational leadership* is important, but in changing times, this is a difficult role to play.

> Old maps that may have worked well in other churches, prior eras, or earlier stages of life cannot guide through unknown territory ... For many leaders the experience of "not knowing" and loss of control will be threatening. It is a genuine experience of powerlessness. It calls for the sort of faithfulness to God found in Christ. Trusting God in the midst of "not knowing" is a key part of the spirituality of servant leaders (Osmer 2008:197).

A new kind of leadership is needed. Such a situation needs leaders that understand change and can use the crisis/chaos of change creatively to facilitate, through a hermeneutical process, a sustainable future for a congregation. In a changing environment, it is "smart leaders [who] encourage their people" (Hames 2007:73) to adapt to change. Leaders should teach people to use their shared learning and to apply their shared knowledge to create a new identity, individually and collectively. In nurturing and enhancing the relational networks between people, new social capital is created. This is social capital that can strengthen trust and affirm a new identity in a congregation, resulting in greater feelings of flourishing in the community. Where trust and shared identity are evident, hope for the future exists. And hope is an indicator of the flourishment in a community.

It becomes clear that in the case of the URCSA congregation of Ebenhaeser, as in many other congregations, attention must be given to the reconstruction of the identity of the community. Ebenhaeser will struggle to flourish if the congregational leadership does not engage in a process of reconstructing

communal identity. But in Ebenhaeser, because of bad memories about their forceful relocation, lack of trust between community members, unattended expectations of the older people, and everyday confrontations of unused historic buildings, there is little willingness or effort towards reconciliation and forgiveness. The congregational leadership should thus start a hermeneutical process to help the people understand what is going on and realise that better lives are possible. Preaching love and forgiveness, conducting group sessions, organising celebrations, and facilitating dialogue will enhance relationships of trust.

Identity building and reformation cannot be done quickly and only once.

> The congregation should on an on-going basis actively participate in the development (if necessary) of structures of congregational life that serve the acts of God's salvation in the congregation and the world (Nel 2015:207).

The creation of social capital is thus an ongoing process whereby the congregation must constantly engage in a hermeneutical way to assist each other in understanding, mutual involvement, obedience to God's call, and the continuous reconstruction of their identity to flourish.

7. Conclusion: Flourishing communities: A call to the local congregation

Social capital and hope are two of the many building blocks in flourishing communities. The social capital in a community is influenced by the collective history and consequent identity of the community. A congregation where the leadership hermeneutically facilitates engagement with the history of the community can utilise history to build a new identity and enhance social capital and hope. A community can heal from bad feelings from the past through a theology where the Triune God is part of their journey. High levels of social capital and hope can showcase a flourishing community.

Because the community and congregation of Ebenhaeser experienced traumatic times of land restitution claims, extreme and still rising poverty levels, water scarcity, environmental change and other traumatic societal changes, it calls

for an ecclesiology appreciating the past and embracing the reformation of a new identity. The time has come for congregations to get more involved in the everyday relationships of people. Where congregational leaders facilitate healing from a collective past, social capital is enhanced, hope is rebuilt, and people start to flourish as a community. Congregations should thus facilitate collective forgiveness in their communities and urge their members to celebrate their history. This will result in flourishing hope-filled communities.

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PART 3

INNOVATIVE
FAITH COMMUNITIES

Developing innovative missional congregations anchored in a Trinitarian theology in a Southern African denomination – a case study

A.R. Tucker

1.   Introduction

The United Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) is seeking to develop innovative missional congregations which would impart and share their experience of living in the love and grace of the Trinity with their local communities. They believe that such congregations anchored in their identity in the Trinity will be able to influence their communities more effectively than inward-looking congregations. This chapter attempts to contribute to this project by applying recent advances in missional Trinitarian theology to analyse, in a case study, how "missional" one UPCSA congregation is. The study uses the Congregational Life Survey as a research tool.[1]

Researching transformation and innovation within UPCSA may be of great significance for understanding how congregations may impact communities within the Southern African context, because the denomination as a whole reflects the mix of cultures and races found in the area and because it has decided to develop missional congregations. It is a multi-cultural reformed church

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1   Note that the research undertaken for this chapter was conducted before the research for the SA-NCLS 2014 on which Chapter 9 in this volume was based. As such this chapter represent the results of the preliminary study, which paved the way for some of the conclusions recorded in Chapter 9.

with 454 congregations in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In 2012, the biennial General Assembly of the UPCSA adopted a Vision, Mission and Values Statement stating that the overarching priority of the UPCSA "is the supporting and development of missional congregations" (Pillay 2014:1, 4). It further endorsed the idea that the core purpose of the church is to develop missional congregations within a Trinitarian framework.

2.   The methodology employed

I used the empirical tool of the Congregational Life Survey to research, as a case study, one UPCSA congregation. The questionnaire associated with this survey was administered to those attending one service of worship. A case study has two advantages. Firstly, it provides useful preliminary insight into a social structure; secondly, it indicates whether or not a questionnaire measures what it is supposed to measure, its validity and reliability for that structure and the need for any adjustments. The results of the questionnaire are interpreted in the light of a missional Trinitarian hermeneutic to discern where on the "missional" spectrum the congregation might be. Paradigm theory is used to estimate the difficulty the congregation may have in developing into an innovative missional congregation.

3.   Paradigm theory

Paradigm theory is found in that branch of knowledge called "perception theory" (see Kuhn 1970). One of its ideas is that errors often occur between what we see and what we think we see, produced by misplaced assumptions or knowledge. This occurs because our normal perceptions are always structured. We read patterns and meaning into events and situations depending on what we want to see or have been taught to see so that we can easily assimilate knowledge. In brief, it is suggested that since AD 315 until the mid-twentieth century the "Christendom paradigm" has dominated much of the Christian world and has successfully transformed the values of many societies. The basic concepts of this paradigm are that the congregation is situated in a community where everyone is a Christian and that the clergy must always initiate and control ministry and evangelism (Bosch 1993:467). Yet now that societies all

over the world are changing so rapidly a new innovative paradigm needs to emerge so that congregations will continue to be able to transform society. For, as Charlesworth & Williams (2014: loc. 340) write, "[T]he church has vital social energy, huge social capital and an army of volunteers who are willing to turn their hands to the task of caring for the poor."

Many suggest that such an innovative paradigm will be based upon missional congregations and Trinitarian missional theology. This usually needs a paradigm shift, which is the shorthand for moving from being influenced by one paradigm to being influenced by another. This is not easy. Moving from one paradigm to another requires a new understanding of reality and undercuts what is automatically considered "culturally and naturally right" (Kuhn 1970:151), and many people find themselves confused, insecure and at a loss to understand the new paradigm.

4.   The South African context

A South African practical theological contextual study has to take account of three factors. These are the sheer ever-enlarging predominance of the SAAD (South Africans of African Descent) population, the progressive cultural Africanisation of churches, and the growing influence of Charismatic and Pentecostal worship and theology in congregations of all cultures and races.

According to Statistics South Africa (2014:3, 9), by 2040, 88% of the population will class themselves as black as compared to 80% in 2014. Then, in South Africa, the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches increased from approximately 7% to 9%, and the African Indigenous churches from approximately 28% to 36% between 1980 and 1991 (Hendriks 1995:36), and this trend has continued. The popularity of Charismatic and Pentecostal worship and theology has also influenced many mainline congregations (Schlemmer 2008:17).

5.   Recent developments in Trinitarian theology

Three twentieth-century developments in Trinitarian theology have enabled the formulation of a missional theology rooted in the Trinity. The first is a renewed recognition that the three persons of the Trinity, whilst being one

God, are not identical in that they are distinguished in role and relationship (Thoennes 2008:n.p.). The second is that the unity of these three persons may be understood in relational terms, using the doctrine of *perichoresis*, reformulated by Moltmann (1981:156ff.), along with Pannenberg, Boff, Kasper and Gunton (Thiselton 1995:56). Moltmann (1981:175) characterises *perichoresis* as a process whereby each person, by their eternal love, lives *in* the other two and "communicates eternal life" to the other two, as a circulation of the eternal divine life, as a fellowship, and as a "process of most perfect and intense sympathy." The third is that the immanent Trinity is revealed in the economic Trinity, by grace, because the triadic conception of God may be understood, according to Barth's (1/1:347) dictum, as Revealer (Father), Revelation (Jesus) and Revealedness (Holy Spirit), as expressed in the first proposition of Rahner's (1970:22) rule, that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity.

6. Developing a missional theology within the framework of the Trinity

It is acknowledged that "great care must be taken in drawing out the implications of the claim that the sole ontological basis for the being of the church is … the communion of Father, Son and Spirit" (Gunton 2003:71). Yet, despite this, I believe it is helpful and productive to develop what Osmer (2012:51) calls a "Trinitarian missional ecclesiology of centred openness", and draw practical conclusions from it. Thus, I would propose that recent developments in the theology of the Trinity, by no means comprehensive, emphasise certain points, as discussed in the subsections that follow.

6.1 Trinitarian missional congregations live in the force field of the Trinity

God is love (1 John 4:8[2]); Jesus' atoning death reveals his love (1 John 3:16) and the Holy Spirit pours God's love into us (Romans 5:5). God the Father is called the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10). Jesus, the Son, is full of grace (John 1:14)

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2   Scriptural quotations in this chapter follow the *New International Version.*

and from his fullness, we all receive grace on top of grace (John 1:16). The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). Thus, "grace is part of God's eternal life apart from the world" (Rosato 2006:173). This means that the Godhead may be described as "a perichoretic indwelling, in a communion of love in each other" which "is a grace-motivated free exchange of gifts of themselves and of the glorification of each other" (Volf 2006:11), which continually and freely, of their own choice, overflows beyond themselves into the created order, for this is the nature of grace. As a result of his love and grace, "God seeks and creates fellowship between himself and us" (Barth II/1:273). The Trinitarian mission is inspired by a personal and congregational experience of this grace and love.

It is the experience of that love and grace that compels congregations to decide to constantly live in God's Trinitarian love and grace. I call this "living in the force field of the Trinity", adapted from Welker's (1994:215) term of "living in the force field of the Spirit".[3] The force field then permeates the congregation's emotions with warmth and their wills with anticipation and excitement. It transforms their planning, thoughts and understanding and floods their attitudes, sentiments, words and actions with a desire for holy living, all for the glory of God.

6.2   Trinitarian mission is fuelled by Trinitarian missional worship

The key ministry that inculcates living in the force field of the Trinity is worship. It is through this ministry the mission that arises from the heart of God himself is communicated from his heart to ours (Stott 1992:335). Thus, worship lies at the heart of a missionary church. Torrance (1996:59) defines Trinitarian worship as "the gift of grace to participate through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father". Missional worship is about experiencing God's love, grace and holiness in the force field of the Trinity. Then,

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3   A "force field" is a scientific concept originated by Faraday in the nineteenth century. Faraday imagined a force field as formed by bundles of infinitely thin lines, which fill space, and which transmit forces, such as electromagnetic forces, so that they influence objects which they connect with. I see this as inevitably a somewhat inadequate, but appropriate, analogy for the way in which the Trinity fills the universe and influences it. Of course, care must always be taken in using analogies which apply one experience of reality to another.

the Spirit lifts us out of any narcissistic preoccupation with ourselves to find our true humanity and dignity in Jesus Christ, in a life centred on others, in communion with Jesus Christ and one another, in a loving concern for the humanity of all (Torrance 1996:107).

6.3 Trinitarian mission extends the Godhead's invitation to enter into the "force field of the Trinity"

The Trinity is a dynamic community of mutuality, openness, difference and love that makes space for others to participate (Van Gelder & Zscheile 2011:108). As a result, God the Father, in love, sends God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit to bring the world into communion with himself. The Christian life, therefore, begins with a response to an invitation to the individual to enter into this fellowship with the Trinity through a relationship with the Holy Spirit. As Webster describes it:

> God the Father wills fellowship with that which is not God, determining and forming the creature out of nothing to exist as his child. God the Son sustains that fellowship by stepping into the place of the ruined creature, bearing its alienation from the Father, and repairing the deadly breach that has opened up between the Creator and the objects of his love. God the Holy Spirit completes this fellowship realizing it in the present by drawing the creature into the sphere of Christ's filial relation to the Father and by promising to perfect the creature in the heavenly fellowship of the redeemed (Webster 2006:145).

In Matthew 14:1-14, the master sends out his servants to deliver an invitation to a feast he has prepared. Likewise, mission is partnering with God in inviting others into the Messianic feast that is experienced within the fellowship of the Trinity. Yet unlike the servants they are going out because they have already tasted of the feast of love and grace, in the *now* of the *not yet*. They become messengers delivering God's invitation to those who are the unchurched who have repudiated their absolute derivation from God and who are seeking to be human in a way other than that purposed by the creator.

6.4 Trinitarian mission seeks to extend God's influence into the community

Even as the Trinity is itself a community, so the Godhead seeks to overflow in transforming love and grace through the community of the church into the community outside the church and is concerned to transform the world around them seeking social and political justice at all levels of society. As Migliore comments:

> We must think of the Trinity first of all as the life of God with and for us here and now. Trinitarian faith is thus expressed not only with our lips but also in our everyday life and practices (Migliore 2004:82).

Thus, the congregation that lives in the force field of the Trinity has the desire to be used by God to pour out his grace and love into the world through sharing the good news, practising mercy, and bringing justice to pass whatever sphere Christ calls to, thus transforming rural, urban and virtual communities. The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be confined to the church, for the church is in the world and participates in the social and political realities around it (Irvin 2011:409).

6.5 Trinitarian mission involves a passionate response to the Godhead's passion

Africa's gift to the world is emphasising passion and emotion in life and religion (Gehman 2005:56, Kalu 2011:132). This reflects that found in the heart of Trinity. Brueggemann (1997:411) defines passion as "powerful strong feeling", as seen in the way that Yahweh commits "to the partner (*those with whom he is in a relationship*) with powerful strong feelings of concern, care, and affection". He loves passionately being jealous of those he loves (Exod. 3:14). His love is metaphorically depicted in passionate terms as that of a father for his son (Hos. 11:1), a lover for his beloved (Song of Solomon), a husband of his wife (Hos. 3:1, Eph. 5:25-27), and a bridegroom for his bride (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7). As Kittel (1964:22-23) states, it is "a spontaneous feeling which impels to self-giving ... an inexplicable power of the soul".

Those who live in the force field of the Trinity are passionately inspired to share this passionate love with others. Our example for this is the apostle Paul, who writes, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The apostle Paul expected the congregations he founded and/or wrote to, to share his passion. At the deepest level of his missionary motivation was Paul's overwhelming experience of the love of God in Christ. He was compelled by the continuous experience of Christ's love, which he passionately reciprocated. For Paul, this love was a passion, obsession and something he could not live without, making him almost insanely passionate (2 Cor. 5:14) for Jesus and his mission.

6.6 Trinitarian mission is motivated by the implications of the uniqueness of the Godhead

But compassion is needed as well as passion. Compassion, which is described in Paul's words as a "great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" (Rom. 9:2) for those whom he did not consider to be saved (Rom. 10:1). And as seen above in 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul expects us to share that compassion which is, in part, predicated upon the uniqueness of the Christian God. This triune uniqueness sets the Christian Creator God apart from any other idea or being that humankind calls or has called "God" in any other religion or metaphysical system of belief. As Barth (1936:346) remarks "Trinity is the Christian way of saying, God".

It becomes a claim to the exclusivity of salvation, temporal and eternal when coupled with the Christian idea that salvation comes about only as a result of the Trinity creating fellowship with us through Christ (Barth 1957 II.1:273). This requires a response to God's invitation, because "I believe … is a human form of existence" and "is consummated in a meeting with … the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Barth 1966:16). The logical conclusion of this argument is that salvation is indivisible union with the Triune God and that through this alone the "human being is freed from the bondage to necessity and death inherent in creaturely existence" (Volf 1998:86, 172). Thus, sharing Paul's missional motivation, the Christian is motivated by compassion to mission through the same sense of concern; a sense of responsibility that he evidenced,

for those who have not responded to the Triune's God's gracious invitation to enter into a relationship (Bosch 1993:133ff.).

6.7 Trinitarian mission inculcates a dependency upon the Godhead evidenced by corporate prayer

The persons of the Trinity depend upon each other for God to exist as the Christian God. "There is no possibility … with any other being of God than that of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as it is God's revelation and in eternity" (Barth 1957 II/1:261). It is the Father who is the prime cause, as Holmes (2012:146) expresses it, "The Father is the sole cause, begetting the Son and spiriting the Spirit", thus the "three divine hypostases exist really, eternally and necessarily." Their dependency upon each other is further expressed by their relationship between each other being one of constant reciprocal communicating, giving and receiving.

When "human beings receive themselves as created in the image of the Trinity" (Volf & Welker 2006:6), they enter the Trinitarian circle of dependency and reciprocity. Dependency is expressed when we listen and talk to God in prayer. Thus, in a missional congregation, all policy and practice are formed (Doornenbal 2012:26), and missional fruitfulness is empowered by corporate prayer.

> Then, and only then, is the Holy Spirit able to guide our prayer life to places and persons we could never reach on our own and … is in that regard an imitation of and following after the … perichoretic God (Leupp 2008:139).

It is perhaps instructive that in the New Testament much missional praying is decidedly Trinitarian, be it privately by individuals, or corporately. As, for example, is Jesus' teaching on prayer about obtaining bread to give to those in need (Luke 11:1-13), or the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, set in the context of a discourse which emphasises the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, and also in Acts 4:23-31, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21, and 6:18-20.

6.8   Trinitarian mission incorporates into the church those who accept the Godhead's invitation

The idea of community is, perhaps, the most prominent characteristic of black African culture and religion. Individuals gain their sense of identity from belonging to a community of persons (Chuwa 2014:vii). This makes it even more important that Trinitarian missional thinking and acting must lead to a desire that those who say "Yes" to God's gracious invitation are incorporated into the local congregation. I can say this no better than Volf:

> Because the Christian God is not a lonely God, but rather a communion of three persons, faith leads human beings into the divine communion. One cannot, however, have a self-enclosed communion with the Triune God – a "foursome," as it were – for the Christian God is not a private deity. Communion with this God is at once also communion with those others who have entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence one and the same act of faith places a person into a new relationship both with God and with all others who stand in communion with God (Volf 1998:173).

6.9   Trinitarian mission aims at the spiritual formation and discipleship of the congregation

Our God is one of constant newness and innovation. The Trinity is a dynamic being that is an event, becoming and motion (Leupp 2008:39, 41). As a result, those who enjoy fellowship with the Trinity have been summoned to a dynamic transforming friendship with God that leads to ever greater sharing in the triune life (Leupp 2008:103) and perfecting of the divine image within them. This perfecting, also known as sanctification, gradually imparts the Trinity's holiness to them. This holiness is the perfection of God that describes God's desire that the image of the Trinity, with all its communicable perfections, is recreated in his people in all purity (Lev. 19:2; Eph. 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:2, etc.). It is produced because in them God "distinguishes and maintains his own will against every other will. He condemns, excludes and annihilates all contradiction and resistance to it" (Barth 1957 II/1:359). It involves both pain and joy, because it, paradoxically, produces a growing reverence and awe of

the Godhead which at the same time is accompanied by blessing, help, and restoration (Barth 1936 1/1:370, 1957 II/1:361).

Although it happens as matter of course in both the unwilling and willing Christian, yet God prefers it to be intentional and a journey with others who are also part of the body of Christ. When that is so, it is sometimes called "spiritual formation" or "discipleship". Spiritual formation can be defined as

> our continuing intentional response to the process of God's grace shaping us into the likeness or image of Jesus Christ (as defined by Trinitarian relationships), through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith for the sake of the world (Doornenbal 2012:211).

It is interesting to note that Osmer (2012:34) records that his research has revealed that, in clearly missional congregations, spiritual formation is generally known as "discipleship", and this latter term is the label I will use. As a result of discipleship within the church, men and women adopt biblically-based values and become increasingly empowered to live by them. They will then become vectors, by example and explanation, of the transference of these values into the social communities in which they have been drawn from surrounding the church, so leading to their transformation.

7.   Defining a Trinitarian missional congregation

The term "missional" is a metaphor which is "based on a verbal picture drawn out of the biblical narrative of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with the world" (Wright 2006:51). A metaphor cannot be wholly defined in propositional terms. Metaphors are powerful tools since they help interpret the history and social phenomena in reference to the salvation of God and assist in the structuring of new experiences of reality within an existing perspective and open up new and creative ways of thinking. They do this in three ways. Their cognitive function provides new information by interpreting existing knowledge; the emotive function stimulates emotions, feelings and attitudes using this knowledge; and their conative function gives direction and helps in the implementation in the reality of the concepts the metaphor carries (Van der Ven 1996:112-129).

My interpretation of the metaphor based upon my theological analysis would therefore be as follows: A Trinitarian missional congregation is one in which there is a consensus among the worshipping congregation that mission, in partnership with the Father, is "the primary value, originating impulse and organizing principle" (Hirsch 2008:n.p.). The Holy Spirit continually creates this consensus as the congregation passionately experiences the Trinity's love and grace in worship, and thus becomes ever more concerned for those who have not responded to the invitation through Christ. It is actualised as the congregation intentionally seeks to allow the Holy Spirit to transform them into the image of Christ, as they journey together as his disciples, as they depend upon God's power through corporate prayer to empower them as they seek to invite the unchurched into fellowship with the Trinity, and innovatively seek to intervene in society to transform the world around them.

The question must be then be asked, "How many people in a congregation are needed to embrace being missional in terms of the above definition before it begins acting as a missional congregation out of passionate Trinitarian theological conviction?" The answer I believe lies in seeing the concept of a Trinitarian missional congregation as a spectrum of convictions so that becoming one is a process along this spectrum from zero to a, as yet, greater indeterminate percentage of attendees receiving the idea. Thus it may begin to act in a missional manner when as little as 16% of the congregation accept the *missio Dei*, if this group includes innovators and early adopters (Hirsch & Ferguson 2011:100), or even as little as 10% if this percentage is committed to the concept and consistently proselytise those with opposing opinions and are immune to their influence (Xie *et al.* 2011: abstract). It seems to me, from my experience in the denomination, that the figure of 20% would apply to the majority of UPCSA congregations because they are mostly inherently conservative and generally composed of those who are well over fifty years of age, as is the situation with the case study congregation.

8. Results of congregational life survey analysis

The Congregational Life Survey covers a wide range of congregational activity as regards congregational health (see Table 13.1: Summary of ten strengths),

but fails to cover some areas that I have diagnosed above as contributing to a Trinitarian missional congregation. I do, however, believe that it includes sufficient information to enable some sort of conclusion to be drawn as to the missional nature of the congregation used for the case study.

Table 13.1 displays the results from the four connections covered by the survey – (1) spiritual connections, (2) inside connections, (3) outside connections and (4) future connections with ten strengths, in the case study congregation (column headed "Case study"). Figures from the congregation life attender survey in a 100 Dutch Reformed congregations (column headed "DRC") in 2006 and the 2010 results of 2 000 congregations from the Presbyterian Church of the United States (column headed "USA") are also shown for purposes of comparison with the case study congregation. The first column refers to the question number in the questionnaire. The results are presented as percentages of the total number who completed the survey in each congregation and averaged out from the sum of the scores for the DRC and PCUSA congregations. I do not deal with all the results given for the connections and strengths, as they are not all pertinent to my research.

Table 13.1   Summary of ten strengths

	Strengths	DRC	USA	Case study
Spiritual connections				
1	Growing spiritually	46	42	38
2	Meaningful worship	62	56	53
Inside connections				
3	Participating in the congregation	45	57	46
4	Having a sense of belonging	26	30	18
5	Caring for young people	39	48	20
Outside connections				
6	Focusing on the community	30	39	24
7	Sharing faith scores	21	22	22
8	Welcoming new worshippers	31	26	19
Future connections				
9	Empowering leadership	44	43	25
10	Looking to the future	38	32	33

I now proceed below to match the results of the survey against the Trinitarian missional theology developed in Section 6.

8.1 Trinitarian missional worship

Woolever and Bruce (2010:134) suggest that worship is a strength in a congregation when many worshippers experience God's presence, joy, inspiration and awe in worship services and feel it helps them with daily life. Schoeman (2010:118) interprets the 2006 DRC results for this in Table 13.2 (Strength 1: Growing spiritually), as indicating that it is a strength in that denomination. The comparison of these results with the case study results indicates that it is also a strength in the case study congregation.

Table 13.2 Strength 1: Growing spiritually

	Percentage of worshippers who …	Average DRC	Average USA	Case study	Question number
A	Are growing in their faith through participation in activities of their congregation	38	33	25	9
B	Spend time at least in private devotional activities a few times a week	90	66	83	8
C	Feel their spiritual needs are being met in their congregation	79	82	68	12
D	Report Bible study and prayer groups as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	15	15	13	25
E	Report the prayer ministry of the congregation as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	7	13	3	25

Worship is the pre-eminent operation and the prime motivational channel for mission. This raises the conundrum that although nearly two-thirds of the case study congregation, as indicated in Table 13.3 (Strength 2: Meaningful worship), where 58% worshippers express satisfaction with the worship service the missional impulse is so small. I would believe that most church leaders would be satisfied with this. Yet this does not seem to be producing a missional congregation that is overflowing with God's love and grace into the community. I suggest that this is due to three reasons.

a. The first is that, as Woolever and Bruce (2004:34) suggest, the lack of correlation between congregations experiencing numerical growth and those with high scoring on meaningful worship may be due to current worshippers being satisfied, but this satisfaction might not apply to newcomers. Woolever and Bruce (2004:35) further comment that in their research, "We found that current members are highly satisfied with their congregation's worship services." This is logical since otherwise they would probably not be attending! The problem is that they often fail to see or feel as a new worshipper would.

b. The second is that it points to a lack somewhere in the congregation's experience of Trinitarian worship and/or of the love, grace and joy associated with it. It is suggested that one reason for this is the predominance of the Christendom paradigm in the congregation and the resulting lack of relational discipleship releasing God's love, grace and holiness into the community. This conjecture seems to be reflected in the results for the spiritual connections and inside connections.

c. The third is the demographic profile of the congregation, as shown in Figure 13.1.
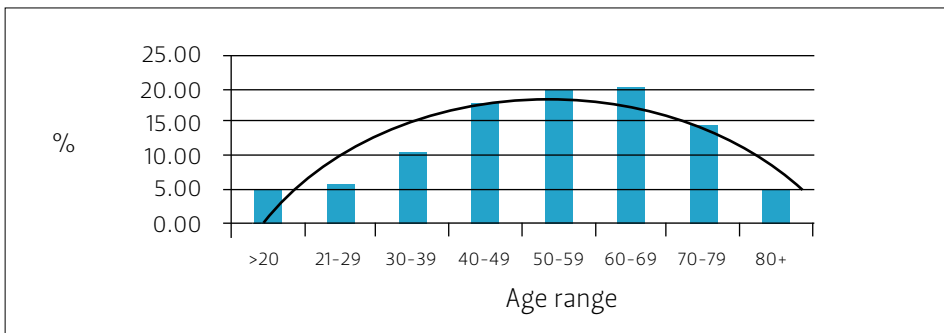
Figure 13.1   Age demographic profile of the congregation

This profile shows that 50% of the congregation is over 50 years of age. Congregations with a larger proportion of elderly members and with a smaller proportion in the thirty to forty age group are much less likely to be high on the missional spectrum, often because they possess programmes and worship

styles unsuited to the needs of younger age groups (Hadaway & Roozen 1995:60-61). This has serious implications for the future of the congregation, since as McCain comments,

> The entire African church is becoming much more African. (For instance) the singing of western hymns is being replaced by singing African choruses. Africans are expressing their worship of God in much more African ways. Churches ... are much more open to physical and emotional expressions than a generation ago (McCain 2000:112).

I believe that those churches with European traditions will inevitably be increasingly influenced by this trend, as many have already been, or become missionally ineffective as they retreat into European racial and cultural laagers. Also, as we have previously commented, the SAADS will soon encompass 80% of the population.

Table 13.3   Strength 2: Meaningful worship

	Percentage of worshippers who ...	Average DRC	Average USA	Case study	Question number
A	Always or usually experience God's presence during services	94	73	62	40.1
B	Always or usually experience inspiration during services	84	70	60	40.2
C	Always or usually experience joy during services	83	73	63	40.5
D	Always or usually experience awe during services	71	18	15	40.4
E	Rarely experience boredom during services	30	63	51	40.3
F	Rarely experience frustration during services	26	67	57	40.6
G	Report the sermons, preaching, or homilies as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	57	40	59	25
H	Report worship services or activities of the congregation help them with everyday living to a great extent	48	43	61	6

8.2   The invitation to enter into the "force field of the Trinity"

The outside connections section has three sections that look in greater detail at the congregation's perceptions and attitudes in the areas that look at Strength 6: Focusing on the community (Table 13.4), Strength 7: Sharing faith (Table 13.5), and Strength 8: Welcoming new worshippers (Table 13.6). (These strengths refer to categories listed in Table 13.1.)

The results suggest that the case study congregation is not a very open community, which looks outwardly to share its faith and touch the community with the love and grace of God. The most meaningful results in this respect, as regard faith sharing, are that only 7% acknowledge that reaching others is one of the most valued aspects of the congregation (Table 13.5: D), and only 28% have invited a friend to a worship service in the past year (Table 13.5: C). This is very low when compared to the DRC and USA results. The results for community involvement are somewhat more missional when compared to the DRC and USA results; yet again only 9% see social justice as a valued aspect (Table 13.4: D), only 3% value social diversity (Strength 1, Table 13.2: E) and only 22% voted in the last election (Table 13.4: G). It is then not surprising that only 19% had been involved in the congregation for less than five years (Table 13.6: A) and that the congregation is not very racially diverse, showing a composition of 80.2% of white origin and 14.8% of black origin (1.2% did not answer). It must be remembered that this is in a country in which by 2040, those of black origin will constitute 88% of the total population in a rapidly racially changing society where many middle-class SAADs are moving into the formerly white suburbs from where the congregation draws most of its current worshippers.

There are signs of a comfortable homogeneity and that many have opted out of the current society, probably because they feel powerless to influence it. Thus, whatever the reason for community involvement, it does not seem to be motivated by deep-seated theological convictions or driven by a passionate love for Jesus and the unchurched or by an experience of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This would also indicate that very few are living in the experience of "being" in the force field of the Trinity.

This above conclusion seems to be arguably supported by Woolever and Bruce's (2004:79) research concerning American congregations, which has revealed that "conservative Protestant churches excel at taking their message to the unchurched". I would suggest that these are the very churches, firstly, in which the congregation would want to share God's love and grace with the unchurched, because most of their members have, at one time, consciously accepted God's invitation to live in the force field of the Trinity. Then, secondly, they are more likely to be motivated by the implications of the uniqueness of the Godhead that only those who have responded positively to the Trinity's offer of fellowship will be saved. In other words, this doctrinal interpretation leads to be compassionate and concerned about those who have not responded.

These results indicate that the missional paradigm is not greatly developed in the congregation and many who are only living in their congregational comfort zone may oppose transformation.

Table 13.4   Strength 6: Focusing on the community

	Percentage (%) of worshippers who ...	Average DRC	Average USA	Case study	Question number
A	Are involved in social service or advocacy groups through their congregation	22	29	25	5
B	Are involved in social service or advocacy groups in their community	29	38	29	15
C	Contribute to charitable community organisations	50	77	52	17
D	Report wider community care or an emphasis on social justice as one of the most valued aspects of their congregation	27	13	40	25
E	Report openness to social diversity as one of most valued aspects of their congregation	3	8	3	25
F	Worked with others to try to solve a community problem	16	26	17	17
G	Voted in the last (presidential) election	60	81	73	17

Table 13.5   Strength 7: Sharing faith

	Percentage of worshippers who ...	Average DRC	Average USA	Case study	Question number
A	Are involved in evangelistic activities in the congregation	8	17	13	5
B	Feel at ease talking about their faith and seek opportunities to do so	12	11	21	13
C	Have invited to a worship service a friend or relative who has not attended in the past year	52	48	28	16
D	Report reaching those who do not attend church as one of the most valued aspect of their congregation	13	11	7	25

Table 13.6   Strength 8: Welcoming new worshippers

	Percentage of worshippers who...	Average DRC	Average USA	Case study	Question number
A	Have been going to worship services or activities of this congregation for 5 years or less	31	26	18.5	2

8.3   Spiritual formation and discipleship

A key indicator that discipleship (as described above) is an important activity in the congregation is the percentage that spends time in listening to, reading and meditating on the prophetic word (called "devotional activities" in the survey) and engaged in communal Bible-study groups and prayer groups in a committed seeking-to be-transformed manner. When such meditation and engagement are taken seriously, it will normally result in spiritual growth.

Most worshippers in the case study congregation take time for private devotional activities, Strength 1 (Table 13.2: B). The majority feel that their spiritual needs are being met in the congregation (Table 13.2: C). This seemingly contradicts the fact that congregational activities are only helping a quarter grow in their faith (Table 13.2: A). In general, spiritual growth seems to be static and therefore cannot be considered satisfactory. Those who have experienced God's love and grace want to expose themselves continually to

the word of his grace so that they may grow in holiness and share it with the unchurched (Acts 20:32). Sixty per cent of the respondents evidenced this desire. Yet the survey suggests that the experience of love and grace of the force field of the Trinity is for many deficient, or even non-existent since it does not flow out of the congregation to the foreigner and outcast.

When considering discipleship, another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is a journey with others. The results of this survey reveal that this may be at a critically low point in the congregation since only 18% (Table not shown) reported that they had a strong and growing sense of belonging.

The responses reveal that the spiritual growth of the congregation is not as healthy as in the comparative denominations, which even in their case still leaves much to be desired. It speaks of stasis, despite the good number spending time in private devotions and a reasonable number feeling that their spiritual needs are being met. Once more there is the conundrum of people having their needs met and spending time on the Bible, yet not experiencing spiritual growth. There are several reasons why this could be so. These may be summarised as follows:

- The age profile of the congregation reveals that 50% of the congregation is over 50 (see Figure 13.1). This suggests that as, in general, those who have spent many years in a congregation have grown comfortable and there will be great resistance to personal change.

- Ignorance of what true spiritual growth is and how it can be audited in their own lives.

- A failure to learn by moving out of their comfort zones through involvement in the faith-building activities in the community.

- Some go through the motions of piety without having a real transformative experience of the Trinity.

- Others attend the worship service but have no desire to grow spiritually because their lives centre around other areas than Christ and his church.

Along with normal human wilfulness and materialistic impulses, it is suggested that most of these reasons are contributed to by the Christendom paradigm

that prevails in the congregation. This stunts the spiritual growth that is dependent upon walking in the force field of the Trinity and experiencing the love, grace and holiness of the Triune God through worship, prayer, the prophetic word, relational discipleship and desiring newness.

8.4   Corporate prayer

The primary activity necessary for envisioning prayer is the presence of prayer groups. Whether or not it is missional is not directly determined by the survey. This latter becomes a mute question as only 3% (Table 13.2: E) report the prayer ministry of the congregation as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation. According to Barth (1956:711), this small percentage should be a warning to the congregation that it is on the road to perishing, which is perhaps due to a lack of dependence upon God's grace. It would suggest that there is no grace empowering missional vision.

9.   Conclusion

In summary, although appearing quite healthy in terms of the congregational life survey (Woolever & Bruce 2004, 2010), the congregation is failing to produce a congregation that is missional or even innovative in this regard. There is little evidence of either the desire or any activity supported by a consensus of the congregation to reach out to invite the unchurched into the force field of the Trinity or to show God's love, grace, compassion, and justice to transform the surrounding community.

I would suggest that, in terms of perception theory, it will be difficult for the congregation to move into the innovative Trinitarian missional paradigm from the prevailing Christendom paradigm. It will require a very disruptive paradigm shift in a congregation where a high percentage are over the age of fifty and 80% have been worshipping in the congregation for over five years. I would also suggest that the results of this case study would be similar in a fair number of UPCSA congregations. It is tentatively suggested at this stage of the research that the least disruptive way for the UPCSA to develop innovative Trinitarian missional congregations is for either individual congregations to train and equip task teams of from 10% to 16% of a congregation, of innovators

or early adopters, and then support them in their missional task within that congregation, hoping that if they are successful their example will "convert" others into becoming missional. However, perhaps a more effective way may be to ask groups of those who have missional hearts to start new congregations, with the financial support of the denomination.

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INDEX

Ecclesiology is the study of the church and has two focal points; the one is the historical and doctrinal perspective on the church, and the other is the church as situated in a local context in the sense of the local practices of actual congregations. The ecclesiology or, more correctly, the ecclesiologies of this volume mainly focuses on the second aspect, i.e., understanding the local congregation or parish as a community of believers.

A congregation may *firstly* be described by posing a *theological* question: What is the local missional church or congregation all about? This question may be answered from different perspectives, but it remains essential to answer it from a theological perspective. The first five chapters in this book focus mainly on a theological understanding of the congregation. This is done from different disciplines within the study field of theology. Congregations are, *secondly*, social realities and should be described and analysed through an *analytical or empirical lens*, or, to answer the question attached to the first empirical-descriptive task of practical theology, "What is going on?". The remaining chapters use a quantitative and qualitative lens and give an empirical analysis of the congregation.

The intention is to critically reflect on the church and congregations' ecclesiology from a theological and analytical perspective with an emphasis on the South African context. It wants to map markers for the development of *contemporary ecclesiologies*, and the different chapters are meant as mirrors to look in and reflect on the theological and contextual relevance of denominations and congregations in South Africa.

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