The Potential of Churches to Contribute to Thriving
and Vibrant Rural Community

A Case Study Approach

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A thesis submitted to

Auckland University of Technology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

2018

School of Social Sciences and Public Policy

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Date: 28.5.18

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the help and support of the following people:

ABSTRACT

The Anglican Church is present in most communities around the region of Taranaki, New Zealand. Where churches were once hubs of community life, in rural and small-town settings they are now often on the periphery. Frequently attended by ageing and diminishing congregations, the capacity to reach out and serve the wider community is dwindling. Buildings become used less frequently, some are closed. Although these churches are well placed to continue to contribute to their rural communities as they have previously done, the opportunity is seemingly ebbing away.

Adding to knowledge in the field of sociology of religion, this study of Anglican parishes in rural Taranaki examines what is being done and what could be done by churches in their communities. The research is based on the positive premise that the potential to contribute is there and still to be found, although what it may look like could be radically different from now. Nine parishes were surveyed initially, and three of these were chosen as case studies. The decision to undertake case studies in parishes that are diminishing was questioned – would it not be more useful to research the ideas and activities present in thriving parishes instead? But this study needed to start "at home", to understand what is or isn't happening, and why. With this in mind, the study was influenced by the values of Action Research: respectful, participatory and democratic, with the tenet of local beginnings. The parishioners were engaged through meetings, questionnaires and in-depth interviews. A foremost finding was the strength of emotion they expressed. This was often sadness, sometimes frustration, anxiety, and an anguish of not knowing what to do. "I don't know" was a frequent response. Others did express energy and ideas, sometimes thwarted. These findings suggest that an educative response will assist, firstly with understanding the barriers to innovation and change, and what will support the parishes to move past these obstacles and re-mobilize their strengths in their communities. Ideas that arise from the strengths, gifts, interests and assets of the congregations and their communities will be owned by them. Whether the ideas stimulated as a result of this process are action plans for an ongoing church or a legacy plan for one less likely to survive, the outcomes of this study suggest potential for contribution is there to be explored.

CHAPTER 1. CONTEXT FOR THIS THESIS

1.1 Introduction – a letter to Sam Hunt

"Near Manaia
A white horse beside a white church
A white church beside a white horse
I'm not sure which I prefer
But please keep things
Just as they are."

Sam Hunt, New Zealand Poet (South Taranaki District Council, 2003)

Dear Sam, I don't know when you wrote this, but keeping things just as they are… well, lots of people have wanted that too, and lots still do, but it seems that's just not how it goes. Things change. The day I drove past this small white church, (which, did you know, is St James The Divine at Otakeho, yes, near Manaia in South Taranaki) - the very rainy day I drove past, I stopped and backed up to look. This small white church was beside some black cattle, not a white horse. That's already different, a different view. But other things are different too. After more than 120 years this church isn't used now; the last time was Christmas 2016. I've read that it closed because of dwindling attendances. That's happening to a lot of small, rural churches like this one, and for lots of reasons - changes in farming communities, changes in small towns, changes in the times we live in, changes in what people think, do and believe - and the people who come to church are getting older, the numbers fewer, and not so many are coming along behind.

There are small white churches like this - and some bigger ones, and different coloured ones - all around Taranaki, with people wondering what to do. Some of these people are quite anxious because they are the ones who've been the whoever-it-is that you are asking to keep things the same, for the churches to stay. They've worked hard to do that, but in some places it's still slipping away. So I got started on this research, Sam, because this is important. You, whimsically, and some others earnestly, do want to keep things as they are - but then what happens? Will the congregations just go on - until they can't anymore? Will these churches just die out? Will all these beautiful buildings be beautiful but unused and deteriorating, like our little one here near Manaia - there for history and memories and for us to muse over? Or is there more that can happen if it's talked about some more?

People care about this – really care. They care about their communities, their churches and each other. I'm really privileged that I got to go and meet them and hear about this, because that was the place to start, with these people at the heart of it. I went to them with this big wondering, about the potential of churches to contribute to thriving and vibrant rural community. You know, many didn't know

what to say about that, because wondering how to even be there is the question in their face. Some said, "This is 10 years too late", some said, "I don't know" a lot, but what they did say altogether suggests the answers are there among them, in more talk about what it is that really matters to them, and how it can be achieved.

So, Sam, your verse of wistful wishing to retain things we hold dear, like that simple rustic picture of who we think we are, has helped. It holds a gentle challenge, to look at things from different perspectives - church by horse or horse by church, whichever you prefer - and see what really matters. You said it gently, but it's urgent. I hope this research will help too, because if a way forward is found, amidst the change, some things that really matter may not be lost. They may be kept, in a way, just as they are.

1.2 The Anglican Church in Taranaki, and The Bishop's Action Foundation

Taranaki is the province on the western cape of the North Island of New Zealand, with one main city and one striking mountain which rises from the plain, surrounded by farmland dotted with small towns and settlements. The Anglican Church there in Taranaki is part of the Anglican Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki. Initially a bishopric under the Diocese of Waikato, this changed in 1998 when a dual episcopacy – two bishops as co-equals in the one diocese – was sanctioned, with Bishop Philip Richardson as the Bishop of Taranaki, within the joint Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki.

A parishioner in a rural Taranaki parish said of Bishop Philip:

> I don't know that anybody's made more difference than Philip has. When he came, he went all the way around the whole of the Taranaki diocese and visited every freezing works and everything, and he spoke to the people on the floor and he listened – seeing the need for us to be church in a different way [...] he has really seen the need within the community. (An extract from interview, Case Study 2)

Seeking to support and resource the people and communities of this diocese, Bishop Philip and other key people pursued a course of action to investigate how this might best be done. A 2004 report, called "The Bishop's Action Foundation: A Project of the Bishop in Taranaki" (cited by Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-b) identified the need for one umbrella organisation to work with existing groups around the province to build their capacity so they could effectively respond to the community needs they were set up to address. The deed for the Bishop's Action Foundation Charitable Trust was signed in 2005. Simon Cayley was appointed as Chief Executive Officer in the same year (still in post in 2018), and the Bishop's Action Foundation (BAF) has been pursuing its aims of supporting growth in the

community through capacity building since its inception through to the present day (Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-a)

The Bishop's Action Foundation has three arms: research, collaboration and projects, its programme and service hub. Within the research arm is a long-term vision of working with partners to create a research institute for rural wellbeing, aiming to inform and support initiatives that seek to respond to rural needs.

Allied to this aim, this thesis came about as part of BAF's drive to understand the part played by churches in rural communities, and the contribution they are or could be making to rural wellbeing and sustainability. The Anglican Church is present in most rural communities and, while facing challenges of its own, the local presence and structures of the church may enable opportunities that have not yet been realised. The first step, and the object of this study, was to investigate what is being done, and what could be done, by churches in their local communities. At a later stage this knowledge will contribute to the development of an educational, workshop-based resource aimed at supporting rural parishes to respond to challenges of rural sustainability (Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-c).

1.3 A Personal Context

My connection to the topic has come about through nearly 20 years of involvement in social services in the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu, a predominantly rural diocese covering the Eastern quarter of the North Island of New Zealand. My roles with Waiapu Anglican Social Services (now Anglican Care Waiapu) have brought me into relationship with clergy, parishioners and community members in parishes around Waiapu and the country. I have seen and heard the stories of growth and decline, witnessed change, been part of many discussions about triumphs - often small but intensely rewarding; and challenges - often big and sometimes seemingly insurmountable. I have a heart for the people who provide the strength, passion, faith, and belief to face the odds and make things happen: the people of church, town and country, who want the best for their communities.

My work through these years has been in the provision of grief support programmes for children, young people and adults, through Anglican social services. For most of that time the programme used was Seasons™, which originated from CatholicCare, Catholic Family Services in Melbourne, Australia. My roles have included volunteer facilitator, local coordinator, trainer, manager of these services within Waiapu, National Coordinator, and National Advisor and Trainer. More recently Anglican dioceses across the country, including Waiapu, have moved to join the Catholic dioceses of New Zealand in together delivering the one same suite of grief support programmes, called Seasons for Growth®. This

strongly research based, educative set of programmes offers opportunities for support and growth in understanding change, loss and grief. There are components for children, young people, adults, parents and professionals.

The roles I currently hold are Seasons for Growth Training Coordinator within the Waiapu Diocese, and I am a member of the national trainer's network. These many perspectives and the close involvement with grieving people of all ages, have provided me a deep understanding of grief and its many faces.

This work has also connected me with Taranaki, with the Bishop's Action Foundation, and the people and parishes there providing these programmes. Knowing that BAF was developing a research arm, I spoke with BAF CEO Simon Cayley on March 24, 2016, about seeking a suitable project for an MA thesis in the field of Human Services. This conversation led to being offered the opportunity to explore this research question, "The Potential of Churches to Contribute to Thriving and Vibrant Rural Community". Simon explained that a researcher with some understanding of the workings of the Anglican Church was needed. That I have, to an extent, along with a personal interest in the rural context.

My own background is rural and small-town, in the Manawatu. I grew up on farms and in the small seaside settlement of Foxton Beach on the North Island's west coast, while my father's occupations were farm labourer, shearer and fencing contractor. I attended university at Massey in the rural service hub of Palmerston North, followed by overseas travel. On my return to New Zealand I lived in Wellington for seven years. My next move was to Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty, which was quite provincial back then, 30 years ago, and so on to work around the small cities, small towns and extensive rural areas of Waiapu and the North Island.

My academic record includes two diverse qualifications: a Bachelor of Science and a Diploma in Teaching, Early Childhood Education. The latter has led to a thirty-year career working with children in education and social service roles, including in management. My current study towards a Master of Arts at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) is extending my experience with formal learning in the broad area of Human Services. The post graduate papers have included study of human services organizations, social research design and analysis, policy analysis, qualitative research, and reading papers in which I followed interests more specific to my work with grief.

Bringing all things together I was pleased to take up the opportunity and embark on this research, for what I saw it would offer me, as a meaningful project, but more importantly, offer people in a realm that I care about, small parishes in rural

communities. I kept the title of the study as it was suggested and set out to explore where that would go.

1.4 Rationale and significance

This study was undertaken to advance knowledge about rural churches in interaction with their rural communities. This is one of several research projects commissioned by the Bishops Action Foundation, seeking to understand more about rural wellbeing and sustainability. There appears to be limited research about the interaction of contemporary church and rural community in the New Zealand setting, and in general the church appears to be under-represented in the research regarding rural community in this country. This study seeks to contribute insight and knowledge into this space.

The concern is that rural communities are under increasing pressure, as demand for greater efficiency sees services and businesses moving to larger urban centres, and as the dynamics of surrounding farming communities also change. Rural communities may have only a limited voice with government and local government. Policy drivers are often "urban-centric, creating questions of sustainability for these communities, and issues of social justice including challenges in accessing services, finding employment and raising families" (Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-c).

The Anglican Church in Taranaki has had a strong presence across the rural landscape of small town and country, and is still present in the centres of any size. This research aimed to understand what is being done, and what could be done, by these church communities to contribute to sustainable futures in their rural centres and areas.

Evidence of the challenges faced by rural communities is extensive. In addition to this, considerable evidence exists to show the church itself is facing significant challenges as congregations in many mainstream churches age and dwindle. Studying these two sets of challenges in combination, specifically in the context of the Anglican Church in Taranaki, adds to a uniquely New Zealand knowledge base, with the intention of informing possibilities, decisions and plans for action.

Accordingly, this study has significance for

- **Knowledge** - few studies have focused on current interaction of church and rural community in New Zealand. Those that have include Bennett (2013), Ennor (2007), Muzondiwa (2013) and Peterson (2015). This study will contribute to the available knowledge of church as an organization in

rural settings in this country, with a focus on potential to contribute to community.

In addition, the study has significance for

- **Planning -** the Anglican Church in Taranaki is continually assessing possibilities for the shape of the church in the future. This study will add to the knowledge available to inform planning and decision making, and processes for these.

- **Practice** - providing information to leaders within the church communities concerned supports exploration with positive process and awareness. The future development of educative and action focused workshops will enable appropriate support and inclusion for those involved.

- **Wellbeing** - adding to knowledge that may improve the outcomes of change, and strengthening the ability to adapt with resilience, is beneficial to all parties. In this case, it will initially be beneficial to members of the church, at congregational and organizational level, with potential for positive effects for their local communities. Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson (2001) in their field of industrial/organizational psychology, advocate for research that has applied relevance, enhancing employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. At this time, regarding the Anglican Church in Taranaki, the "employees" are nearly all unpaid volunteers, but the concept of research as enhancing wellbeing applies for this group as for any other set of workers, and for the church as an organization.

- **Recognition** – rural church communities, like the rural communities around them, may also experience marginalization, or a limited voice, in the larger church environment, which this research seeks to redress.

- **Policy** – adding to the evidence of needs and possible responses in rural communities strengthens the case to be put to policy makers at congregational, local community, regional and national levels.

Significant to the process of this research was the qualitative approach (detailed in Chapter 4) which enabled the opinions and feelings of those most closely affected by changes within the church, to be accessed. For these participants, all parishioners in case study parishes, this research offered the opportunity to contribute their views regarding the future of their parish and community, and therefore to be part of determining that future. The benefits of this for participants

included an experience of safe exploration of potentially difficult questions, of being included and valued, and of being able to express care for their church and community.

It is intended that this research will be used as the basis for developing a tool for education and the safe exploration of change, and effective interaction between church and community which will enable the opportunity for involvement on a wider scale.

For community, the benefits may include support for different or more far-reaching possibilities for contribution by the church than have previously been discussed.

For myself as researcher, benefits have included the satisfaction of completing a meaningful project that will be actively used to promote the welfare of rural congregations and their communities, and the opportunity to work with parish people in accomplishing this, while advancing personal educational goals.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The immediate scope of this study is limited to the Anglican parishes of rural Taranaki and is largely dedicated to case studies of three parishes within the region. This scope was broadened by an initial survey of nine rural parishes to provide a wider picture of the Anglican Church around Taranaki. The literature review also provides access to a national and international experience.

Statistical analysis is minimal within this thesis, as a recent series of studies undertaken for the Bishop's Action Foundation by Ann Pomeroy (2016, 2017, 2018) through Otago University provide detailed analysis of the census data for rural Taranaki, and comparison of this region with others. These studies are referred to and drawn on, but the information is not generally replicated here as it is available in that work.

The focus of this study was within Anglican churches attended in most part by Pākehā (New Zealand European) parishioners. The 1992 Constitution of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia (n.d.) provides for these three partners to order their affairs within their own cultural context: Tikanga Māori, Tikanga Pākehā and Tikanga Pasifika. This study was conducted within the context of the Tikanga Pākehā Anglican Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki and did not include the Māori Anglican Parishes within Taranaki.

The working title was broad. I intentionally retained this, in part to enable a direction within it to become apparent, and so that possibilities would not be discounted. More importantly, the title was retained to support a focus on potential, rather than on the more dire possibilities that could have predominated. Although these were a significant part of the discussion, the title ensured that a search for what could be done remained the driver.

I was also fortunate that the CEO of BAF, as advisor to the research, was direct about the reasons for the project to be undertaken while remaining clear that the thesis was mine to direct as the various possible paths within the breadth of the topic began to unfold. The focus quickly became about the people currently at the heart of the situation.

We had agreed that in exploring the question of what may be "the potential of churches to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community" the study would look beyond the church's traditional methods for interacting with community and responding to need, as current circumstances indicate that more radical possibilities must be considered. This did not demand the work become an exploration of what radical *solutions* there could be, however, only that the idea of more radical possibilities must be included for consideration. This was addressed by exploring the *need* to look for more radical possibilities, and how people might be engaged to do this and generate ideas themselves.

A question raised early on was "wouldn't it be better to be researching for ideas in churches that are thriving and innovative? [...] that would be helpful". Ultimately the answer to that question is that although ideas in other churches or locations may be plentiful and readily available, those ideas had not inspired or enabled *these* parishes to embrace them. Not much was changing *here.* As a result, the first question the study needed to address was "what do we know, or need to know, about *these parishes themselves* in order to support them in the exploration of their circumstances, and what the possibilities could be?" It was agreed that seeking the answer to this question was the best first step, and the outcomes of this study support that. In addition, the outcomes give legitimacy to the case for homegrown ideas, ideas particular to each group, being valued as good ideas. Therefore, this study does not present a list of what the possibilities could be, or good ideas that have worked for others. Instead, it charts a way to explore ideas with the parishes, to open doors.

In keeping with this approach, no attempt was made to explore financial circumstances or other constraints on future possibilities. When the time comes, it will be the flow of ideas that is important, along with searching for solutions to

enable the desired outcomes. Impediments were not the place to start. This was especially important to this study, as the findings revealed that some participants believed there to be no way out of the situation. That is one possibility. Other possibilities also exist, however, which is why the concept of scenarios has been introduced, to support exploration of a range of possible futures.

Becoming familiar with these parishes and communities through the research showed me there were ideas to be found within these parishes. This indicates that more can arise from within the churches and their communities, but also that support and a clear process will be needed to do it. This study is just a first step towards that.

My approach to this study is in no way theological. My upbringing was in a small combined Presbyterian/Methodist church (with some powerful influences from my devout grandparents and faith-inspired mother), from which I drifted in my teens. As identified in the literature review (Brown, 2010; Ward, 2016), that drift was the trend of that time. Years of travel, exploration and personal journey followed, which together eventually led to a comfortable fit for me in Anglican Social Services; not as a member of the church but respectfully beside it. With this background I am able to bring some understanding of the workings and ambience of the Anglican Church through my long working partnership with parish and community, while also standing sufficiently aside to bring an objective view.

The approach, then, is sociological rather than theological. Similar to the position of Suter (2014) in his study *The Future of the Uniting Church of Australia*, this study is concerned more with the church as an organization. It is therefore "secular" in approach, with concepts and language more from organizational approaches.

This secular position does not disregard the argument made by Prebble (2012) for emphasizing spirituality as a part of the research process itself; "that an overt acknowledgement of spirituality should be an integral aspect of the holistic approach typically advocated by Action Research theorists" (Prebble, 2012, p. iv). This study was about the people and parishes of the Anglican Church and their communities in Taranaki – spirituality was inherent and integral to these conversations and considerations, and at the heart of the matter.

1.6 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 provides the context for this thesis, beginning with a response to a poem by New Zealand poet Sam Hunt, which sets the scene of small Anglican parishes in rural Taranaki. The chapter includes introduction to the Anglican Church in Taranaki and the Bishop's Action Foundation, as the instigator of the research. Rationale, significance, scope and limitations of the study are covered.

Chapter 2 provides further background to the study by describing Taranaki as a region and the Anglican Church within it. The work of the Bishop's Commission for the Future (2008) is introduced, some outcomes are described, and the 2014 review of this work considered.

Chapter 3 contains a review of literature pertaining to this study, from the early beginnings of church in New Zealand, through challenges to the present day and the search for new ways to be. It includes a section on change, and some impediments to change in the church environment. Scenario planning is introduced as a way to safely explore possibilities. A story of successful change follows. The final section of the literature review considers aspects of rural community in New Zealand.

Chapter 4 provides a consideration of the methodologies that influenced the design of the study or were employed in undertaking the fieldwork and analysis of data.

Chapter 5 describes the fieldwork plan and the practical aspects of the fieldwork, outlining the process of meetings, questionnaires and interviews, and how these approaches were used.

Chapter 6 begins the analysis of data, with discussion of the findings of some specific questions from the parish surveys. The questions discussed are mostly those that assisted with the selection of case study parishes. Other data from the parish surveys is later incorporated into the discussion of the case study findings.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the case study parishes. Firstly, some detail is provided for each case study parish, including census data (2013) of the communities in which they are located. Findings from the case study parishioner questionnaires are presented and discussed, augmented by data from interviews and the parish surveys. Some comparisons between the case study parishes are noted, and some conclusions drawn, particularly about the strengths and characteristics of each parish in its community.

Chapter 8 continues the case study data analysis, summarizing some of what is currently being undertaken in these parishes, and others around the diocese, as they serve their congregations and communities. Further questions are raised about sustainability of parishes and the services they provide.

Chapter 9 considers some insights from the interviews in more depth, highlighting impediments to change, and processes that may assist with change.

Chapter 10 discusses the interviews undertaken with members of the community in the case study parishes. All those interviewed illustrate the resources that exist within communities; all are innovators. Focus on two of these provides insight into the innovative thinking and action that is occurring, with an impact on the whole community in these parishes.

Chapter 11 briefly considers again the question "why is nothing changing?", providing a further exploration of crisis, cultural consensus, and fear as inhibitors of innovation.

Chapter 12 moves on to examine factors that assist in moving forward, discussing the role of leadership, safe processes for gaining knowledge and decision making, and the empowerment of innovation when it arises from within the group concerned. A brief conclusion includes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. TARANAKI – THE REGION AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

2.1 Taranaki – The Region

Taranaki is a coastal and mountainous region on the western side of New Zealand's North Island. The region has an area of 7258 km². The landscape is dominated by Mount Taranaki, its namesake volcano, which lies within the Egmont National Park (335 km²). The northernmost point is on the coast south of Mokau, the southernmost point is roughly midway between Waverley and Whanganui. To the east are large areas of mountainous and rugged country. The Whanganui National Park and Waitotara Forest form part of the eastern boundary. The extremes of the eastern terrain constrain routes of entry to Taranaki to one main coastal route from the north, via Mokau, and one near-coastal road from the south, via Waverley. A third "road less travelled" links directly from the east to Stratford in Central Taranaki. This 150 km route is known as the Forgotten World Highway, which gives an indication of the remote and rugged country it traverses. The natural bounding of the region by the sea and mountains, with limited access routes, means Taranaki has a relatively self-contained workforce, 98 percent of the workforce living and working within the region. (Venture Taranaki, 2018).

Urban/rural profile maps (Stats NZ, 2006) show substantial areas of Taranaki as *highly rural/remote*, and substantial areas *as rural with low urban influence.* Aside from the communities of Hawera, Stratford and Eltham, the majority of Central and Southern Taranaki is covered by these classifications. Northern Taranaki, conversely, has the *major urban area* of New Plymouth and surrounds, and considerable areas of *rural with high and moderate urban influence*, as well as the *rural with low urban influence* areas further north up the coast, and inland where some areas are also *highly rural/remote.*

The port city of New Plymouth is the area's hub. Of the region's total population of 115,800 (Stats NZ, 2017). just under half reside in New Plymouth. Hawera is the only other town in the region with a population over 10,000. The rural population overall accounts for around a quarter of the region's population. The Taranaki Regional Council notes the general trend has been a decrease in the population of smaller rural towns and a further concentration of the population in north Taranaki. (Taranaki Regional Council, 2016).

Figure 1. Map of Taranaki showing Urban/Rural profiles, 2001 (Stats NZ, 2006)

Source: Statistics New Zealand,
Census of Population and Dwellings, 2001
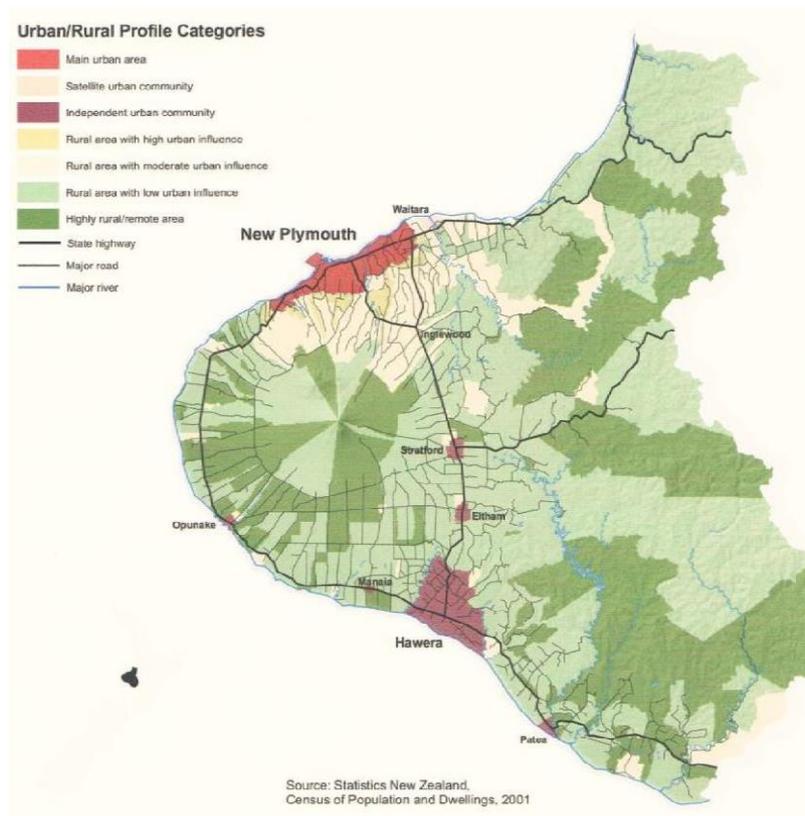
Table 1. Population Figures for Urban Areas in Taranaki

Urban area	Population (June 2015 estimate)	% of region	Urban/Rural Profile (Statistics New Zealand)
New Plymouth	56,300	48.6%	Main urban area
Hawera	11,750	10.1%	Independent urban community
Waitara	6,790	5.9%	Satellite urban community
Stratford	5,610	4.8%	Independent urban community
Inglewood	3,490	3.0%	Satellite urban community
Eltham	2,010	1.7%	Independent urban community
Opunake	1,390	1.2%	Independent urban community
Patea	1,150	1.0%	Independent urban community

2.2 Taranaki – The Anglican Church

The Anglican Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki was originally constituted as the Diocese of Waikato in 1926 and renamed as the Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki in 2010. This brought into being a unique diocesan entity: there are two bishoprics with two co-equal diocesan bishops; the Bishop of Waikato and the Bishop of Taranaki, and two Cathedrals; the Waikato Cathedral Church of St Peter and the Taranaki Cathedral Church of St Mary.

The Bishopric of Taranaki is led by the Most Reverend Philip Richardson, who is also the Archbishop of the New Zealand Dioceses.

Within the Diocese of Taranaki are two archdeaconries, Paraninihi and Waitotara. The Paraninihi Archdeaconry covers the New Plymouth urban parishes, Okato (part of the Cooperating Parish of Oakura/Okato south of New Plymouth, in conjunction with Methodists), and the North Taranaki Ministry region. The Waitotara Archdeaconry contains both the Central Taranaki Ministry Region or cluster, and the Southern Taranaki Ministry Region, or cluster.

The Northern cluster originally comprised three parishes but now there are six; the initial three Northern parishes (Waitara, Inglewood and urban Bellblock), and now two city parishes (Fitzroy and West New Plymouth) and Okato, south of the city.

Figure 1. Map of Taranaki showing Archdeaconries and Regional Cluster areas
(Anglican Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki)
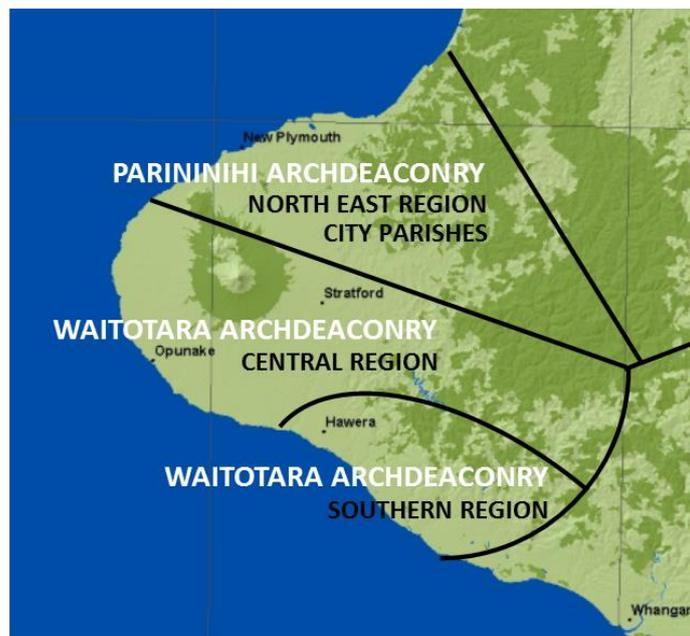
The rural parishes function in various configurations. In the North region there is the Parish of St Andrew in Inglewood, and the Parish of St John the Baptist, serving Waitara and surrounds, including Urenui and Tikorangi to the north. Sunday attendances in Waitara and Inglewood may be up to 25, and attendance is smaller at the once a month services in Urenui and Tikorangi.

In Central Taranaki, the Parish of Holy Trinity, serving Stratford and surrounds, is a Local Ecumenical Project (LEP) formed in conjunction with the Methodist church and operating from the Anglican church building. The Parish District of All Saints, Eltham with Saint Mark's, Kaponga, is also an LEP of combined Anglican and

Methodist congregations, with the Anglican St Mark's church building having been sold (and relocated from Kaponga). The Parish District of St Cuthbert's, Manaia, is a Cooperating Parish - again with the Methodists, each congregation with its own building - while the Parish District of St Barnabas in Opunake remains solely Anglican at this time.

In Southern Taranaki there are three Ministry Units: Hawera - combining Anglican and Methodist, each with their own church building; Patea - a Cooperating Anglican and Methodist parish, each denomination with its own church building: and the third for the Waverley-Waitotara area..

2.2.1 The Bishop's Commission for the Future

These configurations have partly been the outcome of work undertaken by the Bishop's Commission for the Future. This group, convened in 2008, produced the report "Loving God, Loving Others: Sustainable Mission for the new Millennium, Framework for the Anglican Church in Taranaki 2007-2017" (supplied by Bishop's Action Foundation in private correspondence). This sizeable project consulted with parishes to consider resourcing and enabling people, supporting and enhancing mission and ministry, securing a sustainable financial future, and questions of asset management. The report summarizes responses from the parishes and provides recommendations in all areas. The vision provided by Bishop Philip is realistic about the challenges being faced, affirms the local church as the primary vehicle for mission, and encourages the sharing of resources and forming of partnerships. The report is described as providing focus and framework for first steps towards fulfilling the mission of the Church in the decade 2007-2017.

The formation of the regional clusters was one outcome, grouping parishes to ensure all had the support of ordained priests who would work among the parishes in the cluster. There were other resources shared and joint projects undertaken, such as the refurbishment of the vicarage in Eltham as a residence for the regional dean for that cluster and a hub of hospitality.

The clusters have been reconfigured during the years. Clusters now include more parishes as the number of ordained priests has reduced, leaving more parishes without stipended ministers, and in need of the regional support. More interdenominational partnerships have been created, either by the merging of congregations, or by Anglican oversight being offered to small Presbyterian or Methodist congregations.

There has been some rationalization of church property, acknowledged in the Commission's report as a difficult task to consider or undertake. In some cases this has been so, as with the Northern cluster's sale of the Motunui Church. In other cases it has been easier and positive, with the moving of property into community hands by gifting or agreement, as with the little churches at Alton and Uruti. These churches are still consecrated but as they are now in caring local hands the parishes have been relieved of the costs of care and maintenance.

These changes and others (such as the establishment of a central accounts system) evidence the influence of the Commission in setting goals and direction, prompting action and implementation. In 2014, parishioners from the twelve parishes in the clusters as they were at the time (three in the North East, four in Central, five in Southern) were surveyed regarding their experience of the cluster model. The results from 95 returned questionnaires showed a general appreciation of the advantages of the model. Benefits noted included the increased financial security and, overwhelmingly, the support of the regional deans who were regarded very positively. Concerns persisted, however, most commonly: that regional deans carried intense workloads, that there was little sign of younger people being attracted to the church, that congregations continued to dwindle, and that plans for the longer term were no clearer.

The summaries of the reviews for the regions convey this:

> In summary, the survey results show positive interest on the whole for the regional model, but with the caution that unless the regional model can genuinely attract younger generations then ultimately it will not succeed in creating sustainable ministry into the future, but will simply have delayed the inevitable (North-Eastern Cluster, as it was called in 2014).

> It seems that the region has got its house in order in terms of assets, finances and even key people, but there is still lots of work to do to ensure these successes continue to translate into meaningful achievements (Central Cluster).

> [...] There is not yet evidence of new and younger families wanting to engage with the church. If this does not change over time the region will once again begin to struggle as people's energy dwindles (Central Cluster).

> [...] the regional model has been successful in enhancing parish life for the present, but is not making progress in terms of the longer-term sustainability of mission within the region (Southern Cluster).

The work of the Commission appeared to have created considerable positive change, but at the time (2014) was perceived as having little impact on the challenges of aging, dwindling congregations, and shrinking capacity for community engagement. The same concerns were evident in 2017 at the commencement of this study. Questions posed between BAF CEO Simon Cayley

and myself following discussion by diocesan senior staff included, "How do we start spending more time on the future model and less on maintenance (while still providing sufficient maintenance to see out what is now)?" and, "How do we avoid the circle of returning to a default position, as so often happens?"

This research project is an endeavour to revisit these questions, look again at what is being done and ways to move ahead with positivity - including the possibility of the more radical changes that may be needed in the next phase of church and community life.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Search Terms, Strategy and Sources

The original topic for the study was broad: "The potential of the church to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community". To find a footing in this, the initial search was also broad, beginning with the Google Scholar database and combinations of the search terms "church", "rural" and "community". The term "New Zealand" became an important addition, to filter for those items immediately related to this country. Results of these early searches included several New Zealand based theses or dissertations – by Crudge (2013), Ennor (2007), Peterson (2015), Prebble (2012) and Muzondiwa (2013), and a book already known to me titled *God of the Whenua: Rural Ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Bennett, 2013)*.* A further thesis, by Suter (2014) exploring *The Future of the Uniting Church of Australia* also came to early attention, as did a report on rural church ministry in the United Kingdom, *Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church* (2015).

These early sources provided a platform for building an initial picture of the "environment" of this topic, and also provided invaluable reference lists. The lists enabled identification of seminal or influential authors and their work, often referenced in multiple subsequent works, or pointed to other relevant studies of value. This snowball approach, while less systematic, was especially helpful for locating core material by key researchers both in New Zealand, for example Ward (2003, 2005, 2006, 2013, 2016) and overseas, for example Murray (2004, 2009) and Davie (1994, 2013). The substantial work of such authors, frequently in book form, has been mostly accessed in electronic formats, such as Kindle or Google Play Books.

Other sources were journal articles and reports, primarily accessed through the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) Library, employing the Library search engine or searching within specific e-journals, such as *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice.* The website www.nzresearch.org.nz provided material specifically New Zealand in origin, including theses by Derbyshire (2008, 2013) detailing aspects of the history of Anglicanism in this country.

The early searches also provided connection to Rural Ministry on the website of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Rural Network News, a nationwide ecumenical newsletter published 2-3 times a year. These newsletters introduced me to the International Rural Churches Association (IRCA), and to Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ). Attending conferences held by these groups in 2015 (UCANZ "Big Ideas for Smaller Churches", in Lower Hutt) and 2016 (The 9th Trans-Tasman Ecumenical Rural Consultation, in

Masterton), provided early immersion in the topic, and the opportunity to meet New Zealand academics in the field, James Veitch, Garth Cant and Robyn McPhail. Among their other publications, Cant and McPhail are, together or separately, frequent authors or editors of reports arising from the IRCA conferences or similar national or trans-Tasman events. Early reports (Cant & McKay, 1989; McPhail & Cant, 1987; Wilson & Waine,1985) were published by the Rural Ministry Unit of Canterbury University, Christchurch, which no longer appears to be in operation. The reports from early conferences through to the most recent include papers presented on the themes of challenge and change in rural ministry.

The literature reviewed is drawn from work undertaken in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand, with an emphasis on New Zealand. The majority of the work included in this review was published in the 15 years from the year 2000 onward. Exceptions include the crucial earlier work of British author Grace Davie (1990,1994) on "Believing without Belonging", and American researcher Nancy Ammerman (1997), "Congregation and Community". Sources include research reports, literature reviews, conference proceedings, theses and books. Some authors are consistently referenced in other works, Grace Davie being one of those, and in New Zealand, Kevin Ward. The methods of research, which ideally would be given more analysis than it has been possible to include here, are both quantitative and qualitative in approach, including case studies, focus groups and surveys.

The literature is drawn from a variety of disciplines but falls primarily into those of sociology and history of religion. The New Zealand works mostly arise from schools of religion, history or theology at New Zealand universities. The original attempt to focus on church in rural New Zealand was challenged by the scarcity of material, making the items that were found invaluable. Beyond these, most available work focuses on urban church or church generally, or is based in rural domains much different from rural New Zealand and society, such as the American Midwest, or the English countryside. Some of these sources are included, if they have been found to be more widely relevant. Significant work from Australia, regarding the Uniting Church of Australia in rural areas can be related to in New Zealand, and the work of organizations that focus on rural ministry, notably the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) in the UK, or the International Rural Churches Association (IRCA) have wide relevance.

Of particular note, the work by Ammerman (1997) is a detailed study of 23 parishes in nine communities across the United States, exploring the range of congregational responses to a range of changes in their communities. Although the focus is largely urban, the analogy of changing ecologies, in which organisms

thrive, adapt or die, is universal. So too is the sociological analysis of congregation addressed through themes of resources, structures of authority and culture.

Not included in this section is analysis of available data drawn from the New Zealand Census, the New Zealand Church Life Survey or other sources of statistical material. Analysis of this data has been undertaken by numerous studies which highlight and discuss trends, and provide the explanation of the terms and theories that arise from and accompany the data, such as identification, affiliation and attendance; and secularism, pluralism, and diversification (Crothers, 2005; Hoverd, 2008; Hoverd, Atkinson, & Sibley, 2012; Hoverd & Sibley, 2010; N. V. Smith, 2013; Troughton, Bulbulia, & Sibley, 2014; Vaccarino, Kavan, & Gendall, 2011; Ward, 2003, 2006, 2016).

The initial section of this chapter is a review of literature discussing the changes, challenges and paradigms affecting the church today, in the more global sense. This includes some explanations for the changes, and some impacts (Irwin, 2014; Murray, 2004, 2009) and includes New Zealand studies (Bennett, 2013, 2015; Crudge, 2013; Ennor, 2007; Jamieson, 2006; Muzondiwa, 2013; Peterson, 2015; Prebble, 2012; Randerson, 2010; Ward, 2013; 2013a).The work of Suter (2014), on scenario planning, is introduced in this section.

Following sections briefly review literature concerning change and resistance to innovation, drawing on work relating to organizations more generally, including Hasenfeld (1992) and Jaskyte and Dressler (2005); and concepts of rural community, including studies by Liepins (2000a, 2000b).

3.2 The Church

This research was initiated because of the situation in which the church finds itself - especially the rural church, and certainly as illustrated by Anglican parishes in rural Taranaki. Congregations are ageing and reducing in size. The question of "the potential of the church to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community" quickly raises the questions of whether the church can *survive* in order to contribute, and how might this be accomplished. There are many activities, programmes, initiatives and innovative ideas for contribution – some already proving their success, others undoubtedly worth implementing. The work of Randerson (2010), includes outlines of around 130 mission activities being successfully undertaken by Anglican parishes around New Zealand, and some in Australia. In another New Zealand based study, Prebble (2012) presents a model of Action Research, engaging parishes in exploring their potential for missional activity in their communities. These works show the ideas are there, many well established, but the challenge is capacity. If plans are made, will there be the

people on hand and able to fulfil the plans for action, for contribution? Or is the potential for this shrinking, or even gone?

Data aside, the actuality of rural parish experience in Taranaki suggests that the current church decline may eventually be terminal, at least in existing forms. Congregations are becoming smaller, there are fewer services and some church buildings are subject to "rationalization": sold or gifted out of church hands. The Uniting Church of Australia in rural Western Australia is facing this same decline. In 2015 the parishes in Western Australia were surveyed. Each was asked whether they would describe their parish as "transforming, stable, or palliative"; a no-denying-it way to face the realities. With each response an appropriate plan could be made with that parish (R. Vertigan, personal communication, August 5 2016). Derbyshire (2013) likens this approach to the medical practice of triage, assessing and assigning available resources according to the most likely outcome of survival or inevitable demise. The use of terms such as "triage" or "palliative" in relation to the church would have been beyond comprehension just decades ago.

3.2.1 Change and Decline

Christianity came to New Zealand with the missionaries. First came Samuel Marsden for the Anglican Church Missionary Society in 1814, followed by Samuel Leigh of the Wesleyan Missionary Society (Methodist) in 1822, and later by François Pompallier arriving to lead Roman Catholic mission in 1838. From these early beginnings as missionary church, the churches developed to become a formative and central influence in New Zealand society. Lineham (2017) examines this influence in *Sunday Best: How the Church Shaped New Zealand and New Zealand Shaped the Church*, proposing that understanding the culture of religion provides insight to understanding New Zealand culture and society overall, so integral has it been to life in this country.

The literature is extensive on the subject of change and decline (although not necessarily in the area of rural church). Crudge (2013) in his chapter on "Cultural Change and the Decline of the Church" describes the church in New Zealand as "having been on life support with an ever decreasing power supply since the 1960s" (p.112). The explanations for this are well documented, and while the decline in fact started sooner, the change became significant in the mid-sixties. Ward (2013) suggests the critical year appeared to be 1963, when bible class attendances for Presbyterians (Veitch, 1990) and confirmation numbers for Anglicans (Derbyshire, 2013) began to decline. The reasons were multiple and varied, some as prosaic as the introduction of television which proved to be an attractive competitor for discretionary time. Brown (2010) describes "the religious crisis of the 1960s" plunging organized Christianity "into a sustained rapid decline

in attendance, practice and identity" (p. 479), with decreasing church numbers having the effect of separating church from popular culture. Ward (2006) writes of the cohort of baby boomers - the teenagers and young adults of the 1960s - exiting the church in large numbers and not returning. Although it was expected they would return once married with children, most did not. This broke a cycle of children being socialized into the church through their families, or even more specifically, a breakdown in the traditional transmission of religion from mother to child, a hypothesis Troughton (2006) suggests is worth investigating further in New Zealand. The relative absence of young adults with children has affected church membership numbers ever since. Voas and Watt (2014), using data from major British studies, in particular the British Social Attitudes survey from 1983 onwards, conclude similarly: that "the large decline in attendance has not happened because many adults have stopped going to church. The decline has happened because more and more adults never started attending in the first place" (p. 9).

The effect of this is that mainline Protestant churches are left with a dwindling and aging membership, and a church that might be described as in its autumn years.

3.2.2 Mechanisms of Decline

For a time, the most commonly held understanding of the phenomenon of decline was provided by a theory of secularization. Ward (2013) explains the term "secular" as referring to those aspects of life not controlled by religious institutions or beliefs, and "secularization" as the process in which this occurs, as the control of the religious is rejected. Brown (2010) in *Religion and Society* with a focus on Britain, describes a shift in the understanding of secularization during the years from 1900 to 2000. In 1900 Britain was most generally considered a Christian nation, and secularization referred mainly to the move by the state to take over previously religious property and functions such as control of charities, and influence on social policy. By 2000, with this disestablishment mostly complete, secularization was more generally used to refer to the change in people's beliefs. By then Britain was presumed by most to be largely secular - to have lost its Christian faith, practice and culture - in that the understanding of Christian belief had lessened, and "religion occupied a smaller and smaller space in people's lives, thoughts and understanding of their own identity" (Brown, 2010, p. 20). It is not only church attendance records that appear to demonstrate this; it is also evident in behavioural changes such as nightly prayers, the saying of grace before meals, the setting aside of Sunday for church and family activities (such as Sunday lunch together), and the ways in which the religious holidays of Easter and Christmas are observed – traditionally as events of major significance in the Christian calendar, but now more as family occasions for holidays and gift giving. Taken to its extreme as an ongoing process, this secularization would lead to the eventual

disappearance of religion altogether. For a time this scenario was widely accepted by sociologists and historians as most likely to be the case. Although it has been challenged now, the observations of the time strongly supported this likelihood.

The social change of the 1960s provide the most noticeable turning point, with various commentators even pinpointing specific years, for what was described as "the rupture" by McLeod in *The Religious Crisis of the 1960's* (2007; cited by Brown, 2010), and by Brown himself as a sudden and shocking event. Historian Adrian Hastings (1986, cited by Brown, 2010) describes the early sixties with the word "permissive" in regard to sex, art and the whole world of social and intellectual life, with influences as diverse as Marxism and the Beatles, but characterized overall by a decline in any sort of church involvement by ordinary people. In Brown's view, the role of ordinary people in bringing about such change may define it as a revolution (Brown, 2010).

Central to this was "a rebellion by the young against the values, conventions and authorities of the older generation" (Ward 2013, p.18). Young people at the time were in a different and certainly more affluent world compared to the war era from which their parents had just emerged, with its demands for austerity, discipline, sacrifice, common purpose and united action. Permissiveness and individualism, still to be discussed, may in part have been the reaction to these now apparently out-moded approaches to life, for which there was little imperative post-war. Neither was there the same need, in the better times of the post-war decades, for the strength, solidarity and solace that the church had provided through the extremes, the "threats and terrors" (Suter, 2014, p.130), of wartime. With some obliviousness to what had been, as well as some rejection of it (as shown in the anti-war protests of the 1970s), the baby boomers began to set another path - and for many it did not involve attending church.

This was the first generation to go to university in large numbers, which contributed in several ways to declining church attendance. For many, going to university meant leaving home at a relatively young age and living elsewhere, away from family and the family traditions of church attendance. Historians and sociologists in the 19th century expounded on belief being best sustained when it is the norm, and uncontested (Ward, 2013). If belief is supported when it is the single worldview amongst a group of people, then it may be challenged in the mind-expanding melting pot of university, removed from family influence. As well, the findings of Vaccarino and associates (2011) in their New Zealand study include that the decline in religious belief seems greatest in areas of belief that science contradicts. They suggest that education itself may be an underestimated factor in secularization in New Zealand, that secularization grows with increasing access to

tertiary education. An analysis of New Zealand data by Smith (2013) suggested this had been the case originally, but that over the three decades studied the influence had faded by 2008.

Furthermore, many of this generation did not return home after completing their study but followed their new paths of career or overseas experience to eventual homes away from the family base, and from the church of their upbringing. This distance, between adult home and church of upbringing, has been shown to be a factor with high correlation to whether or not they remained in the church in which they were raised (Ward, 2013 p. 24). The span of time before creating a family home of one's own also lengthened. The interlude between an individual's confirmation and the birth of a first child had commonly been the time when young people might leave the church for a while but could be expected to return to marry and raise their children in their faith. This period before marriage became more extended, doubling in length to over 15 years, in large part due to the new contraception technologies (Ward, 2013, p 26). This gave other influences more time to impact, and more time for connections to loosen. Church attendance was no longer a habit. Many of these baby boomers did not return, and subsequently their children and grandchildren did not become church goers. Congregation numbers were no longer being revitalized by the family unit and children being raised within the church. The increasing divorce rate, couples making the decision to delay having children or to remain childless, and more individuals remaining single or raising children alone were all trends away from the nuclear family focus of traditional church life (Ward, 2013, p. 26).

3.2.3 Changes in Societal Values

Ward (2013) summarizes five values inherent in these societal shifts that have had such an immense impact on the church. Clearly in contrast to those embraced by the war time generation, these identified values are individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism and anti-institutionalism (p.19).

Individualism emphasises our personal needs, our feelings and our own advancement of ambition. This is an emphasis on self that can result in faith without community; a distinction between personal spirituality and organized religion, a belief that churchgoing is optional and not necessary to sustain faith (Bellah and associates, cited by Ward, 2013). There may be less connection to denominational and parish activity, more autonomy, with less acknowledgement of external religious authority. A survey of 1027 New Zealanders by Vaccarino, Kavan and Gendall (2011) reflected this, with 45.2% saying they had their own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services.

Privatism refers to living one's life less in public and more in private, or within the family. In regard to religion this is reflected more in privately held beliefs than in acts of public worship; it is more individual than institutional. An effect of this is the weakening of the collective purposes that undergirded the organized church, a shift from being committed to the church for the sake of the organization, to being involved for personal benefit.

Pluralism refers to the changing mix of peoples, cultures, lifestyles and religions that, post-war, created new ethnic and religious landscapes and a multiplicity of options. If a common worldview helps to maintain beliefs, then in a time when Christian values and beliefs were held by the great majority, most would continue to hold those beliefs. In a pluralistic society that is increasingly diverse, alternate worldviews are readily available giving options, and also reducing the social cost of making other choices.

Relativism is an attitude than enables one to live comfortably amidst this diversity. An attitude of "you can believe (do, be) whatever you like as long as it doesn't hurt me" (Ward, 2013) enables acceptance, tolerance and lessening of judgement as there is no longer one all prevailing truth or right or wrong. In the New Zealand study by Vaccarino et al. (2011) this tolerance was evident. 79.2% indicated they believed there to be basic truth in many religions, and 73.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that we must respect all religions. Ward (2013) points out this attitude of relativism is a positive social ethic that at the same time may reduce the drive of the church to evangelistic activities.

Anti-institutionalism is a move away from belonging. When an institution no longer appears to be serving individual needs, people no longer feel a need to belong to or contribute to the institution, a phenomenon that has impacted widely across many aspects of voluntary involvements including sport (Ward, 2013, pp 23-28), not only the religious (Lineham, 2017, p. 383).

3.2.4 Believing without Belonging?

"Believing without belonging" is a concept developed in response to the impact of these changing values, and the evidence of the data that, while rates of attendance at church are dropping, affiliation rates as shown by census statistics have reduced less markedly. As well, profession of belief, as shown by Values and Attitudes studies, has changed rather than significantly dropped. Davie (1990) examined membership figures for religious institutions and statistics relating to patterns of religious belief in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s. reporting that believing was declining at a slower rate than belonging. This was resulting in an imbalance between the two variables, and what might be called the "implicit religion" of the

British people, also variously termed residual, folk, common, or popular religion, or in fact, superstition (Winter & Short, 1993). The large proportion of the population who continue to believe but do not belong to the church in any meaningful sense (other than possibly turning to it at life's milestones) are referred to in Davie's discussion as the inactive religious majority, contrasting with the actively religious minority. Davie's analysis is essentially British and not easily generalized but raises some more universally relevant questions, including if there is a minimum size beyond which the active minority is no longer effective in society, and what factors, apart from size, might determine this effectiveness (This question is picked up by Peterson (2015), in a New Zealand study of small parishes and their leadership). This analysis supports a move away from an all-encompassing theory of secularization, to the understandings which have since gained in acceptance, of pluralism, diversification and spirituality.

"I'm a Believer – but I'll be Damned if I'm Religious", (Rosen, 2009), is a report on similar findings from data in Denmark, where again the majority indicate they are willing to believe or to identify as religious to greater or lesser extent, but overwhelmingly do not participate in services or other religious events. Using other words for "believing without belonging", this report takes its title from a quote from a member of a focus group.

Winter and Short (1993) examined Davie's conclusions in a further study in rural England, concluding it is a mistake to use church attendance, church membership or religious belief in isolation to define degrees of religiosity in a population. Using a different and more inclusive description of belonging they discovered a surprisingly low level of secularization, in that many respondents in their study did consider themselves to "belong" even if not actively engaging in church activities. The belonging was often bedded in the traditions of the church and a person's upbringing within it, the "religion-as-heritage" identified by Rosen (2009). Their findings suggested that in the setting of their study at the time, believing *and* belonging was a more accurate catch phrase than believing without belonging. Bringing this study to the New Zealand context Vaccarino and associates (2011) chose to define secularization in its narrow sense of a decline in adherence to religious institutions, not in the broader sense of a decline in religiosity. With this definition they conclude firmly than New Zealand is becoming more secularized, in that most participants in their study reported low levels of active involvement in religion. They also reported evidence that New Zealanders are becoming less religious – the proportion who said they had no religion increased from 29% among those surveyed in 1991 to 40% in 2008 (Vaccarino et al., 2011, p. 93), which points to secularization in the broader sense also. However, although fewer are saying they believe in God, the proportion who believe in a higher power did not change.

3.2.5 Denominationalism.

Troughton and associates (2014) report from an analysis of The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (2012) that there is insight to be gained from the significant numbers identifying as Christian but without the further definition of a denomination, a group they have termed Christian (No Further Definition) or Christian NFD. The study shows that those in this group indicate a greater strength of Christian affiliation, and more consistency in affiliation across the age range, than those identifying with mainline denominations.

The authors suggest that the growing numerical strength of this group "hints at the dawning of a post-denominational age - one in which, for many people, commitment to a Christian faith is more significant, and a more powerful indicator of religious commitment, than that which comes through denominational identity" (Troughton et. al. 2014, p33).

This is supported in a New Zealand based study leave report by McPhail (2014), following attendance at the 2014 Conference of the International Rural Churches Association (IRCA) in Malawi. The author points out that many rural churches are already multi-denominational, having become structured as Co-operative Ventures, Cooperating Parishes or Union Parishes. Or more simply, they may be *the* church or only church in the local community, drawing people from different denominations into the common ground of being Christian. Here denominationalism may be seen as irrelevant or even a problem, and is being questioned (McPhail, 2014), in line with the findings of Troughton and associates.

 Challenges to denominational loyalties were evident earlier, in the 1960's. Coinciding with the questioning of that time was the increasing impact of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement in New Zealand. There were two effects – the founding or strengthening of Pentecostal churches, such as the Assembly of God; and charismatic influence within mainstream churches. By late 1970s this influence was considerable, and by the 1980s was strongly represented by many parishes throughout the country (Ward, 2013), noticeably in the Anglican, Presbyterian and particularly Baptist churches. A revitalization occurred in many churches that adopted charismatic style worship, and for many growth was significant through to the 1990s. Important to note, this was largely growth through transfer, people moving from one church, congregation or denomination to another, not through an overall growth in number of church attendees. Not surprising then that since the 1990s, the impact has declined. The movement which met needs within the Baby Boomer generation of that time appears less relevant to those that have followed, and these congregations, like others, are generally aging and diminishing (Ward, 2013).

Going against this trend of decline in Pentecostalism since the 1990's, the strongly Pentecostal Destiny Church was formed in 2002 in Rotorua, New Zealand, and grew rapidly over the next decade, as described by Lineham (2013) in the book *Destiny: The Life and Times of a Self-Made Apostle*. The success may lie in the conservative, authoritarian approach of Destiny's founder, Brian Tamaki, demanding commitment from the followers of this church. This is an element identified as missing in today's mainstream churches, thereby "allowing" people to drift away. However, writing in 2013, Lineham considers there is evidence now that the Destiny Church is losing authority, no longer gaining it, and that "clear heads, not dramatic dreams, are needed to shape a Christian community if it is to survive a long siege from its secular critics" (Lineham, 2013. Kindle Locations 2200-2203). Jamieson (2003, 2006) also considers the shape of church into the future, in his New Zealand study of people leaving charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal churches and forming post-church groups, to support each other in on-going spiritual journey. He describes these groups as both emergent - drawing on the "mother'" church from which they have come, and the "father" of current societal milieu - and liminal, as they explore ways to exist in times of change and transformation, the possibly churchless faith of the future.

Whether the change will be towards a non-denominational future, a churchless future (Jamieson, 2006; Ward, 2003) or a secular one, this is clearly a time of ongoing transition in the life of the church.

3.2.6 Transition and Liminality

The culture and times of the 1960's and 70's can be seen to have triggered an exodus that has resulted in subsequent persistent decline which by its nature and with the passing years has become transgenerational. Each generation is becoming less religious, in an institutional sense at least, than the one before. Apart from the initial shock of the sixties (Brown, 2010), the effects have been gradual, the impacts and consequences also only gradually discerned. The church will not disappear overnight, or even at all, but can be seen as in transition from its previously central place in society to a more marginal position, from which place it faces questions of survival and an unknown future.

The concept of liminality provides an interpretation or image of this phase in the bigger picture. Limina is the Latin word for threshold or, as Wolfelt (2009) describes this, the space betwixt and between, an inherently uncomfortable place to be. Murray (2004) writes of liminality as "a transition between the familiar and the unknown, an unsettling process creating anxiety and vulnerability, where reluctance to abandon past securities jeopardises future prospects" (Murray, 2004, p. 304). Metaphorically, the liminal threshold is a place of uncertainty. Stepping

through offers opportunities for new discoveries, development and communal maturing but simultaneously it is an uncertain and threatening time. Jamieson (2006) refers to confusing times of fundamental change in which what was once stable and predictable is increasingly fragile and unpredictable (p 76), and points to the need to grasp what it is to be liminal, on the threshold of the new. The liminal space is likened by Wolfelt (2009) to being in wilderness, such as those grieving the loss of a loved one may experience, where the griever's worldview, their set of beliefs about how the world functions and the place they hold within it, comes into question. Ennor (2007) also refers to this wilderness, or chaos, as the church goes through change. There is no guide to the wilderness experience of grief, nor for that of the church in its liminal space.

The question becomes then how to live in these uncertain times, how to adapt and survive in the wilderness, and prepare for the future. Roof (1998), writing already twenty years ago, provides a view, in effect of the position of the church in liminality, preparing to step forward, while honouring the best of what has been.

> My own view is [that] faith communities should celebrate the life shared by their respective members yet keep the outer boundaries permeable; they should remember their pasts but engage the culture around them and listen always to the spiritual cries of the world; they should claim their heritage but not blind themselves to the wisdom of other traditions. In so doing, these communities may discover- perhaps to their own surprise - that fresh, unanticipated insights may yet come their way (p223).

This may be an insightful, informed and encouraging exhortation, but the question of what to do in practical terms is not answered by this. It could engender the type of response quoted here from a youth pastor in Vancouver, Washington:

> I was tired. […] I was tired of reading books by experts that framed the problem but offered no solutions beyond theological generalities, slight adjustments to existing techniques or ideas feasible only for wealthy congregations (Overton, 2017)

The same challenges regarding practical ways forward may be pertinent too for small rural parishes, as the next two New Zealand based studies suggest (Prebble, 2012; Randerson, 2010)

3.2.7 Missional Viability

In reflecting on the challenges faced by small rural parishes in particular, an illustration emerges from a study conducted by Bishop Richard Randerson in 2009, with a survey of Anglican parishes in New Zealand. The survey included asking for a snapshot of creative ministry projects. The 126 project outlines received are recorded in *Engagement 21: A Wake-Up Call to the 21st Century Church in*

Mission (Randerson, 2010). They range widely across the five elements of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) statement of the Mission of the Church (1986, amended in 1990). These five elements cover worship and proclamation, social service and social justice, and environmental concerns. The projects submitted, which include contributions from parish, diocesan and national levels, also some from Australia, are evidence of innovative and in some cases highly effective implementation of the Statement of Mission. A scan of this list does however highlight that very few responses came from rural churches, and of the less than 10 that can be identified as New Zealand rural, several came from just two parishes. This may reflect the challenge that rural parishes find it to be creative or innovative at this time in the life of the church, at their place.

An insight into this may be found in another New Zealand study, *"Invigorating the Church for Mission. Action Research with Local Parishes"* by Prebble (2012). This project was conducted with members of five Anglican parishes who wanted to explore how they could connect more effectively with their neighbouring communities. An outcome of this work, in which spirituality was emphasized as a dimension of the research process, was the advocating of Missional Viability as the recommended organising principle for local parishes. The suggestion is that this be investigated first before other indicators of wellbeing such as financial viability, or growth.

> If a parish is missionally viable its members can commit to reflect more adequately the Christian principles from which the church as a whole takes its direction. Three components of missional viability were identified:
> a. A functional relationship with an observable community of people outside of its worshipping members
> b. A well-developed (or rediscovered) sense of the congregation's mission,
> c. A commitment to a deepening of spirituality among its members and others with whom they have contact (Prebble, 2012, p. iii).

The suggested premise is that a church that is missionally viable or able to become so is more likely to have capacity for financial viability or growth, while if not missionally viable or likely to become so the other questions have little point. Prebble considers it more important for parishes to work on their ability to take part in mission than on how to pay the bills as the second will follow the first, but not necessarily the other way round. Ammerman (1997) concurs, having observed that growth in congregational resources is more often a result of response to a changed environment, than a predictor to the response (p. 324).

The process of action research used with the five parishes was appreciated, and at the least was thought provoking for them all. Some new mission initiatives emerged very successfully, services to both elderly and the very young. Other existing activities were enriched with worship opportunities. In one parish a new

activity was initiated but was difficult to sustain. For the remaining two parishes the conclusion was that they were not missionally viable, at that time anyway. Of pertinence to this current study is that these two parishes were the smallest of those that Prebble worked with and one was rural. In the rural parish it was difficult to attract even a working committee or the enthusiasm of the vestry. Feedback from this rural parish about the impediments to their missional viability included that the parish was "very much rural […] with parishioners scattered all over the place", most of them elderly and those described as middle aged being very busy with work commitments. These are common themes for rural parishes and underline the question of "who will do it", when considering contribution to community.

Also challenging is the concept of missional church. American authors Roxburgh and Boren (2009) have titled their book "Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, and How to become one", and have a chapter named "Just Give Me a Definition' from which, deliberately, no definition emerges. In effect they suggest the answer is that missional may mean many things. It will differ from parish to parish and be discovered in a process engaged in by the parish, as the people explore what is important to them, their congregation and their community. Becoming missional appears first to be an invitation to reflect.

Accordingly, Roxburgh and Boren (2009) take time to develop for the reader an understanding of what it is for a church to be missional, to become mission agencies in their neighbourhoods and communities. They stress also that it takes time for a congregation to develop true understanding of being missional and to become such. Five to six years is one suggested time frame, with a process to step through, from awareness to understanding, to evaluation, experimentation and eventual commitment. At each stage there is new learning, and a moving back and forth between the levels. This is a process that requires time, and people, and as such may not be practical for resource strapped parishes, but the importance of work at individual parish level fits with the work of Prebble (2012), including espousing "a freer, more flexible way of being, and a greater willingness to be influenced by the communities around them" (p126).

3.2.8 The church is declining – and "it's not your fault"

As described by Prebble (2012), not all parishes will prove to have missional viability, and their futures may be uncertain.

In her book "*Toward the Better Country: Church Closure and Resurrection"* Gail Irwin (2014) describes a long path towards the closure of the mid-western church of which she was the minister, and the pain she endured in wondering what she

had done wrong, and how come she couldn't save her church. In time her message to herself and others became

> As you navigate your concerns about your church's survival, you need to know that you are not alone, your church's decline is not your fault, and your church is not a "failure." The decline of your church is part of a larger cultural shift that is changing the place of the church in society. My church and yours are just small dots on that landscape (Irwin, 2014, p. 6).

Murray (2004, 2009) provides the bigger context to this, an explanation of that very large landscape, in the concepts of Christendom and post-Christendom.

Christendom can be seen historically as the era between the fourth and twentieth centuries, and geographically as anywhere where almost everyone was at least nominally Christian. A useful description and understanding is as "a civilization shaped primarily by the story, language, symbols and rhythms of Christianity" (Murray, 2009, p. 189).

Murray continues that Christendom was also a political arrangement between church and state, providing mutual support and legitimation. As well it was "an ideology, a mind-set, a way of thinking about God's activity in the world" (Murray, 2009, p. 189).

The shift from Christendom to post-Christendom in Western societies is marked by a number of transitions. These include a move from the centre to the margins – the Christian story was central to our society but is now marginal. Christians were a majority, often overwhelmingly, and comfortable in a society shaped by their story. They are now a minority. Beyond that minority the Christian story may be unknown or of little relevance to many. There are shifts from privilege to plurality, control to witness. The emphasis has moved from maintenance of the assumed and long held status quo, to mission in a contested environment. Another transitional signpost is the move from institutional mode to once again becoming a Christian movement (Murray, 2009). Crudge (2011) provides the simple summary to this, that for the church "something is different now" (p.30).

Suter (2014) devotes a section of his doctoral dissertation to the work of Reverend Doctor John Bodycomb (1986) *A Matter of Life and Death: the Future of Australia's Churches.* Bodycomb presents an analytical framework to assist a parish to reflect on where it is placed. He lists 16 factors to be examined, the first seven external and beyond the control of the church, the remainder internal. The seven external factors include demographic factors, location and neighbourhood, functional alternatives, prevailing values, threats and terrors (e.g. seeking divine assurance in

troubled times), church image and societal receptivity. These external factors sit with the nine internal factors, which include internal demography (which Suter suggests is a polite way to refer to the age of the members). One value of the framework Suter sees is that of helping some local churches to recognize that "no matter how hard they try, they may be doomed to failure" (Suter, 2014, p. 131). His example of this is relevant:

> [...] a strength of the Uniting Church [in Australia] in previous decades has been its loyal rural following. But with the decline in the rural population, then no matter how hard rural people may work at maintaining their congregation, there are simply not enough people to sustain a local ministry. This is no reflection of them or their dedication – it is simply that local demography is against them. (Suter, 2014, p. 131).

Suter also summarises Bodycomb's three possible scenarios for the future of the Uniting Church in Australia. These scenarios are entitled Gericon, Tenastas and Imaginex. Gericon is described in particularly blunt terms, as a church "geriatric and contracting ", "a church ageing, weakening, withering, shrinking, gasping". Tenastas is a church "holding on tenaciously to the status quo, making the most of what it is and has". Imaginex is a church "using its imagination to expand into the bazaar of ideas of life and living – determined to promote its system of meaning as aggressively and effectively as sanctified ingenuity allows" (Bodycomb (1986) cited by Suter, 2014, p 132).

Referred to earlier, the Uniting church in Australia in Western Australia is acknowledging the impacts being felt there in this post Christendom time, and has taken an approach that illustrates the work of Bodycomb. In 2014 the Rural Ministries Working Group sent a questionnaire to rural parishes as a step to planning for the future of the Uniting Church in rural areas of Western Australia. Questions were asked about the community, frequency of services, average number of attendees (increasing/steady/decreasing?), other regular activities, unique ministries and interaction with other denominations. A direct question was "Does your congregation have any plans for the future? Yes/ No", followed by, "What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time?" and in 10 years. "Tell us about the changes to your current situation/plans/strategies you will make to achieve this?" and "What assistance do you need to make plans for the future?" (Discussed with R. Vertigan in personal communication, August 5, 2016).

The summarized results of returned questionnaires showed 39 responses were received. Where a population figure was provided in the description of community, these ranged between 5000 and 420, (or were called "small" or "very small"), with one exception of a town of 30,000. That one town noted a congregation of 172 and was the only one to be increasing. Five others reported congregation size of 20 or

more, the other 33 congregations showed as less than 20, the lowest figure being three. The terms "elderly" and "aged" were recurring. Not all declared whether increasing, steady or declining, but 13 of those that did reported decreasing. Nineteen said no, they had no unique ministries. One said, "No. We are close to dead". Not all answered whether they have plans, for the future, but 12 respondents said no. What the vision for five and 10 years hence might be showed a range of responses – innovation and excitement from the largest town church, some spots of hope and possibility from others, a quiet realism or honest sorrow or despair from others - "We won't be here", "What we would like is far different to facing reality", "Realistically I can see us closing our doors", "I am 85 … ", "I am 72 with four congregations all requiring love and care and some in their 70-90s and wanting the churches for their funerals", "We are hitting the end of our human strength. Perhaps it is time for prayer to take over", "To age gracefully" and "Not sure", "Not sure", "Rural ministry is hard to predict". (R. Vertigan, personal communication, August 5, 2016).

In these answers these churches are at the very least acknowledging their lack of missional viability, in Prebble's terms, and facing uncertain or inevitable futures. Size or numbers alone do not have to mean the end is inevitable. Although the correlation of small size with closure is common, the self-assessed measure or feel for missional viability may be a better guide, or a consideration of viability *and* vitality as described by Irwin (2014, p. 59). In 2012 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand directed the investigation of the viability of all parishes with average attendance below 40, implying this as a criteria for the closing of churches not able to support paid ministry, i.e. not financially viable. Peterson (2015) asserts that this is not acceptable to the congregations themselves, which may be small yet *vibrant*. Size or viability as single measures disadvantage these groups, especially when these churches are in far flung rural communities and are a key part of their local community. Local discernment of vitality (Irwin, 2014), missional viability (Prebble, 2012) or vibrancy (Peterson, 2015) appears appropriate.

This approach of self-assessment was applied by the Uniting Church of Australia, WA Rural Ministry Working Group. Informed by the responses from their planning questionnaire, a letter was addressed a year later, in June 2015, to the rural parishes that were without ordained ministry in place. The letter outlined a plan, with a focus on transforming congregations to have a more mission focussed life, to become more community minded in all they do. Rather than apply this as a universal expectation, and in order to plan for best use of resources and support appropriate to each place, congregations were asked to decide which path they felt they were on, choosing between Transforming, Maintaining, or Palliative. (There is

a close similarity here to Bodycomb's scenarios of Imaginex, Tenastas and Gericon, though Palliative, while still realistically clear, is more gently described than Gericon, and carries a connotation of the care that is intended).

Summarised results of this consultation are not available, but the Working Group has continued according to its plan of customized support appropriate to the chosen or acknowledged position of each congregation. The support is the most intensive and regular for those parishes pursuing a path of transformation. The support is provided in person and by email, covering all aspects of their development from spiritual to technological. For those in maintenance mode there is less training and more advice and resourcing. For those self-identified as palliative, the emphasis is on resourcing for personal study, for discerning the future for their congregation and buildings, and provision of pastoral support for closure. There has been at least one closure. One of the smallest congregations responding to the 2014 survey, describing itself then as at a crossroad and, with a condemned building, not practical to continue, closed its doors in June 2016. The final service is reported in *"The Church has left the Building"* on the UCAWA website. It was described as a happy funeral for the 101-year-old building, and that while the church has closed its building, "that same church has gone to join with other churches in the town for the time being and so to be the church with them". The question is posed, is this a loss? Or to be seen as an encore, "with new life, new hope and new inspiration in a church made new for them." (UCAWA, 2016)

Responses in the literature vary regarding this question. Ennor (2007) examines this in the New Zealand setting of the small rural settlement of Sheffield, in Canterbury. His report on the impending closure of the local Presbyterian Church includes chapters on feelings, losses and opportunities. The Losses section is summarized in part by acknowledging that when a community has lost so much through depopulation and closures of businesses and services, the closure of the church is yet another loss (Ennor, 2007, p. 43). Ennor also provides examples from a previous Union parish of which he was minister in Nelson; an Anglican parish at Ross on the west coast of New Zealand; and Methodist and Anglican experiences in England. These suggest that when a church closes, or people are asked to join together in new configurations, some worshippers will be lost. Some people will go elsewhere to worship, possibly with another denomination, some will attend services less regularly, and some will drop out of church altogether. It appears that combining congregations may be an interim step, that meets some of the needs at the time, but transferring does not bolster the total numbers of those that worship, and it is likely overall membership of newly formed, joint congregations will in time also decline.

In other cases, achieving a "critical mass" in the joint congregation may turn the tide, with numbers that together make a sustainable, viable and vital congregation. Irwin (2014) suggests the spiritual energy released by the closure of a church may also result in revitalized energy among former members of a closed church who move on to new ministries. Ennor (2007) describes a model of change in which pain leads to possibility and ultimately, for the church, to finding a faithful and creative choice, a new way to be.

3.2.9 New Ways to Be

The current diversity of ways to be church provides evidence of many new ways already tried.

Bennett (2013) provides profiles of eight rural New Zealand parishes of various denominations, self-described, highlighting their adaptation to the theological, demographic, social and economic changes and challenges of the previous few years. In brief, the issues illustrated, and commonly shared, in these examples. include:

- facing and responding to the loss of full time professional ministry;
- developing lay ministry teams which may take various forms;
- ensuring local worship needs are met while also moving from a maintenance-of-worship mindset to a ministry of encouragement in the community;
- working cooperatively and ecumenically.

The examples illustrate viability, vitality and vibrancy, referred to earlier, resulting from some of the new ways of being. The parishes in Clive and Waimea are meeting new challenges as, perhaps surprisingly even to them, they are growing as new people come to their regions, which are rural but near towns. Others in areas of less urban influence are stable, and have vitality. There are also examples of some ongoing vulnerability. In at least one case, there is the possibility that despite the best of intentions the amalgamation of parishes is likely to be a limited solution, only a step on the way.

While some of the issues are demographic, as evidenced in these examples of both constriction and expansion in the regions, another major factor as Bennett discusses, is leadership. This is fully endorsed by Peterson (2015) in her work "*The Now and Future Church: small yet vibrant churches deserve inspiring leadership too".* This study includes the stories of four Presbyterian parishes led by Local Ministry Teams, three of these in rural areas. Common ongoing challenges are the load there may be on a few, and the instability as people come and, more often, go and have to be replaced from a shrinking pool.

The profiles and stories include some examples of considerable change, amalgamation or restructure. These take time and energy. The stories from Bennett (2013) include at least one considered by those involved as having too limited consultation, with ensuing hostility. Another involved much discussion and heart searching, supporting a positively regarded and relatively trouble-free transition. Others seem to have just happened, while in some cases the consultation has seemed endless and dispiriting. When restructure for a parish occurs, or when major change is undertaken at regional or Diocesan level, there is a need for strategy, at least in the hopes of minimizing the risk of the big step being only short lived in its effectiveness.

This is difficult when much is experimental, trying out new ideas. Bennett (2015) describes how in 2011 in the New Zealand Anglican Diocese of Waiapu, seven rural parishes were brought together after considerable consultation. Each developed a Local Shared Ministry team, and collectively the parishes were resourced by a three-person team of ordained clergy, who in turn had the support of a Regional Dean. The model was regional, no parish had a local vicar. The aim was to become missional church, to build connections and relationship with the local communities. Bennett's 2015 report provided an initial appraisal of this initiative after its first 18 months (from 35 surveys collected in 2012) and reported a strong mood of optimism. This was coupled with recognition of ongoing transition, which it proved to be. In 2015 the region was restructured again, returning to a structure of vicar led parishes, although differently configured than previously.

Suter (2014) cites an article by Lamont (1999) from Crosslight, a publication of the Uniting Church of Australia. In the article entitled "We've come full circle!", Lamont raises the concern of restructure fatigue - the enormous energy required at all levels of the church to adapt to continual structural change, and to hold the hope "that we have it right this time". Experimentation and willingness to try new things carries this risk, when every step forward takes investment and energy, but may be short lived. Some moves, such as amalgamation, may be recognized as only interim measures while larger issues of overall church decline remain the challenge. There may be an urge to try more radical approaches to address the bigger challenges, however radical moves may or may not be the answer either as seen. With the potential of the church to *survive* to contribute to rural community being at apparent risk, a consideration of very broad possibilities for the future may be a positive step.

3.3 Change

In considering the future, the ability to change, adapt or innovate is a key factor.

> "The capacity to innovate is clearly a critical determinant of the long-term survival of the organization" (Hasenfeld, 1992, p.231).

This is said by Hasenfeld in relation to organizations generally, and human service organizations in particular. Elaborating on this Mohr (1969) suggests the capacity to innovate is a function of

   a) the motivation to innovate
   b) the strength of the obstacles to innovation
   c) the resources available to overcome the obstacles

Hasenfeld (p. 231) explains these are affected by factors both external and internal to the organization. Motivation is largely determined by the values of the executive leadership and the level of proactivity in the stance taken toward the environment. Obstacles are affected by the receptivity or hostility of the environment toward the organization, and also by the flexibility or rigidity of its internal structure. Availability of resources is affected by the organization's ability to engage with and put to good use the resources (of all kinds) in the environment, and to reallocate resources internally. Ammerman (1997) applied this understanding to study of parishes.

3.3.1 Obstacles to innovation

a. Resistance

Galbraith (1982) provides a view regarding the impact of innovation on organizations.

> Because innovation is destructive to many established groups, it will be resisted. Also that innovation is contrary to operations and will be ignored. (Galbraith, 1982, p. 25)

One of the effects of this resistance, will be that good people are lost to the organization. In relation to church, this theme is explored by Packard (2015) in the book "*Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why People are Done with Church but not their Faith*". This American-based study draws on over 100 in-depth interviews with people who have left their church, but are still believers. This group is distinct from those who claim no religious affiliation - the Nones, or unchurched. Instead these are the dechurched, for whom Packard uses the term Dones - done with church - people who have been often deeply involved and devoted to their churches, and have made deliberate and difficult decisions to leave.

The authors explored the hypotheses that this leaving, assumed to be by choice, might be part of generational trends, or due to these people seeking more liberal

theology, or due to dismay at poor morality among church leaders, but these did not emerge as the causes. Instead they discovered a fit with the analogy of refugees, who have no choice but to go, and the reasons given were consistent. Broadly, these dechurched became refugees from what they experienced as the stifling institutionalism of the church as an organization.

> They feel they've been forced to leave a place they consider home because they feel a kind of spiritual persecution and it would be dangerous, spiritually, for them to remain. They tell stories of frustration, humiliation, judgment, embarrassment, and fear that caused them to leave the church. They remark time and again that they worked diligently for reform within the church but felt the church was exclusively focused on its own survival, and resistant to change. If they stayed, they would risk further estrangement from their spiritual selves, from God, and from a religion they still believe in. (Packard, 2015, p. 210)

Packard found the Dones had been dedicated to their church, and very active within it, typically with leadership roles.

> [They] were integrated into leadership structures and church life, often organizing daily life around the church and attending some kind of church function two or more times a week. They're the kind of people who are drawn to activity

> [...often working] in an attempt to fix the things about the church that dissatisfy them before ultimately deciding their energies could be better spent elsewhere. In other words, the dechurched were the "doers" in their congregations. (Kindle locations 319 and 359)

New Zealand studies by Jamieson (2003, 2006) have some findings in common, including that those leaving the institutional church and instead becoming involved in "post-church" groups, had been dedicated, active members of their churches, and frequently leaders. The 2003 study began with an assumption that people left the church because of dwindling faith. Instead over the course of 162 interviews with leavers and leaders (from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in New Zealand) Jamieson discovered a range of reasons, leading to a summary description of them being exiles, refugees and outcasts of established churches, similar to those of Packard's Dones.

b. Crisis and Cultural Consensus

The resistance may be heightened in a situation considered critical, or at crisis point.

> A crisis period may be the worst time to initiate innovation because the organization's capacity to change is often at low ebb. The environment may be inhospitable, the executive leadership may cling to old ideas, resources may be strained, and the internal structure too entrenched in old patterns. (Hasenfeld, 1992, p. 246)

Reinforcing the "old patterns" mentioned by Hasenfeld, may be "consensus of culture" described by Jaskyte and Dressler (2005). Findings from their study conducted among a set of human service organizations in the USA included:

> We found that a strongly shared culture might not be appropriate for fostering innovation, especially considering its content. The higher the cultural consensus on such values as stability, security, low level of conflict, predictability, rule orientation, team orientation, working in collaboration with others, the less innovative the organization may be. (Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005)

Considering the "reason to be" of a typical church community, the consensus of culture is likely to be high, with the values described by Jaskyte and Dressler promoted, and presenting challenges or barriers to innovation. These are the very conditions that create the Dones (Packard, 2015) or the exiles (Jamieson, 2006). If leadership supports the cultural consensus, those with another view, or another suggestion, will find it hard to be heard. Jaskyte and Dressler (2005) and Nemeth (1997) draw on the work of Janis (1972) in *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos* to explain this. While using examples on a rather larger scale, and more dramatic, than the dynamics in small parishes, at personal and interpersonal level the insights are pertinent.

> […] groups marked by cohesiveness and a strong directive leader are especially likely to seek "uniformity". As a result, they suffer under the illusion that there is unanimity when, in fact, there is not. Silence is often assumed to indicate assent. Then, out of a fear of ridicule and a sense of futility, each individual is reluctant to voice a differing view" (Nemeth, 1997, p. 65)

Nemeth suggests that even brainstorming activities, explicitly designed to generate as many ideas as possible, with the admonition to refrain from evaluating or criticizing ideas that arise, may have only moderate success. The fear of disapproval and the reluctance to voice ideas remains, rendering these groups still less creative than individuals alone. If conformity is the expected norm, it will prevail, whereas for innovation the voice of the dissenter or the alternate or creative view is crucial. Nemeth suggests that flexibility, openness, and the *welcoming of dissent* are especially useful for stimulating creative thought (Nemeth, 1997, p. 66).

The active endeavours of the company DuPont to teach creativity are described by Nemeth (1997) The first point is a recognition that creative ideas need to be implemented, so resources are allocated that will support translation of the idea into concrete action. Creativity workshops include people directly concerned and also others not particularly knowledgeable about the issue – the hoped for "wildcards" who will bring fresh perspectives. Teams are taught to avoid the "inhibitors" of creativity, to be on guard for indications of convergent thought, to

watch for tendencies to make an idea fit with a preconceived notion, to put aside their own experience and to play with each idea.

These ideas from Nemeth, no longer new but still pertinent, translate to the church setting, if contemplating change. Also relevant is that discussion and most decisions occur in groups.

> Groups can strongly hinder or promote individual creativity and the quality of individual judgments and solutions to problems. (Nemeth, 1997, p. 70).

Given the challenge of strong cultural consensus in the church context, hindering is highly possible, making the role of leadership crucial.

c. Decentralization as a Stabilizing Force

An organization being diverse and decentralized contributes to what Hasenfeld terms as stabilization, that is, the organization as a whole is less likely to change because it is harder for decentralized organizations to innovate at any scale. Sub units may experiment and innovate within their site, and do so successfully, but radical or large-scale innovations are unlikely because of cost or wider impact that require centralized support. Also, the decentralization and diffuseness of power will actually erect barriers to the acceptance of wider innovations because each unit will have an independent voice about their desirability. Radical organization wide innovations require unity and concentration of power in the organization. (Hasenfeld, 1992, pp. 233-234).

At the same time, in relation to the move to develop missional church –

> Culture change is never achieved through top-down processes; it happens as people are empowered to name their own realities and develop experiments in which they test out new habits and practices. (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009, pp. Kindle Location 2069-2070).

Leadership then is a crucial element at all levels, universally to unite, motivate and resource, equipping local leadership and their teams to innovate without fear.

3.3.2. Scenario Planning – exploring possibilities

Positive ways to explore possibilities will be part of a safe process of innovation. Suter (2014) provides a mechanism for these considerations in the form of scenario planning, explored and applied in his PhD dissertation *"The Future of the Uniting Church in Australia: The Application of Scenario Planning to the Creation of Four "Futures" for the Uniting Church in Australia"* (2014). As an exploratory planning tool applied to another church organization in Australasia, this approach

has potential for use regarding church organizations in New Zealand, and provides some direction for this current study.

Predictions, preferences and possibilities are three ways of thinking about the future. Suter (2014) explains

- prediction as being to extrapolate current trends out into the future;
- preference being to have a vision to work towards, going beyond what is being predicted by current trends to what we would like to see happen;
- possibilities being what *could* happen.

 "Possibilities are not necessarily being currently suggested (via prediction) and they may not necessarily be what one would like to see happen (via preferred futures)" (Suter, 2014, p. 83) but could be possible future scenarios.

Importantly, considering possibilities may provide a way to think about the unthinkable. This enables development of plans to adapt to possible futures, or to transform them.

Kahane (2012) writes of *Transformative Scenario Planning: Changing the Future by Exploring Alternatives.* The process described by Kahane works to support those involved to gain new understanding, build trusting relationships, change intentions and plan alternative actions.

> Transformative scenario planning enables people to transform their problematic situation through building a strong alliance that deeply understands the situation, one another, and what they need to do.
>
> It is a way for actors to work cooperatively and creatively to get unstuck and to move forward (Kahane, 2012, p. 21).

3.3.3 A Story of Change

The Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis provides a story of innovation at parish level, described by King (2015) in an article *Death and Resurrection of an Urban Church.* Able to act at local level, the pastor of this church took radical steps to reshaping interaction with the community, drawing on the principles of "asset-based community development". This approach puts focus on what is good and working well in a place, as described in *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). In order to reassess what was good and working well in the community, everything the Broadway United Methodist Church was currently offering the community was stopped, including the foodbank and the thrift shop. Instead of acting out of charity based on need, the church moved to listening, seeking out people's gifts and inviting them to offer these to others. The church has

become a place where the neighbours can go and ask for help - "not for goods or services but for connections" (King, 2015), and every space is filled with interest groups and activity. The church is described by King as a hub, vibrant and humming. The website of the parish suggests this continues to be the case. (Broadway United Methodist Church, n.d.)

3.4 Rural Community

The title of this thesis being "The potential of churches to contribute to thriving and vibrant rural community", this section considers understandings of rural community.

A more comprehensive review of rural social research in New Zealand is provided by Pomeroy (2018), in that author's Report Number 3 for the Bishop's Action Foundation. The need for researched understanding of contemporary rural communities is stressed. A review of literature concerning rural sociology is also provided by Loveridge (2016). This author points out that "rural sociology as a discipline has long encapsulated diverse interests" (p.1), among which community studies are just a part. and seemingly a small part alongside, for instance, sociology of agriculture, or social science of rural issues. This observation is confirmed by others searching literature for understanding of "rural community" in New Zealand (Liepins, 2000a, 2000b; Rhodes, Willis, Smith, & McCann, 2003; Johnsen, 2004).

Liepins (2000a), in "Exploring Rurality through Community", questions the relevance of the concept of 'community' to contemporary rural societies which are recognized to be diverse and rapidly changing. In reviewing texts from the 1990's, Liepins (2000b) reflects that most often "community" is referred to, mentioned in passing, or inserted as a notion with apparently little attention to the complexity of the term. An exception to this is the work of Day and Murdoch (1993), (as cited by Liepins, 2000a), who urge a re-examination of the concept as a valid analytical tool.

Also illustrating the need for attention to understanding "community", is a study entitled "Farm Adjustment and Restructure in North Island Hill Country" (Rhodes et al., 2003). This work includes an extensive review and analysis of the literature relating to change and impediments to change in relation to farming in New Zealand. Like Liepins (2000a), the authors discovered little attention given to the concept of community. The papers they reviewed could be broadly grouped as having focus on one of four different categories – Economic; Environmental; Community; and Cultural/Historical. What stood out to the authors was the overwhelming concentration of research on economics and economic policy.

Of 150 papers, 95 were focussed on economic factors, and 33 on environment. Only 20 focussed on community factors, indicating a low interest in or understanding of this aspect, at that time, prior to 2000. Just three were essentially in the Cultural/Historical category. Johnsen (2004) concurs, that much of the existing literature found then, prior to 2004, was written from a "macrolevel political economy perspective". In Johnsen's review of the literature, just three studies, all from 1994, were identified as focussed on individual farming families.

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These findings informed my decision to focus on community in my search for relevant literature and prompted the choice of search terms "rural ", "community" and "New Zealand". The date set was from 2000 onwards, the purpose being to move beyond the cataclysmic events of the 1980s (described below) to the present, and to the challenges of rural community in more recent and current times. Searches of the academic journals 'The Journal of Rural Studies', and 'Sociologia Ruralis', provided a small number of New Zealand based studies focussed on community in rural settings. (A similar search in these journals by Loveridge, seeking work by New Zealanders but without the set time frame, confirms the number of New Zealand studies in these publications to be small (2016, p.2)). A search of the database Google Scholar and of University research commons added a number more. Overall, the number of studies identified by "rural, community, New Zealand" found in these searches remained relatively small, but also provided a breadth and depth of investigation, information and insight. In the studies found, two features were strikingly in common – consistent reference to the impact of economic policy change in the 1980's as a critical turning point in the New Zealand farming industry; and that each study utilized a case study or personal story approach, with interviews being a primary method of data collection.

Neil Wallace does both in his book "When the Farm Gates Opened: The Impact of Rogernomics on Rural New Zealand" (Wallace, 2014), and provides a useful backdrop for the other studies, with an overview of the 30 years since 1984. In that year the Labour government led by David Lange came into power and, with Roger Douglas as Finance Minister, began the economic reforms that hit the farming industry with devastating impact at that time. Farm subsidies and grants were pronounced by the new government as unsustainable and were removed virtually overnight. Farmers were faced with reduced incomes, higher costs, rising debt, high interest rates, and open market forces. These factors are detailed by Wallace, but the main purpose of the book is to provide a social history, describing the impact of the reforms on the farmers and their families, as they dealt with extreme stress and questioned whether they would survive on the land. It was an era of radical change, for agriculture but also in New Zealand's history more broadly,

impacting the social structure of farms and rural community, and reshaping lives. With the hindsight of 30 years, much of what occurred appears now to be seen, even by those that lived through it, as having been necessary or inevitable, with positive long-term advances for the industry. However, for those willing to recall it, memories are of an era widely experienced as one of extreme stress, depression, struggle, anxiety, heart-wrenching decisions, pain and misery. Some endured, some did not. The book by Wallace is that story, of the people. At one point they are described as "the sacrificed generation, the cohort that spent the prime of their lives in survival mode" (Wallace, 2014, p. Kindle Location 1997), while their children became the generation lost to the land, choosing any other career or lifestyle in preference to the one in which their parents had experienced such suffering. This history provides a useful context, for understanding the forces that have impacted on rural New Zealand and contributed to the current state of rural small towns. Many of these small towns declined sharply and continued to do so in the roll-on effect of the 1980's economic reforms.

> …. for several years after 1984, rural communities felt they were constantly at war, fighting one battle after another to save services and infrastructure and to survive. First it was farming families that were under siege, then rural communities as they saw the closure or contraction of hospitals, post offices, Ministry of Works depots, banks, Forest Service offices, coal mines, and railway depots and stations. Many communities lost their identities when the loss of population meant schools had to close. This was followed by local body amalgamation that forced council offices to close and staff to leave, further eroding community identity and leaving many towns empty, scruffy shells as the uncertainty diminished pride as well as economic clout. (Wallace, 2014, pp. Kindle Location 362-363)

Recognizing that small rural towns are in still-changing rural landscapes, Liepins addresses the concept of community and provides a model (Liepins, 2000a) which is then applied and illustrated through case studies, one of these being of Kurow in Central Otago, New Zealand.

At the centre of this model are *people,* who develop shared *meanings* about their connectedness through interaction and activities. There will be both widely held beliefs about social connection, and also the competing notions of different social groupings within a given 'community'. This allows for understanding of "communities of communities" (Day, 1998, as cited by Liepins, 2000a). Next are the *practices* that connect people with key activities, institutions and spaces. Again, these may be commonly accepted, or contested. The next element of the model is that of the specific *spaces and structures* through which communities are embodied and given a material shape, for example in the churches, schools, businesses and sporting facilities of the town. The final aspect of the model is acknowledgement of the interplay of these four elements – the people, meanings, practices and spaces – how different people, and groupings of people, will

influence or be affected by the meanings, practices and spaces of the community, how some will be fully engaged with what is valued by many or most, while others, a "community within a community", may contest or be marginalized by that same aspect. Exploring the interplay acknowledges diversity and fluidity (and the challenge to the notion of the "rural idyll"). It enables the concept of community to be relevant in contemporary rural studies, and for this model to be usefully applied in the reading of case studies of rural communities, as Liepins illustrates (2000a). Panelli, Kraack and Little (2005) draw on the work of Liepins in their studies of rural women's fear of crime, including a case study based in a rural Otago town.

Scott, Park and Cocklin (2000) in their study of the Mangakahia Valley, in Northland, raise a similar issue to Liepins, regarding another term they find widely used but often without regard for its complexities. In this case it is the notion of "sustainable rural communities", which, they suggest, is outdated. They consider the increasingly divergent mix of ethnicity, economic status and occupational makeup in the population brings complexities in regarding what can be said to contribute to "sustainable rural communities". They propose instead use of a broader concept of "social sustainability", with locally defined content and to include elements of livelihood, social participation, justice and equality. In exploring this through a case study of the region, similar points emerged as with Liepins (2000a), underlining that understanding and experience of community differs across the "communities" within it. This is especially so as the concept of "rural community" moves further from referring essentially to the farming families of the area and a small town primarily in existence as a service hub for those surrounding farms. As an example, withdrawal of services such as banking, general stores, and buses may be felt by farmers more as a "loss of community", while others may experience it primarily as an added burden to economic hardship, and others still, who commute to town to work, may barely notice these changes (Scott et al., 2000). This finding is echoed by Rivlin (2010) in a study of the small central North Island towns of Ohakune and Raetahi, where the loss of sense of community was expressed most by the Pākehā (European New Zealander) respondents and those involved in the various declining associations and voluntary organizations of the town. Māori on the other hand were affected more materially by diminishing availability of local services, their associational needs being met within their own family and iwi networks, rather than those of the town.

These and other case studies of small New Zealand towns and their fortunes in recent decades are made available in a number of works, some titles giving indication of the direction of those fortunes, for example "The Reinvention of Tirau" (Panelli, Stolte, & Bedford, 2003) and "Whatever Happened to Tuatapere: Are we doing very nicely thank you?" (P. A. Smith, 2009).

Comparative studies such as those by Liepins (2000a), and Rivlin (2010) suggest that the communities to which the descriptor "thriving" might be applied are those that are more welcoming of increasing diversity, and that are open to possibilities of "reinventing" themselves, as with Tirau (Panelli et al., 2003) and also the township of Lawrence, in Otago (Wallace, 2014). Those towns in this category have some common characteristics of "place" also. Most generally this is being positioned on a major or relatively significant route that brings a wider population through their town, and / or having a natural environment or feature that is a drawcard to be capitalized on. Ohakune and its location at the foot of Mount Ruapehu with its ski-fields is an example of this.

The presence and resources of entrepreneurs are also crucial, and their inter-relationship with community may be the key to regional development (Keen, 2004). Entrepreneurs who work with the community, and communities that influence entrepreneurs, may together promote social entrepreneurship. This is enterprise focussed on the way in which the success of the venture will have positive impact for the community as a whole or a social group within it. There is potential for this community entrepreneurship to have influence in addressing even large-scale problems, such as a town in demise. Keen (2004) profiles the developments in the rural region of Maniototo in Central Otago, where small town communities and entrepreneurs have engaged to create and promote tourist activity, notably the now renowned Otago Rail Trail. Outcomes of business success, community pride and regional development are evident.

Responses however may still be varied, even where there is apparently overall success and positive impact. In Tirau, for example, the shift from "town in decline" to becoming a tourist stop or destination is still a matter of contention. While some see Tirau as booming with a go-ahead and innovative vision, others may see it as a town catering only for tourists, no longer the locals. Older residents may consider that the previous identity of their town has in fact died, and, as reported by a voluntary worker, "crossing the road is a problem, especially for children and the elderly" (Panelli et al., 2003, p. 394). These are the voices of communities within communities, that feature repeatedly throughout the studies.

Taranaki, specifically South Taranaki, is the location of case studies regarding a number of specific issues – rural social work (Pitt, 2010), the impact of "Big Box" retailing (Stockwell, 2009), and the closure of schools (Kearns, Lewis, McCreanor, & Witten, 2009).

Loss of services of any kind has an impact – in varying ways for different groups within the community, as discussed - but the closure of schools causes widespread

effect, even loss of identity for that community, as quoted earlier (Wallace, 2014), and as determined by Kearns et al (2009).

> …. the closure of rural schools disconnects communities from their past, shuts down a crucial focal point and meeting place for the community, and blocks the path to other resources. Within a landscape of restructuring and at least in New Zealand rural settlements, a school may be the last viable public service agency to remain in a locality (Kearns et al., 2009).

These authors further refer to the affects also, which may range from a sense of betrayal, to feelings of grief.

The significance of school closure is further highlighted by Rhodes et al (2003). In their study of the restructuring of hill country farming around the rural settlements of Taumarunui, Wairoa and Dannevirke, a key factor to emerge was the "role of education in maintaining the vibrancy of rural communities". This is stated in their conclusion as a predominant finding –

> Within each of the districts, farming was just one, albeit very important, factor influencing the health and prosperity of the communities and towns of these rural districts. Both the nature and level of industry, education, health and social services, and the social and wealth structure of the community are all influencing evolving community profile. It is likely that one of the most significant factors that will determine the future rate of development of each of these districts will be the communities' attitude to education in the compulsory sector. Very high-quality learning outcomes for students from early childhood to year 13 are essential if population and essential community services are to be maintained. (Rhodes et al., 2003, p. 59)

Relevant to this research regarding church in rural community, the voice of church as a community is rarely heard in these studies, mentioned mostly in passing and in only some but not all the studies reviewed.

The same was found in the Australian study by Mitchell (2007), "Social Capital and the Rural Church". The findings of Mitchell's study suggest a discernible contribution by the church to social capital – "that reservoir of goodwill and willingness-to-cooperate that facilitates community functioning" (p 1). This contribution, discerned through measures of volunteerism and community attachment, was found to be at levels disproportionate to the size of church population in the general population. This would seem to be a significant indicator of the role of church in community, and is strongly supported by the work of Ammerman in discussing the contribution of churches to social capital (1997, pp. 362-367), but in regard to the general literature:

> There is, however, evidence to show that contemporary sociologists display considerable indifference when it comes to matters of religion. By way of example, in a very time-consuming search of past copies of the influential

journal Sociologia Ruralis covering a period of 42 years and 664 articles, I could only find four that touched on religious influence. A similar search of Rural Society was similarly unfruitful, with just one article out of 194 over a 12-year period. It would appear that in the contemporary sociologist's understandable eagerness to stay on the cutting edge of the science, that an area of social life that appears to be rather anachronistic holds little interest. (Mitchell, 2007, p 11)

Returning to the New Zealand literature, the results are similar. In a study undertaken for the Families Commission by Goodrich and Sampson (2008), entitled "Strengthening Rural Families: an exploration of industry transformation, community and social capital", the church receives no mention.

In the "Reinvention of Tirau" (Panelli et al., 2003) a church leader is listed as among the 12 people interviewed, but no further reference to church emerges in the report.

Rivlin (2010) mentions the church in a general statement about civil society (the church being an association with voluntary membership contributing to the "good society") and also lists a church leader as among those interviewed. There is further mention of church activity in Raetihi, including of the Baptist church being seen as being of influence. It is noted as being involved in the budget service, and as having established a monthly country market, and a youth group. However, a respondent in the research suggested that a lack of communication with other entities, a tendency to work within its own networks, and to serve its own Pākehā and Christian values meant it was limited in its reach (Rivlin, 2010, p. 148). Whitham and Piercy (2013) briefly credit the church for its part in the youth employment programmes successful in Otorohanga.

Two other specific mentions:

> The church was crucial in helping the Cattells through those difficult days, from weekly prayers for rain to the symbolic placing of a dry, rock-hard sod of soil under the altar of their local church, where it would remain until the rain came and the drought was broken. It stayed for 18 months (Wallace, 2014, pp. Kindle Locations 1254-1256).

> "I'd say Kurow is made up of a series of groups, church groups, clubs, and people seem to be gathered around the school. I would say the community was centred around clubs. The church and the clubs … they are the main things that pull things together". (Liepins, 2000a, p. 334)

Perhaps significantly, of the articles reviewed, personal church membership is mentioned most often by participants in "Engaging in Community; Perceptions of the Oldest Old" (Napier, 2016) - a study involving 15 interviews of rural Warkworth residents aged over 85 years.

Studies specifically focussed on church in rural New Zealand are discussed elsewhere, but as will be seen are also relatively few. This study will add to the literature that does focus on church in rural community in New Zealand and will give voice to this "community within community".

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research is discussed here, outlining the approaches that influenced the research design and the theoretical context to the study. This is followed by a chapter describing the specific methods that were used to conduct the research, and how these were implemented.

4.1 Influential Approaches

The aim of this study was to expand knowledge regarding the church and rural community, specifically Anglican parishes in rural Taranaki. Considerations for the future of the church are challenging: the current situation is that many congregations are ageing and dwindling, with competing demands on limited resources – for maintenance of traditional structures and of property, care for elderly parishioners, and response to the needs of the communities of which they are part. In exploring the question of what may be "The potential of churches to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community" the study aimed to look beyond the traditional ways in which the church interacts with community and responds to need, to include consideration of more radical possibilities which current circumstances indicate may be needed.

The overall strategy for the research was that of case study, a design typically employed within the genre of society and culture for the study of groups or organizations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 23). A case study is not in itself a method of research, as data may be gathered by a variety of different methods within the case study, (Seale, 2012) including, as here, by questionnaire and interview. Case study as a strategy is typically complex in design, containing within it elements that may be individual, close and personal, alongside broader, more diffuse and general interactions. Marshall and Rossman (2011) refer to the "illustrative power of research that focuses in depth and in detail on specific instances of a phenomenon. Case studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytical reporting formats" (p 267).

4.2 Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry

The decision to undertake local parish case studies in the search for radical possibilities, could be (and was) initially questioned as counter intuitive or even counterproductive. If the study was designed to search for new ideas and innovative solutions, the parishes facing challenges and uncertainty might appear to be an unlikely source of these; with ideas, energies and capacities already ebbing. The decision to carry out these local case studies was made, however, so as to disallow any such assumption and to provide a respectful start to this search,

involving those most affected and deserving of a voice: the people of the local parishes. As such, this study may be only the beginning, but it is a sound one. Involving these primary stakeholders creates an appropriate platform for what may subsequently unfold. A theoretical justification to this is found in the principles of Action Research, which seeks to remain committed to local contexts and to involve all participants in collaborative inquiry, often to engage in sustained change in organizations or communities (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. p23). The starting point of Action Research is in the articulation of problems as experienced by those most closely involved. This study, while not designed as Action Research, was influenced by these respectful, participatory and democratic values, and the tenet of local beginnings.

Allied to this is the approach of Appreciative Inquiry, which concentrates on exploring ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they do and then tries to work out ways in which this can be built on (Reed, 2007). Although the starting point is on appreciating the activities and responses of people, rather than the problems, as in Action Research, the principles of inclusivity, collaboration and local involvement are common to both. The focus on the positive approach of Appreciative Inquiry influenced a number of this study's questionnaire questions, about the strengths of community and congregation. The purposeful choice of positive terms – potential, vibrant and thriving - in the title of the study is another indicator of intention to seek and build on the positives. As well, adjusting plans in response to experience as the research progresses, as occurred at some points in this study, is also regarded with positivity in Appreciative Inquiry processes.

4.3 A Mixed Method Study

Within the overall strategy of case study, this project was undertaken as a mixed method study, using methodologies from both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This was achieved through the study of background information and by using questionnaires that engendered both quantitative and qualitative responses, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews.

Questionnaires were used first to obtain information from nine rural parishes - to build a broad picture of the Anglican Church in rural Taranaki, and to inform the selection of three parishes for case study - then secondly to obtain information from individual parishioners. These questionnaires enabled a wide range of personal views to be gathered via both narrative responses and answers to structured questions which comprised the quantitative component of this study: yes/no, multiple choice or Likert-scale questions. Thematic analysis of narrative answers also yielded numerical data as answers were coded, grouped, totalled and percentaged.

The third source of information, qualitative interviews of key parish people and parishioners, added insight at personal level, putting "flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses" (Bell, 2010, p. 161). In addition to these a number of interviews were undertaken with senior staff of the diocese and with representatives of local communities. These community members included representatives from various fields; council, school, community services, business, and local residents with longstanding or more recent community interest.

4.5 In-depth Interviews

Fitting with the approach of interpretive phenomenology, in-depth or depth interviews aim to understand an interviewee's personal framework of beliefs and values, and the significance or meaning they associate with their activities and experiences (Seale, 2012, p. 564). The original research design had intended the depth interviews to be semi-structured, but this plan changed as the fieldwork experience unfolded. All parishioners interviewed had previously met me at a parish meeting, and had completed an individual questionnaire, so were well prepared for their interview. As they had already provided responses to structured questions, the interview approach moved purposefully to being conducted with only minimal structure. This allowed space for these willing people to speak to the issues most important to them, within the framework of our topics of local church and community. Bell (2010) describes this type of interview as a guided or focussed interview. In these "conversations with a purpose", no questionnaire or checklist is used as in structured or semi-structured interviews. Instead, with the framework established, questions may be asked and then respondents given time to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time and way. Lester (1999) supports this approach in phenomenology, suggesting a general principle of minimum structure and maximum depth, while both keeping a focus on the research issues and avoiding undue influence by the researcher.

Interviews were recorded and all were transcribed for analysis, but in line with the broad, guided interview approach, and with many pages of transcription in hand, this was not a rigorous analysis. Instead, immersion in the material enabled familiarity with and identification of the themes presenting across the study, appreciation of the individual views around these, and of insights, whether closely related or bringing other dimensions to awareness.

As the focus of the phenomenological approach is on information gained through language and shared meaning, and the insights offered, achieving this through interviews requires attentive and respectful listening from interviewers, the "use of all their senses" Boeree (1998). The guidelines offered by Wolfelt (2009) for those who accompany the bereaved are equally pertinent for phenomenological

interviewers. These guidelines are familiar to me through my work with grieving people. They describe a means to be fully present to those who may be trusting the listener with personal talk, emotion and vulnerability, as occurred at times in this study, in sharing of feelings, faith and commitment.

The establishment of a sense of safety through rapport and empathy is critical to gaining this depth of information, particularly when investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake. In this study, the strong personal investment of participants was quickly apparent and fostered willingness to engage with openness. I brought to this my experience in facilitating grief support, which has provided practice in the roles of listener and participant observer – "benign and non-manipulative" (Marshall, Rossman, 2011) - and together a positive level of rapport was achieved.

4.6 A Relational Foundation to Research

The approaches outlined, and the conscious awareness required to apply them, contribute to what Dutton and Dukerich (2006) describe as a relational foundation to research. They consider relational foundation as key to the creation of those research projects that "[…] draw you in. They touch you on multiple levels, expanding, stretching, and teaching you". Illustrated by their study on homelessness undertaken with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the authors list essential aspects of relational foundation to research. They suggest these are: being vulnerable, being genuinely interested, seeking feedback, and being trustworthy. These practices foster respectful engagement, trust and helping, and assist in building high quality connections between researchers and their interaction partners. High quality connections, they assert, allow more emotions to flow, foster adaptability in the research process, and support an openness to new ideas and learning, all contributing to the life and vitality of the project.

> We look to the relational foundation of a research project as the keystone, […] as pivotal for building a healthy, enriching, and generative research project. (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006, p. 26).

4.4 Qualitative Research, and Phenomenology

 "Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live" (Myers, 2000), and to explore the richness, depth, and complexity of phenomena (Neill, 2006). With this intent the research paradigm employed was interpretive, using phenomenology as the philosophical base.

Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual. This approach fits well for the study of change affecting an institution that is integral to the life and being of the people, as the church is to many, and where long and deeply held assumptions (of the perennial existence of a local parish, for instance) are being challenged. Cohen and Cohen (2000) suggest that change is inevitably experienced at a personal level. This makes phenomenological approaches ideal for exploration of the impacts of change or any phenomenon on the individuals involved, as here with parishioners in parishes facing uncertain times. These approaches are good at "surfacing deep issues and making voices heard" (Lester, 1999), a particular aim of this study. The intention was to hear the voices of parishioners, those individuals most likely to be impacted as change in parishes unfolds.

Pure, or descriptive, phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Balls, 2009). Key to achieving this is the concept of bracketing, which practically speaking means –

> "We must put aside our biases, prejudices, theories, philosophies, religions, even   common sense, and accept the phenomenon for what it is", and "Bracketing means setting aside all our usual, "natural" assumptions about the phenomena. You can't hear it if you are loudly telling it what it is" Boeree (1998).

While guided by the descriptive approach and the concept of bracketing, and although listening without making assumptions to the best of my ability, my approach would be best described as *interpretive* phenomenology in which it is considered impossible to completely rid the mind of preconceptions. In practicing interpretive phenomenology, researchers may draw on their own experiences to interpret those of others, and may also use their experiences to guide their research questions (Balls, 2009). Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research also enables it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allowing it "to inform, support or challenge policy and action" (Lester, 1999).

4.7 Scenario Methodology

A further approach that influenced the design of this study was that of scenario methodology. Most commonly used in planning strategies, Ramirez, Mukherjee, Vezzoli, and Kramer (2015) suggest that applying scenarios as a research methodology can stimulate challenging ideas, and the asking of more "fundamental and sceptical questions" that may encourage significant rethinking. The authors propose that it also helps scholars and those they study to together critically consider existing assumptions and possible future developments in their field of

study. "What if …" becomes the leading question, creating alternative possibilities that help people know and act differently. In this way, knowledge is produced through action, with the understanding that the research contributions are exploratory rather than evaluative (Ramirez et al., 2015, p. 81). The authors noted from their experiences of using scenarios methodology (for projects variously concerning Indian retail, Mediterranean migration, and adaptation to climate change in the Mexican Caribbean) that it requires time and effort to master the thinking, techniques and tools involved in ways that can make the methodology accessible for all of those involved. This clearly being so, employing this methodology in full form was beyond the scope of this study (but, what if …?), however the ideas and those of scenario planning, were in mind as the approaches were devised. Some of the questions used were designed to facilitate scenario thinking, within this study and potentially building from it.

4.8 In summary

The approaches that have influenced and contributed to this study – Action Research, Appreciative Inquiry, Interpretive phenomenology, Relational Foundation, Scenario methodology - overlap in crucial ways, such as respectful listening, the setting aside of assumption, involvement of local participants, challenging questions, and relational underpinnings of vulnerability, genuine interest, trustworthiness and feedback. They are all methods that "at least attempt to capture life as it is lived" (Boeree, 1998) and involve some courage from all parties.

The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. Information came from two levels of questionnaire, and from interviews. These multiple sources provided a means of triangulation, which is to cross-check findings by examining the same thing from more than one perspective (Law, as cited by Bell, 2010, p118). The analysis then includes comparison of material from the data collected, to identify relationships between factors and themes, and to potentially confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another method. In keeping with phenomenology, it is "warm" analysis, wherein empathy is integral to the analysis of data (Boeree, 1998), as it was in generating it.

CHAPTER 5. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The initial broad proposal for the research was to undertake case studies of three rural parishes in Taranaki, exploring the potential of churches to contribute to thriving and vibrant rural community. In early discussions with my academic supervisor at AUT, the proposed plan was for the case studies to be the first practical step, undertaken in two phases in each place, firstly questionnaires and then interviews. In discussion with the CEO of the Bishops Action Foundation, as advisor to the project, an additional step was introduced prior to the case studies. This additional step was to first survey across the range of rural parishes around the diocese, to gain a wider perspective, to inform the selection of the three case study parishes, and to provide a point of entry to these parishes. This plan was adopted and outlined in the application made to the AUT Ethics Committee.

5.1 Plan for Fieldwork

A consideration in planning the fieldwork was the distance between where I live and Taranaki. Distances to reach the parishes where I would spend time ranged from 300-400 kilometres, and 4-6 hours driving time. The fieldwork occurred in winter, making shorter daylight hours and the weather conditions considerations in planning also, given the road travel involved. By necessity, the fieldwork was planned to be largely achieved in the minimum number of trips to Taranaki to be cost and time effective, and during restricted hours of daylight to be safe.

The initial fieldwork was planned to be in five phases, with a later sixth phase for feedback and dissemination of results.

1. Planning meetings– the first with the CEO of the Bishop's Action Foundation, the second with senior diocesan staff - the Regional Deans of the Central and Southern clusters, and the Northern Regional Mission Development and Education Officer. A key part of the discussion was identifying the parishes to be involved.
2. Parish Surveys – 9 parishes, surveys undertaken one per parish, completed by one or two key parish personnel, informing selection of case study parishes.
3. Case Study Parish individual questionnaires – in three case study parishes.
4. Case Study Parish interviews, up to fifteen in each case study parish:
   - Key parish people (up to 5)
   - Parishioners (up to 5)
   - Members of the local community (up to 5)
5. Interviews with senior diocesan staff (up to 5)
6. Feedback and dissemination of results, meetings with parishes and interested groups.

Figure 2 Fieldwork phases planned
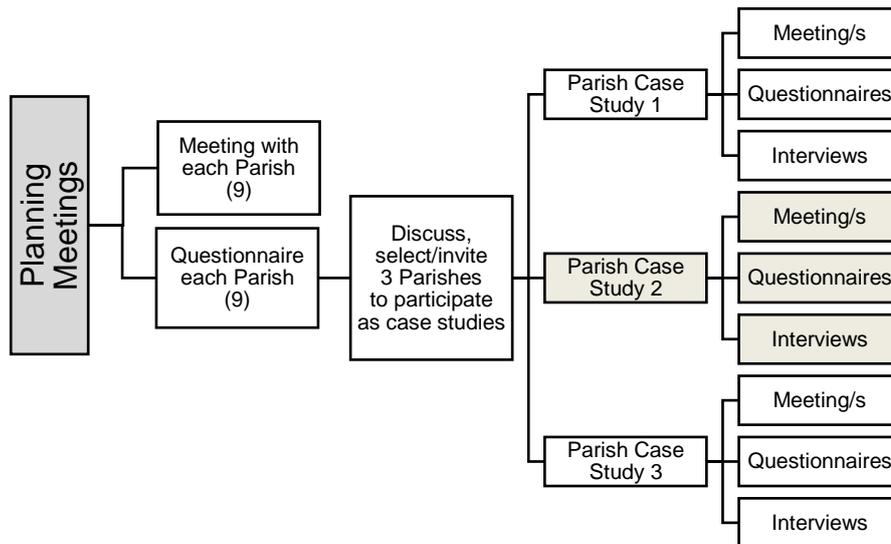
5.2 Planning meetings

These meetings were to confirm approval of the overall plan and clarify the approach. The decision to survey the wider group of rural parishes had been discussed earlier with the CEO. The next step was the meeting with Senior Diocesan staff, to approve this plan, identify the parishes to be involved, and decide on approach.

In discussion a list of eight parishes was confirmed – rural Anglican parishes, all with lay and non-stipended ministry teams. A ninth was added, a Cooperating Anglican/Presbyterian parish, at my request as the most outlying of all the parishes in the diocese.

There was also discussion about the people to be contacts within these parishes. Wardens as a group were suggested, although eventual contacts also included other members of the lay and non-stipended ministry teams. In one cluster, the Regional Dean instigated a process of discussion with parish representatives at Regional Council (for the cluster) and then vestry levels, agreeing the decisions made before contact details were provided to me. In the other clusters, with the approval of the senior staff, my phone call was the first knowledge of the research.

5.3 Meetings with key parish personnel, and completion of parish surveys.

This phase was initially planned to be in two steps beginning with a meeting in each place with key people, to explain the research and introduce the parish questionnaire – which I anticipated leaving with them, one to be completed for

each parish. Instead as I made calls to introduce myself and to ask for the opportunity of an initial meeting, those approached first were open to completing the questionnaire at the time, and this became my suggestion in each case. Eight of the nine parish representatives approached were interested, quickly willing and very welcoming of my coming to meet with them. The ninth was very wary, but still willing. This high level of welcome and engagement made organizing easy, with no concerns that two hours would be needed if we aimed to complete the questionnaire. The meetings were arranged with the one person in each place that I contacted. In seven of the nine another person joined the meeting, and in seven of the nine we succeeded in completing the survey.

Initially I saw the positives of completing the questionnaire at the time in terms of practicality and efficiency in that I would carry the completed questionnaires away with me, not have to wait or wonder about their return. In reality, being with those involved as they engaged in the process was of far greater value than just practicality. The participants talked and discussed their answers together. in each place considering an identical set of questions. Three asked me to do the writing as they talked, the others entered their own answers. For those doing their own writing I also took notes of the surrounding discussion. Besides writing I endeavoured to be present only to support the process, answer questions that arose and occasionally ask a further prompt question. The outcome in most cases was that I had been present during a two-hour process of searching consideration. This and the trust that was established that enabled people to speak as they did was an honour to be part of. As well, six of the nine meetings were held at the church premises. In every case I was invited into the church and experienced the atmosphere of these cherished places in the company of people who care for them, and who showed me around with love and pride. These experiences with the people and places, and travelling between them, enabled a understanding of these parishes and their environment that would not have been possible by paper alone.

Seven of the nine parish questionnaires were completed at the time, the other two were finished and returned later. All were typed out, with any additional notes included, and sent back to the parish for opportunity to correct inaccuracies or edit comments. Some corrections were made, but nothing was deleted – they were returned "uncensored".

Seven of the nine offered to participate further as Case Study Parishes. One of the other two was asked if they would reconsider and they agreed. With three invited and agreeing to be case studies, five other willing parishes were thanked and advised that they would not be involved in the case study phase.

5.4 The Case Study Questionnaires

Three parishes were selected to participate as case studies. They were chosen to include

1. One from each cluster, for best diocesan wide involvement, and to enable insight of the strengths and challenges in each of the North, Central and Southern clusters and their rural environs.

2. One from each self-described category, picked from the given options, of transforming, maintaining, palliative.

The choices also covered a range of configurations within the parish – a single church or several churches, a range of (church) services offered, and differing size of congregation.

As well, the communities within which they are placed provided some commonalities and contrasts.

The plan for completion of questionnaires was pre-arranged with the contact people in each case. Again, my suggestion was to meet with the congregation, introduce myself, the research and the questionnaire, and leave these to be completed. However I was guided by the organizers who said in every case that it would be best to do the questionnaires at the time, during the after-service morning tea. With their willing help, arrangements were easily made. My schedule was set for three Sundays in a row, each in a different parish, to attend a service, meet with the congregation over their cup of tea and collect questionnaires. People willing to be interviewed identified this on the questionnaires, so by the second week I was also arranging and conducting interviews with people from the previous week's meeting, between Sundays.

The three meetings with congregations were very different. At one the group settled around a table and worked at the questionnaires in focussed silence. Some people still took them home to give them more time. Another larger group were seated all around the church lounge chatting and found it hard to attend to the questionnaires, or didn't want to. Some questionnaires were returned then with minimal answers, others were taken home and returned later completed, some in depth. At the third parish, no-one attended the service except the two officiating and me. Two more parishioners were looking after the church bookstall in the hall next door and completed questionnaires there. Two more I gathered later in the week by attending the Friday prayer service which three parishioners came to plus the Regional Dean, and going with them to their usual Friday after-service café meeting. The remaining four were gathered for me, so questionnaires were

eventually collected from all possible 10 respondents (although one was blank). In each parish, a box was set up where questionnaires could be posted at any time, sealed in blank envelopes provided. These posted forms were collected by me or sent on to me, still in their envelopes, by my parish contact person.

The welcome and inclusion I encountered at all services I attended (in all, three Sunday services and two Friday prayer services) and social or fellowship occasions (after service morning teas, café meetings, and a lunch for a social group) were very much appreciated. These opportunities also added to my experience and understanding of the culture and ambience of these three different parishes.

5.5 Case Study Interviews

The last two pages of the individual questionnaires contained an invitation to indicate willingness to be interviewed, a description of the process for consent, and a separate page on which to provide contact details if willing to be contacted about a possible interview – that page could be returned with the questionnaire, or separately.

The original plan allowed for up to 15 interviews per parish

- Key parish people (up to 5)
- Parishioners (up to 5)
- Members of the local community (up to 5)

The number of formal interviews eventually undertaken was 24. The final count of key parish people and other parishioners (14 in all) reflected those who indicated willingness to be interviewed and who were available during the times I was able to be in Taranaki, over a period of four weeks. These and 10 further interviews, eight with community people and two with diocesan staff, were conducted in a range of venues - at the church (8), in the person's home (8), or in community locations such as a café (2), the library (1) or the person's place of work or volunteer involvement (5). There were numerous other informal conversations and phone calls in addition to the formal interviews.

All but three of the interviews were audio recorded. During the three not recorded, detailed notes were taken instead. Prior to interview, each interviewee read and signed a "Consent to Interview" form. These included a place to indicate if they wished to receive a typed transcript of their interview. Transcribing was undertaken by a transcriber for most of the audio recorded interviews and by myself for the remainder and for those recorded in note form. A copy of the transcript was sent to those who had requested this.

Transcribing proved to be a significant cost in time and budget resource, one reason for undertaking fewer interviews than the maximum. Another was meshing my availability in Taranaki with the availability of prospective interviewees. More importantly, it became apparent that the smaller number of interviews was already providing substantial information and satisfying the search for initial insights – if not to saturation level, to a point where there were enough indicators to confirm where future investigation would be helpful.

5.6 Confidentiality and Coding

The case study parishes were willing for it to be known around the diocese during the research that they were participating in the case study phase of the project, but not all considered that being identified in the written reports and thesis would add value to the research outcomes. Accordingly, the parishes are not named and are referred to instead as Parish Case Study 1 etc. with the codes C1, C2 and C3. Specific identifying features of people have been removed. Initial broad description of places and parishes are included to provide context, after which details and specifics of place are kept minimal, so that for general readership, the information presented maintains a focus on themes, not people or place.

The nine parishes (and parish questionnaires) are coded as P1 to P9
The three case study parishes are coded as C1, C2, C3
Three of the parishes included in P1-P9 are also the case study parishes C1-3, and may be identified by either code as better suits the section of analysis. The numbers 1-3 do not directly correlate between the Parish and Case Study codes.

Individual questionnaires from parishioners in the case study parishes were coded as C1.Q1 -15, C2.Q1-19, C3.Q1-9, however this detail is not attached to the comments quoted in the analysis.

Similarly interviews with parishioners (key personnel not differentiated) were coded as C1 Interview1, C2 Interview1, C3 Interview1 etc.
Interviews with community members were coded as C1 Interview A etc.

In some instances, no code is attached to quotations used in the analysis, or the interview number or letter is not provided. Instead, (cw) may be used to indicate "code withheld". This is in line with the undertaking made to participants in the information sheets, where it is noted "in all cases of interview, there is some limitation to the confidentiality that may be offered given the small pool of potential participants whose views may be well known to each other, but every attempt will be made to protect privacy".

CHAPTER 6. THE PARISH SURVEYS

6.1 Introduction

The parish questionnaires were completed one per parish by one or two key parish personnel in each. The people speaking on behalf of the parish were in leadership roles, a mix of ordained priests, lay ministers, parish wardens and administrators, often with more than one role. The intended method for introducing these questionnaires changed as the plan evolved, and again as contact was made. Eventually the questionnaires were introduced by me at meetings with the respondents in each place, and most were completed during two-hour long meetings during which all respondents were considering the same questions. As I had not originally intended to be present during the process, the questionnaires were detailed, to ensure a working understanding would be gained (by the researcher) of the parish structures and operations. Primary aims of these surveys were a) to provide some initial familiarity with the full spread of rural parishes, and background information as needed, b) to inform the selection of the case study parishes, and c) to enable some context and comparison for these in the bigger picture of the diocese. Accordingly, not all data collated and analysed from the nine parish surveys is reported here but is drawn on where relevant at various points in the discussions that follow in later sections. The parishes are coded as P1-P9.

As noted in the Methods section, the parish people had been primed about the research in one cluster and not the others. Those expecting my call responded easily to the contact. With the other five more explanation was needed when I called. Invitations and information sheets were sent to everyone. Eight of the nine contacts were quickly willing. The ninth was wary and questioned the motives of the research, especially on hearing the link with the Bishop's Action Foundation and diocese - "Is this going to give them more ammunition to shut us down?" (cw). The conversation developed rapidly to an expression of considerable emotion.

> We don't want to shut our doors. If we had to, the people here wouldn't go anywhere. We don't want to be told to go to [other location]. We don't want to, people wouldn't go. They wouldn't go anywhere. Then I would spend all my time going to them to give Communion one by one. […] We are people, not numbers on paper, we are people. And it hurts. (cw).

This conversation gave me early insight into the depth of feeling to be encountered in this study.

Possibly surprisingly, I was still invited to meet with this key parish person and spent two hours over the questionnaire. Of the parish meetings it was the most initially uneasy but settled to a positive rapport and appeared to serve purpose as a vehicle for expressing deeply held views and being heard. This parish ultimately

did not offer to participate further as a case study parish, to my regret as my interest was high given the passionate views expressed and the rapport achieved. However, I accepted this decision. It was made, as I was told in later discussion, because the respondent "felt overwhelmed by everything".

One other parish also initially declared unwillingness to continue into the case study phase. We had started the questionnaire together at our meeting but did not finish. I took it away, typed it as far as had been done and sent it back for completion. It was returned completed, and with the case study option marked No. I asked about this and was told, "It was hard. When I was doing it, I thought I don't like this, this is hard, it hurts, I'm going to avoid it. So, No" (cw). I asked this person if they might please reconsider, my reason being the interest in rural ministry expressed here, and by no other parish in the survey. Agreement was reached, and full support for the study offered from there.

The other seven respondents indicated the time spent talking through the questionnaires had been positive for them. Comments on the questionnaires or in emails that accompanied them included "I did enjoy being part of it" (P7), "It's good to talk about how it really is" (P4), "It's good to have somebody interested" (P9), "excellent […] it got me thinking, I like that" (P7).

Seven of the nine offered to participate further as Case Study Parishes plus the one that first said no but reconsidered. With three invited and agreeing to be case studies, five other willing parishes were thanked and advised that they would not be involved in the case study phase. This engendered evident disappointment for some. The extent to which it appeared people really wanted to be further involved was apparent in these calls, and showed the value being placed in the study. People were seeing it as helpful – "we need all the help we can get" (P9) - and appreciated the opportunity to contribute and be heard, a finding in itself.

For myself, I was drawn to every parish, its story and the people I met there, and personally wished I could have continued to work in more depth in each place. Selecting just three was a challenge. Time having been spent in each parish, and people having engaged both widely and deeply as they did ,will hopefully be positive in later phases of feedback and into the future for the diocese with development of ideas.

Although two respondents initially questioned the safety of being involved – one as already described, and another, who asked, "Is this going to slam us? Is it going to be bad for us and the town, like a bad ERO report for the school?" - both appeared reassured by the statement in Information Sheet 1, for parishes, which read:

The Anglican Church in Taranaki is already exploring possibilities for the shape of the church in the future, acknowledging the challenges being faced particularly in rural areas. Alongside this, The Bishop's Action Foundation (BAF), is working to establish a Rural Research Institute, with the purpose of being a centre for research and resource development that supports the sustainability and wellbeing of rural communities and ministry.
(Information Sheet 1 for Parishes 18.5 2017).

The most wary respondent commented that this seemed positive, and the meeting proceeded with more ease from there.

6.2 Church services and Congregation size.

The parish respondents were asked how often services were held at the church or churches, the average number attending, and whether this number was decreasing, steady or increasing.

The average numbers of people attending in a week were added to provide an estimate of the number who may be attending a service at least once in the week, in total across the nine parishes. Some respondents provided a range, and the higher number was used to add into the total, so the actual weekly total around the parishes will be less than the 211 reached here.

"There was a time when 160 was described as a small congregation" {P8}, speaking of one congregation in one church. Typical attendances in this parish now are as low as four, or as I encountered at one service, two, both of whom were officiating. Talking on that occasion, these two said they had both experienced times when they had been the only one to come. The services continue to be offered faithfully for those who do.

Asked "Are these numbers decreasing, steady or increasing", none responded increasing. Two are decreasing (P1, P9), two steady but tending towards decreasing (P4, P7), and five indicated steady (P2, P3, P5, P6, P8).
In discussion, primary reasons for decrease were given as the congregations being elderly, moving away to retire or go into rest homes, becoming unwell, dying. Seven of the nine included dying. There are few new people coming in to balance this natural attrition.

Other reasons given included families ceasing to attend because of shift work, Sunday sport, the children going to boarding school, and young people moving away for their tertiary education or work.

One parish said that the attendance had gone from nine to 30 to 10 in a three-year period – swelled by a number of families joining, then dropping again when there

was offense between them, and all left again, all three generations. "Without children the whole place plummets". (P6)

Where numbers were holding steady this was seen as due to new people moving to the area, some joining with children, other congregations joining as their churches closed, and relationships being built.

Responses varied regarding what might happen if decreases continued. The six replies included the possibility of fewer or no services, or different services, like home groups. "Don't know. I suppose we wouldn't have a service. Or church would be different, like a home group" (P2). One suggested they could share more with other denominations, but noted that some of their parishioners don't come to services that are not Anglican (P8). One could envisage becoming a festival church, used for occasional special services (but still with a weekly service offered for the few parishioners). Another more clearly foresaw closure - "I see the Church closing (locally and more broadly) if the trend continues. Unless something significant changes there will be no Church" (P1), while the last said, "Don't know. We have to keep going" (P7).

The idea of contracting to fewer or occasional services or becoming a festival church presents as a practical option, but one that may presage success or more challenges, perhaps just delaying an evitable closure. P9 provides an example of these mixed outcomes. There are three small outlying churches in the parish. The most remote of these successfully offers a number of services a year, including special festival events, well supported by the surrounding community. The other two have experienced ongoing reduction in their use. The suggestion had earlier been made to close one of these, receiving a community response akin to "Close the church?! Over my dead body!" (P9). Accordingly, the church remains. Service provision moved to four services a year at first, but then to one. At both small churches, with just one service a year now, at Christmas, there is no longer power connected as one annual service does not justify a monthly bill.

These are difficult scenarios for the parishes surveyed to contemplate.

6.3 Plans for the Future

The question was asked, "Does your parish have plans of any kind for the future?"

Parish P6, which opted for yes and no, identified plans to succeed in the challenge of having the whole congregation complete reading the New Testament in six months, and, to establish a young mothers' group. The "no" part of the response was acknowledging that while there were positive small goals being worked on (and since achieved), there was no bigger plan.

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The others, where detail was given, indicate more the need and desire for plans, than the actual existence of anything firm.

Table 2 Plans for the Future

		Does your congregation have plans of any kind for the future?
P1	Yes	We know we have to do something but are undecided as to what
P2	Yes	
P3	Yes	Plan to survive
P4	No	Older congregation in the pews
P5	Yes	
P6	Yes and No	
P7	Yes	To fill seats, but we don't know how to do it
P8	No	
P9	No	

In a later question, seven of the nine agreed they needed to rethink where they were headed, and when asked "What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time?", all nine could describe this.

The essential themes were

- Larger, more people (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6)
- Younger, families, young people, children (P1, P2, P7, P8, P9)

One said, "More community involvement "(P4), one "Revitalized" (P9) and two used identical words "Thriving, bursting at the seams" (P3, P6). The preferred future is clear. Two added a different note – "What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time? Larger and younger (There probably won't be one)" (P1), and "More bodies in there worshipping. Families, children. Doing what we are doing. We are working to capacity now" (P2).

Question D4 asked "What changes to your current situation/strategies would be needed to achieve this?" Replies to this varied more, but still some themes emerged, merging with the second part of this question "What assistance do you need to make or act on plans for the future?"

- More priests (P3, P4)
- More personnel, or manpower (P3, P4, P9)
- Finance (P2, P3, P7)
- Expertise, guidelines, ideas (P1, P2, P9)
- Courage, encouragement, pure dedication, vision, passion (P1, P4, P6)

One parish, P8, found nothing to say here. Another explained:

Staffing remains at a critical point. We need clergy. We have no one to call on as back up, even for a funeral, so a few are doing more - both clergy and volunteers/congregation. People are doing too much – running on empty (P4).

As in Question D3 it is actual plans that are generally absent, except for suggestions of discipleship training (P2), youth groups (P7, P9) and that larger parishes in the wider diocese could perhaps support smaller ones more, even in small matters like producing newsletters (P3). At other points in the questionnaire, respondents said, "I am all out of ideas" (P7), and that "ideas take people power" (P3).

The overall need expressed here is to be better resourced. As the congregations have aged and dwindled, capacity is shrinking, in terms of both people power and finance – smaller congregations also result in less giving as there are fewer people to give. Once stipends for clergy become hard to maintain, the number of paid staff also decreases, and workloads and demands on volunteer effort increase. The able few who carry this load are "under pressure – can't cover needs of community – taking on more – it's not sustainable" (P4), and as one said, "(we) are getting long in the tooth, and who is going to take over?" (P3).

Beyond the practical resources is the ask for ideas, expertise, and support of the kind to "create some confidence that the changes planned will result in the hoped for results. (There are no guarantees and no useful guidelines. It is very much try it and see what happens.)" (P1).

These replies are those of key parish personnel, people experiencing this pressure.

6.4 Perceived Interest, Willingness and Sense of Urgency for Change

Respondents were then asked to provide an indication of how interested and willing they considered their congregations to be in exploring options for the future, and with what sense of urgency.

The answers showed that in the view of the parish respondent/s, the congregations were likely to be interested (six of nine) and mostly willing (seven of nine) to consider plans for the future, most with some sense of urgency (six of nine)

Only one (P2) was considered to be very interested. One was considered likely to be not very interested (P6), and one mixed between interested and not very interested (P8).

On how willing the congregation might be to explore options for the future and make change, two said "not very willing" (P4, P6), the other seven considered their congregations as willing.

Table 3 Perceived Interest, Willingness and Sense of Urgency for Change

	Degree of interest	Willingness	Sense of urgency
P1	Interested	Willing	Some sense of urgency
P2	Very interested	Willing	Strong sense of urgency
P3	Interested	Willing	Some sense of urgency
P4	Interested	Not very willing	Not very urgent
P5	Interested	Willing	Not very urgent
P6	Not very interested	Not very willing	Some sense of urgency
P7	Interested	Willing	Some sense of urgency
P8	Interested → not very	Willing	Some sense of urgency
P9	Interested	Willing	Some sense of urgency

Regarding sense of urgency, six indicated "some sense of urgency" (P1, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9) with some explanation from two about why this wasn't greater. "A strong sense of urgency means you have to do something about it" (P3. Another elaborated further:

> Passed thinking about it. They are tired of having to do everything. If it happened they would probably support it, "Oh well, you go ahead and do it" (P7).

Two (P4, P5) indicated "no sense of urgency". "They have reached an age – done their work, our time to care for them" (P4). For P5, conversely, other answers suggest a level of satisfaction with how things are currently, hence no pressure to change. Only one, P2, considered the congregation would have a strong sense of urgency about planning or acting for the future, along with being very interested in doing so.

For the others, the likely moderate (or low) levels of interest, willingness and sense of urgency indicate the generally supportive nature of the congregations, but not the drive needed to initiate and enact change.

6.5 Self Descriptions – Transforming, Maintaining, Palliative

This led to a consideration of the future path of the parish. The respondents were asked to consider the following question:

E8. Within the Uniting Church of Australia, Western Australia, the Rural Ministries Working Group wrote to all rural parishes and asked them each to consider the following definitions, and to choose which best described the path of their parish moving into the future.

1. Transforming – these congregations choose to be more active in their community, taking their worship, witness and service seriously to grow the Body of Christ. They are risk-takers seeking to explore their gifts.

2. Maintaining – these congregations choose to stay as they are, keeping the church doors open to maintain Sunday worship and possibly a bible study. The members do not want to be involved in any extensive community outreach.

3. Palliative – these congregations acknowledge that there is little likelihood of growth and they will only exist until the last members are too old to carry on.

Your understanding or interpretation of these categories may differ from those used by the Uniting Church of Australia, but as you think of your parish, which of these would you consider to be the most likely future path for your parish?

Transforming   *Maintaining*   *Palliative*

This question is potentially confronting. It was purposefully checked with the senior staff of the diocese, for their approval for it to be asked, and was agreed to. The responses ranged from transformative through to palliative.

Table 4 Self Descriptions – Transforming, Maintaining, Palliative

Parish	Self-Description	Comment
P1	Transforming	Have to be, otherwise we would be palliative
P2	Transforming / Maintaining	Most of the key people are in transforming mode
P3	Maintaining	We are involved in community outreach as far as we are able
P4	Maintaining	The members are <u>not able</u> to be involved in any extensive community outreach.
P5	Transforming / Maintaining	Transforming leads to Evangelism - All for it Maintaining – happy doing what we do now
P6	Maintaining	But would love to be transforming
P7	Palliative	But doing all we can to transform – to be out there in the community
P8	Maintaining/Palliative	Very elderly congregation. Hoping our young families will want to step up. No money for ministry.
P9	Maintaining	Maintaining through to palliative phase. To be honest, palliative

Those whose answers included Transforming may be stating the ideal, or what they wish to be - "We have to be, otherwise we would be palliative" (P1) – but the energy and intention of these three parishes (P1, P2, P5) is important to note.

The questions and the replies from the nine survey parishes laid out in this section are only some of the questions asked in the parish questionnaires. These and more will be explored in more depth in the next section, the Case Studies Parishes, and further data from the parish surveys will be drawn on where relevant.

CHAPTER 7. THE CASE STUDY PARISHES

The choice of three parishes to be invited to participate as Case Studies was informed by the results of the meetings and the Parish Questionnaires, along with considerations about geographic spread across the districts of the region, and the clusters of the diocese. Accordingly, it was ideal that there would be one Case Study Parish in each cluster, and that between them there would representation of the self-described categories of transforming, maintaining and palliative.

7.1 The Clusters

The three case study parishes were chosen to include one from each cluster, for best diocesan wide engagement and to enable insight of the strengths and challenges in each of the Northern, Central and Southern clusters and their rural environs.

7.1.1 Northern cluster

The Northern Cluster has recently been enlarged to include six parishes in all. Three are within the urban area of New Plymouth, but all are operating with lay ministry teams, having no stipended priests. In this cluster, two parishes participated in the parish surveys as rural, although they are characterized by their proximity to New Plymouth. Just under 20 kms from the city centre, to the north and north east, they were in fact initially described to me as urban fringe. This proximity facilitates commuting in either direction, with its inherent advantages and disadvantages. One respondent remarked on the disadvantage for development also.

> We are "too close" to New Plymouth – we are expected to go there e.g. to the WINZ office and for anything else we don't have here. (P2)

This contrasted with more distant centres which might be resourced differently due to distance. Going to the WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand) office in New Plymouth could take the whole day, be stressful, and "it costs" (P2).

> […] because we are a satellite area from New Plymouth it's a case of people having to go in [to town for services they need] and that is applied to lots of other small communities, if they're near a fairly large city or town. C1. Interview A

The local respondents described their towns similarly, as rural towns serving large rural farming areas, with dairy, sheep, cattle and some horticulture.

Both centres had in the past experienced the devastating impact of their major industries closing or withdrawing from their towns – in one case the dairy factory, in the other the freezing works, car assembly plant and clothing manufacturer.

One parish has one church building, situated in the town. The other, the case study parish, has one church in the town, and four others - two with active congregations in more rural locations, and two in phases of transition back to the community. This parish was chosen for the connections it maintains into the rural communities, and the expressed interest in rural ministry – the one in the nine surveyed that mentioned this specifically. Regarding the description of transforming, maintaining or palliative, the response given here was ''transforming – we have to be, otherwise we are palliative''.

7.1.2 Central cluster

All four Anglican parishes in the Central cluster took part in the initial survey of nine. Spread across the region south of the mountain, these parishes have greater geographic distance from New Plymouth. Stratford is the biggest town within this region. Travel times between Stratford and the other cluster parishes range from 10 to 35 minutes. All are also within 30 minutes of Hawera, the second largest town in Taranaki, positioned in the Southern cluster.

The four parishes were described as
   •   Rural farming area, predominantly dairy, some sheep farming in the
       backcountry. No industry here.
   •   Rural base – services the farming community and is also the most
       industrialized town per capita in New Zealand, with freezing works, cheese
       factory and engineering.
   •   Farming provides the main income. Bakery is the main employer.
   •   Mixed bag! [Services the surrounding dairy farming region, also the tourist
       trade, visitors to the surf and beaches].

As in the north, these centres had experienced major downturns with closure of dairy factories, a clothing factory, a bottling plant.

These four parishes each have one church, except one which maintains its connection to the cooperating parish in a nearby settlement, where the Anglican church was sold and the congregation joined with the Methodist church. All four self-described as maintaining, though one selected transforming ("that would lead to evangelism – all for it") *and* maintaining ("happy doing what we are doing"). Another added that "we would love to be transforming". The other two qualified the given definition of maintaining, changing it from "do not want to be involved in extensive community outreach" to "are not able to be", or "we are involved, as far as we are able". That last statement is from the case study parish for Central. This is another where Anglican and Methodist congregations have combined, but here they now meet in the Anglican church building, and the Methodist church was sold.

7.1.3 Southern Cluster

This cluster includes three Anglican parishes, one a cooperating parish combined with Presbyterian. These three parishes all took part in the original survey of nine. These are the southernmost parishes of the diocese, and the furthest from New Plymouth. Hawera is the second largest town in Taranaki, with a population of 7740. The others in this cluster are small with populations of around 1,100 and 800, along a coastal strip stretching roughly 50 kms south east from Hawera. They are within similar reach of Whanganui, a provincial city in the neighbouring diocese.

The respondents for these parishes described their towns and surrounding areas as

- A basic rural town, mainly farming, with freezing works and dairy factory
- Small town, farming community north and south of the town, mostly dairy farms
- Coastal strip, reasonably flat - mostly dairy. Inland, hilly – mostly sheep, beef, trees, honey

As with all the others, these are centres that had been affected earlier by closures – of freezing works, port, hospital, dairy factories, and by the head office of the dairy company relocating.

Of these parishes, one has a single church in the town. Another is a cooperating parish, Anglican-Presbyterian. Here, both denominations demolished their old churches and a new church was built on the Presbyterian site, with land ownership now shared. Both halls were kept, (the Anglican hall moved on site), and joined on either side of the new church. This complex is described as in good condition, only 40 years old. This parish has three other churches in the surrounding area. Two of these are used just once a year now, for Christmas services. The other is the most remote of all the churches in the diocese, an hour off the state highway, up a very winding rural road. This church serves the local farming community with seven services a year, attended by 10-20 people. The third parish in the cluster has a church in town, and connection to two more, both now more in community hands.

The three parishes in this cluster all included palliative in their self-assessment. One said "palliative, but doing all we can to transform, to be out in the community". Another said "Maintaining. Maintaining through to palliative phase. To be honest, palliative". The third, the Southern case study parish, said "maintaining/palliative. Struggling, no money for ministry".

7.2 Overview of Case Study Parishes

The parishes were willing that it be known around the diocese that they were participating in the case study phase of the project, but not all considered that being named in the written reports and thesis would add value to the research outcomes. Accordingly, the parishes are not named and are referred to instead as Parish Case Study 1 etc. with the codes C1, C2 and C3. Specific identifying features of people have been removed and where possible of places, beyond initial description, so that for general readership beyond the diocese, the themes are the focus, not the people or place.

Table 5 The Three Case Study Parishes

	Cluster	Denomination	Services	Numbers typically attending in a week	Self-described: • Transforming • Maintaining • Palliative
C1	Northern	Anglican	1 per week in town, one per fortnight in a second location	Approx. 25	Transforming (have to be or would be palliative)
C2	Central	Anglican / Methodist	2 each week, 1 church	Approx. 25	Maintaining
C3	Southern	Anglican	2 each week 1 church	Up to 10	Maintaining / Palliative

In the case study parishes, data was gathered through the initial parish surveys (along with the surveys from the other six parishes which participated in this phase), individual questionnaires completed by parishioners, and a small number of interviews.

Table 5a Respondents per Parish

	Questionnaires returned	Interviews with parishioners	Interviews with members of community	Numbers typically attending in a week	Number of respondents as % of typical weekly attendance
C1	15	6	2	25	60%
C2	19	5	3	25	76%
C3	9 (plus 1 blank)	3	3	Up to 10	90%
Total	43	14	8		

7.3 Case Study Parish Census Data 2013

Figures from the 2013 Statistics New Zealand Census show 109,608 people were usually living in the Taranaki Region at that time. This was an increase of 5,481

people, or 5.3 percent, since the 2006 Census. The Taranaki Region then had 2.6 percent of New Zealand's population, and by population ranked 10th in size out of the 16 regions in New Zealand.

There are three districts within the region. The New Plymouth District in the North, Stratford District in the East, and South Taranaki District to the South. The case study parishes lie one within each district.

In summary, across the three case study parishes, C1 and C2 showed slight increases in population with some building activity, C3 a decrease and no building activity. All showed the percentage of their population aged over 65 to be greater than their districts or New Zealand overall (by up to 6%, in C3). In addition, on the Deprivation Index 2013, C1 and C3 are rated 10, the highest level of deprivation (Atkinson, Salmond, & Crampton, 2014)

7.3.1 Parish Case Study C1

This parish is situated in the New Plymouth district in which 78,184 people were usually living at the time of the 2013 Census. That was an increase in population of 5,283 people (7.7 percent) since the 2006 Statistics New Zealand Census. Over 70 percent of the people in this district were living in the main urban centre, the city of New Plymouth.

The New Plymouth District then consisted of 71 percent of the Taranaki region's population, and 1.7 percent of New Zealand's population, ranking 10th in size out of the 67 districts in New Zealand.

The main church building/facility of C1 is in a township situated roughly 20 kilometres from the main Taranaki city of New Plymouth. This town is described in the statistics New Zealand Urban/Rural Profile categories as a satellite urban community.

In 2013 there were 6,483 people usually living in this town, detailed in the Census as West (usual population 3,672) and East (usual population 2,811). This was an overall increase of 192 people, or 2.9 percent, since the 2006 Census, and was around 8.3 percent of the population of the district.

The median age for people in this township was just over 40 years, similar to the median age in the New Plymouth District overall (40.6). Nearly 19 percent of people in the town were aged 65 years and over, compared with 16.8 percent of the total district population. Nearly 22.4 percent of people were aged under 15 years compared with 20.4 percent for all of the district.

There are 2616 occupied dwellings and 153 unoccupied dwellings - 5.5 percent – and nine dwellings under construction.

On the Deprivation Index 2013, this town is rated 10, the highest level of deprivation (Atkinson et al., 2014). A report profiling Taranaki children and services was commissioned in 2015 by the TSB [Taranaki Savings Bank] Community Trust, with project partners Philanthropy New Zealand, The Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Bishop's Action Foundation. The report states there are 4,680 children living in Taranaki communities which have high deprivation scores (NZDep 9&10). Of these,1692 (36% of the Taranaki children affected by living in areas with the highest deprivation scores) live within this one small community (TSB Community Trust, 2015).

Besides the Anglican Church, near the centre of town, there are five other denominations. These are strong Presbyterian and Roman Catholic parishes, plus Latter Day Saints, River of Life and an Anglican Māori Pastorate.

Within the Anglican parish are two other churches at which monthly services are held. One of these sits inland in a rural setting. The other is in a coastal rural settlement to the north, where at the time of the 2013 Census, 426 people were usually living, three less than the previous census. The median age for the people there was 49.7 years, compared to 40.6 years for the whole district. 25.9 percent of people there were aged 65 years and over, at that time, compared with 16.8 percent of the total New Plymouth District population. There were 195 occupied dwellings and 135 unoccupied dwellings on census night, reflecting the seaside holiday nature of the town. No dwellings were being built.

Of the three church buildings in the parish, the one in town is the most recently built, in 1960, replacing the original one built in 1878. The other two church buildings in the parish are the original wooden buildings both built around 1890, with one, near the sea, a Category 2 listed historical building.

7.3.2 Parish Case Study C2

This parish is situated in the Stratford district in which 8,991 were usually living at the time of the 2013 Census. That was an increase in population of 99 people (1.1 percent) since the 2006 Statistics New Zealand Census. The district then consisted of 8.2 percent of Taranaki region's population, and less than one percent of New Zealand's population

In 2013, almost exactly 60 percent of the usual population for the district lived in the main township, classified as an independent urban community, in which the Case Study church itself is situated. This township is described in the Census in

two parts, as West (usual population 3,264) and East (usual population 2,199), totalling 5,463. This figure was an overall increase of 123 people since the previous Census.

Close to 20 percent of those usually living in the town were aged 65 and over, compared to just over 16 percent for both the district, and for the Taranaki Region. Those aged 65 and over comprised 14.3 percent of the total New Zealand population at that time.

In total there were 2,271 occupied dwellings and 171 unoccupied dwellings in the town – 7 percent unoccupied – and 9 dwellings under construction.

This parish has only this one church building at this time. Seven other denominations serve the district beside the Anglican/Methodist. These are Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Baptist, Vineyard, Jehovah's Witness and Brethren.

7.3.3 Parish Case Study C3

This parish is situated in the south Taranaki District in which 26,577 were usually living at the time of the 2013 Census. This was an increase in population of 90 people, or less than one percent since the 2006 Statistics New Zealand Census.

The district then consisted of around 24 percent of Taranaki region's population, and less than one percent of New Zealand's population.

The town in which the church itself is situated is classified as an independent urban community. In 2013, those usually living there numbered 1,098. This was just 4.1 percent of the usual population for the district and a decrease of 42 people, or 3.7 percent, since the 2006 Census.

The median age was 46.0 years for people in the town, compared to 38 years in the district. Close to 21 percent of those usually living in the town were aged 65 and over, compared to 14.7 percent for the wider District, 16 percent for the Taranaki Region, and 14.3 percent of the total New Zealand population at that time, showing this to be a distinctly older population, as well as a dwindling one. The statistics for dwellings in this town show there were 486 occupied dwellings and 96 unoccupied dwellings - 16.5 percent empty- and no new dwellings under construction.

On the Deprivation Index 2013, this town is rated 10, the highest level of deprivation (Atkinson et al., 2014).

This parish has now only the one church building (plus hall). The church building is a Category 1 listed historical building. Several other denominations serve the district beside Anglican - these are Methodist/Presbyterian, Catholic, Māori Methodist, and Apostolic, which has services provided via Skype from Auckland.

7.4 Analysis of Case Study Data

The parish surveys were aimed at gathering information as well as opinion, with questions generally formally phrased. Where views are expressed about community or congregation, these are opinions of the just one or two people involved in the survey for each parish. The individual questionnaires collectively bring a wider range of opinion to similar questions and more scope for feeling to be expressed, (as did the interviews), although feelings were often evident in the parish surveys too.

Section A of both parish and individual questionnaires concerned the local community, but with more detail requested in the parish surveys. Accordingly, analysis of this data relating to Section A is based primarily on the parish surveys that were completed for the case study parishes, augmented with input from the other sources (individual questionnaires and interviews, and non-case study parish surveys). In later sections this is reversed; the analysis begins with data from the individual questionnaires as the more in-depth source, augmented from the other sources.

In the analyses, similar keywords, concepts and ideas have been grouped to enable identification of themes. In the commentary, *counts* or *mentions* are used interchangeably to refer to the number of items in that group. For example, if "young people" is said in the answers given by three different people, these will be grouped together, and the counts or mentions of "young people" will be 3. The total number of counts or mentions frequently exceeds the number of respondents, as one answer may contain several keywords. For example, "friendship, worship, and serving others", may all be said by one person, and provide one count to each of three different themes.

Section A. Your community.

Section A of the parish and Individual questionnaires asked some similar questions, but with more detail sought in the parish surveys. Analysis of data in this section is primarily of the parish questionnaires, augmented by data from the other sources of individual questionnaires and interviews.

Section A of the parish questionnaires asked the following questions:

A1   Please provide a brief description of the community this parish serves

A2   Have there been any significant changes or trends – in the past 30 years?   In the past 10 years?

A3   Would you describe your community as

Declining/Struggling   *Maintaining*   *Growing/Thriving*

A4   Would you describe your community as

Poorly resourced   *Adequately resourced*   *Well resourced*

A5   What do you see as the particular needs of your community?

A6   What do you see as the strengths of your community?

To consider these questions individually:

A1. Please provide a brief description of the community this parish serves

1. location, landscape, brief history, main farming or other activities.
2. ethnicity, age mix, occupational and social groupings

These questions are similar to those used by Bennett (2013) to

1. Position case study parishes in their localities and environment, and
2. To provide a first insight into local demographics.

Asking these questions facilitates the first phase of "reading" rural community suggested by Liepins (2000a), in which the meanings people ascribe to rural community are often associated firstly with the character of the wider rural area, its environmental and economic aspects, physical features and agricultural production; and secondly with the identification of social collectives, differentiated into different groupings.

Fitting with this, the responses included

From Case Study 1 (C1)

The area stretches from the [...] River to [...], coastal strip. Mostly a farming area. (Dairy, sheep and cattle, some horticulture). A service town, garages, supermarket, farming stores etc. also a meat processing plant (small goods) – main employer. The wealth is in the rural areas (farming) – historically. Units are amalgamating reducing numbers of persons involved in the industry. Lifestyle blocks are increasing but often they do not connect with the resident rural community. They have different interests and communities. High proportion of beneficiaries, quite a lot of elderly– it's a cheap place to live. Large Māori component in [the town]. (C1)

From Case Study 2 (C2)

Rural farming area, predominantly dairy, some sheep farming in the backcountry. Predominantly Pākehā, some Māori, Asians in healthcare and retail. More predominantly elderly. Age care is the biggest employer. Benefit dependency. No industry. Good council that listens to us. (C2)

From Case Study 3 (C3)

> Small town, maybe 1,100 -1,200 residents now. Strong industry historically – port, dairy, freezing works. Farming community north and south of the town, mostly dairy farms. Steady decline in population and service industries over last 20-30 years. Strong Māori population in the town. Elderly population now, fewer young families. Retired living in town. Fluctuating rural community. Some Filipino farm staff. Large beneficiary group. (C3)

Another comment was the difficulty of finding farm workers locally -

> "It's easier to find an au pair to look after the children and home, so the wife can work on the farm, than to find farm workers" (C3)

The reference by all three to the sizeable or increasing elderly population is significant, and links to later discussion about the nature of congregations.

A2.   Have there been any significant changes or trends – in the past 30 years? in the past 10 years?

Asking about changes over the 30-year span allowed the major impact events of the 1980s and 1990s to be named, which is important as these were a turning point for the thriving rural centres of the time. From then, many became smaller, struggling townships, without the same clear identity, character or purpose.

The disappearance of major industries from these towns 25-30 years ago has been mentioned. The impacts were immense:

> "Unemployment was rife, the gangs took over" (C1)

> "People left and, in some cases, took their houses with them leaving empty sections around town" (C3, Interview A)

The effects flowed on - the closure of banks, post offices, many shops, petrol stations, pubs, picture theatres and hospitals, leaving the towns poorly serviced. Pressures in the farming arena led to amalgamation of farming units resulting in reduction of the outlying farming populations, and on to another of the losses devastating especially to smaller or more remote rural communities – the closure of their schools. This was referred to particularly in C3, where the local primary school (years 1-8) in the town closed in 2004, joining with the High School to make an Area school, years 1-13. The small farming communities around the town also had school closures.

> Farms have got bigger, amalgamated [...] and schools have closed down. [Ours, in an outlying rural community] is still going, but they have children from [three other farming areas] coming. Those schools all closed. And it's funny, if you've got a focus in a country community, the community really sticks together more. When a school closes, [the community] often loses a lot of its focus, especially if it's a real country school where all the parents get behind everything. I mean, ours is like that, so we're lucky that we've still

got a school. About 95 kids, because they do come from 'round about. It makes a big impact, on communities, when there are changes like that. [...] City people wouldn't notice it like we would. (C3, Interview A)

Kearns, Lewis, McCreanor, and Witten (2009) concur, in their study "The status quo is not an option: Community impacts of school closure in South Taranaki, New Zealand". The schools and communities researched were four in the more western region of South Taranaki, not in the area of the Southern cluster parishes, but otherwise similar communities, undergoing school closures in 2004.

The closure of rural schools disconnects communities from their past, shuts down a crucial focal point and meeting place for the community, and blocks the paths to other resources. Within a landscape of restructuring, and at least in New Zealand rural settlements, a school may be the last viable public service agency to remain in a locality. [...] closure and its threat generate not only tangible *effects* but also discernible *affects* that range from a sense of betrayal to feelings of grief. To this extent, our paper has been a contribution to the emotional geographies of rural life in New Zealand. (Kearns et al., 2009, p. 9)

The next part of the question brought focus to the more recent changes of the past 10 years. These included some indications of ongoing decline, and some of improvement. Noticeably also, the focus of replies shifted somewhat towards the identification of "social collectives" (Liepins, 2000a). The owners of lifestyle blocks, "lifestylers", and others who commute to work elsewhere were noted among these groups.

Amalgamation of farming units has resulted in reduction of farming population. In the past 10 years an increase in lifestyle blocks reversed the trend. All [our rural areas] have more lifestyle blocks than in the past. These people often don't connect to the community, [they] commute to New Plymouth. Also more transient, they move on - often find that lifestyle blocks equal no life and no style – there is always something needs doing or fixing. (C1)

This was echoed by a parishioner from an outlying area:

"neighbours […] change so frequently now, work in town, and no longer really identify with the district." (C1)

Others provided figures for the commuting workforce:

70% of our workforce leave here every day to go somewhere else to work. So … it's more, what do they call them, a town where people come for the lifestyle and they live here, but they don't work here, it's kind of strange. (C1, Interview A)

50% of the workforce commute north or south for work. So it's a satellite town in a sense that it provides equity and a lifestyle. (C2, Interview B)

In a study of the rural centre of Sheffield, in the South Island of New Zealand, Ennor (2007) found the 45-minute commuting time to the city of Christchurch, had led to a proliferation of lifestyle blocks around Sheffield, many owned by people whose work (and often other activities), are in the city. Ennor suggests that as lifestyle block activity is not generally agricultural, "lifestylers" are not really part of the rural community and would seem to fit better into the category of commuter, a "differentiated group within the community" (Liepins, 2000a).

Commuters are also mentioned by C2 as one of the changes of the past 10 years, including people leaving town at 3am to travel to work. Also listed by C2 were other "social collectives" and issues - "increased numbers of beneficiaries, and the foodbank being used more. Rising rents is another more recent issue" - and by C3, "The gradual close of small businesses. More beneficiaries arriving and a large elderly population".

Some trends towards growth and revitalization were also noted. The formation of a community medical centre, and the opening of rest homes were among C3 positives, along with the town attracting a growing artistic community.

> There is a sense of tightening of the community. People are buying houses that used to be rented, in the past 5 years, making them holiday houses or baches. There is a strong boating club. There are artists coming, the beginnings of an art community, and the old Post Office building has been turned into a Bed and Breakfast. (C3)

> We've survived – with a smaller population. Interesting, we've got different people, because the housing was cheap, we had a lot of people coming in and buying a house rather than paying rent, so that changed the dynamics of the community a wee bit. And this last lot of people we've had in, we've had several artists come into the town, that's changed it again! (C3, Interview A)

A developing "vibrant art scene" was also mentioned in the parish questionnaire from a Central cluster parish, P4, of note as these communities appraise their more recent changes and opportunities.

The increasing elderly population is a theme across all three case studies. It appears to be a result of the normally resident population ageing, and of incoming older and retired people.

The movement of older people to these areas is attributed to farming people retiring into town for better access to amenities, and people coming from other areas either within or beyond Taranaki, because of cheaper housing than in larger urban areas. Having newcomers arrive from Auckland was mentioned by two of the original nine parishes. Nationally, this was part of a noticeable phenomenon in 2016-17 and ongoing, of relocation especially from Auckland. House prices there

had risen so sharply that many sought new homes around the country in order to afford housing. Others chose to relocate or to retire after selling their high value Auckland home and buying more cheaply elsewhere, sometimes becoming mortgage free and with equity to spare. This migration introduces new people, different skills, energy and money into small communities. Even small numbers of these new arrivals are significant. "Housing is affordable – [there has been] an influx from Auckland - eight!" (P4).

A business couple recently arrived from Auckland were among the community interviewees in C2.

> Because we'd been based around Auckland we decided we wanted something smaller, rather than just moving to another big town, or another big city type thing. So we wanted something a bit more personal and friendly. […] Auckland, everyone's too busy to sort of spend the time of day with you, or say a hello, or anything like that… we found this place. (C2, Interview C)

A3. Would you describe your community as

Declining/Struggling   *Maintaining*   *Growing/Thriving*

This question was asked in the Parish surveys, and the individual parishioners questionnaires, enabling a comparison, which shows the key people have voiced an opinion agreed by roughly half the parish respondents in each case.

The respondents from C1 appear the most confident that their town/area is maintaining or growing, with more in C2 and C3 aware of decline.

Table 6 A3. Parish/Parishioner views on growing/maintaining/declining

	Parish respondent/s	Individual responses	
C1	Maintaining	57.1% agreed maintaining	7.1% declining 35.7% growing
C2	Maintaining	52.9% agreed maintaining	41.2% declining 5.9% growing
C3	Declining	44.4% agreed declining	22.2% maintaining 33.4% mixed (declining/maintaining)

A4. Would you describe your community as –

Poorly resourced   *Adequately resourced*   *Well resourced*

C1 and C2 responded "Adequately resourced", C3 responded "Poorly resourced." Individual parishioners were asked if availability of services had increased, decreased or remained the same. In line with the overall view of maintaining/decline, 71% of C3 parishioners responded that availability of services had decreased.

These questions were asked to provide context to the research question which refers to "thriving and vibrant rural community". The responses from these parishioners in these centres indicate they do not appear to see their towns in these terms at this time, but more as holding their own, or in C3, slipping back. The needs and strengths of the communities were also explored, at both parish and parishioner level. Parishioners were also asked, "What is something you are sad or concerned about in your community" and "What is something you are glad about or happy to see in your community?". These more personal questions received more response from parishioners than the needs/strengths questions.

A5.   What do you see as the particular needs of your community?

Specifics from the parish surveys included:

From Parish Case Study C1

> Land titles - many properties are leasehold, there are legal barriers to freeholding, which restricts development. The ability to freehold land would significantly change the outlook for this town's future

From Parish Case Study C2

> Affordable housing

From Parish Case Study C3

> Ongoing maintenance of community resources - unused buildings, absent landlords – gives town a derelict look
> Support for the local school

Table 7 A5. (Parish) What do you see as the particular needs of your community

	C1	C2	C3

People / personal needs
    to be listened to,
    to develop resilience, to gain hope,
    support when lonely
	3		1

Spiritual needs	2	1	2

Social
    Assistance where there are low incomes /financial disadvantage
    Care for young mothers/children
    Support for families where there are drug/ alcohol/ abuse issues
    Employment for young people
    Affordable housing,
    Quality education
    Transport for the elderly in town.
	6	2	4

Parishioners were also asked this, at another point in the questionnaire. Around half of respondents answered this question, with 25 issues raised in all.

As well, parishioners were asked, "What is something you are sad or concerned about in your community?". This question received answers from every respondent. The strongest theme was church related – sadness about the lack of interest and involvement from the community with the local church, meaning people missed on the supportiveness to be found within the church.

Table 8 A5. (Parishioners) What is something you are sad or concerned about in your community?

	C1	C2	C3
Schools / Youth	5	2	1
Older people	3	2	
Social Underprivileged, struggling financially	1	3	
Church / lack of community interest	2	9	2

Feeling of community being lost
      Transience
      Commuting
      Lack/loss of amenities, shops, clubs
      Loss of major employer
      Hard to attract professional support, doctors etc
      Distance, isolation
      Fewer volunteers
      Council/community affairs
	4	3	6

Totals	15	19	9

The issues identified regarding schools were that families in the town were sending their children to other, out of town "country" schools or to schools in other towns perceived as more favourable, or when older, into New Plymouth to the High Schools there, rather than supporting their local schools in town. In effect, the children are commuters too, and the families less connected and invested in the community they live in.

> "Once you went to the school nearest. But now there are buses and people have cars – they can go and visit and choose." (C1, Interview 1)

As these are families with the means to make these choices, it is likely that with them go skills and other resources that would benefit the in-town schools which instead may continue to decline, and have "a reputation". Conversely the small country schools are seen as more desirable and struggle with the demand. Some introduce zoning to curb the increase of enrolments from town children.

A6.   What do you see as the strengths of your community?

Specifics from the parish surveys included:

From Parish Case Study C1

> Very friendly, collegial, caring community - in contrast to New Plymouth Community spirit.   Pull together.

Lions club is a significant positive influence in the town.
Good facilities for sports – and will improve with the new sports hub.
Main street is upgraded. More needed
Freeholding would significantly change the outlook for (our town's) future

From Parish Case Study C2

Community House,
Connector bus for students
Community cares for each other
Community spirit

From Parish Case Study C3

Volunteers

Parishioners that answered this identified a wide spread of strengths, but most clearly, like C1 and C2 above, considered the people and the qualities of the people, to be core strengths of their small towns.

These responses are tabulated below using the categories provided by Liepins (2000a) for reading or understanding community – the people, the meanings they make, the practices that connect people to community, and the spaces or structures with which the people identify

Table 9 A6. (Parishioners) What do you see as the strengths of your community?

	C1	C2	C3

People
   The people!
     caring, kind
     supportive, helping each other
     friendliness, welcoming, accepting
     knowing everybody
     don't give up
     independent attitudes
   The principal at the school
   Increasing population
	8	7	4

Meanings
   Family and historic connections
   Benefits of ageing population
   Developing art scene
	1		2

Practices
   Church related
   Support for the elderly
   Volunteer and community groups
   Community house
   Farming and industry
   Council/Community Board
	4	3	2

Spaces and structures
   A love of Taranaki / environment
   Safe beach, surfing, swimming, fishing, boat access
   Visually appealing
   Museum
		2	2

Totals	13	12	10

The is some fluidity between categories, for example the church is a structure with which people identify, but also a practice that fosters community. It also epitomizes belief and meaning for the people who attend.

The above findings suggest that for all the case studies, the qualities of the people in these small communities are seen as the biggest strength. The things that are done that connect people are also important, more so in C1. The physical spaces were not mentioned there, but were in C2 and C3, most importantly for C3, where history and family connection were also important. This was evident also in the interviews of C3 parishioners and community people, and the strength of interest in the town's historical society. The church in this parish is a category 1 listed heritage building, and local families are commemorated through the stained-glass windows in the church.

In addition to this, parishioners were asked "What is something you are happy about or glad to see in your community?". Again, this attracted more responses than the question about strengths.

Table 10 A7. What is something you are glad about or happy to see in your community?

	C1	C2	C3

People
    People, friends, friendliness, acceptance, positive attitudes
    New arrivals
	1	3	4

Meanings
    Support for projects
    Clubs, groups, organizations, services
    Facilities for the elderly
    Church related
		10	6

Practices
    Community events
    New businesses
    Strong farming and tourism
    Council
	3	1	

Spaces and Structures
    Township upgraded
    Parks, facilities, parking
    School
	5	3	2

Totals	9	17	12

Physical spaces and structures were more important in this question than the previous one, with respondents pleased to see improvements being made to their environment.

Where schools were seen as strengths in the community, this was accompanied by recognition for the principal.

> "A new principal for the high school who cares and is making a difference."
> (C1)

> "The principal of Area School making a huge difference for the better." (C3)

Parishioners were asked in A7, "Is there any point of difference your community has or could develop?" There were very few responses to this question.

In the previous section where results are shown from collated individual questionnaires, and in the following sections where these become the focus, it should be remembered that these results are gathered from just a small number of people – 43 in total. There is considerable homogeneity in this group of respondents, who, as a starting point, are all worshipping members of the Anglican church. This is a "community within a community", particularistic in Ammerman's terms (1997, p.355), providing perhaps a narrow perspective. Only one respondent is Māori, all others New Zealand European, with the exception of one who identified as English. For the 39 (of 43) who provided their age, the mean age of the respondents was 69.87 (with a standard deviation of 12.835). Of individuals in C2, 6 of the 18 were aged between 81 and 90.

However, this group is of integral importance to the question posed in this study. Many are long term residents of Taranaki and of their current rural centre or area. They have seen the changes, stayed and lived through them, watched their town struggle. They have invested themselves there. They know what they value, what concerns them, and what the strengths of the community are. As some say, "I wouldn't want to live anywhere else".

> "Because [our town] is a really good community. I mean I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. And I think it's very friendly, people are really supportive." (C1, Interview 1)

> "[Our town] gets a lot of knockbacks [...] like [another town] in North Taranaki, being freezing works towns [...] you live with those knock backs, but it's a great little community to be involved in, I wouldn't be anywhere else really! [...] It's friendly, it's got a doctor and a chemist. It's got sports clubs. And of course, I've got grandkids here, so I don't want to shift anyway. And I think when you've grown up in a small community, well near a small community, and being in a farming community, it's your life really." (C3, Interview A)

Similarly, many are long term members of their current church communities, who had been there since 1967, or '74, or '88 or "since I was seven" (samples from Interviews, C1-3).

Again, they have seen the changes, and are in the main saddened or concerned by them, especially in the intersection of church and community. Diminishing

interest from the general community for involvement with the church appears possibly dire in its consequences for the church, but also as church members see it, it is a loss for the people of the community. For many, the church in their experience provides them friendship, fellowship, acceptance, help and support. Not only was it a centre for their family life in earlier times, it is for many in itself a family now, a spiritual family, nurturing people in their faith. It fosters "involvement with the Lord and being guided by His spirit" (C3). That many in the community are not interested and so are missing out on this physical and emotional nurture and spiritual nourishment is saddening to them, as is the feeling of impotence to effectively alter this. For others there is frustration in this, and sometimes at attitudes past and present that inhibit possibly effective action. Responses on these topics are considered next in Section B – Your Congregation.

Section B. Your Congregation

Section B of the parish surveys and of the individual questionnaires asked similar questions, more personally in the latter. Analysis of data in this section is primarily of the individual questionnaires, augmented by data from the other sources.

Section B of the individual questionnaires asked the following questions:

B1. How often do you attend services at your church?

B2. Does your congregation have any other activities or ministries that you are part of?

B3. What is something you are sad or concerned about in your parish/congregation?

B4. What is something you are glad or happy to see in your parish/congregation?

B5. What do you see as the needs of people in your congregation?

B6. What do you see as the strengths of this congregation?

B7. What is most important to you about being part of this congregation?

B8. If this congregation wasn't here to be part of, what would you do instead

Data from questions B1 and B2 is not included here.

B3. What is something you are sad or concerned about in your parish/congregation?

Small or declining numbers were the most frequently mentioned causes of sadness/concern, common to all three parishes, with 18 counts. The decline in young people attending was next with 11 counts, (the descriptors "young people" or "younger people" sometimes referred to a range as wide as 0-50), and that the congregation was predominantly ageing or elderly was next (9 counts). These concerns were not mentioned by C3 except, like the others, for one mention of there being no children or young families.

The parish surveys provided some insights into the reasons for declining numbers – the elderly dying (or "snuffing it", as one said), or going overseas, becoming too unwell to attend or being "whisked away to rest homes their families think they should be in" (C2).

The idea of the current congregation wanting more young people was contested in one parish survey - "What they say they want is more young people – but they don't want to accommodate them" (C1). The difficulty appears to be that below a "critical mass" the situation per force becomes a one size must fit all. This may be because small numbers of attendees make it difficult to have multiple arrangements, or due to the lack of manpower that would be required to do it. The largest parish surveyed, P7, is running an early morning traditional service, a later morning "family" service, and a Thursday morning service, which currently attracts a different congregation. Each service caters for the needs of those attending at the time of their choice. In the smaller parishes, all of which used to do something similar, offering a range of services now has become impractical. If the older people want the familiar services they have always known, it becomes more challenging to involve children and younger people within the one setting. As with schools, mobility provides options - people will look around to find what suits and may go elsewhere.

Other reasons discussed for declining numbers included that when children left to go to boarding school it could mean parents stopped attending too. For others it could be "a preconceived idea – if I come to church I will have to do something" (C3). Also as church attendance has fallen away it is likely that many of those remaining are of strong faith, which may not be a natural group for others to fit with.

> Church is largely social – if you come along and there is no-one there to talk to (about the farm or whatever) you don't want to come. Used to be you could sneak in the back and put money in the plate – don't know about God but that's ok. Now people in the pews appear more religious, church matters. Could get by [in the past] being 50% religious, now you have to be 75% religious. (P4)

Ammerman (1997) found on a similar theme, observing that the most committed groups were perhaps the least accommodating or comfortable for others, and therefore least adaptive, a contributing factor to decline.

Among concerns expressed, being static in ideas, resistant to change and not meeting "the needs of today" each received two mentions, six in total with three of these from C2. All others were single mentions except three comments from C3 about the difficulty of connecting church with community. This may be a reflection of this congregation being so small, with just 10 people in total involved and no money for ministry (C3 parish questionnaire), and also due to attempts that have

been unsuccessful, such a community carol service, or a change of seasons service, specifically with the farming community in mind, which no-one attended.

Table 11 B3. What is something you are sad or concerned about in your parish/congregation?

	C1	C2	C3
Small numbers / Declining numbers	7	5	6
Ageing/elderly congregation	5	4	
Decline in young people attending, No children/young families	6	7	1
Clergy are overworked, non-stipendiary Lack of volunteers Ministries "fall over"	3		
Congregation static in ideas/focus Resistance to change Not meeting needs of today	2	3	1
Irregular communion Lack of pastoral care Lack of communication within parish		2	1
People don't understand gifting Inability to raise funds		1	1
Difficulty connecting with community Difficulty connecting with community in faith inspired activities c Church used less for weddings and funerals		1	3
Totals	23	23	13

B4. What is something you are glad about or happy to see in your parish/congregation?

Overwhelmingly, the responses were about friendship, fellowship, positive qualities of people, and relationships within the congregation – care and concern for each other, compassion, love, goodwill and good spirit, and happy, smiling people. Of 43 total mentions, 23 relate to these aspects of congregational life, indicating the high value of friendships and relationships, in the C2 congregation especially, where 12 of 16 mentions fell in these categories.

> "There is a good spirit, a supporting spirit with a strong base of compassion for the whole as well as the individual" (C1)

> "The strengths of our friendships"; "Good fellowship and support"; "The love they [the parishioners] all have for each other"; "Good spirit of caring" (C2)

> "We are all a very loyal bunch and try to help one another where we can"; "Our small group get on well together" (C3)

Also important was the loyalty and commitment of members to their congregation:

"The genuine faithfulness of the parishioners. Their faithfulness and perseverance to attend while watching the declining numbers." (C2)

This commitment was mentioned in all three parishes.

There was also acknowledgement of the clergy (C1, C3), people being involved and using their gifts (C1, C2), community outreach (C1), and being glad of the newcomers in C3.

Other singular responses included attempts to think, be flexible and try new ideas, sound teaching, ecumenical cooperation, survival and a strong sense of wanting to keep the church open.

Overall, the appreciation is for the people, the relationships and the genuine efforts being made to support each other and the whole they are part of.

The appreciation of friendship and support is particularly apparent in C2, reflecting the group of respondents including mostly women, many older and living alone. The similarly high count in this area for C1 is more surprising, as the respondents are more equally men and women, and mostly married, so this finding suggests a strong appreciation of connection and awareness of other. C1 and C3, as with other results show a wider spread of appreciation across both social and worship aspects of their congregational life.

Table 12 B4. What is something you are glad about or happy to see in your parish/congregation?

	C1	C2	C3
Care and concern for each other Acceptance, inclusion, unity Love, goodwill, good spirit, compassion	7	5	2
Friends, friendliness, fellowship Happy, smiling people	1	7	1
Loyal parishioners, committed, faithful Surviving Strong sense of wanting to keep churches open Using our gifts	3	4	2
Wonderful clergy Sound teaching	2		2
Attempts to think Ability to be flexible, try new things	1		1
Community outreach Ecumenical cooperation	3		1
Some newcomers, growth in numbers			3
Totals	17	16	12

B5. What do you see as the needs of people in your congregation?

A category of need strongly identified was that of support of parishioners as people got older, and for those living alone. More generally, in all three parishes needs included companionship, friendship, connection, to be looked after, watched out for and cared for. Encouragement, visits and pastoral care were specifically mentioned, as were practical needs like transport, and assistance with modern challenges such as Information Technology (IT). In all, 35 mentions of 54 (65%) related to these needs for care and support.

> "Unfortunately we are all getting older but we do look after each other"
> "Helping each other" (C1)
>
> "Ageing congregation, health and mobility issues"
> "As many people are elderly they are looking for companionship and continuation of their Anglican faith (and Methodist)" (C2)
>
> "Companionship"
> "To be enabled to participate" (C3)

Church services, worship, teaching, nourishment of the spirit and upliftment formed the next group, with 11 counts.

> "Stability, friendship, worship"
> "A secure place to worship and build special connection" (C1)
>
> "Spiritual leadership and guidance"
> "Reassurance that God is with them in their declining years" (C2)
>
> "Supporting one another in faith"
> "To encourage each other in our faith journeys" (C3)

A resident minister providing leadership and pastoral care was identified as a need in C2, also patience and forbearance.

These responses indicate the awareness in the congregation of the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of themselves as a group, and as individuals. Expectations appear to be largely that needs will be addressed within the group, with care extended to the elderly and more generally between all members of the group. The limits of these current internal resources are also referred to.
C2 included the need for a resident minister, leadership and pastoral care.
C3 highlighted the need to welcome new members and meet the challenges of encouraging growth.

C1 included the congregational need to have more young people attending. This would ostensibly introduce new energy and expand the resource, but not necessarily. In the C2 parish survey it was noted "younger people are high needs", a broad statement but possibly a reflection of those who might seek the support of the church in a troubled community. Also, "younger people don't have the time"

was an observation made by a senior staff member at our planning meeting. This was also the comment from the rural parish in the study by Prebble (2012), that the younger people (or those described as middle aged) were very busy with work commitments.

Table 13 B5. What do you see as the needs of people in your congregation?

	C1	C2	C3
Look after, watch out for, help each other, TLC, to be cared for Support as people get older and for those living alone Visits, pastoral care	11	7	1
Companionship, friendship, connection Support and encouragement Patience and forbearance	2	8	4
Transport Assistance with challenges of the modern world, IT etc	1	1	
Church services, worship Supporting each other in faith Good teaching Nourishment of the spirit, upliftment	3	6	2
A resident minister, leadership, pastoral care Stability	2	2	
Encouraging new members and participation Young people	1		3
Totals	20	24	10

B6. What do you see as the strengths of this congregation?

There were overall fewer responses to this question than B4 (what are you glad about or happy to see in your congregation), possibly because the B4 wording was intentionally simpler, or because this question may have seemed repetitious. However it was included to enable direct comparison with the same question in the parish surveys., and still drew worthwhile response.

Again the close and caring qualities of the congregation received the most mentions – everyone knowing each other, being accepting and inclusive, offering caring and close support, with love and loving hearts - "we feel like a family" . These characteristics are valued as genuine strengths, with 12 counts.

The way the groups work together was next – being small and cohesive, unity, everyone helping, participation - with 9 counts. Fellowship, people meeting for a common cause, and strength of faith were important, with 6 counts. Other single mentions included attempts to link with other denominations, dedicated volunteer clergy, the experience that elderly folk have to offer, being flexible, and involvement in community affairs. "They are troopers" and "They keep going" were both mentioned.

These views were very much in line with those expressed in the parish surveys, where caring and support received most frequent mention. Accommodating difference and "looking after the odd bods" were a part of this (C1, C2). Being welcoming and generous, helpful and committed were other strengths. Food, flowers and music were among the gifts of the congregations, and, "An ability to live into their 90's!" (P7). Collegiality and comradery, plus commitment and having regular services were valued. Keeping contact with those who support the church but are not in the congregation was mentioned here (P4) and elsewhere in the questionnaire by P90 - "Still supported financially by farmers / retired farmers, who don't come to church but will write a cheque".

Table 14 B6.   What do you see as the strengths of this congregation?

	C1	C2		C3
We feel like a family We all know each other Love, loving hearts Caring, close support	6	6		
Dedicated volunteer clergy Attempts to link with other denominations Involvement in community affairs	2			1
Everyone helps, small, cohesive Participation, unity Flexibility	4	3		3
Fellowship Mostly accepting and inclusive	1	4		1
Experience of elderly folk They are troopers, they keep going		2		1
People meet with a common cause Strong faith		2		
Totals	13	17		6

B7. What is most important to you about being part of this congregation?

Responses to this question fell almost equally into two main themes - the importance of being part of a worshipping community, and the personal/interpersonal aspects of belonging to the congregation. Being part of a Christian community, having a common focus and worshipping God formed a strong theme, with 13 of 46 mentions, along with being able to take Communion, serve God as a lay preacher, the positive leadership team, spiritual family and "we love our church" bringing this count to 18 (49%). The remaining counts fell broadly into the more personal aspects of congregation as "family" – "it is my family", the people, knowing everyone, the safe environment, fellowship, friendship, acceptance, inclusiveness, kindness, love and support.

From C1, some examples from the 14 responses given:

"We love our church and work hard so it can survive"

"It is a safe environment for someone like me who may not always have the same views as the church. It allows me to practice my belief in the One Self safely without too much judgement"

"It is my spiritual family where I have been nurtured and encouraged"

"Being with kind people"

"I know everyone and we all have a common focus – worshipping God"

From C2, examples from 15 responses given:

"Being treated as a person"

"Being part of a family worshipping together"

"Belonging to a church and having weekly fellowship"

"The love and support I receive from them"

"The friendship and communion together with our worship"

"I love the people"

The members of the small congregation of C3 offered the following as of greatest importance to them:

"Sharing our faith journey"

"Acceptance"

"Being involved with our Lord and being guided by his spirit"

"Being an active Christian"

"We have a very positive group of church leadership"

"Enjoying seeing each other every week although we are only small"

"To belong to a small but sincere community of believers"

"Being able to come to church"

And that

"[My/our involvement] brings numbers up to more than four".

Table 15 B7. What is most important to you about being part of this congregation?

	C1	C2	C3
Being part of a Christian community Common focus, worshipping God Communion We love our church	4	7	5
The people, family, spiritual family	5	5	1
Acceptance, inclusiveness, safe environment Kindness, love and support Know everybody, friendship Encouraging fellowship	7	8	2
Serving God as a lay preacher Positive group of church leadership		1	1
Adding to the numbers			1
Totals	16	21	10

These responses illustrate the point made by Lineham (2017) about the ambiguity of the term "community" as used by or about local congregations. In one usage it is the community (place, populace etc.) that the congregation sits within. In another usage it is the congregation itself that is described as community, "an autonomous family of believers" (p250). The description of that congregational community as family occurs from the 1950s (Lineham, 2017 p 268), and is a strong theme through this study.

B8. If this congregation wasn't here to be part of, what would you do instead?

Asked to think about what they would do if the current congregation was no longer available to them, respondents indicated a strong preference for continuing to belong to a congregation, with some openness to a change of denomination to achieve this. Of 39 mentions, 24 were of joining another church – Presbyterian was mentioned twice, Methodist once, "similar" three times, and in C3, four of the five who said they would join another church suggested it would be the Catholic church, "next door". Although willing to entertain the idea of joining another congregation, some added that their commitment might be less than currently – that their attendance might be part time, irregular, not as involved or consistent.

Seven people indicated they would prefer to travel to another town to continue attending at an Anglican church, than to join another denomination. For some this was due to links in parishes they had attended before, for example the Cathedral parish in New Plymouth. For others it was due to concerns that the theology, leadership, structure or style of worship in other denominations would not suit them.

Table 16 B8. If this congregation wasn't here to be part of, what would you do instead?

	C1	**C2**	**C3**
Join another church	9	10	5
Where this was specified	Pres 1, Meth 1	Pres 1 Similar 3	Catholic 4
Go to Anglican in next town	3		
Pray to God each day Continue with spiritual pursuits	3		
Home church, study group			1
Increase other social club activities Involve with cultural events		1	1
Stay at home Probably not attend another church		2	1
Not sure, no plan B		2	1
Totals	15	15	9

A third group indicated they would opt for personal prayer, other individual solutions, or possibly the creation of a home group. Two said their church involvement would be replaced with cultural or social involvement. Two said they were unsure, one that they had no plan B, and two said just that they would stay home.

Feelings expressed included "A huge hole to fill!" and "I would be very lost and most probably be staying home because it would be too far to travel to [the next town] every week" (C3).

Section C. Organization of your Parish

The questions asked in this section of the individual questionnaires here were:

C1. Do you have responsibilities, roles or involvement in

1. the administration or leadership of the parish?   *Yes*   *No*
2. in any other parish activities or ministries?   *Yes*   *No*

and

C2. What works really well in the organization of your parish?

Analysis for these questions is not included here but drawn on or referred to where relevant.in other areas of analysis.

Section D. Your Ideas for the Future

The questions asked in this section of the individual questionnaires were:

D1. Does your congregation have plans of any kind for the future that you know about?   *Yes*   *No*

D2. Do you think any changes or action are needed to support the future of your Church?   *Yes*   *Maybe*   *No*

If yes or maybe, what changes could there be?

If yes or maybe, how urgently do you think change or action is needed?

   Not very urgently   *Urgently*   *Very urgently*

How willing are you for things to change?

   Not very willing   *Willing*   *Very willing*

D3. What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time?

(And D3a. If that doesn't happen, what do you think might happen?)

D4. What feelings do you have when you think about the future of your church or congregation?

D1. Does your congregation have plans of any kind for the future that you know about?   *Yes*   *No*

This question had been asked in the parish surveys, and received the responses

- C1 – yes - we know we have to do something but are undecided as to what
- C2 – yes – [our plan is] to survive
- C3 – no

Comparing with the parishioners' responses:
- The parishioners of C1 appeared to mostly agree, with 10 of 15 respondents saying Yes.
- Respondents of C2 mostly said No – 8 of 11 responses
- The eight C3 respondents who answered this question all agreed No.

D2.   Do you think any changes or action are needed to support the future of your Church?   *Yes*   *Maybe*   *No*

The majority view in all three parishes was strongly Yes. A small number didn't respond, two in C3 said maybe, but no one said No.

D2 (cont.) If yes or maybe, how urgently do you think change or action is needed?

         Not very urgently   *Urgently*   *Very urgently*

How willing are you for things to change?

         Not very willing   *Willing*   *Very willing*

This had been asked in the parish surveys also and in each case the person/people responding on behalf of the parishes which became case studies had indicated that in their opinion the parishioners would have some sense of urgency and generally be willing for things to change (Table 3). The collated individual responses support "some sense of urgency" but suggest the willingness for things to change may be higher than perceived by the key parish personnel respondents. This is significant, discussed further in later chapters.

Table 17 D2. Parishioner's sense of urgency and willingness for change

	How urgently is change needed?			How willing are you for things to change?		
	Not Very urgent	Urgently	Very urgent	Not very willing	Willing	Very Willing
C1	1	9	1		6	7
C2	3	6	1	1	6	5
C3	2	4	1		5	3
Totals	6	19	3	1	17	15

D3.   What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time?

   (And **D3a. If that doesn't happen, what do you think might happen?**)

The phrasing of this question as "what would you like" was purposeful, as an invitation to describe a preferred future for their church (Suter, 2014).

The responses from all three case study parishes strongly reflected the desire for more people, younger people, people from a cross section of the community – children, families, middle age and older people. Thirty of 51 mentions related to this desire to see larger, younger or generally more age diverse congregations. Five more used descriptors like vibrant, growing, excited and thriving. Another three, all from C2, said they would like to see the church full, "bursting at the seams", words also used by P6 in the parish surveys. In all, there were 38 references to wishing to see the church growing in numbers, age diversity and energy. One person, C2, more conservatively said "viable", and another, C3, "a tight knit group of believers".

C1 respondents spoke of changes in ideas and attitudes, "plain language for ordinary people", and "good meaty, truthful teaching". C1 was also strong about reaching out into the community and "spreading God's love", with 4 of the 5 counts in this group coming from C1, the other being from C3.

Another single count, from C2, was of supporting any changes good for the church.

Table 18 D3. What would you like your congregation to look like in 5 years' time?

	C1	C2	C3
More people	5	4	5
Younger	3	6	1
Cross section of community, children, families, middle age and older people	3	2	1
Vibrant/growing/excited, thriving, revitalized	1	2	2
Full, bursting at the seams		3	
Viable		1	
A tight knit group of believers			1
Changes in ideas and attitudes	1		
Plain language for ordinary people "good meaty truthful teaching "	2		
Reaching out to community Spreading God's love	4		1
I'm 89, I don't look that far ahead Not sure		2	
Support any changes good for the church		1	
Totals	19	21	11

These answers were similar to those that came from the parish surveys also – ideally seeing larger, younger, more age diverse, thriving, and revitalized congregations.

In a model of considering "predictions, preferences and possibilities" (Suter, 2014), the above responses show the preferences. Observations are of ageing and dwindling congregations. Reports provided on the website of the Christian Research Association (n.d.) demonstrate decadal decline in church affiliation, and *trends may predict* the continuance of this decline, but the *preference* of the people is the opposite. When the parishioners were asked "what would you like your

congregation to look like in five years' time", 38 of 51 mentions were of growth in numbers, involving all ages, i.e. 75% of mentions were preferences at odds with the trends or predictions.

> "With a "preferred" future we move from what is currently being suggested by prevailing trends ("prediction") to what we would like to see happen" (Suter, 2014, p. 80)

Preferred futures may provide positive goals, or a vision for the future – "this is what we'd like to see, how can we achieve it?", fuelling a positive energy or resolve, and motivating action. Alternatively, a focus on preferred futures may engender a kind of wishful thinking, imagining that a very unlikely future may be possible and might somehow happen, but with no actual plan. Without a plan, and if thinking doesn't go beyond the preferred, this could stall action, at least in part by enabling avoidance of the wider range of possibilities, some of which may be painful to consider.

The next question, "If that doesn't happen, what do you think might happen?" was asked to enable consideration of other possibilities than those preferred.

> "Possible futures are what *could* happen. They are not necessarily being currently suggested (via prediction) and they may not necessarily be what one would like to see happen (via preferred futures)" (Suter, 2014, p. 83)

D3a. If that doesn't happen, what do you think might happen?

This is a "but what if?" question as suggested by Ramirez et al. (2015). "What you would like to see happen might happen, but what if it doesn't?" In this case, the question gave opportunity to acknowledge or "think about the unthinkable" (Suter, 2014).

Of the possibilities mentioned, half (22 of 45, 49%) were acknowledging the possibility of an ending of some kind, if their preferred future did not happen. This ending was described in various ways – that the church would disappear, cease to exist, fade away, or fizzle out (8 counts), close (9 counts), or close and the building sold (2 counts). Another two in this group spoke of the church dying out, and the last said "Death!".

The next group saw continued decline (4 counts) and its effects (9) – being unable to maintain services/ministry (2), not having a local minister (1), having fewer services (2), providing ministry only (1), stepping further into survival mode (1), not being able to maintain buildings (1), and the collapse of church (in that town) except for funerals etc. (1). This group (13 of 45 counts) accounted for 29% of the mentions.

A small number of responses (8, 17%) referred to action that might be taken if the church continued to decline, or closed - keep trying to attract new people, doing things differently e.g. with house groups, join other churches, travel to join other congregations.

The final 2 mentions indicated a continued assuredness that the church is "still here for us", and "there will always be people who follow the way".

These responses indicate a clear awareness of the realities, acknowledged when asked about. C1 showed perhaps more capacity for seeking alternatives than C2 or C3, but overall the parishioners can recognize the very real and difficult possibilities that could lie ahead.

Table 19 D3a. If that doesn't happen, what do you think might happen?

	C1	C2	C3
Disappear, cease to exist, fade away, fizzle out Death, die out Close, church closed, sold off	9	10	3

Continued decline:
    Step further into survival mode
    Be unable to maintain services/ministry
    No local minister
    Fewer services
    May not be able to maintain buildings
    Collapse of churches except for funerals etc
    Ministry only
	4	3	6

Different:
    House groups
    Keep trying to attract new people
    People will travel
    Join another church
	6	1	1

Staying hopeful
    Still here for us
    There will always be people who follow the way
	1	1	

Totals	20	15	10

As one parish respondent said when asked about how they would like the congregation to look in five years' time, "Larger and younger (There probably won't be one)", and that if numbers continued to decline "I see the church closing (locally and more broadly) if the trend continues. Unless something significant changes, there will be no church" (P1).

A senior staff person spoke clearly about this possibility of the churches dying. Speaking of a group of parishes,

> None of them, by my crude definition, would be in a state of sustainable health in terms of a healthy spread of ages [...] where every age group is represented in somewhat equal proportions. So [...] three or four of those are probably essentially terminal - palliative if you like [...] without some sort of

direct intervention beyond their current control or resources, their trajectory is probably going to be measured in [years]. [...] that would be an observation shared at their congregational level, you know, they look around and they see 12 people, and the average age is probably 75. So, they don't need explaining the seriousness of the situation, and the trend has only gone in one direction for the last probably 10 years. It's not a recent phenomenon. Some of them it might have been 20 years or 15 years since they really remember the last time things felt like they were on the up. So they've just continued to probably evolve, and over time that's meant changes from having a vicar to not having a vicar, and people stepping up and serving in ever more significant ways, but without actually having a change in the trends. So I think there's a sense of sadness about this - despite a lot of effort they haven't been able to turn things around. (Senior Staff Interview 1)

This observation about how the parishioners may be feeling is supported in the responses to the next question: D4. What feelings do you have when you think about the future of your church or congregation?

D4. What feelings do you have when you think about the future of your church or congregation?

In all, the 38 responses to this question contained 43 separate mentions of named feelings or reactions to thinking about the future, plus a number of other comments.

Fifteen mentions were made of sad, sadness or sorrow (35% of feelings named), coming from all three case study parishes, but with most (8) from C2. Two other mentions were of disappointment or feeling let down.

Others show degrees of stress or distress: uncertainty, concern, worry, anxiety, guilt, fear, dread, and desperation (11 counts in all).

These 28 mentions (65% of the total count of feelings named) are, in simple terms, grief reactions. They are typical responses to change, loss or grief. As these individuals contemplate futures for their church which may include continued decline and possible closure, the feelings expressed align with grieving.

This was also conveyed strongly in a parish survey, not in a question about feelings, but in acknowledging the need to rethink where they were headed:

> "Asking [ourselves], where are we going? How are we going to be in 10 years' time? - there's fear - disappointment – sadness – confusion – bewilderment" (P2)

For some in the case studies, the feelings were named or conveyed along with reflections on increasing age, of themselves and the group, and its realities:

> "Sad when I look at the age"

"Deep concern! We are all getting older and less able to continue with the upkeep of our assets and with less energy for visiting etc."

"Over the years we have both worked hard for the church, now we are old [83] only limited work we can do"

This concern was conveyed in a parish survey too:

"You and I [the two parish people present] are getting long in the tooth – who is going to take over?" (C2)

For some the sadness was regarding the community:

"I am sad that the pressures of modern life seem to rule out church attendance and commitment for many in our parish";

"Sad in the lack of faith out there"

"Wouldn't like to see church close as that would be another bad thing [to happen in the community]"

On the other hand, after sadness, the other single most frequently mentioned feeling was hope, again from all C1-3, with 6 counts:

"We must have hope"

"Always hope. It is God's church. He has not left us"

These and other responses expressed optimism, trust or in one case that they were heartened "by the response of the people we attract".

Two people used the word "mixed" to introduce how they felt. For others this was inherent in their response. Often the mix was of the more difficult feelings, and the positivity of their faith:

"Mixed – sad when I look at the age, delighted when I see who's still coming, expectant – what has God in store for us?"

"Mixed – I trust that God has a plan, but – I fear having to move if this church closes"

"Anxiety. On a good day, hope"

"Anxiety. Sadness. Hope!"

"Disappointment, but hope and peace knowing it's God's responsibility and call on people's lives."

There were philosophical responses, supported by faith:

"Practice non-attachment. God I think wants to sweep away the old before God brings in something much more relevant"

"Increasing those who attend regularly. Although it did start with 12"

"The true Temple is the human body and while I like churches and their ministries these things and people will come and go. People need a point of interest, a place to gather. [But] for most part the work is done moment by moment in the very place we stand."

And for two, a call or question:

"This is God's work, but what does he/she want <u>me</u> to do?";

"God please inspire and help us."

The tension experienced between faith and hopelessness was expressed in one questionnaire and an interview:

"Realistically we need a "mission of miracles" to turn us around. So I have feelings of desperation, and also guilt for my lack of faith to believe we can grow again!" (C1)

"Christianity is supposed to bring us hope, and yet the situation we find ourselves in, there is a strong element of hopelessness [...] I think the nub of this whole thing. We can't see a way out of where we are." (C1)

Table 20 D4. What feelings do you have when you think about the future of your church or congregation?

	C1	C2	C3
Sad, sadness, sorrow	3	7	5
Concern, anxiety, worry	1	3	1
Guilt	1		
Fear, dread		2	
Desperation	2		
Disappointment, let down		1	1
Unsure (uncertainty), unsettled		1	1
Pain	1		
Regret	1		
Mixed	1	1	
Hope	3	2	1
Delighted, joy	1		1
Heartened, expectant, optimism	4		
Trust, peace – this is God's responsibility		1	1
Philosophical	3		
Asking God for guidance	1		1
Totals	22	18	12

There are some striking differences between the parishes in the responses to this question. The first nine lines in the chart above, down to regret, are the record of the more difficult feelings, the remaining seven lines, including "mixed", are the more positive or philosophical feelings and responses.

Between these lists, C1 has a ratio of 9:13, or 59% more positive or philosophical. C2 has a ratio of 14:4, or just 22% in the more positive or philosophical range. C3 has a ratio of 8:4, or 33% in the more positive or philosophical range

The potential realities being acknowledged include possibilities of significant loss and change, engendering responses such as those listed above, normal grief reactions. How individuals respond to loss may range from intuitive styles to instrumental as described by Doka and Martin (2011). On a continuum, intuitive grievers are more expressive of feelings, such as sadness, and instrumental grievers more likely to think, plan and act. For most there is a blending of the two styles.

Recalling that in C2, six of 18 respondents were women in their 80s, this may in part explain the higher levels of sadness and anxiety being expressed here, as their time or options for action may be perceived by them as more limited, (or their personal styles of grieving may be more intuitive). In total over 70% of the respondents in C2 were women, which may be contributing to a less broad response to this question than in the other parishes. This is also the one of the three parishes that does not have an ordained minister as part of the local leadership team.

By contrast, C1 has two non stipended priests, two vocational deacons and one retired non stipended priest in the leadership team, and C3 has two ordained priests within the local team. Both C1 and C3 had a more equal number of women and men responding.

Section E.   Church and Community

The questions asked in this section of the individual questionnaires were:

E1.   What is one of your best memories of church and community working together?

E2.   What do you see as particular needs in your community?

If the church could do one big thing to help (that it isn't already) what would you most like it to be?

E3.   If the community could do one big thing to assist the church, what would you most like that to be?

E4.   How important is the church building to you as a member of the local community? *Not very important   Important   Very important*

In what ways is the building important or not important to you as member of the local community?

E5.   How important is the church building to your needs as a parishioner here?   *Not very important   Important   Very important*

In what ways is the building important or not important to your own needs as a parishioner?

E6.   When you look ahead what is most important to you about the future of your church in your community?

E7   Are there any other comments or ideas you would like to add about you, your church and the community?

Questions E2 and E3 are not analysed here.

E1.   What is one of your best memories of church and community working together?

This is another Appreciative Enquiry type question – looking for those things that are or have been valued, to see if there are ways they can built on. Of 43 respondents, 11 people did not answer this question, eight of these from C2.   The other 32 respondents between them mentioned 53 same or different memories. A striking difference to the outcomes of this question from others, is that there is very little overlap between the answers of the three case studies. The memories are mostly specific to things each parish had been involved in with its own community – different activities have been the tradition perhaps, in each place, or specific projects have been accomplished with satisfaction.

In C1, "working together on common goals" provided memories, from market days (4 mentions), gala days, working bees and fundraisers (9 mentions in total). Services offered to the community were another group – the op shop, holiday and after school programmes, coffee mornings and craft (also 9 counts).

> "There are many, but the Op Shop, which has been going for 30 years, offers good cheap clothes to the community, helpers are mostly not church people. An opportunity for a chat. We also have morning teas for the volunteers" (C1)

All age worship and the choir were mentioned, and some more personal memories: "when our children were teens" and "when our family lived at home and came to church with us".

Memories from C2 clustered around a specific project – the establishment of a community house on church land, accomplished together with the community – and an ongoing service, the food bank. The next cluster was about traditional activity in that community – Anzac parades, Christmas parades and pageants, and concerts. Dressing the church with flowers for festivals, a holiday programme with a Christian message, and a pre-school playgroup were two others, and again, two personal family memories:

> "Seeing our daughter get married in the church both she and her brother were baptised in"

and

> "My husband's funeral"

In C3 there was also a cluster around a specific project, the fundraising for the restoration of the church building (3 counts). The others were individual memories -

two about gala days and the op shop (in common with C1), the others more directly of church involvement with activities, programmes such as Alpha and Cursillo courses, and for one, "The love factor, to be together as one".

Many of these activities may in fact be common to all the different parishes, but the snapshot provided by this sample appears to provide a sense of the different character of each place through the memories valued. The replies from C1 give a sense of "working together" as was stated, and doing things together, busy, enjoyable things instigated by the parish. C2 responses give a sense of going out and joining with the community in community things – the Anzac services and Christmas parades.

C2 and C3 both had accomplished significant projects, with community involvement. In C2 the establishment of the Community House involved the community in a project for the benefit of the community. Built on church land, the house was designed to provide spaces for agencies to be housed, with facilities and centralized admin, to ensure services were available locally to their consumers.   This project was achieved as a partnership of the church, community and the Bishop's Action Foundation.

In C3, the church restoration project was on one hand for the church itself, and on the other for the community, for its history and generations of farming and community people around the area – these were the people who committed to the project and made the extensive restoration work possible. The chairperson of the restoration committee was herself a member of the Catholic Church, another illustration of the wider significance of this project than for the parish alone. In C3, the history of the area and how it is valued was mentioned often throughout this study.

The other memories of C3 were as individual as the members themselves in this small group, and as often with C3, the focus was on the worship related activities of the church – attending courses or retreats, or way back, "being at Sunday School and Bible class every week" - as well as the book stalls and church fairs.

Accomplishing projects with community involvement was significant in multiple ways wherever these were discussed.

P4 spoke of the community youth centre established at the church in 2008 in response to community need and functioning successfully 10 years later. This was an initiative of the parish, BAF, local council and community agencies, and included a nurse being in attendance once a fortnight. Initially the programme included a breakfast club, now provided by the school.

P5 expressed great satisfaction in the recent establishment of a once a week Day Centre for older people in their community. This had been accomplished again with community consultation and involvement, in partnership with a local rest home, and with the support of the Bishop's Action Foundation. There was upgrading needed at the church to enable this service to be provided, including an accessible toilet and new carpet, and to ensure all health and safety requirements were met. Sincere appreciation was expressed - "We are so very, very thankful for the cluster of churches which has helped with the improvements and accounts as we don't have the money to do all this by ourselves. Amen!" and to the community, "People like projects." (P5)

Table 21 E1. What is one of your best memories of church and community working together?

	C1	C2	C3
All of them good	1	1	
Working together on common goals	2		
Market days, gala days, church fairs, book sales	5		2
Op shop	2		1
Fundraisers, working bees	2		
Family memories	2	2	
All age worship	1		
Active Christian choir	2		
Holiday programmes, after school programme	5	1	
Coffee mornings, craft	2		
Foodbank		3	
Community House establishment		3	
Anzac parades/services		1	
Annual Santa parade		2	
Christmas pageant/ family night		1	
Preschool playgroup		1	
Dressing the church with flowers for festivals		1	
3-monthly concerts with music talent from community		1	
Being at Sunday School and Bible Class every week			1
Raising money to repair the church, restoration project			3
Alpha course, Cursillo course			2
Christmas lunch in NP, one day Women's Retreat			2
The love factor, to be together as one			1
Totals	24	18	12

The projects mentioned are already existing illustrations of the potential of churches to contribute to their communities in significant ways. Understanding and responding to community needs, using existing resources and facilities, forming partnerships and accessing the support available through BAF have enabled these three diverse projects, each distinct to its community – a community house, a youth centre, and a day centre for older people.

In a project of another kind, P4 also discussed their Stained-Glass Window initiative. In this, the history and family connections of each window in the church

was researched, a booklet created containing the stories, and the church included as part of the programme during the Taranaki garden festival. Welcoming the public in this way, connecting with local community and beyond, enabled a wider appreciation of these stained-glass artworks, their history, their place in the community story and also of the church as custodian. This is a project that interested individuals are working to develop more widely, involving other churches in the area.

Questions E4 and E5 asked about the importance of the church buildings.

E4. How important is the church building to you as a member of the local community?

Not very important   *Important*   *Very important*

In what ways is the building important or not important to you as a member of the local community?

E5. How important is the church building to <u>your needs</u> as a parishioner here?

Not very important   *Important*   *Very important*

In what ways is the building important or not important to your own needs as a parishioner?

In both C1 and C2 around half of respondents considered the church building important to them as members of the community. The other half in each case were about equally split between not very important and very important.

In C3, the church building was seen by a higher percentage (45%) as very important to the community, among the reasons for this:

"It is an historic landmark, with 150 years of Anglican worship in the community"

"It is a category A listed building, visited by tourists"

About the importance of the building to the respondents as parishioners there was overall a very slight shift towards the building as less important, but with this small sample too slight to be significant.

Ammerman (1997) notes the consistent role of church buildings in the response of congregation to their changing environment. High maintenance costs and strong attachment to loved buildings both showed to be frequent impediments to creative adaptation, affecting proportionately more of the declining congregations in that study than those that were changing in more positive ways (p. 325).

Table 22 E4. and E5. Importance of church buildings

Parish	How important is the church building to you as a member of the local community?				How important is the church building to <u>your needs</u> as a parishioner here?			
	Not Imp	*Imp*	*V Imp*	*N/R*	*Not Imp*	*Imp*	*V Imp*	*N/R*
C1	4	7	4		5	6	3	1
C2	4	8	5	2	3	9	3	4
C3	1	3	5		2	3	4	2
Totals	9	18	14	2	10	18	10	7

E6.   When you look ahead what is most important to you about the future of your church in your community?

Of 34 mentions in response to this question 7 (21%) were of survival, to keep going, to keep functioning. These mentions came from all three parishes. Attracting younger people (1) and growing (4) were another five mentions, along with being strong and pulling together (2), also to maintain a gathering place for like-minded people (1). In all, these 15 mentions of surviving, maintaining, pulling together and growing accounted for 44% of the total.

The second theme was of the importance of God being acknowledged and worshipped (1), of speaking out the Gospel and sharing our faith (4), providing a place to be with God (2) and being a stronger Christian presence in the community (1). Five of these eight mentions are from C1.

A further individual mention from C1 was to regenerate along new lines.
C2 provided 3 mentions of people – people, to be out and about with people, and ministering to all the people in our parish. Individuals from C2 also provided the following words of what was most important to them about the future of their church in their community:

> "A voice of spirituality, care, love, respect, compassion, truth, teaching, faith"

and

> "That it [the church] stands tall, a beacon to show the way forward to a strong community."

C3 respondents spoke more of the church offering itself in service to the community – outreach to youth, extending to all ethnic groups, being part of community service, being part of community life, and a haven to all who need it.

Of key importance for the future then, as the responding parishioners see it, is that the church survives, to continue its mission
- of expressing faith in the community, as strongly expressed in C1;
- of compassionate care of the people, a keynote emerging from C2;
- and of service to the community, as expressed in C3.

Table 23 E6.   What is most important to you about the future of your church in your community?

	C1	C2	C3
To keep going, survival, functioning, remaining viable	3	3	1
Attracting younger people, growth	1	3	1
Be strong, pull together		2	
Maintain a gathering place for like-minded people	1		
That we speak out the Gospel, share our faith	3	1	
That God is acknowledged and worshipped, a place to be with God	1	1	1
Stronger Christian presence in community	1		
Regenerates along new lines	1		
People, to be out and about with people, ministering to all people in our parish		3	
A voice of spirituality, care, love, respect, compassion, truth, teaching, faith		1	
That it stands tall, a beacon to show the way forward to a strong community		1	
A part of community service, community life			2
Extending across all ethnic groups			1
Outreach to youth			1
Be a haven for all who need it			1
Totals	11	15	8

7.5 Summary of Case Study Data

Commonalities and differences between the case study parishes emerged through the study.

C1 had the strongest ministry team in terms of involvement of ordained priests, and the congregation had the higher involvement of men, and married couples. The number of "thinking responses" from this parish may reflect these factors – a more instrumental approach to the situation, creating more drive to action. The direction this might take was possibly less apparent than in the other case studies, but the interest in youth was evident, and social isolation was also noted as an issue to address. There was also greater interest in connecting with the surrounding rural areas. There is considerable social activity in the parish. Events are mostly for the congregation currently but are important in supporting the bonds within the group, which are its strength. The parish has considerable community resources available to it. Linking with these may be the way forward (Ammerman, 1997, p. 360). There are also three church buildings in this parish, spread across the town and rural settings. This may support opportunity for developing/redeveloping more rural ministry here, as part of expressing faith in their communities.

C2 has a congregation comprising more women, and more people living alone than the other case study parishes. Also in contrast to C1 and C3, the C2 ministry team is led by all women. This parish is intensely concerned with meeting identified needs of social isolation. This strength in their ministry may provide their direction for development. There are other ideas also, for evolving forms of worship.

C3 has a small and diverse congregation, a mix of men and women, alone or married. The difficulty here is the smallness of the group and the needs within it. Given the size of the congregation I had expected to be able to connect more closely with the whole group than in fact eventuated. I only ever saw a few of the members at any one time and some I never met. A very strong theme or interest among those I did speak with was the history of the town and church, which may be a lead, in interesting combination with the forward-thinking activity at the school.

CHAPTER 8. WHAT IS BEING DONE

The activities currently being undertaken by the parishes (case study and other), beyond their scheduled services, fall into three groups: those that are primarily worship related activities, those that are primarily social or fellowship activities for the parishioners, and those with outreach as a primary aim. There is also considerable overlap between these, and some have elements of all three.

The primarily **worship activities** include prayer groups, Advent and Lenten study groups, house groups and bible study groups, and Scripture Union activities. One parish has a small youth group, also a Mothers' Union, both with aims that include supporting the faith of those involved.

Outreach to rest homes or people confined to their own homes is common. Several of the parishes lead regular services in rest homes or take communion there or to people at home. Special services include pet days or St. Francis services, blessing of the farming year, harvest festivals. These are worship activities but are also for the wider community and reflect the rural nature of those communities.

Parish activities serving social and fellowship purposes for the parishioners are diverse. Most congregations join for morning tea after their services, usually on site, and in one case routinely at a local café after their Friday prayer service. Additionally, one has a monthly morning tea, another an afternoon tea. One (P1) offers a Men's Breakfast and a men's coffee group, also a Women's Friendship group, plus a newly started monthly discussion group. Another (P2) does "Lunches for Six", where groups of six are formed as a good number to share a conversation. There are mid-winter dinners (calling them mid-winter Christmas is discouraged (C2)) and the occasional film evening. A strong social group in one parish is referred to as 4F – fun, food, fellowship and film – but 4F is code, as "we aren't supposed to show films to a group". Transport is provided to help people attend.

Community outreach activities also come in a variety of forms:
1. Activities which are both fundraisers and services to the community
2. Inclusive social activities
3. Activities and programmes for children
4. Larger projects

1. The first group includes activities that provide a service to the community while also potentially raising funds for use by the parish, be this paying the rates or money for mission. Market days, op shops, a regular book stall, and catering for funerals were mentioned. These activities provide services, for example access to affordable clothing and goods, while also creating an interface between church and

community. It is through activities like these that the active presence of the church is made known in the community.

Op shops, a traditionally shortened name for opportunity shops (or thrift or charity shops), were spoken of with particular fondness (P1, P7). Specific mention was made that the op shop volunteer workers are not necessarily Anglican, or church goers at all, but are community members with willingness to help - "they love it and it's their service" (P7). Given the labour intensity of op shop provision, this support is greatly appreciated and the volunteers are thanked with special occasion events like morning teas. The welcome that op shops provide "for a chat" (P1) is another part of this service beyond the goods on sale, serving a purpose in addressing social isolation.

2. A second group in the category of community outreach is inclusive activities for people from parish and community, like "Coffee and Chat", "Chicks Alive", and "Moving On". Events like these meet the community need for companionship and social connection. "Chicks Alive" (P6) is a small group of women meeting for lunch once a fortnight. The "Moving On" group (C2) was originally for people widowed, but now is more generally for anyone living alone. This group meets every second month.

3. A third group is **children's activities**, which is a speciality of parish P6. These activities include "Messy Church", "Cool Kids", and an annual "Light Party" as an alternative to Halloween. Another (P7) offers Christmas and Easter services specifically for children (alongside alternative services for the elderly). These include Jesus' Birthday, which was very successful, and an Easter Egg Hunt, which interestingly was less so. Parishes P1 and P6 discussed Bible in Schools (or Christian Religious Education). Delivery of this programme appears more challenging to provide now than in earlier times, with more restrictions such as "during lunch time only, not class time", and a new requirement for two volunteers to be present which is difficult in times of volunteer shortage. No parishes surveyed mentioned doing this now, though some had in the past and regretted it was no longer one of the possible outreaches. School chaplaincy presents another way to be available in schools. One parish (C1) mentioned this form of involvement in schools, as well as hospital chaplaincy.

There are other outreach activities for children that have been offered by local parishes previously but no longer are, or not in the same way. Two of these involve paid staff. One was a holiday and after school programme in parish P1, which closed when staff left and couldn't be replaced. The parish had found it difficult having local management responsibility for professional services, involving health

and safety regulations and employment matters. Another mentioned was the "Seasons for Growth®" programmes of education and support around change, loss and grief. This programme was formerly managed by local parish committees but is now administered centrally for all Taranaki by the Bishop's Action Foundation. Parishes now fulfil a smaller support and advisory role for the paid staff and volunteer teams.

4. The fourth group of outreach activities is comprised of larger projects that have been accomplished in partnership with other entities and with the support of the Bishop's Action Foundation. These are a Community House, a youth centre, and a day centre for the elderly.

The **Community House** (C3) is described as a central point for social service groups in the district, supported by the District Council and the Bishop's Action Foundation. It is a purpose-built house beside the church, on church land (owned by the Taranaki Anglican Trust Board), providing a space for full time and part time tenants. This enables out of town agencies to have a base in the town from which to offer services locally, which was a primary aims of the project.

Currently the social service groups using the House, alongside the Anglican Church Parish Office, include:
- CCS Disability Action
- Family Works
- A genealogy group
- The Foodbank
- Taranaki Community Law
- Te Puna Trust - Nurture Taranaki (providing support during pregnancy and early years)
- Tui Ora (Māori health and social services provider)
- Big Brother Big Sister (mentoring service)
- Counsellors/psychologists in private practice
- A local Member of Parliament

Opened in 2011, the House is managed by volunteer trustees with a part-time on-site administrator. Along with housing social services, the Community House also offers office space and a meeting room for hire, and a range of printing and photocopying services.

The second of these larger projects is a **youth centre**, which arose as a positive response to a crisis in the community of one small town. The Regional Dean, the local church (P4), the local iwi (Ngāti Ruanui), community and social service organizations, local families, funders and the Bishop's Action Foundation worked

together to set up this youth centre for the young people of the town. The youth centre programme began in 2008, with an official opening in 2010, and is based in the church hall. Activities have included sports, crafts, Te Reo Māori classes, and movie nights, as well as the Balance Me healthy eating / healthy action programme, and a youth health nurse visiting once a week. The centre's activities have also included a Breakfast Club, which has since transferred to the local primary school. The centre is now focussed on running four holiday programmes a year. The Bishop's Action Foundation works with the centre's trust board to secure funding, maintain the accreditation required to deliver OSCAR (Out of School Care) holiday programmes, and manage the development and review of policies for this service. This collaborative effort means the parish can navigate the challenges of managing such a service at parish level, and avoid the issues which contributed to the closure of the after-school and holiday programmes in another parish (P1). In addition, the diocese employs a youth worker, who is involved with all the youth and children activities (including at this youth centre) for the Central cluster parishes.

The third and most recent project has been the establishment of a day centre for older people in one of the most outlying parishes (P5). The Bishop's Action Foundation has partnered with Auckland's Selwyn Foundation to enable the founding of Selwyn Centres (or similar) in Anglican parishes in Waikato and Taranaki. The aim is to address the issue of social isolation and loneliness for those over 65 who may be living alone or have limited opportunity for social contact, as described on the website of the Bishop's Action Foundation (n.d.-d).

The centre in P5, which serves older people from across the community, is delivered in partnership with the Taranaki based Tainui Rest Home and Village. The programme runs one morning a week in the church hall. The project necessitated some refurbishment: the hall has a new carpet and new chairs, a mobility toilet has been installed, and all health and safety requirements addressed. Employed staff work with those attending.

At the opening of the youth centre (P4), the Bishop thanked the local community for their support and the opportunity to develop that initiative, and is quoted as saying "This project has brought new life to this church space". This also appears to be the case with the day centre in P5. Respondents to the parish questionnaire appeared positive, encouraged, and proud of the new venture, and grateful to all who had supported them to achieve it.

These three very different projects, Community House, youth centre and day centre for older people, have significant aspects in common:

- Outreach to the community
- Response to an identified need in each of the three different communities
- Use of parish facilities and/or resources (church halls or church land)
- Community partnerships
- Bishop's Action Foundation leadership and involvement
- Employed staff and volunteer involvement

In each case the initiative can be seen to be making a contribution to the vibrancy of the local community, achieving aims of service, outreach, connection with the community and meeting identified needs. They are all projects in which the church communities feel involved and have pride, and which have lifted the profile of the local Anglican church. Some of the difficulties engendered through lack of internal "people power" are solved through employing staff. The expertise needed to guide governance, management and operational matters is provided, or at least established, by functions of the Bishop's Action Foundation.

Another commonality is that increasing church attendance was not an immediate aim of the projects, and it would appear has not been an outcome at any of the three sites. Each of the three parishes describe their congregation numbers as currently steady, however, in two cases this is due at least in part to other congregations having joined them as their own denominational churches closed (P3 and P4). These projects, then, were designed for mission, and meeting community need, and they are meeting these aims with success.

This leaves the question of what the future of these projects will be - particularly those operating in church facilities - if the congregation itself is not sustained. Parish respondents in P3 and P4 presage this quandary when talking about the congregation ageing, "the able few doing more", and giving voice to fear that that is unsustainable. The community house and youth centre are long-standing projects now (seven and 10 years old respectively). They are proven in the community, successful, and part of the parish identity, but are apparently without direct influence regarding the possible future of the parish itself and do not relieve concerns about this. Somewhat conversely, the respondents from P5 were feeling positive and bolstered by their new initiative, and overall showed satisfaction with how things are, using phrases like "coping nicely", "doing well" and "happy doing what we are now". At the time of the survey the attitudes conveyed were those of being empowered and, in fact, in transformational mode.

This is an energy to capture and build on, but still leaves questions to explore. Even with a new burst of life and initiative the future of this parish might be considered tenuous, with a weekly church attendance of 15-20. How is this congregation (P5) to be sustained in order to keep up the good work? Or, is the

mission designed to eventually become sustainable independently, even if the parish no longer has a weekly congregation? Are these questions being asked, or is the preference simply to continue on in faith? P5 referred positively to "keeping on keeping on" but what would happen if capacity for that diminishes, as the trends suggest it will? As they said, "at 80, people can't do what they used to". These questions relate back to the predictions, preferences and possibilities of Suter (2014): the opportunity to think about the unthinkable, to consider scenarios and build on current gains to support potential for the future.

These considerations are central to the research question of "The potential of churches to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community". Of the nine parishes initially surveyed, seven are engaged in activities beyond the core Sunday services, and three of these have the larger projects described. Equally, all have small congregations, possibly steady in number but none increasing. The experience of P3 and P4, with the Community House and youth centre, illustrate the benefits to community and to the parish, but also that the prevailing trend of ageing, contracting congregations has not been impacted by these efforts. The parishes themselves are struggling despite their good works. Knowing this, P5, which is in a flow of new energy, may provide a useful case for examining the next step, the possibilities and alternatives that may be ahead.

Table 24. Are there other regular activities your congregation organizes?

Worship related		Parish social		Community focussed	
Prayer groups	P1 P2	Men's Breakfasts	P1	Market days	P1
Lenten studies	P1 P2 P8	Men's coffee group	P1	Moving On	P3
Scripture Union Bible Month	P2	Monthly discussion group	P1	Youth Ministry	P4 P1
House groups Bible Study	P4	Parish morning tea (monthly)	P1	Tainui Day Centre	P5
Rest home communion or services	P2 P3 P7 P8	Lunches for Six	P2	Easter and Christmas services for the elderly	P7
Youth group	P3	Afternoon tea	P2	Light Party	P6
Mothers' Union	P3	Mid-winter Christmas dinner	P2	Cool Kids Afterschool	P6
Blessing of the farming year	P7, P8	Women's Friendship group	P1	Easter and Christmas services for children	P7
Pet services	P7 P8	4Fs	P3	Coffee and Chat	P1
Home visiting	P2, P3			School chaplaincy	P1
				Hospital chaplaincy	P1
				Meals on Wheels	P3
				Catering for Funerals	P3
				Foodbank	P3
				Book fair	P8
				Op shop	P1, P2, P7

CHAPTER 9. SOME THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

The number of formal interviews undertaken was 24. Fourteen of these were with key parish people and other parishioners, eight with community people and two with diocesan staff. The themes discussed here largely arose from the fourteen parish interviews. Insights from the community interviews follow in Chapter 10.

9.1 Frustration

A number of parish interviewees expressed significant frustration about ideas being spurned, opportunities missed, existing wisdoms undervalued, proffered energy wasted. This theme is explored by Packard (2015) in the book "Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why People are Done with Church but not their Faith". Packard coined the term "Dones" for those leaving the church still strong in their faith, but frustrated or disillusioned about their relationship with the institution of their church.

Several interviewees in the current study, every one of them deeply committed to their faith, told stories akin to those of Packard's Dones, or the exiles in the study by Jamieson (2006). All were still involved in the church, so not refugees per se, but spoke of similar experiences. One had left the parish, but still attended other (mostly Anglican) churches in the region. I encountered this person unexpectedly, as a community interviewee. Two others, interviewed as parishioners, had previously left and engaged with other denominations but later returned. Others have just stayed despite the discomfort, or are not yet Done.

The interviewee who had left described years of leadership in the parish, prior to an instance of bringing an idea to the vestry. They were allocated five minutes to present the idea, during which several interjections were made, using up the time allowed. The interviewee left the meeting, and ultimately the parish, feeling unheard and frustrated. They went on to pursue the vision independently, beginning what is now a successful outreach in the town six years on, meeting needs and engaging community volunteers. This outreach could have been under the church umbrella but isn't. The church apparently missed that opportunity and lost an energetic person with a vision for church and community that they made a reality. Later they were asked to bring it back to the church, and replied "No, why would I do that?". In interview this person stressed "I'm not angry here, I'm just giving you the facts the way I see it".

These two statements illustrate one of Packard's findings: in general the Dones are not angry. Their leaving reflects their experience that the church is ill-equipped to support the flourishing life they wish for (2014, Kindle Location 310). They are not angry, but - more damagingly for the church, Packard (2014) claims - they are no longer interested. They're Done. By contrast Jamieson (2003) did discover the "Hurt" and the "Angry" among his interviewed leavers. These subjects, grouped

together as the Displaced Followers (17.5% of his total sample), left due to dissatisfaction with the leadership, direction, vision, or the operating nature of the church, as had Packard's refugees.

Similarly, among my interviewees were parishioners who had not left, but who described experiences of hurt and frustration around encounters with leadership. Several spoke of Cursillo, "a worldwide Christian movement" which offers "a method by which our relationship with Jesus may be developed, lived out with the support of other Christians, and used by God to change the world about us" (Cursillo, n.d.).

While it had once been strong in Taranaki, one interviewee said that Cursillo was unsupported or opposed by their local vicar at an earlier time - "It turned to custard. It broke. And it's broken all through" - and that at other levels it had been "damned with faint praise". Individual interviewees described being significantly invested in Cursillo, and strongly believing in its potential as a tool for development for the church.

> I have invested a huge amount of time in Cursillo, and I believe that, well deep down I believe that Cursillo is a way forward. I think things have been done very, very poorly. Cursillo being a network of believing people that meet together in small groups at some time, we can happen independent of a building [...] it was independent and it had the potential to be very spiritually focused rather than socially focused [...] But of course it hasn't been picked up and I'm seeing it die beneath our hands [...] whereas if [the vicar of that time] had said "Ooh here's this package, with an organisation, with a group of people- put that there, there's your small groups, there's your thing, go to it! (cw)

This is the exact same lack of encouragement and support as described by the Dones in Packard's study. These previously keen people with energy for new or existing ideas found their efforts or enthusiasms squashed "when somebody's in a position of authority and it goes to their heads" (cw).

Church Army was another movement in which some people described significant investment and belief, but experienced lack of support for the endeavour. Unlike Cursillo, the focus of which is the spiritual journey of those already churched, Church Army is an evangelistic movement with a focus beyond the known congregation. It is described on the website of Church Army New Zealand as "[...] a Community of Pioneering Evangelists. Our roots are within the Anglican Church, but we happily partner with all those who love and follow Jesus" (Church Army New Zealand, n.d.).

From an interview:

> [...] Anglican Church Army, and I have learned a lot through that. Very

interesting stuff about evangelism, about church growth, a lot about church growth, and any trying to input those or suggest, or anything like that through the years has been... just … not wanted, not touched. (cw).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate these movements or initiatives, their contribution, or their potential in any way, and no such comment is being made here. These experiences are mentioned only to illustrate the strength of belief and energy that individuals may offer and find they are met with barriers that can result in hurt, frustration, and possibly in being Done. This incurs loss of resource and innovative energy from churches, which, it appears, can ill afford their active members to become disillusioned and withdraw, or for potential members to look elsewhere, especially if there are alternatives to these outcomes.

9.2 Innovation, Resistance and Ways forward

Along with the previous examples, other interviewees described experiencing push-back over a wide range of possible change or activity, such as changes to music, changes to worship style, community outreach, and support for rural ministry. This was mentioned in several parishes (cw):

> "They missed that opportunity"

> "Just no interest for it"

> "When it comes to change mode it's just a no-go area"

> "There [was a] lack of including people in. These were enthusiastic people who could see that change could happen, and a number of these people are now good members of other churches and are now leaders too"

> "Ideas are often not accepted …[no] healthy robust discussion, and usually discussions are shut down as well about anything for change or new ideas".

These reactions to ideas appear to fit with the explanation that "because innovation is destructive to many established groups, it will be resisted. Also that innovation is contrary to operations and will be ignored." (Galbraith, 1982, p. 25)

This view was reflected across several interviews and parish questionnaires, with references to "survival mode". With the focus so fully on maintaining what is currently being sustained with limited resources, or possibly on the struggling hope of just growing that a little, there is no energy or capacity to divert to innovation or change.

> "Ideas take people power" (P3)

> "We are at capacity now" (P4)

The thought of having to do more or do things differently appears to become too much for those charged with the operations and routine maintenance of all that is happening now.

Galbraith (1982) proposed that to overcome such barriers to innovation, a purposefully designed organization is needed. The innovating organization is a combination of "idea people", space in which they can operate, sponsors and orchestrators to support the ideas and see them happen, funding for their ideas, and rewards for success that increase the odds in favour of innovation.

In Taranaki, The Bishop's Action Foundation is largely designed to innovate and is well described by the criteria Galbraith provides. It is differentiated from operations, apart from a small number of services and programmes.

> So BAF - at our heart we would call ourselves a catalyst for change. [...] we don't want to be an organization that does the same thing year on year. We want to create responses that ultimately can survive without us […] so we can recycle ourselves back into initiatives, and if you look across our twelve years you can see that happening […] there are things we did years ago that we don't do any more but that still continue (Interview with BAF CEO Simon Cayley)

Evidence of this is in the list of innovative involvements on the BAF website, including ICT initiatives, leadership in social enterprise, piloting a youth mentoring programme, investigating affordable housing, and providing capacity building support to community organizations. Collaboration and partnering with other organizations is key:

> We think that working together can achieve greater outcomes. That's why BAF works with partners across Taranaki and wider New Zealand to manage and deliver solutions to varying community issues. We see ourselves as the catalyst for change, getting everything into place and watching it take off. Working with partners allows us to put in the work to get things running, and then hand-over so we can continue to search for and grow new projects. (Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-e)

BAF is a resource available to the churches. Currently this includes oversight of the Parish Accounting Service in Taranaki which supports over 30 parishes to access affordable accounting services. This service addresses the need for centralized administration support identified in the Commission for the Future, and is also in line with the report from the Arthur Rank Centre (2015) "*Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church*". This report stated in recommendation 4:

> The burden of administration, financial management and legal requirements is generally too heavy for clergy and lay people alike, taking up a considerable amount of time and energy. (Arthur Rank Centre, 2015)

As described in Chapter 8, the Bishop's Action Foundation has also supported several significant parish-community initiatives. These include a community house, youth centre, day care for older people, and most recently the employment of youth workers. These projects are evidence of the vigour of BAF as a resource, and the effectiveness of its work, collaboration and innovation in addressing community needs and working with parishes to meet them.

A possible shortfall is that the parishes may not be fully aware of what BAF is doing or can assist with:

> [...] was rattling off all these projects (BAF's) involved with, and I was scrambling to keep up with all these things that are happening […] I was just rather overwhelmed! And I was thinking "Why don't we know about this in the parish?!" We don't get told things in the parish. (cw)

> Well I'm aware there is a Bishop's Action Foundation and that money is paid in from the churches to do things within the community [...] but if you were to ask me something the Bishop's Action Foundation is doing, I couldn't tell you (cw)

These comments are from interviewees categorised as key parish personnel, in the cluster where the three major projects described have been undertaken. This suggests that the resources which BAF can bring to supporting innovation and initiative may not be fully understood or utilized. This is despite the sound and successful examples of BAF's involvement around the diocese.

In other respects, the Bishop's Action Foundation is a highly effective platform for innovation, as described by Hasenfeld (p.231). It is an outcome of the values of the executive leadership of the diocese, and is a proactive stance in the current church community environment. BAF is in place and designed to respond, and respond innovatively, to the needs and challenges of Taranaki communities.

> [...] it's exciting, you get some knocks but you keep going [...] that's the space we work in, and if we weren't responding to the new ideas, and the headaches, we wouldn't be doing what BAF was set up for (Interview with BAF CEO Simon Cayley).

Resources are allocated to BAF to enable this responsiveness. There is support for the skills and expertise of the staff, in pursuit of innovation. The development of a research arm within BAF and even this study itself are evidence of this active commitment to innovation, bringing in new knowledge and ideas to fuel motivation. BAF has developed extensive inter-organizational relationships ("we had a talk with […], we had a chat to [...], we formed a partnership with […], we're doing that for them […]") and "boundary-spanning activities" (Hasenfeld, 1992, p. 233). These relationships increase its capacity to innovate through interaction and partnership with others, and there is receptivity to the organization. Interviewees report:

> Yea, I've done some work with the BAF around some of the modules of work they're doing in terms of the chairmanship for NGOs and the like, so I think they're doing a great job [...] BAF is leaving, through the CEO at its head, indelible prints on many organisations, effective ones really, focused on their longevity. (C2, Interview C)

> [The CEO of BAF] is my go-to guy […] they [BAF] just want to back up this rural sustainability thing, first and foremost. (C1, Interview B)

Given the community focussed values of the executive leadership of the diocese; the proactive stance demonstrated (by the establishment of the Bishop's Action Foundation to function as a catalyst for change and innovation); the commitment of resources to this end; and the receptivity of the environment to BAF activity, the diocese appears to be well placed for innovation as an organization.

This does not seem to apply, however, within the parish congregations. At parish level, the other factors of motivation and obstacles (Hasenfeld, 1992, p. 231) appear to impact on capacity for innovation, and BAF may not be fully understood as an available resource. It appears that some leadership is required for the parishes in the exploration of motivation for change and obstacles to innovation. Establishing that leadership and understanding in this area will be a helpful step towards more fully utilizing BAF as a resource.

9.3 Communication

Any organization that is large, multi-sited and has numerous sub-units is likely to have challenges with connection and communication. Alongside stories of positive connection, communication difficulties were mentioned across several parishes in either the initial survey or in case study parishes, and at all levels.

Between parish and the institutional church:

> A challenge in the current organizational structure for this parish is "maintaining connections with the institutional church", which becomes increasingly remote and possibly irrelevant. (cw)

Between diocesan structures and parishes:

> We don't get told much. We don't know what's said behind closed doors. (cw)

Between parishes:

> "[About a concern] they [another parish] are all right, they don't have to worry like us" (cw)

In fact, the reality of almost that same concern was voiced by that other parish.

Within parish teams:

> I'm concerned that our cluster meetings and our vestry meetings tend to be just ticking the boxes, what's coming up, what's going to happen – there's no reflection on how we're doing, what can we do better, what's interesting. (cw)

Between parish teams and congregations:

> "[...] the parishioners, they are not given any input to decisions". (cw)

The challenges of communication and keeping everyone informed, connected and involved at all levels across a diverse and decentralized organization are evident here, and will be contributing to stabilization (Hasenfeld, 1992), a barrier to change.

Considering this view from an initial parish survey:

> The regional cluster was established with 3 parishes, now 6 parishes in the cluster. So far [the parishes] are very emphatic that each parish unit is different and is to retain their own identity, that each parish has a voice. The theme of our region is – "simple, local, gift based". (P2)

There are key insights in this. Firstly, there is insight into the question of why nothing is changing. The trajectory of the churches seems clear, and radical innovation appears necessary if there is to be any other outcome than the seemingly most likely - continued decline. Why is nothing changing? Because the decentralization and emphatic individualism or independence of parishes may be stabilizing, stalling bigger picture change: broader radical innovation is harder to achieve when power is diffused.

Secondly, however, is the stated theme of this region: simple, local and gift based. This is the power that can be engaged. The case studies illustrated strongly that each region and each parish is different. Each has its strengths, its gifts, and in these will be found the capacity and motivation for change, a view supported by Roxburgh and Boren (2009).

The question then becomes how to meld these two contrasting elements – the challenge of creating radical change in a decentralized organization, and the potential for positive action that is contained in its emphatically independent subunits.

 An answer to this may be in leadership, at all levels, discussed further in Chapter 12.

CHAPTER 10   INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

The number of community interviews undertaken was in the end small, only eight. Had I been looking for the "solutions", community sources would have been a stronger focus, and these interviews greater in number. Looking instead for potential, a small number of interviews quickly established that possibilities are there, and that inspirational people are on hand.

Two interviewees were new to town, the others were long term or lifelong residents. All, including the newcomers, spoke of their "place", their sense of community.

Those interviewed were:

- A school principal, returning to her hometown to take over a school in crisis

    "So I'm born and bred in [this town]. I think that's probably one of the most significant things. So this isn't just another place, I've got a vested interest in this. My family still lives in and around [here]."

- A Community Development Advisor

    "I really think it's got so much potential, this place!"

- Recent "incomers from Auckland", building a business and integrating into local community with ideas for reviving a local historical feature

    "We wanted something a bit more personal and friendly. Where - cause Auckland everyone's too busy to sort of spend the time of day with you, or say a hello, or anything like that […] we found this place."

    "[…] wherever we've moved to we've wanted to be part of that community and put in what we can."

- Community members with teaching in their background, involved in local community projects, one on the District Council

    "As an outsider, because I'm not of this place - I wasn't born and bred here, but I've lived here for 30 years […] I consider this place to be home and I'm really passionate about this place."

- An instigator of a local community project

    "We've lived here for just over 35 years. People used to say when we came here first, "Why did you want to live [there]?" and I used to say "Why not?" And uh, we've settled in here, we're well known with the locals."

- Members of long-time local farming families, and of other denominations than Anglican, involved in care and maintenance of church buildings in community hands

    "We don't want to be the generation that lost that lovely little church!"

The exciting find from these interviews was to see that the opportunities are open-ended for connecting with innovative people. The outstanding features across the interviews were the knowledge of people and place, and the abundance of energy and ideas. It was evident that there is great resource in the community: specialist knowledge, personal knowledge, connections, ideas, and innovation, both potential and already underway. The ideas are here.

Of this small number of nine interviewees (in eight interviews), six had lived in Taranaki either all their lives, or for 30-40 years. One was born and raised in Taranaki, had been away and come back several times, and had now been a resident for the last seven years. The business couple from Auckland were recent arrivals, residents of just nine months, providing a different perspective. All except these last two were widely connected. All expressed passionate interest in their communities. Most of these people are well engaged in projects already, and some at least are already involved with the church/community interface; for instance with the Community House, or with a church building moving into community hands, or in discussing social enterprise with BAF. The point is, these are just nine people out of thousands. They were not a random group, having been handpicked to speak to as suggested by the parishes, and were already known for their contribution and/or innovation. Nevertheless, it suggests they represent the tip of the iceberg of local resource.

The interviews were exciting. If time had allowed I would have done more, partly for the pure enjoyment and privilege of meeting these inspiring people. More important for this project, however, was confirmation that the ideas are there.

Every interview confirmed this. Interviewees described ideas and projects that included moves:
- to address social isolation and loneliness, family violence, financial hardship
- to care for the environment
- to support positive ageing in the community
- to prepare for the future
- to embrace diversity
- to provide continuity of heritage
- to restore and build local identity
- to tell the stories of people and place

The value of every interview was immense. Put together, they convey a richness of story which regrettably is beyond what can be detailed here, but which provides an underlay of the personal meaning and investment that can inspire innovation,

development and change. These interviews also support the commentary of Nemeth (1997), that most often change and innovation start with an idea, and often with an individual.

Two interviews are described and quoted here at more length to illustrate this. These are two radical, transformative projects: one still a vision, one in action now. The projects are sited within two of the case study parish towns, both communities with significantly low socio-economic status.

11.1 Community Development and Social Enterprise

The website of the New Zealand Government Department of Internal Affairs provides a Government Position Statement on Social Enterprise, with the following definition:

> Social enterprises use commercial methods to support social or environmental goals. They principally reinvest surpluses in the social/environmental purpose rather than maximising profit for shareholders and owners. Potential benefits of social enterprise include innovative responses to societal issues, new employment opportunities, and sustainable income generation. (Department of Internal Affairs, n.d.)

The community development advisor interviewed described problems of the town - drugs, suicide, domestic violence, child poverty - as issues "more or less the same as anywhere in New Zealand" but with high rates in the Taranaki town where she is based. Having returned and lived for seven years in the region in which she grew up, and to which her family is deeply connected, her vision now includes development through social enterprise. The idea is centred on a "value added harakeke industry", harakeke being a distinctive native plant otherwise called flax or New Zealand flax. In a town that was built around the former freezing works industry, which provided employment but polluted the river and the coastline with "the blood and guts" that went straight down the chute into the river, the determination is to see creation of an uplifting industry with positive values, and with benefits for both people and environment.

> We'll make an industry that is good for our people and they can make money by looking after [the harakeke] and planting the waterways with it. […] This is its place! This is where it lives! It's an indigenous plant, it belongs here. And you know, some of the connections there are, it belongs here, our people belong here. It connects you to everything about this place. And the values around it, the Māori values, you know […]. I also think it has the ability to meet the needs of all sorts of people in this town too, not just the ones that would be happy to get their hands dirty and harvest and do stuff like that, but ones that want to get back into traditional weaving, ones that want to look at contemporary use for harakeke, ones that want to get into art, ones that want to get into tourism […] we start small, but the scale's going to have to get huge […] it's a social enterprise model, is what we're looking at. [We] are

going down to Christchurch to the Social Enterprise World Forum! (C1, Interview B)

The Bishop's Action Foundation is in support of this enterprise. BAF sees social enterprise as a proven method of responding to social needs through trading enterprises and has an aim "to inspire and nurture social entrepreneurs, and to draw entrepreneurs from around the country to Taranaki" (Bishop's Action Foundation, n.d.-f).

The harakeke project is still a vision, (which, since the change of government in the 2017 New Zealand general election must now be discussed again, and its benefits advocated to a new set of politicians), but it is a strong vision. It has inspired and inspiring people in the community to drive it, plus the resources that BAF and others can provide to support it. This is a radical and potentially community changing idea that could see the image of the town and the wellbeing of the community transformed.

Other innovative social enterprise ideas and opportunities of every size are potentially there in the communities of Taranaki, and support for their exploration is available.

Returning to Overton (2017), the youth worker in Vancouver, who was tired, and "tired of doing ministry in the same old ways". He saw that "social enterprise - essentially, a business with a social good in mind - represented a new kind of experiment that offered a truly new way forward in ministry". While acknowledging that social enterprises may be an unusual and risky form of ministry, in his view, "the church needs more of those". (Overton, 2017 p.1)

10.2 Innovation in Education and Vision for the Future

In another much smaller Taranaki town, also built around its former freezing works and associated port, the population was decimated following closure of these industries. These closures led to a drastic decline in the town and also of its schools. The primary school closed in 2004 and the children moved to join with the secondary school, creating an Area School which caters for students from Year one to Year 13 (ages five to 18). By 2014 the decile one school, in a community with an average household income of $17,000 per annum, was struggling. Poor academic results and a falling roll led to it being placed under statutory management and facing closure.

A new principal was appointed in 2016 and has instigated immense change, working to the by-line of "Growing Good People for a Changing World".

We've done a huge amount of extensive research to make sure that what we're delivering for our community is cutting edge, and we have a huge commitment to making sure our young people are digitally fluent. So that they are not just the users of technology, but actually they're being well positioned to be the designers and the thinkers and the creators of it. So everything within our school, or our curriculum operates under I guess those two pillars, as well as our school values around P.R.I.D.E - participation, respect, integrity, diversity and excellence - being embedded in every aspect of who we are, and being true to our vision which is "growing good people – good people for a changing world", because you know, what's the point of being the top mathematician or scientist if actually first and foremost you're not a good person.   (C3, Interview C)

The principal has introduced innovations which include a flexible school day (with options for students to attend between the hours of 7am and 5pm) to enable students to hold part time jobs. This means that students can assist with the household income without impacting on their ability to attend school. Bells and timetables have been removed from the senior school, promoting "self-directed, personalised learning that's real and contextual and authentic, and connects them to the real world beyond our school gates". Form time has been replaced with mentor groups of just 10 students. Each group has a mentor.

And it is their business to know that child's business, and advocate for that child, and be the champion for that child's learning and participation, and you know, engagement in a holistic picture of what education represents. […] "success" of that has been that we have 95% attendance from our community to our key events, and that's because of the way we've structured it, so you know with only maybe 8-10 kids you're able to get on the phone, you're able to have regular contact, and it's so much more powerful than sending out a letter, […] So it's those kind of connections, and real true commitment to a relationship with our families and our community.

The school has held its first school ball in 25 years and:

[...] The other great thing is we've had growth in our sports participation, in our teams. So last year was the first time in 14 years we've had a school rugby team, and now we've got basketball, and now we've got netball, and you know, it's just – those things are real key critical things to growing good people, and how important it is, and a reminder that it actually takes a village to grow a good person, not just a school at the end of town, you know?

There are five-year olds learning to code, and children exploring how to encourage the return of native birds to the area. There is a 14-year-old who went out on the boats with scientists to conduct research on seabed mining, a significant environmental issue for the region. She then presented a report to a select committee at Parliament. One student is being paid to paint the school. A group of senior students have visited Silicon Valley and Stanford University, others have volunteered in an orphanage in Fiji.

[…] we're largely a bicultural school, so a lot of tikanga, reo and the spirituality of that is interwoven with who we are. But I'm also really, really conscious that I do want our students to be, effectively I guess the dream of the country, that they are bilingual and bicultural and able to uphold and walk in both worlds really confidently, but I also want them to be globally connected. So we're the first school in Taranaki to have a Mandarin language assistant teacher. And any of our emails we're able to respond in Māori or Mandarin real time. So we make sure that our kids have got the best opportunities to be not only confident in who they are, and that's the holistic person, that's you know – tinana, hinengaro, wairua – everything – whānau – but also that they have those …. that diversity and that respect at a global level.

[…] the other thing I'm really passionate about is business internships. So I don't want my kids just having work experience, because actually they probably get a lot of that on the marae, at home and - I want my kids to be mentored by top business CEOs, or the top scientists out at Fonterra [Dairy Company], an internship where they can actually be mentored into fulfilling these leadership roles for the areas of need in our region. Which is the science, the technologies, the engineering, I could put arts in there, and the maths.

The progress this school has achieved in under two years is also evident in more usual measures:

[…] effectively 12 months down the track our roll has close to doubled. We've had outstanding NCEA results, so significantly increased and really proud of that, and we've had a few articles written on the amount of time it's taken us to produce the results that we've gained.

[…] the most significant thing that has allowed us to create the transformative change that we're in the process of doing now, it's the shift in mindset.

The principal credits this change in mindset, doing the homework or research about what sort of models exist out there, being agile and able to adapt as the essential aspects of what has been achieved in this school.

So there's the real challenge, that mindset change, doing your homework on stuff, and then making sure that you're viable by being agile or adaptable. And you know, I would imagine the church, just like the sector I'm sitting in here saying "Flog a dead horse" - exactly the same. I've got the same circumstances and challenges.

This is a story of transformational change, still in its early days but proving itself, with a leader at the helm saying and demonstrating it can be done, and suggesting this could be so in churches too.

CHAPTER 11.   "WHY IS NOTHING CHANGING?"

This question, regarding the parishes, was posed in early discussion of this project and stayed with me, niggling its way to becoming a central issue.

> [The parishioners] look around and they see 12 people, you know, and the average age is probably 75 […] So, they don't need explaining the seriousness of the situation. (Senior Staff, Interview 1)

So if what is occurring in the church, in the parishes, in the trends of decline, is so obvious, then "why is nothing changing?". There are people and resources primed to instigate change, so why is it so hard? Why does it seem possible the parishes will just continue as they are, reluctant or unable to change, until they cannot function anymore - and that this will occur without any other plan in place?

> "[In five years' time] we probably won't be here". (P1)
>
> We could just keep going and wait 'til every parish has stopped working, or we could do something...   (Senior Staff, Interview 2)

Despite the bleak outlook, there seems to be no traction for that "something" to be done. Any action being taken is mostly logistical. Reducing the number of services, combining parishes, cooperating with other denominations, moving unused church buildings on for other uses – these are actions aimed at reducing the demands on existing people and financial resources, and providing a way to continue. These are changes, but they follow the same trajectory of becoming smaller. Projects with positive parish and BAF involvement make contributions to the community but are not designed to stimulate the parishes themselves in terms of growth or sustainment, that is not the intention. Overall the track toward the most likely outcome remains unchanged: that these parishes will go the way of many before them like the white church near Manaia, left to its white horse and black cattle.

The recent employment of youth workers, one cluster-wide in the Central Region, one parish based (this appointment, in C1, occurred after the fieldwork was undertaken so is not reported on here), may prove to be a move toward growth, and positive for both community and parish. This type of multi-purpose action appears to be of high importance. If the parish is sustained it continues to exist and may be able to contribute to the community into the future. Other options, in the absence of a radical or highly innovative plan, seem bleak. So again, given the pressing need, why is this so hard to contemplate or engage in?

11.1 A time of crisis

To return to Hasenfeld, one reason may be that the situation is already at crisis point.

> A crisis period may be the worst time to instigate change because an organization's capacity to change is often at low ebb. The environment may be inhospitable, the executive leadership may cling to old ideas, resources may be strained, and the internal structure too entrenched in old patterns. (Hasenfeld, 1992, p. 246)

This may be the case here. Crisis and low ebb may have already drastically reduced the ability to act (rendering this research 10 years too late, as was suggested more than once by participants in the study).

The environment, while not exactly inhospitable to change, has a similar chilling effect simply through lack of interest. The parish survey contained the question:

E1. How do you think your church/congregation is perceived in the community?

Five of the nine respondents, including C1, answered positively. Of the other four, which included C2 and C3, two said "just there", and others "irrelevant" and "indifferent".

> "Joe Bloggs isn't interested" (C2)

This lack of interest is of course a major contributor to the decline, making it an even greater obstacle to change. When asked "if the community could do one big thing to assist the church, what would you most like that to be?", few could suggest anything, while others expressed a wish for acknowledgement as part of the community, and for the involvement that is missing.

11.2 Cultural consensus, and fear

Other impediments to change may lie in the strength of cultural consensus, (Jaskyte and Dressler, 2005), within the church environment.

Considering the "reason to be" or shared culture of a typical church community, strength of cultural consensus is inherently high. This is evidenced in this study, for example, in the highlighted importance of faith, worship, fellowship, care of each other, and community. These characteristics of church culture embody values such as stability, security, low level of conflict, predictability, rule orientation, team orientation, and working collaboratively – values that Jaskyte and Dressler (2005) identify as presenting challenges or barriers to change and innovation. In short, it may be hard to make things move, to create change and innovation, given the high level of cultural consensus that prevails in church organization and congregation. In addition, the organization or community is now ageing, with many older members who may be less able or less interested in instigating change. When the

uncertain future of cherished buildings is included in the mix, the obstacles to innovation are considerable.

These are the very conditions that create the Dones (Packard, 2015) or the exiles (Jamieson, 2006). Where there is strong cultural consensus those with another view or another suggestion will find it hard to be heard, or "out of a fear of ridicule and a sense of futility [...] [will be] reluctant to voice a differing view" (Nemeth, 1997).

This sense of futility suppresses the expression of diverse input, that is, innovation:

> And people will not offer to do anything, because if you offer to do it you're "pushing yourself forward." That's how it's looked upon. "No, we don't really need that". But I can see a crying need for certain areas in this church, but I will not offer to do it because they've said no so often" (cw)

The willingness and openness of participants and the warmth and welcome for this research may reflect that for some at least it was a relief to be able to speak in safety outside of the culturally accepted norm, to be able to express a genuine view.

> "[…]. because I hope you'll go back and say where I'm coming from" (C1)

> "I didn't expect to get picked to do this [interview]" (C2)

> "I think that this sort of thing you're doing is marvellous, eh. Because it's going to come back to the churches: "I've interviewed X amount of people from your congregation, this is the overall theme of what they've been talking about, and I think that we could help you in these areas, you may be able to branch out into that area..." and I think the thing is to be brave, and to step out" (C1)

Giving individuals the opportunity to speak openly in safety was a key element of the research design, and as a result individual questionnaires and interviews were chosen as a methodology in preference to focus groups. Anonymity was very important to some, to be assured of the safety of speaking:

> "No, I won't leave it, but I want to be assured of some... anonymity" (C1).

I was twice asked to stop recording while the talking continued, because of fear or anxiety generated by expressing certain views.

The findings of this study clearly show that the congregations contain a range of voices, views and ideas. Some are heard and some perhaps are not. New ideas are present, but if conformity is the expected norm in an environment with a strong cultural consensus then conformity will prevail. For innovation, however, the voice of the dissenter, or the alternate or "creative" view is crucial. Nemeth suggests that

flexibility, openness, and the *welcoming of dissent* are especially useful for stimulating creative thought (1997, p. 66). These findings indicate that if greater innovation in the parishes is to occur, skilled facilitation will be required when the time comes for group work, discussion and decision. It is necessary, at both the individual and group level, to limit the fear of failure and promote risk taking.

> "Taking risks is scary for us and yet we must" (P1.)

How to foster this innovation, the risk taking, becomes a crucially important point.

Ammerman (1997) describes a striking relationship between *trying* to change and achieving change, in the parishes studied. Those most obviously experiencing decline were those which "either actively resisted change or continued with existing patterns, apparently unable to envisage how things might be different" (p. 323).

To move past the fear of failure and the resulting inertia, it will be key to foster an environment that welcomes dissent or alternate views. There must be mechanisms that support those taking the risks and which enable safe exploration of the possibilities. A minority view expressed may or may not be valid, but welcoming the safe expression of *all* ideas is shown to stimulate more complex thinking, better problem solving, and more creativity.

The following comments were recorded by a parishioner in an anonymous case study questionnaire, in section D, about ideas for the future:

> D3. What would you like your congregation to look like in five years' time?
>
> "Changes in ideas and attitudes. Dropping jargon and assumed ideas and speaking plain language to ordinary people"

And
> "God I think wants to sweep away the old before God brings in something much more relevant" (cw)

I don't know who said this, what other ideas this person has, whether there has been another opportunity to express them, or if an anonymous questionnaire presented a unique chance to express a view that might be considered counter-cultural. Whatever the situation, what this response illustrates is that other views are or could be in the mix during vigorous discussion for change. Opinions gathered from other respondents support this – it is evident that ideas and energy exist within the groups. What appears to be missing is the mechanism to explore them.

If innovation is to be supported, alongside welcoming and exploring a full range of views is the need to encourage the group in risk taking, and to overcome the fear of failure. As one interviewee expressed:

> It's the uncertainty of the outcomes that is scary [...] Yes we need to change, we need to do things differently, but what is it? Because if we get it wrong, we probably won't have another chance! That's how it seems to us. Many of us are getting to the end of our [active involvement] and if we stuff it up, and we've seen a few stuff ups, I have to say, over the years, we won't be able to go back and undo it and change it and fix it, so there's a tendency to sit on our hands and do what we've already always done, because we know how to do that. And if we always do that, the results will be the same. (C1, Interview 3)

Leadership, discussed in the following chapter, has a crucial role in fostering the courage for change.

CHAPTER 12. ELEMENTS OF THE WAY FORWARD

12.1 Leadership

This discussion has focused on the challenges to innovation, especially in times of crisis, and on the phenomenon of cultural consensus when it becomes an obstacle rather than the strength it is more commonly perceived to be. The discussion also needs to consider the role of leadership, and the part it plays in navigating change when the above factors are involved.

Crucially, there will be dexterity in the leadership. To support an environment of innovation, a variety of leadership styles and expressions will be needed at various times and at different levels.

Initially, leadership must set the scene for change, and establish some common goals and purpose. This is a directive aspect of leadership, consolidating and enhancing the power of the cultural consensus: "together we need to do this". An organization can grow its capacity to innovate when leadership lends legitimization and power to that innovation. Leadership can be used effectively in this way to overcome the stabilizing effect of a decentralized structure.

This overall leadership style must also foster creativity: allow, enable, make safe and encourage diversity of thought and ideas. The leadership must be seen to welcome the whole range of views, including the dissenter, to provide the mechanism for safe exploration. They must also resource the experimentation. At a later stage, once decisions are made, directive leadership again has a role in implementation, bringing everyone together again with the commitment to see the project through.

These different types of support in different phases reduce the fear of risk taking, whether that is the individual's contribution of nonconforming ideas or the group's commitment to innovative or radical change.

Leadership is present within the church in Taranaki at numerous levels, from the Bishop and senior staff to regional councils, vestries, ministry teams and other groupings within the diocese, archdeaconries, clusters and parishes. Each level of leadership may play various roles that differ in influence and function, including employing different approaches at different phases of the process. It is likely that different regions or parishes will need to support different projects. The findings of this study give no indication that there is a single solution for the challenge of contribution to community. The challenge may be shared, but the strengths of the different parishes suggest that individual parish (or possibly cluster) responses will be the best way forward.

There are already many examples in this diocese of leadership at the various levels working effectively and openly for innovation and change. These can be seen in:

- the creation of the Bishop's Action Foundation and its ongoing work
- the body of work "Commission for the Future", which set the direction for the 10 years 2007-2017
- the creation of clusters and subsequent adjustments to these
- the creation of new leadership and ministry roles
- the amalgamation of parishes including across denominations
- the movement of church buildings, whether back into the hands of community or by public sale
- the services established through partnerships of BAF, parish and community, through to smaller parish-based outreach activities
- the maintenance of worship services by continual reassessment of needs
- the sustaining and nurturing of elderly congregations in newly fitting ways

There are key personnel at every level making these adjustments with their teams in large and small ways, and they are greatly appreciated for their work.

"Great local leadership – they give so much" (C1, Interview 4)

"[The regional dean] will come, we want him to. The community expects it every year! And [he's] our man. He needs to be here. [...] Yea he's great" (C3, Interview B)

"[Regional dean] is great. He is always extremely caring, he will always make time, even when he's already had an 18-hour day and has 24 hours to work tomorrow he will always make time. A gentle man, but [...] with authority. And he is very supportive" (C2, Interview 1)

"Sound leadership"; "Friendly, helpful ministers"; "The ministers have enthusiasm" (C3 questionnaires)

"[The ministry team] do such a fabulous job" (C2, Interview 1)

These are the people already leading with the strengths they bring for maintaining or innovating or both. There are more challenges ahead, for them, along with others, to further foster the environment of innovation. If the churches are to have the capacity to contribute to their communities in the future more than they currently do, further development of leaders will be a key.

We need leaders who can initiate change. We need parishioners who can support leaders of change. We need people who can train leaders and parishioners to recognise, accept, embrace and implement healthy change. (C2 interview)

12.2 Processes for Decision Making and Gaining Knowledge

The need to make decisions may be another hurdle in the quest for change. Ammerman (1997, p.333) found that congregations that achieved significant change had worked hard at creating and reforming their decision making structures. The study showed this to be a sometimes conflictual process, but where it did not occur there was most often little change.

Understanding and mechanisms to support decision making may assist. A process discussed by Hasenfeld (1992, p. 234) has three components:

- Knowledge/awareness
- Formation of attitudes towards the innovation
- Decision

This thesis is concerned with the first two of these. While exploring the potential of churches to contribute to thriving and vibrant rural community, it quickly became apparent (or was confirmed) that the parishes are in a precarious state. Facing dwindling resources, people expressed uncertainty about the capacity for the churches to contribute, or even to survive.

The findings show an awareness for the need to change. Participants frequently mentioned this need, while also expressing the sense of not knowing what to do. There was some desperation evident from key parish people, charged with the responsibilities of the parish. There was frustration from those unable to influence what was happening, and sadness from the wider congregation in the face of seemingly inevitable continued decline. There is also an expressed willingness to change, but there is little actual movement. Even though ideas and energies are present and the utmost effort is being exerted by those in key roles to keep things going, the trajectory appears to be set. Which brings us back to the question "why is nothing changing?", to which cultural consensus provides a partial answer.

The first stage of the decision-making process outlined above, gaining knowledge and awareness, is therefore vital. In the model of transformative scenario planning, (Kahane, 2012), gaining knowledge is also the first step. This is reinforced again in the model proposed by Roxburgh and Boren (2009) which categorises the first two stages of moving towards becoming missional as "awareness" and "understanding."

The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for educative input specific to the parishes in this study, aiming to increase:

1. Understanding of where things are at, and where that may lead if left unaddressed. Described by Roxburgh and Boren (2009) as "staring reality in the face", there were participants in this research who expressed gratitude for the opportunity to do this: "It's good to talk about how things really are" (P4), "This has been invaluable to me" (C1)

2. Understanding of the possibilities; the introduction of scenarios to enable genuine discussion of the realities, and a wide range of possibilities. "Can we really talk about these things?" (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009, p. Kindle location 2338)

3. Understanding of the processes that will be needed to explore these possibilities, to consider innovation, focus on strengths and inform decisions.

Within or following this will be the discussion of ideas, the aim being to welcome creativity, and to think broadly to arrive at best options. It is clear from earlier discussion that skilled facilitation will be required for this. Ideally it will not be left for local teams to navigate without support.

An accompanying part of this process will be a recommendation to add a further educative element, available to all parishes, for support in adapting to change. Among the services offered by the Bishop's Action Foundation is Seasons for Growth®, a suite of programmes designed to provide resources, learning and support regarding change, loss and grief. One component is a seminar package that can be presented to interested groups. The "Understanding Change, Loss and Grief" seminar would provide a forum for appropriate learning and support in preparation for the changes ahead. If these small parishes are to determine their futures and continue to contribute to their communities in some form, these changes may be radical ones. This seminar would provide useful insights at both leadership and parishioner level, enabling support for each other and the process.

The above steps regarding knowledge and awareness overlap with the second step of Hasenfeld's decision making process: the formation of attitudes towards the innovation. Initially this will be about innovation generally, as the need for change and possible future scenarios are discussed. Later formation of attitudes will be about specific changes or innovations that may be chosen for focus.

The third step, the actual decision making, may occur as the earlier processes unfold but any decisions will need to be finalized, agreed, ratified and committed to. Some developments may be allowed or encouraged to proceed with minimal consensus, in the spirit of enabling innovation. The greater, more radical

developments will require at least acceptance by the organizational unit concerned, be that parish, cluster, archdeaconry or diocese.

Implementation is another chapter, beyond this thesis, but would involve further steps and the more practical challenges. Not all plans prove practical to implement and not all those implemented will be counted a success. However, if the church environment has shifted gear toward being more innovation focussed, if congregations have an understanding of why and how to explore innovation, and have grown beyond the limitations of "not knowing what to do" so frequently expressed in this study, then there is success regardless. The courage for risk taking will grow, more solutions will be found and plans will be made. Something will be changing.

12.3 People and Empowerment

This study was always guided by the question of the potential of churches to contribute to vibrant and thriving rural community, and at its conclusion, this remains the central theme. Along the way, however, what overtook that theme time and again was the need to recognize the situation of the parishes now, and their struggle to even be. People are at the heart of this. Decision making about what happens next will ideally include these people of the congregations, as it affects them deeply. There is also the question of capacity; that those who will undertake the next steps may still have to be found:

> And it won't be our parishioners, they're too old. It's not going to happen from those ladies, and the gentlemen. They are all despairing about the church, they're all worried, upset, anxious, and because they're elderly they'll be even more anxious - "What's going to happen to our church?!" - and they can't do much." (C2)
>
> "They have reached an age – done their work, our time to care for them." (P4)
>
> "Average age range 70-80s and into their 90's. Interested as long as they don't have to do anything about it - they are too old." (P7)

At the same time, the decision to concentrate on parish case studies was deliberate. It was a quest to hear these voices working to maintain and care, of parishioners both "too old' and those younger, and to hear the ideas that are here in these places. These may not always be expressed directly as ideas, but ideas become available through the expression of areas of concern, of interest and most importantly of strengths. As well, these congregations expressed a more than expected willingness for change, a proven element in achieving change. With a respectful process for listening to and engaging these groups, a focus on the

strengths of the congregation, and support for innovation, satisfying outcomes may be found - and these may be more radical than anticipated.

There are stories available of churches that have engaged in similar processes. The book by Roxburgh and Boren (2009), *"Introducing the Missional Church: what it is, why it matters, and how to become one"*, provides stories and a detailed description of process, resonating with the findings of this study. Crucial to the journey, they suggest, is the process of engaging and listening to the people of the congregation.

> Culture change is never achieved through top-down processes; it happens as people are empowered to name their own realities and develop experiments in which they test out new habits and practices. (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009, pp. Kindle Location 2069-2070).

There is the story of change and innovation from the Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, detailed in the article *Death and Resurrection of an Urban Church* (King, 2015). The church there moved from charity-based activity to recognition of assets in the community, and encouraged others around them to share their gifts.

That is one idea. Others might include using church land for affordable housing as BAF is exploring, or developing the stained-glass window project begun in one Central cluster parish in order to replicate it elsewhere, or to explore the possibilities of social enterprise. The key is not to provide a list, and no attempt has been made to do that here. It is tempting to, because being in the privileged position of listening and being with the people of these parishes, the possibilities begin to bubble. Nonetheless, the key is that the ideas should not be those of a researcher, or anybody else's but theirs. The key is that the ideas arise from the awareness and understanding of the people concerned and grow from the strengths, gifts, interests and assets of the congregations and their communities, like the stained-glass window project has. That way the innovations will be owned. Whether they are action plans for an ongoing church or a legacy plan for one less likely to survive, the potential is there, and the contribution will be sound, enhancing vibrant communities.

E6. As you look ahead, what is most important to you about the future of your church in your community?

> "That it stands tall, a beacon to show the way forward to a strong community." (C2)

12.4 Conclusion

This study provides insight into the challenges and potentials of Anglican parishes in rural and small-town settings in Taranaki, New Zealand. Against trends of continuing decline in church attendance, those involved are highly invested in maintaining their capacity to provide worship and pastoral care for existing congregations and to serve their communities. Significant changes and innovation are likely to be needed to achieve this, and as discussed, there are obstacles to change. Findings suggest that an educative approach will assist, to understand the need for change, the impediments to it, how these may be addressed, and what the possibilities may be.

The ideas and possibilities for contribution to community will be best found in each parish. They will likely be specific to each group and arising from the strengths, interests, needs and resources to be found there. The study showed there are resources available within church and community that will support innovation, but that what is needed initially is sound process to ensure individuals and groups are safe and encouraged to take risks as they explore potentially radical options. Resources to facilitate this will be developed further to this thesis, including refined questionnaires and workshop programmes. The need for support to understand the impact of change, loss and grief is also indicated.

The limitations of the study include that the research, while in depth, was conducted with a small number of people, in a small number of parishes, in one region of New Zealand. The findings may be relevant to other sites but are not strictly generalizable. Similar studies in other regions are recommended, to advance the knowledge in this aspect of sociology of religion.

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