Australian College
of Theology

A phenomenological study on the experiences of Anglican clergy encountering emotional systems in their first parish.

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October 2017

DECLARATION

Candidate

I certify that the substance of this thesis of approximately 40,000 words, has not previously been submitted for and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I also certify that any assistance received in conducting the research embodied in this thesis, and all quotations and the sources of significant ideas and paraphrases, have been acknowledged in the text or notes.
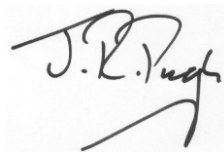
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Supervisor

I consider that this thesis of approximately 40,000 words is in a form suitable for examination and conforms to the regulations of the [*relevant sponsoring institution*] for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

The thesis shows evidence of original research and the exercise of independent critical analysis. The candidate has been trained in the techniques relevant to the field of research, and is capable, without supervision, of applying these techniques to other research projects.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Anglican clergy as they took charge of their first parish and encountered human emotional processes in their respective congregations. Eleven participants were recruited from three Australian metropolitan dioceses (Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne). The study was designed to investigate the reactions of parishioners and other stakeholders to their new minister's leadership as perceived and described by those ministers. The study also considered implications that are relevant for other debutant incumbents and clergy formation institutions.

The inquiry adopted a qualitative research design and employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research method. Phenomenology was chosen because it seeks to illuminate the specific and describe phenomena through the perceptions of the actors and, as such, provides a powerful tool for understanding subjective experience (Lester, 1999).

Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews centred on the main research question, "What was it like for you to take charge of your first parish? What did you experience?". The transcribed and explicated data revealed a singular recurring theme that was best summarised in the words of one participant who said, "The way people related to each other". This constituted the main challenge clergy faced. Five structural themes emerged relating to clergy responses to this phenomenon and they formed the basis for the findings. The themes were: shock, inadequacy, alienation, relinquishment and hopelessness.

Bowen family systems theory was introduced as a conversation partner to comment on the five themes which resulted in a 'fusion of horizons', that of the

participants and the researcher. The levels of conflict intensity and clergy differentiation and the depth of change achieved by the incumbents were then compared. The comparisons generally revealed that clergy who were more internally resilient, or differentiated, were able to endure more intense conflict and achieved lasting systemic change, while those of lower differentiation were changed by the system even though they faced less intense conflict.

The study is beneficial in three ways. Firstly, the descriptions bring to the surface deep issues, make voices heard (Lester, 1999) and document what exists mostly in oral tradition. Secondly, the study provides other potential inaugural rectors with an insight into 'what's out there' and what they might expect. Thirdly, the study challenges existing assumptions about clergy experiences by identifying the need for ecclesial authorities and clergy formation bodies to address the five core themes. It also encourages them to consider strategies that will maximise clergy resilience and minimise unnecessary trauma and stress for transitioning clergy.

For Carol, Andrew, Benjamin and Melanie.

But as for you, keep your head in all situations…

2 Timothy 4:5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to my supervisor, the Rev Dr Jeff Pugh who was the only person in the country lecturing on family systems theory in a Doctor of Ministry program when I wanted to pursue the subject. He has been a wise head who has given me excellent guidance, feedback and encouragement, kept me focused and whose patience with a plodding student has been impeccable.

I am indebted to Dr Carol Frith, who has been an academic colleague, constant encourager and devoted wife for thirty-six years. Her sharp mind often cleared the muddy waters of mine and she patiently scoured the manuscript drafts offering invaluable feedback and incalculable support.

I would like to thank the Rev Doug Sotheren for introducing me to Bowen's family systems theory over twenty years ago. He set me on a path that showed me things I would not have otherwise seen, a path that I never once regretted traversing. My thanks to Dr Roberta Gilbert because she set me on the path for this research by bringing to my attention the plight of North American theological graduates who had 'hit a wall' once they were deployed to a local church. She commented that this phenomenon needed investigation.

I am also indebted to the participants who were an inspiration to me and who were courageous enough to open up and share their stories for the record. This research would not have been possible without them and I thank them for their honesty, bravery and willingness to participate.

Lastly, all glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for his grace, love, and guidance and who has been 'a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background to the research

This study explored the lived experiences of Anglican rectors as they took charge of their first parish and encountered their respective congregation's emotional system. The study sought to uncover the major relational and emotional challenges they faced as they transitioned from an assistant minister's role to that of a minister in charge.

The researcher's interest in this subject sprang from two sources. Firstly, from his personal history because he was once a first-time rector himself and, since then, he has pastored three other parishes. His experiences led him to reflect widely and deeply on the challenges new vicars face and the impact that they have on the clergy and their families. Secondly, the researcher's interest arose from his interactions with other clergy over the past twenty years, many of whom recounted stories of hardship and trauma. One example of a clergyman's experience appeared in an Australian Anglican church blog. He admitted,

> For reasons, I still don't fully understand, church became a depressing and deadening experience for me. I tried to explain my feelings to the leadership, but my message was not well received - and probably not well delivered either. Things rapidly spiralled down. My low level of enthusiasm for the church and its vision saw me lose my 'insider' status, and I was criticised as hard-hearted and lacking kingdom focus. I was already serving in several ministries, but I was told the solution to 'my problem' was to serve even more. Spiritual vitality drained away, and church became hateful to me (Schwarze, 2009).

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Roberta Gilbert, author and exponent of the application of Bowen family systems theory to church settings, wrote to this researcher in a personal email and outlined similar experiences occurring in North America. She wrote (Gilbert, R., 2009, pers. com.),

> …several years ago, a bishop of the United Methodist denomination told me something interesting. [*He said*], 'I was interviewing people, for my own learning, in that denomination at a training event'. I [*Gilbert*] asked, 'What do you see as the primary problem of pastors in the ministry today?'. He told me that 'they come out of seminary all enthusiastic and ready to do ministry. But sooner, or later, they come up against a wall that knocks all the steam out of them. From then on, they lose their enthusiasm. They either leave the ministry or just wait out the time until retirement'. It is my guess [*says Gilbert*] that that 'wall' is the emotional system of the congregation. Nothing in their training has prepared them for dealing with it. If that is what it is (and our experience shows that it is) then, family systems theory shows a way to go that brings back the enthusiasm and even better functioning than before. That is the research I would like to see done. Just asking pastors what is most difficult for them about ministry.

There is a paucity of literature documenting clerical experiences of negotiating a new incumbency and there is an even greater scarcity reporting on the experiences of ministers leading a church for the first time.

This researcher was keen to explore the experiences of Australian clergy in an Anglican setting and to determine if they correlated to the North American experience. His prior discussions with other clergy had already engaged him in a private and informal, albeit undocumented, phenomenological inquiry as he attempted to listen, without prejudice, to their stories. They left him with a hunch that

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there was something out there in Australian parish life that was worth investigating with some academic rigour.

While undertaking this inquiry, the researcher consciously and intentionally incorporated his prior understanding of Bowen family systems theory[1], a legitimate practice under the terms of hermeneutic phenomenology. BFST, employed as a conversation partner, illuminated the participants' descriptions and helped the researcher arrive at a better understanding of the phenomenological essences.

The Anglican system

This study confined itself to researching Australian Anglican clergy. The following is a general summary of Anglican ecclesiology and is offered to help the reader appreciate the nature of the Anglican church and its protocols for appointing clergy and laity to office which shaped the structure of the local churches in this study.

The Anglican Church of Australia, as part of the worldwide Anglican communion, is episcopal in its governance being comprised of three orders of ordained ministry: bishops, priests (rebadged as *presbyters* in Sydney) and deacons/deaconesses. Although the laity are included, even at the highest levels of decision making, pastoral oversight rests with the theologically trained clergy. The national church is divided geographically into five provinces, twenty-three dioceses and numerous local parishes within those provinces and dioceses. Generally, to each of these parishes, an incumbent in priest's orders, entitled 'rector' or 'vicar'[2], is

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[1] From now on referred to as BFST.

[2] 'Rector' is derived from the Latin 'rector' meaning 'ruler' or 'director' and 'vicar' from the French 'vicaire' meaning 'deputy' or 'second-in-command'. 'Rector', 'vicar' are interchangeable terms in this thesis. Source: *www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=rector.*

appointed by a presiding bishop who authorises the priest to oversee ministry in that local area. Their appointment usually takes place after the candidate has completed the required theological training, submitted himself or herself to a two-step ordination process, first as a deacon/deaconess then as a priest, and after having gained some pastoral experience as an assistant under the direction of a senior minister. The focus of this research is on the experiences of those clergy who had met these criteria and had taken up their first parish incumbency.

Usually, each parish conducts an annual general meeting[3] during which lay officers are elected, including church wardens and parish councillors. The vicar appoints one warden and one or more parish councillors depending on the size of the council which is determined by the AGM. Wardens and parish council are mainly responsible for the parish finances and the maintenance of property but can also discuss pastoral matters in consultation with the vicar. A search committee is elected at the AGM every three years whose responsibility is to search for a new vicar should that position become vacant. Multi-church parishes comprise of a main church and one or more subsidiary branch churches. Branch churches may conduct their own AGM and may elect wardens of their own, depending on the local parish's polity. A parish treasurer is appointed by the church wardens but most other lay leadership appointments are the prerogative of the vicar.

Significance of the study

Recent studies among parish clergy have highlighted the increasing levels of burnout and recognised the need for this issue to be addressed (Kaldor, 2001, Randall, 2004, Whetham, 2000). This study provided a unique and detailed account

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[3] 'AGM' is also called an 'annual vestry meeting' or 'AVM'.

of parish clergy experiences and adds to the body of literature that is relevant to clergy burnout and attrition rates.

The study has the potential to help church authorities anticipate problematic issues that can arise at the beginning of a pastoral ministry and minimise transitional problems and clergy stress by developing early intervention strategies. The study is also significant and instructive for clergy who aspire to lead their own parishes because it provides an insight into what it feels like to lead a parish for the first time and to encounter an emotional system. This research could prove valuable to new clergy by raising their awareness of the types of issues that new parish leaders may encounter and it does so in the hope that they might enter their first charge better prepared. The research could motivate clergy to develop their skills in the areas of self-management and leadership of the church's relational system, especially in times of tension.

Denominational and theological training bodies responsible for clergy formation and transitioning, might benefit by utilising the findings of this study to inform their training programs and commissioning procedures in an effort to minimise clergy unpreparedness.

CHAPTER 2: RELATED LITERATURE & STUDY REVIEWS

This chapter contains a review of the literature pertaining to this study. Firstly, literature covering the background of and concepts in Bowen family systems theory was included because the phenomenon under investigation related to emotional systems and because BFST was employed during the interpretive process. Secondly, ecclesial literature relating to clergy psychology, ministry stress, church conflict and social issues. Thirdly, literature emerging from the nursing profession was included because qualitative phenomenology has become a popular research method in nursing over recent years because it is deemed a suitable method for studying the human experience of pain. Fourthly, literature collected from the education sector, especially studies that investigated the experiences of inaugural school principals, who faced similar challenges to clergy. Fifthly, the relevant biblical literature which informed the theological reflection in chapter nine was reviewed.

Bowen family systems theory

Murray Bowen, after whom BFST is named, initially sat under Sigmund Freud as a student, but it was later, as an army physician, that Bowen noticed many returning WWII veterans were not only unresponsive to therapy for treating emotional trauma but regressed upon returning to their home environment (Rabstejnek, n.d.). Subsequently, Bowen moved away from the traditional focus on treating the individual, often called the 'identified patient', and concentrated on the intra-psychic and dysfunctional familial relationships (Foley, 1984). Bowen redirected his attention away from the Freudian dyadic relationship of mother/child towards the triadic relationship of father/mother/child. This became the crucial foundation for his family systems theory (Rabstejnek, n.d.). In 1978 Bowen published his only book,

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Family Therapy in Clinical Practice, a collation of his work over twenty years from 1957 to 1977 in which he crystallised his research into the eight key concepts of BFST[4]. The second of these concepts, the differentiation of self and its associated scale of differentiation, is particularly relevant to this study and is therefore explained in more detail as follows.

Differentiation: Bowen's concept of differentiation lies at the heart of his theory (Papero in Titleman, 2014, 65). It relates specifically to a person's ability to suppress emotional impulses in order to maintain rational objectivity. Bowen devised a scale to denote the levels of differentiation and Figure 1, on the following page, is an adaptation by this researcher of Bowen's original diagram. It identifies higher and lower levels of human functioning and the movement between them is determined by an individual's ability or inability to distinguish thinking from feeling.

Bowen argued that, in forming social networks, the human species distinguished itself from the animal species by its ability to reason not just react. Humans, he argued, do not act out of instinct or impulse alone but cognitively reflect upon and regulate their actions. He wrote (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, 94),

> The ability to think and reflect, not to automatically respond to internal and external emotional stimuli, gives man the ability to restrain selfish and spiteful urges, even during periods of high anxiety.

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[4] See Appendix C for a summary of Bowen's eight concepts.

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Figure 1 - Bowen's differentiation of self scale

Bowen's Differentiation of Self Scale

High differentiation (100):

Thinking and feeling are disentangled. Reasoned, thoughtful responses are not sabotaged by emotion.
Characterised by:
- Less anxiety, relationship enmeshment and thinking/emotional fusion.
- Better decisions and relationships and fewer life problems.
- Less determined by others' opinions.
- Life is lived from a solid sense of self which is shaped by convictions and beliefs.

100 is hypothetical only.
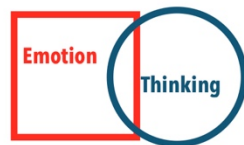
75-95
- Can listen without reacting.
- Able to assume responsibility for oneself.
- Not preoccupied with placement in the hierarchy.
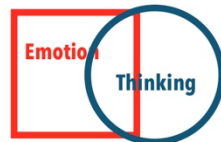
60-75
- Less emotionally reactive & less chronically anxious.
- Able to choose between closeness and goals.
- Can extricate themselves from high emotion situations.
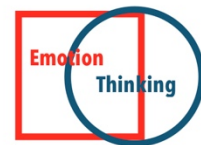
50-60
- Aware of the difference between thoughts & feelings.
- Still sensitive to others' opinions.
- Hesitate to say what they believe lest they offend.

25-50
- Lives in a feeling world.
- Borrows beliefs and convictions from others.
- Quick to imitate others to gain acceptance.
- Energy goes into loving and being loved.
- Little energy for goal directed activity.
- Addicted to comfort.
- Can react as authoritarian, compliant or rebellious.

0-25
- Makes major life decisions based on what feels right.
- Responses range from compliance to rebellion.
- Narcissistic statements dominate e.g. "I want" or "I hurt".
- So sensitive to other's opinions that functioning is governed by reactions to the environment.
- Immersed in a feeling world.

Low differentiation (0):

Thinking and emotion are fused and confused.
Automatic, instinctive reactions overwhelm cognitive objectivity.
Characterised by:
- More anxiety, relationship enmeshment, emotion/thinking fusion and life problems.
- Poorer decision making; more relationship trouble; focused on others' opinions.
- Life is lived from a pseudo-self which is shaped by others.

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Higher differentiated individuals are more likely to distinguish emotional reactivity from thoughtful reflection and are more able to restrain their emotions in order to think logically and objectively. They tend to function from deeply held convictions and beliefs which are derived from what Bowen called their "solid self"[5]. A highly-differentiated individual possesses a substantial solid-self. Hence they are located towards the top of Bowen's scale.

Figure 2 - The solid and pseudo self

Conversely, lower differentiated individuals tend to operate from a "pseudo-self"[6], a sense of self which is borrowed from the opinions and expectations of others rather than emanating from a set of personal convictions. Poorly differentiated individuals are correspondingly located at the lower end of Bowen's scale. Functioning out of a more substantial pseudo-self, they experience more difficulty in separating rational responses from emotional reactions inclining instead to confuse and fuse them. For them, emotional reactivity tends to overrun and dominate objectivity and rationality. The pop song 'Love is all around', originally written by British rock band The Troggs, contains the lyric,

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[5] Bowen's term to describe the self that is "made up of clearly defined beliefs, opinions, convictions, and life principles" that can say, "'this is who I am, what I believe, what I stand for, and what I will do or will not do' in a given situation" (Bowen in Gilbert, 2008, 20-21). See Figure 2.

[6] Bowen's term for the 'pretend' self. Knowledge and beliefs are acquired from others and the pseudo-self is created and modified by emotional pressure. People "pretend to be more or less important than they really are", and one can "quickly change to enhance one's image with others" (Kerr & Bowen, 1998, 103). The pseudo self is defined by others. See Figure 2.

…my mind's made up by the way that I feel…

and this is not a bad depiction of someone whose emotional processes dictate their cognitive functioning.

Commenting on the constricting power of emotional reactivity in families, Bowen wrote (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, 90),

> In a poorly differentiated family, emotionality and subjectivity have a strong influence on family relationships. The high intensity of emotionality or togetherness pressure does not permit a child to grow, think, feel, and act for himself.

Subsequent to Bowen, there were other notable works on BFST such as C. Margaret Hall's *Bowen Family Systems Theory and It's Uses* (1981), regarded as a better organised treatment of the theory than Bowen's own book (Rabstejnek, n.d.). Philip Guerin published *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice* (1976), chapter four of which Bowen himself wrote. Many others followed suit but it is not within the scope of this study to summarise them.

The fundamental concepts of BFST applied to ecclesiastical contexts have been popularised by authors such as Gilbert (1992, 2004, 2006, 2008), Steinke (1999, 2000, 2006, 2010), Herrington et al. (2003), Boers (2002), Richardson (1996, 2004, 2005, 2012). What follows is a summary of some key features of BFST drawn from this literature in order familiarise the reader with the dynamic of emotional systems in church settings, which is central to this study.

The systemic nature of emotion: Bowen proposed that the family is an emotional system, not simply meaning that individual family members are emotional entities, but that emotion is transferrable. Emotion, and anxiety in particular, gets passed

around family members and is therefore infectious and systemic (Steinke, 2006, 10).

The feelings of one person reverberate among and can even be replicated in other

family members. Practitioners of Bowen theory likened the emotional system to a

child's hanging mobile toy. Suspended from the ceiling by a thread, the various parts

are tenuously connected as it floats in the air, perfectly balanced by the

counterweighted components. Poised in mid-air, the balance of the whole is so

sensitive that the slightest disturbance of just one part upsets the equilibrium and the

whole unit animates. In a human grouping, members are connected not by threads, as

in a child's mobile, but by emotions and any change in just one person's emotional

state reverberates through others and agitates the whole family system.

Togetherness and individuality: Bowen also proposed the existence of two basic

life forces, viz. togetherness and individuality, that are 'hard wired' into human

biology (Richardson 1996, 56).These two forces determine the 'to-and-fro-ness' of

emotion in relationships. Steinke noted that it is the differentiated individual who

possesses the ability to maintain a proper balance between individuality and

togetherness (Steinke, 2006, 19).

Firstly, Bowen thought that humans have a basic need for individuality or

separateness. Individuality is about difference and the need for uniqueness and

independence that makes one stand out from the rest. Independence is a matter of

thinking, feeling and acting for oneself rather than being determined by others.

Bowen wrote (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, 95),

> Family systems theory assumes the existence of an instinctually rooted life
>
> force (differentiation or individuality) in every human being that propels
>
> the developing child to grow to be an emotionally separate person, an
>
> individual with the ability to think, feel, and act for himself.

Secondly, and almost paradoxically, Bowen thought that humans also need togetherness and connection. Togetherness relates to the need for emotional intimacy with other humans, for solidarity, friendship and a sense of 'team play' (Richardson 1996, 57). Togetherness is about the commonness that people share, the affective 'stuff' that binds them together. Bowen wrote again (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, 95),

> Also assumed is the existence of an instinctually rooted life force (togetherness) that propels child and family to remain emotionally connected and to operate in reaction to one another. The togetherness force propels a child and family to think, feel, and act as one.

These life forces exist as two polarities that live in tension in relationships, like magnetic poles. Never static, they constantly dance in all human relationships, oscillating from one to the other. Sometimes people feel the need to make compromises in order to engender closeness and, at other times, they might prefer to distance themselves by acting or thinking differently. However, too much togetherness will result in enmeshment and too much individuality will result in disengagement. When the balance between the life forces is upset, anxiety gets relayed around the social system as people react emotionally and instinctively in order to redress the imbalance. For example, the desire to increase a sense of togetherness or sameness may result in an individual's loss of independence or 'self' to the group's pressure to maintain homogeneity. This would inevitably create tension as the individual begins to feel smothered and loses their identity to the group's need for conformity. On the other hand, an individual who is uncomfortable with too much closeness, might remove themselves from social interaction altogether, retreating to a hermit-like existence. Their preference for solitude would

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similarly create tension around the system which intensifies the pressure to re-assimilate them. The extremes of fusion and disengagement are signs of dysfunction.

Bowen believed that higher differentiated people, with a substantial solid self, are more likely to balance the life forces as they live by their own values and convictions, yet remain connected to others. Individuation plus connectedness is the key, thus Bowen wrote (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, 94),

> The more differentiated a self, the more a person can be an individual *while in emotional contact with the group.*

Richardson (1996, 101) distilled these concepts in a functional-style grid, a graphical way to position persons on the axes of high/low differentiation and togetherness/individuality. An adaptation of Richardson's functional style chart is contained in Figure 3 on the following page and illustrates four quadrants representing four functional styles that individuals can adopt as they navigate around the emotional system.

However, it should be noted in advance that one shortcoming of Richardson's chart lies in its two-dimensional depiction of a person's functional style frozen in time. In reality the positioning of individuals needs to take into account their capacity to change their functional style over time and this adds an important third dimension. Bowen wrote that, in order to make an accurate estimate of an individual's degree of differentiation, observation of generational patterns of behaviour over a long period of time is necessary (Bowen, 2004, 306). This is an important qualification for this study which will attempt to locate its participants on Richardson's chart. Their placements on the chart will only provide an approximation because the scope of the

study did not permit observation over an extended period of time as Bowen

suggested.

Figure 3 - Richardson's functional style chart

HIGH DIFFERENTIATION
Separation of thinking & feeling

Q1
Connected

Q2
Alone

CLOSENESS
Togetherness

DISTANCE
Individuality

Q3
Enmeshed

Q4
Isolated

LOW DIFFERENTIATION
Fusion of thinking & feeling
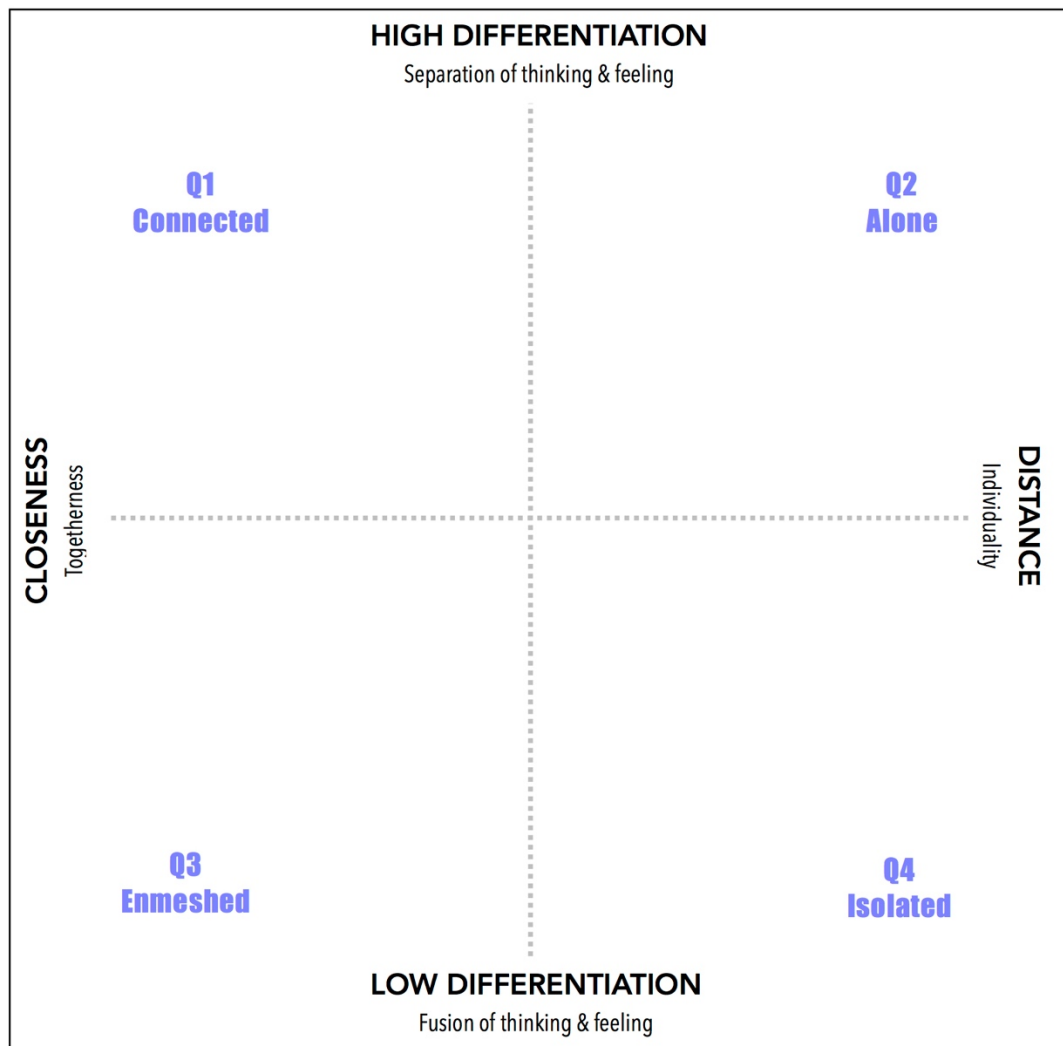
LEGEND:

Top half = higher differentiated functioning   Right half = individuality life force
Lower half = lower differentiated functioning   Left half = togetherness life force

The four quadrants relate to functioning position:

- Quadrant 1 (Q1): *differentiated/connected* – thinking and feeling are distinguished and one determines how self wants to be. One remains connected to others but thinks, feels & acts out of set of beliefs & convictions.

- Quadrant 2 (Q2): *differentiated/alone* – thinking and feeling are distinguished. Aloneness is not a chosen goal, but is a possible outcome as a result of the group's distancing reaction to a differentiated individual.

- Quadrant 3 (Q3): *enmeshed/fusion* – thinking and feeling are fused and the self is derived from others. People band together out of an intense need to be loved, accepted and approved. There is pressure to conform because togetherness and unity mean 'sameness'. Bowen called this the "undifferentiated ego mass" (Bowen, 1976, 66).

- Quadrant 4 (Q4): *isolated/fusion* – thinking and feeling are fused and a person is allergic to closeness. They gain a sense of self by distancing. They choose emotional isolation. But, ironically, their sense of self is still determined by others.

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Anxiety: Anxiety, Bowen's word for tension, is always present in human relationships because life is a constant balancing act to keep the two life forces of togetherness and individuality in some sort of equilibrium. In any human emotional system, if the balance between these life forces is destabilised, it will invariably result in anxiety permeating the entire system. For Bowen, differentiation of self is a process of recognising, positioning and managing oneself within an anxious system and of functioning from a solid self while remaining connected to others.

Anxiety intensifies in a human system when one or more members feel threatened by someone or something. The sense of threat can be real or imagined, says Richardson (Richardson, 1996), and can arise for many reasons. For example, a person may feel that their liberty is suppressed or they may feel left out, or uncared for, or ostracised, or they fear being abandoned and so on. The ways in which people react to real or imagined threats that confront them will vary, depending on their level of differentiation. Those positioned higher on Bowen's scale will be more able to separate thinking from feeling, calmly and rationally marshal the facts and make measured responses. They are more likely to function in the group from a position of a 'non-anxious presence'[7] and inject a calming influence on the rest of the system. Their calm and reasoning presence can dilute the anxious intensity of the system and so orientate the crowd toward more imaginative and reasonable responses. However, for those positioned lower on Bowen's scale, imaginative thinking is constricted by emotional reactivity expressed in fight, flight or freeze responses. Lower functioning individuals who experience high anxiety tend to pass the anxiety around which, if left unchecked, can result in a type of herd mentality generating panic through the

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[7] Bowen's term for a differentiated and connected individual in an anxious system. The researcher prefers the phrase 'low-anxious presence' because a non-anxious state is a virtual impossibility.

entire family. One can witness this phenomenon by observing crowd riots in which unthinking passion quickly spreads and intensifies. Kerr and Bowen observed (Bowen and Kerr, 1988, 93),

> The higher the level of self-differentiation of people in a family or social group, the more they can cooperate, look out for one another's welfare, and stay in adequate contact during stressful as well as calm periods. The lower the level of differentiation, the more likely the family, when stressed, will regress to selfish, aggressive, and avoidance behaviours; cohesiveness, altruism, and cooperativeness will break down.[8]

Faith communities are not immune to exhibiting similar patterns of behaviour and Edwin Friedman was a pioneer in the area of applying BFST to faith communities such as synagogues and churches. His seminal work on this subject was produced in his 1985 publication entitled *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Friedman argued that emotional systems are prevalent wherever people congregate, not just among families. In faith communities, emotion is felt by individuals and gets transferred, sometimes constructively but often destructively. Friedman believed that faith communities are notorious places for tolerating toxic behaviour – a combination of lowly differentiated individuals and intense anxiety (Friedman in Steinke, 2000, 59)[9]:

> Actually, religious institutions are the worst offenders at encouraging immaturity and irresponsibility. In church after church, some member is passively-aggressively holding the whole system hostage, and no one

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[8] See Appendix E for Steinke's summary on differentiated/undifferentiated functioning contrasts.

[9] Steinke quoting from Friedman's lectures.

wants to fire him or force her to leave because it wouldn't be "the Christian

thing to do".

Friedman felt that leaders of faith organisations would serve their communities better

if they focused more on their own differentiation and non-anxious presence and less

on changing those they led. Thus, he offered a fresh alternative to ecclesial

leadership theory and practice that had been dominated by skill, technique and

programmatically based models. He identified three functional polarities at play in

the system that leaders need to be aware of and respond to (Cox, 2006), namely:

- The individual and togetherness polarity.

- The over-functioning/under-functioning polarity.[10]

- The pursuers and distancers polarity.[11]

Friedman's book spawned a bevy of ecclesiastical writers through the nineties

and later, including a slow but steady stream of Christian leadership literature which

absorbed BFST concepts. Some wrote about the nature of the local church as an

emotional system in order to understand the emotional dynamics undergirding

behaviour, particularly troublesome behaviour (Steinke 1999, 2000; Boers 2002).

Some chose to focus on church health, suggesting that health and sickness could be

measured in relational terms and that BFST provided a unique diagnostic tool

(Richardson 1996; Scazzero 2003). Some authors restricted their attention to the

leader as a highly-differentiated change agent (Gilbert, 2006, 2008; J. Herrington, R.

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[10] Describes the co-dependent relationship between those who under-function by not taking responsibility for their own emotional functioning and those who, reciprocally, over-function by taking responsibility vicariously.

[11] Describes the dynamic whereby a person, who feels uncomfortable with the emotional distance between themselves and another, pursues the other in order to regain some of the lost intimacy. The other may feel uncomfortable with that level of closeness and, so, they distance themselves further. After time, the pursuer may slow their pursuit, making the other uncomfortable with not being chased, and the roles are reversed: the pursued then becomes the pursuer.

R. Creech and T. Taylor, 2003), while others concentrated on the lead pastor's family of origin and how this shaped their leadership style (Richardson, 2005). Brown emphasized the maturation process of individuals, including leaders (Brown, 2012).

Some authors likened the church to a family by examining the roles people adopt in churches such as a matriarchal or patriarchal role, or those who function dependently like children (C. H. Cosgrove and D. D. Hatfield, 1994). There have been those who depict the local church as an organisational and relational system (Parsons and Leas, 1993) and, although there were elements of overlap between these works and BFST, they did not specifically confine themselves to emotional systems, nor did they focus on the key elements of BFST.

Ecclesial studies

The reason for this research partly related to the paucity of literature documenting the real experiences of clergy. The research, therefore, attempted to redress the imbalance somewhat. Studies had been conducted over the past twenty to thirty years targeting clergy of different denominations, including Anglican, but relatively few were located in Australia.

Much of the research that investigated clergy fell broadly into the following categories:

1. Studies that focused on personality type or psychological content. Francis and Thomas (1997) conducted a study on the psychological stability of 222 male Anglican clergy and concluded, contrary to conventional assumptions, that there was no correlation between charismatic experience and neuroticism among Anglican clergy. Musson (1998) investigated the personality profiles of 441 Anglican clergy in England

and compared them to men in society generally. He discovered clergy

were more outgoing, intelligent, emotionally stable, conscientious,

tenderminded, imaginative, apprehensive and tense than the general male

population. Both these studies, although conducted among Anglican

clergy, targeted English clergy.

2. Studies that focused on ministry stress, burnout, coping strategies, job

satisfaction and wellbeing. Berry, Francis, Rolph and Rolph (2012)

conducted a qualitative (grounded theory) investigation into vocational

stress experienced by 63 male and 10 female Anglican clergy in Wales.

Their research discovered that clergy were aware of the stress-inducing

aspects of their vocation, displayed signs of work overload and were

'critical of or resistant to strategies that can confuse pastoral care with the

management role of the church's hierarchy' (Berry et al., 2012, 2).

However, the study focused on clergy stress and did not address their

broader experiences, nor was it limited to clergy in their first senior

leadership role, as in this study. The Berry et al. study offered some

valuable insights that complement this study. They found that the main

causes for clergy stress related to work overload, administration,

expectations and lack of care. The findings in this research touched on

these aspects but revealed that the main causes for clergy stress were

more complex and included internal and emotional factors. Turton and

Francis (2002), in a qualitative study, assessed the trustworthiness of the

Ministry Job Satisfaction Scale but did not actually address job

satisfaction among clergy. Randall (2004) researched 340 clergy as to

whether burnout was an effective predictor of clergy leaving parish

ministry. Using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, he concluded that there was a correlation between higher levels of exhaustion, depersonalisation and the lack of personal accomplishment with the frequency with which clergy considered leaving the ministry. This was a valuable, albeit quantitative, study for the purposes of this research. However, clergy in this study described what the experience of burnout was like and what it meant for them and this added a further dimension to Randall's study. Strümpfer and Bands (1996) explored stress among ten South African priests. This was a qualitative study but not phenomenological in nature. Nevertheless, they were able to ascertain from the participants three stressors for clergy: person-role conflict, quantitative workload and role insufficiency. Quite a different result emerged from the participants in this study, all of whom experienced degrees of dis-stress which they attributed to emotional and relational processes. Pugh (2006) explored the world of pastors who had been terminated or opted for a forced resignation due to intense conflict, and how their mental image of God either helped or hindered their recovery. His study led him to uncover some 'counter-intuitive' results such as a number of pastors who relocated and continued ministry elsewhere after experiencing intense conflict, while others, who experienced less intense conflict, left pastoral ministry completely. These counter-intuitive findings were echoed in some of the findings in this paper. Pugh's study followed a similar methodological approach to this paper in that it was systemic, included BFST categories, examined clergy in conflicted settings and explored the inner world of emotional dynamics. Kinman, McFall and Rodriguez

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(2011) and Kaldor and Bullpit (2001) studied the causes and effects of emotional distress among church leaders and suggested possible preventative strategies. Once again, they were studies that focused on the singular aspect of clergy stress.

3.   Literature on church conflict and how to manage it included Shelley (1985), Haugk (1988) and Rediger (1997). Boers' criticism of these books was that 'they are so sweeping, advocating broad policies to fit a wide array of circumstances. There is little sense of how churches function' (Boers, 1997, 7). Boers was also concerned that the titles and contents of these works tended towards emotive labelling which contributed to 'anxious mistrust'. Labelling, he believed, accelerated anxiety, whereas the task of conflict management was to reduce anxiety (p. 7). There have also been literary models proposed on the process of breaking into a new church, such as Pattison's treatment (1985, 61)[12] but these do not give an insight into what the experience is like.

4.   Studies to do with social challenges. Leavy, Loewenthal and King (2007) investigated the role that United Kingdom clergy played in the transition of mental health patients from hospital back into the community. They found that clergy were under-utilised as a resource. Peterson (2009) conducted a qualitative study on the experiences of clergy confronting domestic violence in South Africa. He concluded that the challenges to

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[12] Pattison proposes four stages church leaders must navigate as they break into a new church: storming, forming, norming and performing.

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clergy were primarily related to the lack of training in dealing with real life issues.

Two other works, namely Peter Steinke (2006) and Speed Leas (1985) were consulted more extensively in the findings phase of this research. Steinke's criteria for determining a person's level of differentiation, proved useful when objectifying the participants' own differentiation and helped the researcher avoid arbitrary subjectivity. Leas' five levels of conflict intensity likewise helped to identify the types of conflict which the participants encountered. However, it should be noted that the usefulness of these diagnostic tools only emerged as the research progressed and was not part of the prearranged methodology.

Nursing studies

Qualitative and, in particular, phenomenological research methods are increasingly being applied to nursing studies (Al-Busaida, 1993) and will continue to be applied (Annells, 1996) with its growing acceptance (Beck, 1994) because it seeks to determine meaning through description (Al-Busaida, 1993). Annells (1996), thought that hermeneutical phenomenology was a 'wise choice' for nursing research (p. 705), while Boyd (1993) added that it was an appropriate research method for exploring issues of human pain and suffering. Boyd argued that 'description is an effective communication of insights into human experience' (Boyd, 1993, 99). Walton & Madjar (1999) believed that phenomenology attempted to overcome the traditional mind-body dualism by focusing on body consciousness or lived-body experience. The main benefit of phenomenology, they concluded, was that it described the 'depth' of the experience and nature of the phenomenon, although it did not elucidate its extent or prevalence.

Wilding, Muir-Cochrane and May (2006) conducted a phenomenological study on the significance of spirituality in the lives of mental health patients and concluded that spirituality was a personal matter for patients, to which they attached great significance. They recommended that health professionals must empower patients to openly discuss their spirituality as part of their treatment.

These studies have provided useful insights into phenomenology as a research method and research into the experience of human suffering which bears some relevance to this study.

Educational studies

Daresh and Male (2000) investigated the transition of classroom teachers to managerial roles (Daresh and Male 2000, 89). Sixteen school principals were interviewed and reported that nothing had, nor could have, prepared them for the culture shock they felt even if they had previous experience as a deputy head or locum-tenens. Daresh and Male commented, 'They did not realize the full extent of what the job entailed until after they had taken up the post on their own' (p. 96). This echoed the findings in this study that clergy reported feeling unprepared and a type of culture shock when they took charge of their first parish. Daresh and Male also documented the reactions of the principals' known associates in the school and wider community to their new role. The principals reported experiencing isolation, cold-shouldering, wariness, distancing, stereotyping and name dropping, the latter because some actually liked being associated with a headmaster rather than with 'just a teacher' (p. 97). Furthermore, they found that the principals sought out their peers and colleagues in the teaching profession for support rather than the official educational bodies which, some said, didn't understand what was happening 'out

here in the trenches' (p. 97). Daresh and Male concluded that the heads of schools carry enormous responsibilities for the management of expensive plant, conflict resolution, diverse expectations, as well as providing the core service of educating pupils. Parish clergy have similar responsibilities to school heads and, as this study has shown, are faced with similar human reactions to their leading role.

Celoria and Roberson in their qualitative study on new principal coaching (2015), addressed some of the issues raised in Daresh and Male's work. They conducted an inquiry with six new school principals paired to six coaches, the purpose of which was (Celoria and Roberson 2015, 87),

> To explore new principal coaching as an induction process that could be responsive to work-related stress, the emotional dimensions of leadership, and the personal domain of principals.

They found that new principal coaching provided a (Celoria and Roberson 2015, 86)

> Safe place for first and second year principals to express how they relate to demands from both a personal and professional perspective including offering a safe place for emotional intensity.

Celoria and Roberson (2015) discovered that principal coaching can provide new principals with a person to talk to as they grow into their new role. They stressed that the coaches did not act as supervisors or evaluators but as supporters who helped with more emotionally oriented issues such as stress and isolation. Their central finding indicated an improvement in the psycho-social functioning of the principals as a result of coaching intervention. Celoria and Roberson's findings are quite insightful and instructive for new vicar induction processes and adopting a similar coaching model forms part of the recommendations in this study.

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This literature review highlighted the value of phenomenology as a research method for studying human suffering. It also highlighted the importance of the emotional dimension of leadership and suggested that stable emotional functioning is just as important for effective ministry functioning as is intellect, talent and competence. It is this line of thought that this study pursued.

Biblical literature

The books of the Bible and, in particular, the New Testament epistles, were consulted extensively in order to offer a theological interpretation of the phenomenon. This was achieved by employing theological concepts to interpret particular episodes and construct ethical norms to guide one's responses and learning (Osmer 2008, 4). Focusing on the New Testament epistles meant that these theological concepts were extracted from first century local church settings which were more immediately resonant with the participants' own church settings.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Anglican rectors, or vicars, in their first parish as they encountered the emotional processes of their respective congregations. The study adopted a qualitative research design and employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research method. Phenomenology was chosen because it aims to illuminate the specific and describe phenomena through the perceptions of the actors and, as such, provides a powerful tool for understanding subjective experience (Lester, 1999). The following material traces the development of qualitative phenomenology and justifies its suitability for this study.

Husserl and the rise of phenomenology

Qualitative research emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century in reaction to the perceived inadequacies of empirical, positivistic and quantitative methods for human research. Postmodern thinkers became disenchanted with the foundationalism that undergirded the natural sciences (Allen, 1995), according to which, the researcher took on the role of an unbiased, detached observer and interpreter of the subject he or she investigated. Constructivists believed that the neutral stance of the researcher (Swinton, 2001), who was devoid of biases or values (Polkinghorne, 1983) and separate from the world, was impossible to achieve. The scientist, they said, is inevitably a part of world they investigate, that all reality is perceived reality and all truth is perceived truth. Scientists needed a new approach for practicing human science, one which emphasised discovery, description and meaning over prediction, control and measurement (Laverty, 2003).

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Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher (1859-1938), emerged from this philosophical restlessness as the founding father of phenomenological research (Cohen, 1987, Koch, 1996 and Polkinghorne, 1983 in Laverty, 2003). For Husserl, reality is phenomena as they present themselves to human consciousness and phenomenology evolved as a qualitative tool for studying lived experience, that is what it is like to live in the world.

Husserl also believed that information about the real world was not reliable (Groenewald 2004) because people can only be certain about how things appear to them, not how the things are in themselves, their essence. We don't see things as they are, we see them as we see them. So, Husserl argued that reality is largely contained in the mind of a conscious being and in their perception of things. He objected to the idea that scientists see essences while, simultaneously, remaining blind to their own predispositions which invariably influence their perceptions. Consequently, Husserl devised a research method whereby the researcher consciously and intentionally could bracket out or 'transcend' his or her pre-knowledge and prejudgements.

Defining qualitative research is a difficult task, according to Swinton and Mowat (2006), because it is 'slippery and difficult to contain in a single definition' (p. 29) due to its open ended and evolving nature. Nevertheless, Denzin and Lincoln have offered a workable definition (in Swinton and Mowat, 2006, 29):

> Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Creswell wrote, 'Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem' (Creswell, 2009, 294), and Van Manen added that the meaning they ascribe to their world is shaped by factors such as environment, the people themselves, culture, race and setting (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenological research method

The term 'phenomenology' is derived from two Greek words, '*phainomenon*' meaning 'that which appears' and '*logos*', meaning 'word' or 'to study'. In studying the appearance of things, phenomenology involves description, interpretation and challenge. It asks, 'what is this or that kind of experience like?' as it presents itself to human consciousness (Van Manen, 1997, 9). It seeks 'to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live and what it means to them', (Langridge in Kafle, 2011, 182). It challenges existing assumptions as it 'focuses attention on the deeply embedded frameworks of tacitly known, taken-for-granted assumptions through which humans make sense of their lives' (Yanow, 2014, 15).

In attempting to explicate the meaning, structures and essences of human interaction (Simon and Goes, 2011), the researcher needs to follow a structured and an exact procedure (Madison in Laverty, 2003), in order to avoid aimlessness and a lack of thoroughness. Polkinghorne (1983), however, warned that there was no correct method for launching into phenomenological investigation and he preferred to adopt a creative approach. Likewise, Holloway wrote that phenomenologists are reluctant to prescribe techniques because one cannot impose a method on phenomena lest it 'do a great injustice to the phenomenon' (in Van Manen, 2004, 6). Hycner noted that one cannot reduce the research procedure to a mere 'cookbook' recipe lest

it threaten the integrity of the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985, 280). Osborne (1994)

believed in following a guided research procedure but qualified this to say that

researchers need to follow their chosen procedure consistently throughout the

entirety of the research. Nevertheless, Hycner believed that, whatever procedure is

adopted, the researcher should approach the phenomenon sensitively and

responsively and that some guidelines are needed (Hycner, 1985).

Bracketing and transcendence

Husserl argued that, in order to observe phenomena more clearly, the researcher

must be able to identify and consciously put aside his or her preconceptions. He

called this process of reduction '*epoché*' or 'bracketing'. Bracketing places the

researcher in a more receptive posture and positions them to offer a more

uncontaminated rendition of the phenomenon.

However, one of Husserl's students, Martin Heidegger, recognised a weakness in

Husserl's theory and modified Husserl's concept of bracketing. Consciousness,

Heidegger proposed, including that of the researcher, cannot be isolated from the

world in which it exists and pre-knowledge is something that cannot be transcended.

Our most fundamental experience of the world is already full of meaning (Merleau-

Ponty, 1962/ 2006). Van Manen added (in Goble and Yin, 2014, 1),

> We are enmeshed in our world and immediately experience our world as
>
> meaningful because our world—with its other people, its histories and
>
> cultures, and its events—precedes any attempt on our part to understand it
>
> or explain it.

A person's background, culture and history influences them from birth to

understand the world the way they do (Laverty, 2003). Humans are interpreting

beings and hermeneutics is part of being human, so Heidegger believed that absolute transcendence was unachievable and that phenomenological research is necessarily interpretive as well as descriptive.

Hermeneutical phenomenology

Heidegger's concept of hermeneutic phenomenology opened a path for phenomenological research to incorporate rather than set aside the researcher's own world perception.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1981) also believed that hermeneutics was an inescapable feature of human existence (Wilding and Whitford, 2005) and built on Heidegger's work. He thought that the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology was to illuminate and reflect upon the meaning of an experience. Gadamer and Annells added that description through the medium of language is itself 'an interpretive process that seeks to bring understanding and disclosure of phenomena' (Annells in Laverty, 2003, 24). That is to say, the moment one uses language to describe a phenomenon, one has interpreted the phenomenon.

Since the researcher cannot avoid interpreting phenomena, Gadamer developed a symbiotic concept he called the 'fusion of horizons'. A horizon, according to Wilding and Whitford (Wilding and Whitford 2005, 101),

> is the sum total of all influences that make individuals who they are,
> including the social, historical and political contexts in which they live. As
> a researcher, one's interpretation of participants' stories is always mediated
> and influenced by one's own experiences.

It is only when different individuals communicate with each other and see things from the other person's horizon can they both appreciate a more complete picture of

a phenomenon. In human research, researchers cannot avoid bringing their horizon to bear on the phenomenon so, rather than bracketing out the researcher's horizon, as in Husserl, Gadamer effectively included the researcher as an integral part of the research.

However, writing from the field of nursing, Salsberry raised the question, how can researchers claim to investigate phenomena without their preconceived notions getting in the way in practice? She made this insightful observation (Salsberry in LeVasseur, 2003, 416):

> Even if we, as researchers, can bracket our own viewpoints, what of the participants? Does the fact that participants do not bracket their own preconceived notions in the telling of experience mean that our knowledge is based on a flawed understanding, already skewed from the things themselves?

Nevertheless, Salsberry still believed that this bracketing anomaly did not necessarily mitigate against achieving a credible interpretation of phenomena. But it was LeVasseur who went further and sought to solve this dilemma by proposing a slightly different understanding and practice of bracketing.

Firstly, LeVasseur, citing Ray (1994), suggested that researchers can contribute their own horizons to the data (LeVasseur, 2003, 417):

> Hermeneutical phenomenology holds that prejudgements can be used positively as part of the data of conscious experience and help to establish the horizon of meaning.

Wilding and Whiteford went further to argue that the inclusion of the researcher's pre-understanding and subjectivity should be celebrated (Wilding and

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Whiteford, 2005, 101) and Hasselkus wrote that pre-understanding 'enables rather than constrains the researcher' (Hasselkus 1997 in Wilding and Whiteford 2005, 101).

Secondly, LeVasseur offered a 'fresh interpretation of bracketing' which she called the practice of 'curiosity'. Curiosity, she said, puts the researcher in an inquisitive frame of mind for, when we are curious, we assume that we do not know everything. We are open to learn and question prior knowledge. She cited Merleau-Ponty (1964) who submitted that bracketing is a 'kind of astonishment before the world that disrupts habitual patterns of thinking' (Merleau-Ponty in LeVasseur, 2003, 417). It is the 'natural attitude', which is incurious, that needs to be bracketed out and LeVasseur wrote (LeVasseur, 2003, 417),

> I believe that a distinction focused on bracketing the natural attitude, that
> is, bracketing the everyday assumption that things are only as they appear
> to our unreflective consciousness...

The researcher of this study adopted Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology, LeVasseur's bracketing discipline via curiosity and Wilding and Whitford's inclusion of pre-understanding to produce a 'fusion of horizons', that of the participants' meaningful descriptions with the researcher's knowledge of BFST.

Phenomenology's suitability for this study

Creswell (2007, 40) posited twelve reasons why qualitative research is an appropriate research approach for human study and these have been adopted as justification for using phenomenology in this study. He said it was appropriate for:

- Exploring a human problem or issue among groups or populations.

- Hearing silenced voices and empowering people to tell their stories.

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- Not relying on predetermined literature or research results.

- Adopting a detailed understanding which only comes by talking to them.

- Minimizing the power relationships between researcher and participants by way of a collaborative effort in clarifying and checking data.

- Understanding the contexts and settings of experiences.

- Addressing the inadequacies of quantitative, causal studies which do not tell us why people responded as they did.

- Describing human interactions in a way that statistical analysis cannot.

Research procedure

Designing the research question

The formulation of the research question was governed by the following considerations. Groenwald (2004) said that the starting point of research is embedded in the investigator's own epistemology whose theory of knowledge shapes the nature and type of research undertaken, including the research question. Van Manen remarked, 'the questions themselves and the way one understands the question are the important starting points' (Van Manen, 1990, 2). Wilding and Whitford argued that pre-understanding helps shape the research question (Wilding and Whitford, 2003, 101) and the researcher's systemic epistemology shaped the research question for this study.

In designing the research question, it is important to use open ended questions (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994) that allow the participant to respond in their own words with as much latitude as they wish to take, so long as they remain focused on the research objective.

The main research question asked of the participants in this study was:

What was it like for you to take charge of your first parish? What did you experience?

Subsequent open-ended questions were employed, when necessary, to focus on the research intent of relational dynamics and emotional processes. These questions were:

- What were the major challenges and difficulties you faced?

- Can you describe any stand out moments or flash points you remember which were significant for you?

- What did you observe and experience of parishioner's responses and reactions to your arrival?

- Has your experience in any way and at any time caused you to question or doubt your calling to this parish or to ministry generally? If so, can you describe what that was like?

Because the research question was systemically focused and shaped by the researcher's epistemology, systemic questions were also injected into the interview if it was thought the participant had begun to over-focus on individuals or on matters of content or had become locked into cause-and-effect thinking. In these cases, questions were asked such as:

- What was the rest of the congregation doing? (When a participant seemed to over focus on the symptomatic behaviour of a difficult individual).

- How were people reacting? What behaviour did they display? Who was talking to whom? What were they saying? (When the participant focused

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more on content such as building projects or Sunday services instead of human processes).

- What was that like for you? How did it make you feel?

Recruitment of participants

Hycner argued that (Hycner 1985, 294),

> The phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the selection and type of participants. In fact, part of the "control" and rigor emerges from the type of participants chosen and their ability to fully describe the experience being researched.

Therefore, purposive sampling was used to select participants who had experienced the phenomenon and could answer the research question. Eleven candidates were recruited based on Boyd (2001) and Creswell (2007) who regard ten as an adequate number to achieve saturation.

Research participants were recruited on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Australian Anglican clergy were approached for this study to the exclusion of other denominations. This was to ensure a more consistent study of one particular sample group without adding too many variables such as denominational polity and protocols.

2. The participant was currently, or had recently been, an incumbent in their first parish.

3. The sampling extended beyond a single diocese (Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne) in order to cover a more diverse field.

4. Candidates were willing to participate in the research.

5. Age and gender factors were not determinants. However, because of the
    different theological views on women priests, no women were included
    from the Sydney diocese since females cannot be priested there and
    cannot be inducted as incumbents. The overall sample was predominantly
    male due either to the scarcity of female incumbents or their
    unavailability for the study.

Other variables that were omitted included marital status, vocational background, social demographics of the parish in which they serve(d), single or multi-centre parish and whether the parish was located in urban or rural/semi-rural areas, although all three dioceses were large metropolitan dioceses and geographical vast enough to contain both rural and urban parishes[13].

In order to locate potential candidates, copies of the clergy directories for each diocese were obtained and clergy who met the criteria were shortlisted. Some incumbents were still undergoing training and supervision by the local bishop, and these clergy were deselected from the list in preference for those who were more autonomous.

The shortlisted clergy were contacted by the researcher via telephone and a friendly, introductory conversation ensued in order to build trust and put the participant at ease. Lester stressed the need for a good relationship between researcher and wrote (Lester, 1999, 2),

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[13] See Table 1 at the end of this section for participant profiles outlining the number of years spent in parish, since leaving theological college and as an assistant minister.

The establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to

gaining depth of information, particularly where investigating issues where

the participant has a strong personal stake.

The conversation then proceeded with an explanation of the purpose and type of

research, of the expectations for participants and an invitation to receive printed

material which contained more detailed information. Candidates were sent an

introductory letter including background information on the researcher, on his

interests, the topic and the aim of the research, a summary of the risks and benefits of

participation and a statement on its voluntary nature. Participants were advised that

they could cease the research at any moment without explanation if they so wished

and were given the contact details of those authorities sponsoring the research should

they feel the need to report any concerns. The interviews were explained as being

sixty to ninety minutes in length with the possibility of a second but shorter interview

should clarification or additional information be required. However, only one

participant needed a second interview. For the remainder, one interview was

sufficient to gather enough data for the purposes of the study. Participants were

informed that the interviews would be recorded on digital media - audio for face to

face interviews and Skype video recordings, where possible, for distance interviews.

Candidates who agreed to receive the correspondence, were sent a letter detailing

the research brief, an invitation to participate plus a copy of the informed consent[14].

The covering letter explained that the informed consent was an agreement between

the participant and the researcher and fulfilled the ethical requirements of the

Australian College of Theology for human research. The consent outlined a

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[14] See Appendix B.

commitment by the researcher to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the

participant. Candidates were given seven to ten days to consider the proposal, after

which the researcher phoned them to ascertain their response. All eleven of the

candidates who were solicited agreed to participate in the study and signed the

consent voluntarily and without coercion.

Table 1 - Participant Profiles

Participant	Years out of college	Years since ordination	Years as an assistant	Years in first parish	Demographic: Type & size
Tom	15	15	3	8	Suburban, 130
Neil	13	13	8	5	Suburban, 220
Alan	9	8	4	4	Semi-rural, 140
Ron	8	8	4	4	Suburban, 120
Robert	10	10	5	5	Suburban, 110
Wayne	13	12	6	6	Suburban, 200
David	6	6	3	3	Suburban, 70
Don	12	12	6	6	Rural, 24
Tina	5	2	2	3	Suburban, 40
Malcolm	10	10	9	2	Suburban, 280
Wanda	9	9	4	5	Rural, 35
Average	*10*	*9.5*	*4.9*	*4.6*	

Participant interviews and data recording

Data were gathered from the participants in semi-structured interviews during

which participants were asked the five to eight focused but open questions listed

above, including the main research question, designed to elicit detailed stories. Kvale

(1996) contended that the interview is an inter-view, an interchange of views

between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest. The researcher

sought to preserve the integrity of an 'exchange of views' with participants and

bracketed by posing questions rather than making comments or statements, with the

exception of chit chat which was used to build rapport. Nevertheless, the questions

were focused and aligned with the research intent.

The recorded interviews were reviewed immediately after the session in order to

ensure the clarity of the recording.[15] Moustakas emphasised the need for long and

deep reflection on the material in order to carry out quality analysis and synthesis

(Moustakas, 1994, 47). Recordings were then listened to regularly, even travelling in

the car, in order to familiarise the researcher with the complete stories as well as their

detail. Notes and memos were written during the interviews in order to register body

language, gestures and other non-vocal signals that were considered important. Notes

were also taken as the recordings were replayed.

The digital media from the recorded interviews and scanned memos were backed

up immediately after the interview on two additional hard drives. The three copies

were stored in separate locations in secure environments and filenames were coded

to preserve the participants' anonymity. Any hard copies were stored in a lockable

cabinet. Video and audio files were imported into the analytical software program,

NVivo, and assigned coded filenames. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for

their names and their parishes for the purposes of all published material.

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[15] See Table 2 outlining the duration of the recorded interviews and the length of the verbatim transcripts.

Table 2 - Participant interview & transcript length

Participant	Interview duration (mins)	Transcript word count
Tom	74	8,546
Neil	102	12,228
Alan	64	8,742
Ron	84	9,816
Robert	64	5,870
Wayne	64	7,952
David	65	7,396
Don	58	7,866
Tina	73	5,412
Malcolm	57	7,017
Wanda	83	8,508
Total	*788*	*89,353*

For the remaining stages of the research, the researcher followed the procedural steps of Van Kaam modified by Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994, 120), namely:

1. Epoché.

2. Textural Representation.

3. Preliminary Grouping.

4. Reduction and Elimination.

5. Clustering into Themes.

6. Textural-structural Representation.

7. Imaginative Variation

8. Synthesis and Essences.

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In addition to Moustakas' procedural method, Creswell recommended eight strategies for checking the accuracy of the data, one or more of which should be utilised by researchers (Creswell, 2007, 251):

1. Triangulate[16] - utilise different sources of information.

2. Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report, descriptions or themes back to the participants.

3. Use rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings that can transport readers into the setting.

4. Clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study.

5. Present negative or discrepant data that contradict the themes because real life is composed of different perspectives that don't always coalesce.

6. Spend prolonged time in the field to develop an in depth understanding of the phenomenon.

7. Peer debriefing – locate a peer who can review and ask questions about the study.

8. Use an external auditor to review the entire project.

In the current study, other research projects were accessed, participants were sent copies of the transcripts for verification, thick descriptions were provided by the extensive inclusion of participant quotes, the researcher's bias has been enunciated, peer review has been sought and obtained.

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[16] Note for clarification: triangulation described by Creswell here is a different concept to 'triangling' used in Bowen theory and in this study.

Epoché

Epoché is the declaration and articulation of biases and reflection upon one's position (Moustakas, 1994). The discipline of epoché is worthwhile because it places researchers in a different frame of mind as they read the transcripts. They are positioned differently to approach the phenomena without trying to predict what they will discover and it helps them listen to the entire interview and get a sense of the whole (Hycner, 1985).

This researcher was careful to bracket out family systems notions such as 'triangling' or 'cut off' or 'over-functioning' in order to avoid the power of suggestion and extract the participants' own descriptive language. As proposed by LeVasseur (LeVasseur, 2003), the researcher approached the interviews with an attitude of curiosity and, prior to each interview, he intentionally reflected on discovering, 'what was it like for them, not for me?'. During the interview, he attempted to listen to the stories in a way that was fresh and new and he positioned himself to be astonished.

During the hermeneutical process, the researcher aimed at achieving a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1981) by dovetailing the five core themes with his own pre-knowledge of BFST, culminating in chapter eight. He attempted this in a balanced way so as not to obscure the participants' descriptions nor be blind to the influence of his own horizon on the textual interpretation.

Textural representation

The audio and video digital recordings were imported into the NVivo analytical software program, then typed verbatim into text by the researcher as the recordings were played back. Texts and recordings were then synchronised by NVivo enabling

the researcher to read and listen to the data simultaneously upon review. Texts were also exported as word processing files for easier formatting of the text. Memos, notes and personal observations were written, scanned and imported into NVivo as well, allowing central access to all forms of data from a single source.

Preliminary grouping

Every expression that represented 'necessary and sufficient moments of the experience and could be labelled' (Moustakas, 1994, 121) was isolated and tagged as a 'node'[17] using NVivo software and listed with other nodes. Each quote was treated with equal value (Moustakas, 1994) and this process of horizontalisation was repeated as transcripts were reread in order to check the expression's relevancy.

Reduction and elimination[18]

Moustakas (1994) submitted that data be filtered by testing each expression, or node, against two requirements:

- Does it contain necessary and sufficient moment of the experience for understanding it?

- And is it possible to abstract and label it?

If one can answer 'yes' to both of these questions, then the quote is a 'horizon of the experience'. One can then eliminate overlapping, repetitive and vague expressions which don't satisfy the above criteria. The 'horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience', wrote Moustakas (1994, 121).

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[17] 'Nodes' in NVivo refer to units of relevant data such as a word, phrase or block of text.

[18] In analysing data, Giorgi preferred the term "explication" over "analysis" for interpreting data because it balanced the context as a whole with the detail (Giorgi in Hycner, 1985, 300). "Analysis", he argued, usually refers to 'breaking into parts' which can lose a sense of the whole. "Explication" is the preferred term in this study.

Clustering into themes

The invariant constituents were examined to see if they naturally coalesced into clusters of meaning (Hycner, 1985). Using NVivo software, they were grouped under thematic labels which represented the core themes of the experience[19].

Textural-structural representation

Validation is the process of comparing the invariant constituents with the entire record of the experience. In order to confirm the validity of the clusters of meaning, Moustakas suggested asking two questions: Are they expressed explicitly? Are they compatible? Data that does not meet either of these criteria is considered irrelevant (Moustakas, 1994, 121). This process needs to be repeated a number of times as the researcher re-visits the texts and compares clusters of meaning in order to get a sense of the emergent themes that capture the essence of the experience. The themes that survive scrutiny will constitute the core themes. The researcher of this study pursued these steps and the five core themes solidified.

Description is the primary way of presenting 'what' the participants experienced and, in an individual textural description, the researcher writes a detailed summary each participant's stories, asking 'what is the nature of the phenomenon? What are its qualities?' (Moustakas, 1994, 78). The aim is to give a description of the 'texture' or appearance of the experience. This is a summary that does not constitute a full copy of the transcript, however, Moustakas points out that nothing should be omitted and every part should be treated with equal value. The writing of the textural description

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[19] See Appendix G.

should be shaped by the invariant constituents and the themes that have emerged. This was achieved in chapters four, five and six.

Imaginative variation

While a textural description addresses 'what' was experienced, a structural description addresses 'how' the phenomenon was experienced in its setting. The latter seeks to uncover the essences or invariant structures of the phenomenon experienced by all participants. The first step involves writing an individual structural description for each account. Moustakas said that this involved the use of imagination to seek all possible meanings by 'approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions' (Moustakas, 1994, 97). This serves the goal of phenomenology which is to 'reduce the textural (*what*) and structural (*how*) meanings of experiences to a brief description that typifies the experiences of all of the participants in a study' (Creswell 2007, 235).

The researcher of this study wrote textural and structural descriptions drawn from each participant's narrative, the invariant constituents and clusters of meaning and presented them in chapters four, five and six.

Composite description of essences

Following Creswell, the researcher then writes a composite description, drawn from the textural and individual structural descriptions, which focuses on the common experiences of the participants and presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the 'essential, invariant structure (or essence)' (Creswell, 2007, 159). The reader, said Polkinghorne, should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that'

(Polkinghorne in Creswell, 2007, 62). The composite structural description formed

the basis for chapter seven detailing the five core themes.

Synthesis of findings with BFST

This final step in the explicative process was not included in Moustakas' list of procedural steps. However, in keeping with Gadamer's fusion of horizons and LeVasseur's positive inclusion of the researcher's perspective, this chapter introduced BFST as a way of conceptualising the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT STORIES OF CONTEST

Introduction

Phenomenological research studies the life experiences of humans as described by them in order to gain some insight into their world and to uncover the essential underlying themes or essences of the phenomenon. Participants were interviewed in semi-structured interviews and the research question shaped the interview questions. The interview questions were open ended and designed to extract stories and rich descriptions of each participant's perception of the phenomenon being explored. An environment of trust was established in order to provide a safe setting which helped the participants speak liberally about their memories. Hence, this chapter is central to the thesis. The intention of these textural descriptions is to help the reader familiarise him or herself with each scenario and identify with their experiences.

The next three chapters contain summaries of the eleven stories under three categories using Speed Leas' five levels of conflict[20]. The stories depict conflicts that qualify as level III, IV or V conflicts on Leas' list. Each person's story is peppered with quotes drawn directly from the interview transcripts and is sub-titled with a tag word articulated by each participant which captured the theme succinctly. Leas' categories of conflict do not form part of Bowen theory, but the two overlap in similar fields of research. Used in concert, they can help us determine if the experience of distress reflected the level of conflict encountered or whether it reflected the level of a person's inner fortitude, or both.

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[20] See Table 3 on the following page for a summary of Leas' levels of conflict.

The following three stories, after Table 3, describe congregational passivity as the key issue for these rectors. However, resistance lurked beneath the passiveness and, in each case, there was a battle of wills and a resolve by each of the parties to get their way. The stories represented conflict stronger than level II but not as intense as level IV and therefore have been labelled as level III conflicts.

Table 3 - Speed Leas' levels of conflict

(Leas, 1985, p. 19)

Conflict level	Theme	Description
Level I	A problem to solve	• Language is specific & clear • Focus on solving the problem using rationale • Discomfort but anger short-lived • Collaborative, win/win outcome
Level II	Disagreement	• Self-protection vs solving problems. • People more calculating & shrewd • General or vague language • Selectively withholding information • Put downs and gibes to relieve tension • Not necessarily win/lose yet
Level III	Contest	• Objective is winning • Factions emerge – taking sides • Several problems cluster • Perceptual distortions, e.g. over-generalisations • Irrational thinking
Level IV	Fight or flight	• Objective is to punish or remove opponents • Factions solidify • Language reverts to ideology, e.g. truth, freedom • No middle ground • Enlisting outsiders to the cause
Level V	Intractable situation	• Unmanageable • Objective is to destroy opponent • Opposition is a threat to wider community • Parties see themselves as part of an eternal cause • Parties feel compelled to fight

The following accounts are stories of win/lose contests. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity.

David: Drained

David had been heading up a church plant project for the last four years. The congregation meets in a rented community hall for their church services plus other activities and David identified the absence of a church building as a central concern. It impacted everything they attempted. Land was too expensive for either the church or the diocese to afford and the lack of their own complex impacted their vision and morale enormously. Nor were there any firm plans for a building in the near future. However, David felt it was important for a congregation to "feel safe" and to "control their own environment". The congregation had survived on a five-year grant from the diocese which, at the time of the interview, had reached its fourth year and there was little communication from the diocese about the parish's destiny once the grant finished in a year's time.

The word which David used to sum up his and the congregation's feeling was "draining". He said people were tired, including himself, because they struggled to stay motivated and hopeful.

Initially, there were successful ventures with outreach events such as barbecues and Christmas events which strengthened the connections between the church and the community. But people had started to wilt. In addition, there was the weekly tedium of setting and packing up chairs and equipment in borrowed premises for the running of Sunday services and Sunday school.

When the interviewer asked David to describe what "drained" looked like he said, "most people just back away. So, when you try to run an event of some sort they won't sign up for it, they won't get involved".

David had also suffered the loss of his grandfather, his great aunt and a mentor/father figure to whom he was very close all in the space of one year and he confessed his grief had affected his temperament:

> …people could see that I was tired or short tempered or a bit despondent..

David felt the energy draining out of him but was conscious that, as the congregation looked on, it responded by pulling back its involvement. The cycle lasted for about eighteen months, a period during which David confessed "I didn't lead well". Fortunately, David sought some help from a trusted friend and realised he needed to get himself "back on track".

He spent more time and energy concentrating on his own well-being by engaging in the things he enjoyed without feeling guilty. He noticed, after some time, that his own mood began to lift as did the church's morale. It made David realise how heavily the church depended on his "positivity" which, he felt, had exerted the pressure that caused him to go "into a hole" in the first place.

David also shared some stories of conflict. The first centred on the occasion of a community car boot sale organised by the church. A church member donated $15 towards the running costs but later complained about the poor publicity and demanded his money back. David discussed this with a warden and they decided not to return the money because it was a donation. When David returned to the man with the verdict, the man made a "big issue" out of it so David relented and returned the money. When David reported his decision to the warden, however, the warden

reacted sharply and threatened to resign if the money wasn't retrieved. The warden then spoke to other members in the church in order to "try to gain that kind of momentum" of empathy for his side of the story. One woman to whom he spoke, did not agree with him and "he was quite nasty to and dismissive of her", David said. David gently challenged the warden on his behaviour which began a long conversation over many weeks which gradually saw a change for the better in the warden's attitude. He remained in the church and is still an active member.

Another incident involved a characteristically "abrupt" woman who was unaware of the effect that her abruptness had on others. David started a conversation with her and, over time, brought to her attention what he and others observed in her behaviour. Fortunately, it also had a fairly positive outcome.

In isolating these two stories, David indicated the prevalence of, what he regarded to be, childish behaviour in the congregation, especially their tendency to talk behind his or someone else's back. His response was to treat people like the adults they were. He elaborated,

> I'm treating you all like adults if you're going to act like that then you can be responsible to come and talk to me, I'm not going to go on hearsay, I'm not going to deal with all that, I've always said I'm open to be talking about something, come and deal with it. If you're not prepared to do, I'm not going to come chasing you.

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Wayne: Lame duck

Wayne had moved interstate to take up his new position. The church had been without a senior minister for twelve months, so when Wayne accepted, there was a lot of excitement in the church, especially over the arrival of a young rectory family of seven including a three-month old baby. From the beginning, Wayne felt accepted and supported and he discovered, to his delight, how favourably the selection committee had "talked him up" to the congregation. The bishop, at Wayne's induction, charged the congregation with the responsibility of ensuring that Wayne and his family should "feel better off for having come here" and that they needed to look after them as a family. Apparently, the bishop's words had made an impact on the church and Wayne reported that, even after six years, he still felt the warmth and love. Wayne and his family reciprocated the kindness as well. "We said 'yes' to everything", he said. They entertained and were entertained in people's houses and Wayne said he established some strong friendships.

However, some members had misgivings about his appointment because he was young and inexperienced. One man, he remembered, likened Wayne to an AFL rookie rather than an AFL veteran, so dubious was he about Wayne's capacity to lead the church. But it was something they both laughed off. However, the man's comment in jest may have been a little prophetic. Soon after Wayne had arrived in the parish, the three assistant ministers left for other positions and Wayne's inexperience became apparent to himself and the congregation. He was not well networked in his new diocese and he was unfamiliar with the protocol for replacing staff. He admitted, "I was sort of floundering". The congregation empathised with his situation but still recognised his inexperience which made things difficult. Wayne

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summed up the situation by saying, "they thought, 'well it's not all his fault but we've got a lame duck here, he needs help'". But he was still loved.

After four years Wayne was required by the diocese to undergo a ministry review. The review, which included interviews with key parishioners, revealed some 'significant deficiencies' in Wayne, of which he was aware, but the church's response was to say "we love him, we don't want to rehearse them, we don't want to make a big deal of them because we love him".

Although warm and accepting, the diverse church was culturally very different to the "compatibility that I grew up with", he said. The churches in which his faith was nurtured were more homogeneous in their theological outlook and ministry philosophies. Everyone "rowed in the same direction" as he put it. But his new church was notably different being much more diverse in theology, culture, values and opinions.

Wayne's predecessor was skilled at grounding people in the gospel basics then strengthening their personal journey of faith. This was admirable, but Wayne thought this style didn't rally people around a common vision. Wayne's dream was to reshape the culture of the church to resemble something with which he was more familiar,

> I work very well, very effectively as a minister in the culture that I knew and in the culture that I grew up in like where I was formed as a Christian person, I could trade on that, I could work within that, I could build on that.

But, transitioning the church from a "diverse" model to a "united" one presented a challenge, one that Wayne felt exposed his deficiencies as a leader. He said, "I was scrounging around in the bottom of my toolkit bag finding I haven't got a lot".

Parish council was pivotal for Wayne's vision and he attempted to change the sub-culture of the council first. Parish council had functioned as a decision-making body but seldom involved itself in the implementation. Wayne decided to delegate portfolios to each parish councillor and to lift their profile in the church so they would be the go-to people for things that needed attention. But his attempt failed and it became a great source of frustration and disappointment for him.

In the midst of this, Wayne recalled the biggest conflict he could remember. A couple had transferred from the neighbouring parish after its minister had left. The couple had enjoyed some power during the vicar's tenure because they were "in the minister's pocket". However, when he departed, they lost their influence. They came to Wayne's church thinking they could do the same thing with the new minister there. They weren't high on the "E.Q. scale", said Wayne and they came in on their "white horse" saying "we've got the answers for you". They managed to get elected to parish council, but immediately "stymied it, making it ineffective". It soon became apparent to Wayne that they wanted to "force my hand". They attempted to control the staff by moving motions at parish council that were intended "squeeze" others to submit to their wishes. Others soon discovered they couldn't work with this couple, with some of them resigning from committees. Wayne summarised the couple's whole approach as "messy" and "distasteful". The parish council shared Wayne's concerns and the "squeeze" motions they proposed were voted down. Wayne knew he "was always going to have the numbers" on his side and remarked "they backed me like you would not believe…I never felt on my own" and "it was ugly', but "it was the worst it ever got".

Ron: Apathy

Ron learned early in his new parish that "a lot of the major conflicts had been dealt with" under previous rectors. However, tension still existed in two forms. The first related to the cultural and demographic changes in the parish precinct and, the second, to the past history of the congregation and, in particular the influence of a previous rector.

Firstly, Ron spoke of the culture shock he and the congregation experienced due to the changing nature of the surrounding community. He discovered that the area had grown more religiously diverse over the last fifteen years with a disproportionate number of faith groups per capita. This included sixteen protestant churches in a relatively small area. He also realised that the church was not representative of the ethnically diverse community. The diversity brought with it a high degree of transience among the general population which was reflected in the church. Short term residents created a sense of heartache in the congregation as Ron noted,

> it's just devastating because you've got people who are trying to be more
>
> friendly…but then people just walk out on them.

The result was a certain "numbness" or "callousness" that had descended on the church which translated into a lack of care or interest in people who failed to turn up to activities or services. It affected Ron personally as well as he watched retirees move out of the area rather than remain and contribute to the ministry. He said it was something, "I've been grieved over and has caused me a lot of pain".

Secondly, twenty years earlier, the church had experienced a period of rapid growth and dynamic ministry under the leadership of an enterprising minister. It was a time of excitement and energy that many still looked back on with fond memories.

Ron believed that many parishioners who had lived through those glory days still looked to them as their reference point and to the minister of the day as a model minister. Both the community and the church in those days were mostly Anglo-Saxon and with a more working-class cross-section. But the church had not adapted to the changing times. Ron said that the parishioners, who were part of that growth period, were now 20-25 years older now and lacked the energy they had back then. The lack of zeal was compounded by the fact that the previous minister's strategy for growth depended heavily on diocesan grants which he had secured and had used to multiply staff. But this had the undesirable effect of professionalising the ministry and the church became over-dependent on staff. Ron ended up being faced with a "tired" and "apathetic" church which was still living in the glory years of old.

Ron said people had become cynical about vision statements and "to get people to move is really hard and time consuming and, so far, we have really struggled". He had tried to rally the parish around a new logo, new motto, and some pre-evangelistic tools to help people develop conversations with the non-churched, but these attempts had largely met with the attitude of "whatever...we'll just continue doing what we're doing anyway".

Ron worked hard, averaging 55-60 hours a week, in order to make things happen and his wife is "the kind of person who doubles your ministry". Together they also struggled with a young family and sickness in their extended family. It started to take its toll. Ron's wife was hospitalised because "I couldn't get her to slow down" and "she was fatigued", he said. Ron's mother-in-law became seriously ill and moved into the rectory which added to the strain. He said the congregation was very understanding and caring toward his family during this time, but he was frustrated at his inability to mobilise the congregation's involvement in other areas.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPANT STORIES OF FIGHT/FLIGHT

Judging by Leas' measurement for levels of conflict, the following stories described conflict that was more intense than level III but not as intense as level V. These stories were marked by punitive elements, solidified factions and no middle ground compromises.

Alan: Annus horribilis

Alan's story differed from the others in two respects. Firstly, he became acting rector of his parish by default. Secondly, the circumstances which unfolded were quite unique. Alan was appointed as the full-time assistant minister under an incumbent who had been in charge of the parish for some years. About three months after Alan's arrival, it was discovered that the rector had been intimately involved with a number of women in the parish. As more information came to light, it was further discovered that the same pattern of behaviour had occurred in the rector's previous parishes over a twenty-year period.

Once the scandal became public knowledge, the rector took extended leave and Alan was put in charge of the parish. It was a role into which Alan was thrust and caused him extreme distress because "my whole existence was completely dominated by this guy's sin", he said. Alan felt that the man's conduct and its repercussions "chased me around".

Speaking in the interview four years after those events he said, "it took a chunk out of me that hasn't grown back yet" and it was clear that the experience left him with some lasting emotional scars. The incident was totally unexpected and something for which Alan felt totally unprepared.

The parish was set in a semi-rural, small town village on the outskirts of a metropolis and the rector's reputation had spread widely around the town. Two examples elucidate the situation Alan faced. Alan was shopping one day at the local store, standing in the checkout queue behind two women, who were not church members, and overheard them chatting. They were talking about the wayward rector and one of the women said, "Oh, he tried it on me!". Another example concerned a young married couple with children who had a history of marital difficulties. The rector offered to meet with them and offer some help with counselling. They agreed to this but reconciliation proved difficult and, after some time, the rector suggested a temporary separation to allow them some breathing space. They agreed to his suggestion but, during the separation, the rector started sleeping with the wife. Alan concluded "he was predatory…no doubt about it".

The impact of the scandal, once it became public, was devastating to the congregation. Alan said, "there was a lot of anger about", and it created a feeling of "insiders" and "outsiders". People, he said, were suspicious and uncertain in their relationships and "everyone was offended against". Some of the women who had been intimate with the rector were still present in the congregation and people didn't know how to relate to them. Alan watched the relational dynamics saying, "there was the inter-relatedness, the interplay, you could just see it at work", referring to the gossip that circulated. He remembered one incident when two women verbally attacked him, as if he was to blame. Their reaction was irrational and he said, "these two grown women were like teenage girls. They didn't realise I was on their side, that I had worked hard to get rid of the guy…".

The parish consisted of four centres, the main church and three branch churches. Alan said the biggest of these branch churches, which the previous rector's wife

attended, had a history of independence from the main church and "an inherent distrust" of it. The rector's immoral conduct simply reinforced their distrust. However, Alan was most surprised at the reaction of key people there. He said, "the way they handled themselves, I couldn't believe how immature they were". He was shocked that such long standing Christians could behave in such an infantile manner. Not everyone was angry, however. Some were paralysed Alan said, "people were in the foetal position". But, overall, "everyone was a basket case up there" constituted Alan's summary.

The church staff were hurting as well, and they looked to Alan for support and leadership. He, however, felt inadequate for this role, saying, "I'm way out of my depth here".

The rector had, after his improprieties had become known, departed on stress leave. In the meantime, a retired minister was appointed to the parish as a part-time acting rector. However, Alan still carried the bulk of the work, making most of the important decisions, and people looked to him as the day to day leader. It took a heavy toll on him. He recalled, "I was over-fried", "I just wanted to get out of there", "I got depressed". Alan said that he felt overworked and didn't get a lot of help or support including backup from the diocese. "The diocese sent in a parish recovery team but they didn't give us any staff and we were left with a big hole", he said.

He and one other staff member cleared the rector's furnishings from the rectory in order to paint inside the house and would finish about 11:30pm each night after a full day's work. He remembered, on one of these nights, reaching a low point when he even questioned the validity of his own faith, saying, "I remember thinking to myself, am I really a Christian? Do I really believe in the resurrection? Crazy". He

returned to his wife, a trained health professional, and said, "I don't think I'm doing all that well". She responded, "no, you're not". It was at that point Alan decided he needed to seek professional help.

The congregation was looking for answers so they could 'make sense' of the situation and they wanted the guilty parties, the women who succumbed to the rector's advances, to repent. Alan related how people's expectations were not reasonable though, "it was an emotional response…logic can only get you so far. You just have to cop it on the chin". As the parish leader, Alan felt, "you couldn't possibly do right…", and "I just felt incredibly alone carrying a ridiculous burden". Alan summarised the whole experience by saying:

> 2008 was without question the worst year of my life. Annus horribilis. It
> was.

Malcolm: Carnage

Malcolm arrived in his new parish excited about the potential of a congregation consisting of about three hundred attenders. It was a "right fit" for him and he looked forward to providing fresh leadership, initiatives and strategies in a church that had plateaued in numbers and was looking for someone to lead them towards growth. Malcolm plans were "embraced" enthusiastically and unanimously by the parish council and the congregation and, as a result, the church grew rapidly with a 77% attendance increase within a short time. The parish was a-buzz with a new lease of life and Malcolm entered a twenty-month "honeymoon" period. The first year was "incredible", "rosy", "full of positive energy which was contagious" and "fantastic" in terms of excitement and growth. However, there existed two areas which did not exhibit growth proportional to the numbers, that of additional staff and financial giving. The pastoral team consisted of Malcolm and a youth/children's worker, Brad, whom he inherited, plus some volunteers. Malcom was conscious that "I was on my own" and "it was a complete struggle" due to the rapidly growing numbers and the demanding workload. He advertised a full-time assistant minister's position and offered it twice, but was twice rejected. Malcolm also needed to address a financial shortfall and embarked on a fundraising campaign to increase the church's level of giving. But, he said, "energy-wise, I was on my last legs…it nearly broke me". Furthermore, he felt he lacked the experienced to spearhead such campaigns and this added to his stress. It did work, however, more than he expected, reaping a 40% increase in giving and "the honeymoon continued", he said. He said the boost in giving, "buoyed me, even though I was kind of on my last legs fatigue wise", and it confirmed for him that the church was "on board". The momentum reached a crescendo later that second year with a special night of praise and thanksgiving to

God called "celebrate". The atmosphere was euphoric and Malcolm described the night as "phenomenal! Probably the highlight of my whole time here".

But the honeymoon came to an abrupt end just two weeks after the celebration night when Malcolm made a controversial decision to terminate the youth worker's position. Malcom had become convinced, as had the parish council, that the full-time youth worker was no longer suited to the position and needed to move on, both for his sake and for the church's. "He was never a student minister or a ministry trainee anywhere else" and Malcolm was concerned for his future in that role, advancement in which, in that diocese, depended on gaining a breadth of experience in different locations. Malcolm's dilemma centred, not so much on letting the youth worker go, but how to go about it. As with the fundraising campaign, the prospect of retrenching a staff member made him realise his inexperience. "He's a very well-liked guy in the church and I didn't know what to do…", Malcolm said. But he liked Brad and genuinely wanted the best for him and his family and he did not wish to terminate Brad before he had lined up another position. Malcolm didn't like "performance managing" staff out of their jobs as he had witnessed in other parishes. He felt uncomfortable with its impersonal, business-like approach. Instead he took a more gracious and caring path with Brad, giving him twelve-month's notice, far in excess of the norm, with the opportunity to negotiate an extension at the end of the period. Malcolm, also concerned not to disrupt the unity of the church with untimely information leaks, got Brad to agree that neither of them would say anything public about the decision until Brad had found a new job.

But Brad immediately gave notice of his resignation. When the news filtered through to the congregation, Malcolm was surprised by the hostile reactions and the abruptness with which the general mood descended from celebration to "carnage"

and resulted in "divisiveness", "difficulty" and generally halted "the progress and movement of the church".

Brad and his family took some on holiday leave soon after and a group of his friends and supporters rallied on social media and convened to move the entire contents of Brad's house to a new residence before he returned. Brad was planning to relocate after his holiday anyway but the friends' pre-emptive action was a display of their solidarity with and affection for the youth worker and his family. When Brad returned from holiday to a new home, furnished with all their belongings, he and his family were also treated to a farewell party. Malcom and his wife were not invited to help with move the furnishings nor to the party.

In the interview, Malcolm gave a deep sigh and uttered a statement of bewilderment about people's fickleness saying,

> What I don't understand about this job, really, is how you can go from being in such a great frame of mind and ministry to being completely and utterly belted to the point where you're absolutely down in the gutter, down and out, in such a short timeframe.

Malcolm went from elation to feeling isolated and wanting to be somewhere else saying, "no one wanted to have anything to do with me" and "I just wanted to get the heck out of here". He experienced of "a lot of cold-shouldering" and noticed "lots of little conversations with disgruntled people" which left him feeling "a bit paranoid" and reclusive.

Furthermore, when the news of Brad's resignation leaked and its ensuing negative reaction, the leaders, who initially supported the decision to terminate Brad, withdrew their support leaving Malcolm to feel like he had been "hung out to dry".

He also felt there was nobody within the church he could to talk to and, ultimately, he found himself sitting in his office on his own after church services, trying to avoid people. He said he had became uncharacteristically sensitive to criticism. Criticism that didn't bother him before, now made him feel "hammered" and he admitted his "low resilience" to such criticism during this time. Much of the criticism, he believed, was nothing more than "ungodly grumbling" and he lamented "there's no one in the church that's really prepared just call those people on that behaviour ", nor did he feel "emotionally strong enough" to tackle it himself. The situation raised in Malcolm emotions that were a new experience for him, "I don't think I've ever felt like that, ever, in church life before".

Finally, in a solemn admission, Malcolm said "I feel like I don't know what to do and it's at those points where, my wife and I, would say how much longer can we bear this?". In answer to the interviewer's question, "now, when you say that, do you mean you can no longer bear this parish or ministry altogether?", Malcolm replied, "at all".

Robert: Dysfunctional

Robert's parish is located on the east coast near a popular surf beach and the church is marked by a more traditional style of ministry and an aging congregation with a small children's and youth ministry. The parish consists of a main church on a busy main road and a small branch church located on a peninsula accessed by one road in and out.

In response to the research questions, "What did you experience?" and "What were the greatest challenges you faced', Robert remarked more than once, "The way people related to each other".

Robert recounted an incident that occurred on the night of his induction during which he observed how the parish council related to each other. It wasn't his first taste because he described how he been dropped into a few email exchanges between parish council members before he arrived and noted, "it wasn't pretty". He concluded, "the parish council that I inherited was fairly dysfunctional". The incident in question centred on the church property which contained a limited number of car parking spaces. On the night of Robert's induction, any overflow parking was to be diverted onto the street. One section of the church grounds contained a gated-off, grassed area and this area created discussion and tension among the parish councillors and wardens as to whether it could be used for parking when they were expecting a larger than normal crowd. No official decision was ever reached but, on the night of the induction, "someone" opened the gates to let the traffic in. It started a "big fight" which continued for two years and was "horrendous", said Robert. It also led to further discussion about the use of the grassed area for parking on regular Sunday service days. It generated a lot of heat, said Robert, to the point where the treasurer independently petitioned the congregation to oppose the use of the grassed

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area for parking. During the deliberations at parish council, Robert observed a few "strong personalities" who dominated discussion and others who "wouldn't speak their minds" in the meeting but who would later "say things behind the scenes".

Robert also recalled his first parish council meeting, during which the first big decision he faced related to purchasing the house that was currently leased to the church and accommodated the assistant minister. The parish had access to a bequest that had been donated years before and earmarked for staff accommodation by the donor. Robert said the parish council meetings were, at times, "explosive" with "shouting" and "back room machinations", a "hot-pot" he said. Some years before, the parish was presented with an opportunity to purchase a block of land adjacent to the main church, but decided against it. The decision back then was greeted with "ill feeling" around the church because people felt the parish council "lacked foresight" and was "unwilling to take risks". The second time around, with a new opportunity to buy the house, people were unhappy again and the "ill feeling" had resurfaced. However, Robert's main concern was about the process and said, "the way it was handled was poor".

One female member of parish council expressed to Robert her disappointment with the decision not to purchase the house. He encouraged her to consider standing for election as a warden at the next AGM if she wanted to make a difference. She agreed to stand but, when word got out, Robert said, "that set the cat among the pigeons….it just hit the fan". The three current wardens who had, for years been elected unopposed, declared this suggestion by the rector "divisive". At the next AGM one of the wardens, speaking on behalf of all three, stood and announced that they had "lost the confidence of the rector". All three stood down from office and the parish ended up with three new wardens. But, the battles weren't over yet as Robert

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recounted. "From then there was just a lot of stuff that went on behind the scenes that year", he said. There were many fights at parish council over different issues and he was often the target. "I was getting smashed", he said and, ultimately, "I hated going to parish council, just dreaded it... it was just...terrible".

The following year, two of the wardens who had resigned at the AGM, stood for re-election and were re-appointed. The treasurer, whom Robert thought acted like a fourth warden, had also stepped down but he too was reappointed by the two re-elected wardens.

Robert, after some years in the parish, decided he wanted to undertake some post-graduate study which would require him to travel overseas for two weeks each year. When the wardens, and some on parish councillors, discovered this, they "couldn't handle it" and it created more ill feeling in the church, he said. One of the wardens, "who was a stickler for the rules kept throwing the rule book at me...it was ugly, it was awful". This man announced at a parish council meeting that, if the council endorsed Robert's study plans, it would be the "most important decision the parish council was going to make" and moved a motion to the contrary. Robert believed it was an attempt by them to gain "control" over the rector. It was a watershed moment because, as Robert put it, people saw "the writing on the wall". The motion was lost and Robert regarded this as a turning point when others were willing to stand up to the wardens in question.

Neil: Cannibalised

Neil used the phrase "cannibalised" to refer to the ways in which the members of the branch church used to repel new people. The branch church had been started as an Anglican church plant in the 1980's by an enterprising clergyman. It grew quickly to the point where the locals called it "the evangelical church of choice in the region". But it declined after the church planter relocated and the finances dropped to the point where they could no longer afford a fulltime minister. The regional bishop of the time intervened and orchestrated the church's merge with the neighbouring parish, but did so "against their will".

So, Neil arrived and came to a parish where the relationship between the principal church and branch church was "full of animosity" and he soon realised that much of the animosity was directed towards the rector. The assistant minister stationed at the branch church reported to Neil, "they are just filled with loathing of you for nothing that you've done".

As a sort of peace offering, Neil negotiated with the branch church wardens to adopt a change to their status under a diocesan ordinance that would give them greater self-determining powers. A date was set for Neil to chair a meeting after the Sunday service, but the congregation convened its own meeting a week before, without telling Neil, and decided against any proposal to change their status.

Neil related a number of similar stories about the branch church, such as organising their own Christmas carol service and publishing their own church newsletter etc., that reinforced their desire to retain their independence and express their contempt for the main church and whoever represented it. Ultimately, Neil felt he had no control over the branch church and that their defiant attitude nurtured a

critical and negative atmosphere in the church which repelled new people. Neil tired of hearing about newcomers being poorly treated at the branch church. For example, one family joined the church through the schools ministry of the student minister. Not being church goers, they thought it wise to take bibles with them but, when they arrived at the Sunday service for the first time, they were greeted by one of the leaders who ridiculed them, calling them "bible-bashers". They never returned. Hence, Neil summarised the church by saying, "they just cannibalise stuff".

Generally, Neil was struck by the differences in culture and traditions of his new parish compared to his previous experiences and thought they were refreshing but frustrating. From the start, he encountered resistance in the main church as well as the branch church. For example, within three weeks of his arrival, he received a letter from a woman in the 8am congregation outlining a list of fourteen criticisms such as taking his mobile phone into the pulpit. In the letter, she also likened Neil to the snake in the garden of Eden. Neil commented, "wow, I think she just called me Satan".

He received other letters from upset people "all pushing their barrows" listing things that Neil had apparently done to offend them. In fact, he received a "lot of negative letters - no positive letters". However, he recognised that "they've been upset for five generations" and that he was confronting some longstanding attitudes.

Neil's predecessor was not one to make hard decisions and would often succumb to people's demands. One notable example concerned an incident of moral impropriety perpetrated by a member of the congregation, the truth of which had been verified by a professional standards investigation. The diocesan protocol called for a carefully worded statement to be read to the congregation by the rector of the

day. However, Neil's predecessor refused to read it which resulted in the bishop's reluctant intervention to do the job. Neil said this was characteristic of his predecessor's indecisive style. In contrast, Neil's leadership style was more proactive and deliberate and he sought to make changes that he believed were "principled" and based on "the right things to do". He believed the changes in leadership style accounted for a lot of the angst in the congregation. His determination to see things through earned him a reputation for "not listening", even though he consulted widely and sought to "keep conversations going" and not "cut-off", even if people disagreed with him. He recounted a number of incidences, such as the removal of candles from the communion table and serving black current juice at communion both of which generated a lot of criticism. But Neil knew the battles were "more about winning the battle over me than having the right sort of juice".

The good news, that excited Neil, centred on the 10am family service at the main church. This congregation had embraced Neil's vision, courageously moved out of the inadequate space of the church building and into a school hall. As a result they had experienced the rapid growth of families, more money in the plate and a generally positive vibe. The changes and growth also slowed the leakage of evangelical Anglicans who, historically, would sample the church but quickly move on to more vibrant churches, such as the Baptists. Neil said the success of the 10am service relocation also muffled a lot of criticism because the increase in families, children, youth and money were difficult to argue against.

Neil's story is included in this category because the conflict at the main church was rated at level IV but the branch church situation could be conceivably rated at level V – an intractable situation.

Tina: Bullet makers

Tina said she had enjoyed a honeymoon period with the parish for her first two years and her introduction to the parish was a relatively pleasant experience. However, a woman, who was a key church member and also a bit of a gossip, brought the honeymoon to an abrupt end. Tina said, "if there were rumours or conflicts, I can name on one hand...if I was given a list of names, I would get the right name" and this woman was one of them. The woman was one half of a pair in the parish who, together, were "like poison to each other". Tina cited an example of their rumour-mongering when another woman in the parish fell ill and became bed-ridden. Tina visited the sick woman regularly including during her holiday leave, but the two gossips spread a rumour that Tina was not providing enough pastoral care for the sick woman. When the interviewer asked "how much airplay do these women get in the church? Do people take on board what they say?", Tina replied "more than I would like".

The rest of the interview centred around one man, Ivan, a previous warden and the current treasurer, who had caused Tina to consider leaving the parish and even to reconsider her calling to parish ministry. "I would have walked…I didn't want to be a parish priest", she said. The core problem was that "I think he fell in love with me", she said but, although Tina believed Ivan had fallen for her, she felt he was using the relationship to control her. As a previous warden, Ivan had been a very "controlling person". He would send "mean and abusive emails" or make "nasty phone calls" if she didn't do what he wanted.

The two afore mentioned women, "got in Ivan's ear" over things about which they were unhappy and Tina said it took months to "suck the poison out that, basically, that they had injected". "They were bullet-makers and some people are

suckers enough to fire their bullets", she said, the latter referring to Ivan. The women complained to Ivan about a range of issues which Ivan wrote down as a list of grievances and which Tina was never meant to see. However, Ivan gave the list to another warden, Sam, who started asking Tina questions about the issues raised on the list. Tina asked Sam to show her the list and, when he did, she was horrified. "It was horrible…it was like a punch to the face…I was so upset...I cried…", she admitted. The criticisms related to such things as the use of the parish car by Tina's husband, Tina supposedly underpaying her electricity bill and not contributing to the parish offertory. Ivan even questioned her about her own use of the car, demanding to know where she had been and whom she had travelled to see. But, Tina maintained that the criticisms were not based on any facts nor on the diocesan canons which outlined her entitlements for such things. For example, family members were permitted the use of the parish car and church officers could not divulge a minister's private financial affairs. Ivan had committed a number of breaches of these canons and had also not been transparent about the list. Tina felt she could not let the matter rest.

Tina was friendly with Ivan's wife which complicated matters further and her concern was that any action she took against Ivan might adversely affect his wife and "why should she lose her church family because her husband was being an idiot, worse than an idiot, he was really mean".

Moreover, Ivan's list surfaced around the same time that Tina's brother-in-law died of cancer after being diagnosed just months earlier. She had taken a few days off to attend the funeral and, still grieving, Ivan wrote a letter stating in it, "I don't see why she needed any time off for her brother-in-law's demise". Tina was "just torn apart", she said and

I cried, I went home and I didn't show my husband how angry I was, but

he knew how angry I was, I came home and I was so upset. Unfortunately,

it caused a lot of conflict between me and my husband.

Tina's husband became so incensed that he refused to return to the church and demanded that Ivan step down from parish council. Tina painfully remembered her own anger and dismay commenting, "I felt like walking out and telling them all to shove it…they can all shove it up their…", she said. Sometime later, Tina was further shocked to discover that other church people were privy to the list's contents even before she was aware of its existence.

No long after this, Tina had just finished conducting a special service and Ivan was waiting for her at the back of the church. He looked distressed, she recalled, as he approached her and said "look, you don't like me anymore" and then expressed outrage that she found out about the list, protesting that his confidentiality had been broken. Tina was aware by now "that he was trying to control me" and countered with her own indignation stating that Ivan had repeatedly broken her confidentiality and how she had felt betrayed by him repeatedly. His response was to say nothing, "he just hugged me", she said. On another occasion, Ivan "put his hand on my leg", she said, inferring that this was another example of Ivan's manipulative tactics, extending to sexual intimidation.

The interviewer asked Tina to reflect on what everyone else in the church was doing while all this was going on. She replied that there was another female warden, Sue, who didn't like conflict and would say, "oh, that's just Ivan being Ivan", or she would try to pretend it didn't happen. Sue wanted to validate both sides and Tina said this was the attitude of others on parish council - they wanted to "validate" Ivan. And they wanted to fix it by addressing the complaints in the letter. Tina found this

offensive because it ignored the abusive and emotionally manipulative behaviour she had had to suffer and it also demonstrated their ignorance of the canons.

Ivan took some holiday leave outside the parish for a few weeks which gave Tina the opportunity to talk to people directly and try to "remove the poison he had injected into the community". She visited one family, the husband and father of which was a good friend of Ivan's. Ironically, this man, Jim, often "ran him down" to her face, Tina said. But Jim's feeling was that Ivan had been badly mistreated. By the time Ivan returned, Tina felt that there was a lot of sympathy for Ivan but that her side of the story was never really heard.

She came to realise, as she visited the church members during Ivan's absence, how much this conflict had consumed her emotionally,

> it showed me how small this was and it showed me how I was directing all
> of my energy and emotions at what turned out to be a small group of people
> amongst a large group of contented to very happy people.

Ultimately, Ivan offered his resignation on the grounds of his deteriorating relationship with Tina and Tina accepted it graciously but firmly saying,

> that's the right decision, that was inappropriate, you don't get to do that, no.
> I'd had it, you don't get a second time at this. Then I'd go home and cry.

In a corollary, Tina mentioned that the previous rector, who had retired to the next suburb and remained "in the background". He maintained regular meetings with Ivan, the gossiping women and other church members and regularly requested copies of the parish financial statements. He had told his previous parishioners that the church would fail once he left, but it hadn't. On one occasion, Tina returned from a funeral to find him on her computer, in her office, accessing her files. Tina had the

opportunity to confront him at a conference and, when he declared that he was

keeping his distance from her church, Tina responded,

> Actually, that's not how I've seen it, it's been really hard having you
> continuing to visit people and bring them communion.

She said that it had made her ministry a lot harder. "He said he was sorry, but I

don't think it stopped", she said.

CHAPTER 6: PARTICIPANT STORIES OF INTRACTABLE SITUATIONS

The following three stories were deemed level V conflicts because they revealed unmanageable situations and destructive intent.

Wanda: Aggressive-aggressive

> I said to her 'this lady is passive-aggressive'. After a short while, my assistant, a trained counsellor, said to me 'Oh no, she's not passive-aggressive, she's aggressive-aggressive!' This aggression impacted every aspect of that church and extinguished every sign of new life.

These were the words of a clergy person who had acted as locum while Wanda took stress leave. Wanda commented twice in the interview that she needed to take "time out" twice in the first five years of her pastorate because she felt herself "coming close to burnout". She had been warned "by a darling old lady that this church breaks vicars and has been a vicar-breaker for a long time" and Wanda attributed her stress to her dealings with one influential family.

The church in question was a branch church in a rural parish. The parish consisted of a main church centre in a town populated by about 3,000 people, and two branch churches, one in a smaller town and another situated in a locality – it stood alone in a field. All three churches contained aging congregations and Wanda's brief was to try to connect the church with the upcoming younger generations. But she used almost the entire interview to focus on the field church and its associated difficulties. Historically, the parish council there consisted of "four people who were all from one family and they'd been in control of the place for decades, for all of their lives really". The church's matriarch, Mary, was a woman Wanda described as

…the nastiest woman I ever had the displeasure to come across. Anyone

who disagreed with her, even just slightly, she would just scream at and

abuse and yell at.

When Wanda first arrived, she had been warned by Mary's sister "never to cross Mary…if you cross her, she's an enemy for life".

One example that Wanda recalled of 'crossing Mary' centred around the misplacement of Wanda's keys during a wedding ceremony at which Mary acted as verger. Wanda asked Mary, innocently, if she had seen the keys. Mary barked back aggressively and said she had not seen them nor had she touched them. Wanda was puzzled at the disappearance of the keys because her usual practice, at each wedding, was to place them on a particular table, and she mentioned this to Mary. Once again, Mary retorted angrily, "have you looked in your bag?". Wanda did not believe they were in there, but she looked anyway. No keys. She returned to Mary with the news that she hadn't found them in her bag. Wanda described Mary's response as, "she just started screaming at me again". But, as she was "ranting and raving", Mary put her hand into her own purse and extracted the keys and, looking rather "sheepish" Wanda responded, "well, we all make mistakes". Wanda insisted that this was an example of Mary's regular pattern of engagement. Mary was a churchwarden by the vicar's appointment and, with the AGM looming the following day after the church service, Wanda felt she could not re-appoint Mary to that role. Nervously, she rang Mary that night after the wedding and explained her position as factually as she could, saying she did not think Mary was supportive of her. Mary exploded down the phone line, protesting and affirming her support. Wanda replied, "no, every time you're talking to me, you're yelling in my face and that is not supportive" to which Mary exploded again and hung up the phone. At church the next day, Mary was

"stomping around" and "slamming everything down" and "muttering under her breath". When it came time for the AGM to commence, Mary "was absolutely ropable, furious and yelling and carrying on". She and her husband resigned from the six official positions they held between them in the parish. Mary's brother-in-law phoned Wanda after the AGM and he "told me off because I'd failed to maintain harmony in my council". It was at that point Wanda realised that the way people kept harmony in this council was never to cross Mary. Mary's sister, the one who warned Wanda never to cross Mary, then "stepped into behaving exactly like her sister". Wanda realised that this was "how they actually planned to control me". Wanda later discovered that the "controlling family used the plate…their practice was that if the minister crossed them, they would try to starve them out with the giving". Shrewdly, Wanda increased the wedding fees to bring them in line with the wedding market and also guaranteed her an income. But, it met with opposition because, as Wanda explained, "it made the church less dependent on their offerings and therefore starving the vicar out wasn't as effective. They were horrified".

Wanda had begun a family service at the main church and, noticing this, the field church people asked Wanda why there wasn't a similar family service at their own church. Wanda stated her reasons as being, firstly, they didn't have any children at their church and, secondly, the family service used a data projector and their church didn't have one. Responding to the first obstacle, Mary said they would bring their grandchildren. In response to the second, Wanda was surprised to discover that a data projector had been purchased and installed the following week, even though it was a heritage listed church building and their attitude was characteristically, "you can't change anything, you can't put in anything new". Wanda was willing to trial a family service and contacted all the families who were linked with the church, mostly

through past weddings or baptisms, and invited them to a new service. Families started to attend, but the regulars were not happy. Mary's sister sarcastically called them "those people that you bring in" and "they're not us". "That's how they described them", Wanda said.

Some members of the field church visited a large and vibrant and church located about twenty minutes' drive away. They attended the 8am traditional church comprised mostly of elderly people like themselves. When they returned, they called a meeting with the archdeacon during which they propositioned the him to pressure the vicar of the large church to send fifty eighty-year old members over to field church to save it from dying. Wanda was bypassed and thought it was laughable.

The field church included a vicarage which was rented to a young family. Prior to the Christmas carols service one year, Wanda received a call from the tenant, Karen, who complained, "I've never been so bullied in my life". Some of the church women had "descended" on the property, "let themselves in and started abusing our tenant", saying that the family had no right to be there, that they were "destroying 165 years of tradition" and that parish council had no right to lease the house to them. Karen also arranged the flowers for wedding services periodically. On one occasion, she was preparing the flowers with her two young daughters when Mary's sister arrived and commented on "how the flowers were wilted" and referred to them as "weeds".

The other branch church and its hall is located in a small town. The church and the town-folk enjoy a good relationship and the local folk had proposed joint use of the community hall by the various community groups and the church. Although Wanda was in agreement, the church could offer no financial assistance, so the town-

folk decided to fundraise. The regional bishop intervened and told the community that the diocese would pay for what was needed. However, the diocese had "no money" either and the bishop's intervention, said Wanda, made the situation "absolutely impossible" because the townsfolk were waiting for the funding to arrive, but it would never eventuate.

At the main church, the old hall needed re-carpeting but the ladies' guild was opposed. Despite this, the project proceeded and the following week Wanda said the women "were grizzly and weren't talking to us". However, another week later, during their regular meeting, the guild passed a motion congratulating the vicar for carpeting the hall. The reason for the sudden turn-around was that the new carpet had improved the hall's acoustics and now the elderly women could hear each other speak. Wanda used this story to contrast the attitudes at the main church and those of the field church. One wanted her to succeed, the other to fail, she said.

Tom: Wild

Tom's summary term for his experience was "wild". By "wild", he referred to conduct in church life that was "volatile", "crazy", "complex", "dysfunctional", "messy", "ugly" and "brutal" and the membership contained people who "weren't particularly good at handling difficulties or conflict in relationships in disagreements or differences of opinion". He said,

> This place was marked out by that volatility driven by that inability to consider the other person's perspective and inability to negotiate.

He reported that there were often screaming matches at morning tea after church and

> …the language you know... having come out of the army and there's really no difference between seeing it in the army and seeing it and morning tea.

Tom reflected, "my time in the army, in the providence of God, was very good training for this place" and he told a number of stories to illustrate the volatility.

The hall kitchen was forty years old, in poor condition and desperately in need of renovation evidenced by the "weetbix" condition of the particleboard cupboards. The parish council was unanimously in favour of a makeover, bar one member, the church women were pushing for it and the church had enough funds to afford it. But one "mouthy bloke" on parish council objected, saying that the kitchen had plenty of years left in it. Nothing had been attempted in the past because, Tom said, no one dared oppose this man. However, Tom took him aside and together they inspected the kitchen in its dilapidated condition. At the next parish council meeting, Tom announced they would go ahead with the project. The mouthy man erupted,

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screaming and accusing Tom of being a "bully boy" and storming out of the meeting. This was not unusual behaviour for the man. Tom explained that he was

> …the sort of guy who rocks up to church on Sunday and you never know what sort of mood he's going to be in…emotionally up and down and all over the place and people always are treading on egg shells trying to relate to him.

The church was experiencing a period when "morale was low" largely because of "four high-maintenance, dysfunctional, confused, inbred families", not including the "mouthy bloke". In one of the families a mother and daughter were at odds over the girl's boyfriend who had "booted her out" of the house, then took off. He was an ice addict but the mother took him back in, as was her custom. The following Sunday, mother and daughter engaged in a heated argument over morning tea, as Tom so graphically described,

> Mum and daughter, they have a blow-up and mum says "your f-ing boyfriend is f-ing me in my f-ing house!". This is at morning tea and then, boom, it's on!

A few weeks later, when things had calmed down, Tom gently confronted the mother with her behaviour, pointing out its inconsistency with her claim to be Christian. He laid down an ultimatum that she shouldn't return to church until she had "sorted herself out". But she and her daughter never returned.

In one of the other four "dysfunctional" families, the mother was a parish council member and a "good woman" but her husband, although Christian, was "a very odd bloke" and "they had produced three sons and one daughter, all very odd human beings. All drunks". The younger son was in the night church band and had started dating a girl from the church. But the girl was concerned about his drinking habit and

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dumped him. The next Sunday Tom spotted the lad turning up to church drunk, smoking and heading straight for the girl, intending, Tom believed, to harm her. Tom intercepted him before he reached the girl, tackled him to the ground and held his head down while one of the wardens kept "yelling, 'don't, Tom, don't!'", fearing Tom was going to do something worse. Tom said the boy's pattern repeated itself for the next year until he was eventually admitted to a mental health facility. Tom still has contact with him and has earned the boy's trust to a point where, if there he got into trouble again, Tom was confident he would be one of the boy's "go-to mates".

The wife and mother in one of the four families wanted to "have the world record for the number of births, and was clearly incapable of raising kids". "She's mad", Tom declared, but she was well on her way with sixteen children already. However, Tom pointed out, she was really unfit to be a mother. The family had a sad history of rape and incest and, in the end, no one knew whom to believe, which stories were true and which ones were fabricated.

Then there was Tom's appointed warden, Bill, who was very supportive, yet was one whom Tom described as "abrupt", "always offending people", "hard core" and could never hold down a job for very long because he would offend someone and get the sack. Bill's fifteen-year old son, whom Tom believed to be somewhat autistic, had no empathy for other people's feelings. He was constantly in trouble at school and some of the teachers wanted the boy submitted for psychological assessment, but Bill refused. The boy was also prone to tell lies, reported Tom and, one day, he was caught lying at school. The school staff spoke to Bill about the incident, but he vigorously refuted the claim. One weekend, the church youth group to which the boy belonged, attended a regional youth conference. A teenage girl, whose family attended Tom's church, went to the conference as well. Tom believed, the girl "was

damaged goods". She was known to police because of her history of five to six false allegations of sexual abuse. At the conference the two of them, the girl and Bill's son, managed to find themselves alone in an upstairs room at the conference venue. When the girl came downstairs, she approached one of the youth leaders and claimed that Bill's son had assaulted her, but the boy denied it. Tom said no one knew who believe because, on the one hand the boy was an inveterate liar, and on the other the girl had a reputation for crying "rape". Bill, without showing any interest in the facts, was adamant that his son was innocent and insisted that the girl's parents should take the matter to the police, thinking this would vindicate his son. The next Sunday, the two sets of parents were sitting in church and Tom said the tension "was just sucking the life out of the place". Bill demanded that Tom kick the other family out, and if not, he would leave the church. Tom refused to "kick them out", so Bill left. But it proved to be a critical moment which Tom described as the "lid being taken off". Bill was the last of those families who were "sucking the life out of the church" and Tom confessed his relief as he noticed an immediate improvement in the church's atmosphere and commented. "Within two or three months I felt like a million bucks", he said. He believed there was

> …a series of these problem people who were in key positions that affect growth…when they go it's like that life sucking parasite has left and it can get healthy.

Don: Pruning

Don entered his first parish, a rural town, at the age of twenty-nine and, even before he arrived, there was discontent because of his youth and inexperience. Don would have faced a lot more opposition were it not for a semi-retired locum who had pastored the church in the interregnum before Don's arrival. This man reassured the church of twenty-five people that he would teach Don how to be a good priest. Nevertheless, "there was a lot of tension from the start".

Don's first sermon was "blunt" and, in it, he announced that his wife was not a church goer at the current time and that her attendance was not his immediate expectation, although he hoped that, ultimately, she would one day "be in the front pew". He also hoped that, being so "blunt" and candid, would take the power out of any "kitchen talk". It didn't and doubts were aired that if he couldn't get his wife to church, what hope was there of him getting anyone to church? So, there developed "a campaign by a few of them after only a few months to discredit me and get me out of the parish".

However, Don was fortunate to discover some loyal supporters who wanted him to succeed in the parish, who "had my back" and "didn't want me overwhelmed by all the negativity", he said.

But one woman in particular, Elsie, and a group of five or six other women close to her, still had an issue with Don's age and inexperience. They were used to older priests. Since the departure of the previous vicar, there had been a series of part-time locums. In the absence of a permanent vicar, the women, especially Elsie as the "ringleader", as Don called her, "took control…it was their parish and they were used to doing things their way". One example, he recalled, concerned a donation

given to the church by the women. Unfortunately, they earmarked the gift, specifying

what the money could be used for. Don thanked them for the gift but added, "parish

council will decide how those funds are to be used because they are the ones that are

running the parish". He said they didn't like that "because they had lost control in

their eyes" so they reneged on the offer saying, "if you're not going to do what we

want you to do, you're not having the money". Don stood his ground and the

donation was withdrawn.

Don backed this up with another example of the way in which this group, under

Elsie's influence, exercised control. The parish operated an Op Shop in town with

Elsie acting as the unofficial coordinator. The proceeds from the shop helped to keep

the parish afloat financially and was considered a vital ministry. From time to time,

work, health and safety concerns in the shop arose but these had never been

addressed, so Don decided to introduce some guidelines. His concern was not just for

the safety of the clientele and the volunteer staff, but also because he was responsible

as the vicar. Should an incident occur, it would have legal ramifications for him.

Elsie didn't like the new measures "because I was stepping on her turf" and that's

where the "real sort of nastiness started to come out from her and her friend", he

said. Don then recounted the extent to which these women were willing to go in their

opposition. Elsie tried "to get the police involved and the diocese involved with false

accusations of lewdness on my part, saying that I had done the whole paedophile sort

of stuff", he said. The allegations were serious enough for the bishop to intervene

and conduct his own inquiry. After concluding that the allegations were baseless, he

addressed the congregation and announced that "the accusations were not upheld".

Don's supporters in the church, particularly one young father who was a church

warden and his father who was a parish councillor, were alarmed at what had

happened. The latter said to Don, referring to Elsie, "look, if you want to get her for defamation of character, I'll fund the court case". Don didn't pursue the matter, but he was enormously encouraged by the show of support.

Some members of Elsie's group were parish council members, one of them being a church warden and, in those official settings, they would "be polite and politically correct". But Don felt they were duplicitous and petty and would "run things under-handed elsewhere". He said, on one occasion, parish council decided to mow the church lawn on Tuesday, but these women turned up to mow it before Tuesday "so they could be praised and not allow others to be involved".

A few weeks later, Easter arrived and, on Maundy Thursday, Don walked into the vestry to discover a letter from Elsie outlining her decision to leave the parish. Don couldn't contain his delight saying, "it was a true Easter for me, there was a death in her going and there was some grief for that, but there was a real sense of resurrection, within a month the numbers had doubled". After she left, Don watched the gossip, backstabbing and negativity evaporate and a new "warmth" enter the church. It was a palpable change that even Elsie's group noticed. Although two of her followers left the church with Elsie, the other three remained and they "saw the change instantly and commented that the parish felt different". They became "great supporters" and they began to talk about their own lives whereas, previously, they only talked about what was on Elsie's agenda.

The change in mood was also noticeable in the hall kitchen where morning tea was served after church. Elsie's little group of women used to wash up and, each Sunday, it deteriorated into a den of cliques and negative gossip. However, after Elsie left, there was an almost instantaneous change. The cliques ertationipated and

"after church everyone just flowed from one person to the next to become just one big group that just moved", Don reported. Even the fringe group of people, who used to watch the mischief but never got involved, broke up because "there was nothing left to watch", Don said.

Don discovered that he was not really the focus of the conflicts because the women's conduct represented a pattern of behaviour that extended back through generations of previous ministers.

After Elsie left, Don's wife began to attend church services. Although she hadn't attended since they arrived in the parish, she had voluntarily done a lot of maintenance work around the church grounds. Impressed with this, someone stood up in the congregation one week and announced that, although she didn't attend services, Don's wife did more in and for the church than many of the regulars. Don saw this as a pivotal moment and, soon after, his wife started attending about every second week.

The church experienced a boost in weekly attendance which Don attributed to congregation's new sense of love and care towards newcomers. In three years, they grew from twenty-five to one hundred regular worshippers. Even Don was surprised. "I was gobsmacked", he said.

Don still chances upon Elsie around town. She won't engage him but Don said he's forgiven her. He felt that if he didn't forgive her, she would still have control over him by being constantly on his mind and he would be constantly second-guessing her next move.

Finally, one of the women from Elsie's group, remarked to Don, "I can't believe you stayed". Don replied, "God called me here for a reason and I think that was the reason to do the pruning that was needed for the growth of this parish".

Summary of the stories

This chapter provided individual textural and structural descriptions of what the participants experienced, how they experienced it and the meaning they attributed to those experiences. The participants were asked to focus on relational processes and human reaction to their leadership and all of them recounted negative or even traumatic introductions to their first parish. Their difficulties centred around human behaviour that was unreasonable, chaotic and lacking in fairness or natural justice that left them feeling shocked, incompetent, isolated. Some felt their sense of calling had been dislodged and that they needed to realign themselves in order to survive. There appeared some prominent correlations between their experiences and these were condensed into five core themes which became the basis of the findings. These are elaborated on in chapter seven.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS

This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of Anglican clergy encountering emotional systems in their first parish and data were collected via semi-structured interviews with eleven clergy.

The participants all recounted, prior to entering their first parishes, their initial enthusiasm and excitement at the prospect of stepping out from under the shadow of a senior minister and take the helm for the first time. They looked forward to making their own decisions and being able to design their own ministry blueprint. All the participants had undergone extensive interview processes by their respective selection committees, during the course of which, they gained enough information on the respective parishes to affirm their acceptance. Some received extra advice and insight from colleagues or diocesan officials that enlightened them further. For example, Robert was warned that his parish was not "going to be easy", but if he was willing to "slog it out" he might see some fruit "after five years". However, he was not deterred and entered the parish with a little more caution and "didn't go in with the wool pulled over our eyes", he said.

All the participants also acknowledged their awareness of the differences they faced as they moved from an assistant's role to that of senior minister. However, many felt they had underestimated the enormity of those differences or the shape they would take.

Five core themes emerged from the eleven interviews with some variables noticeable in some themes. The five core themes were: shock, inadequacy, alienation, relinquishment and hopelessness.

Theme 1: Shock

A major theme that emerged from the data related to the shock that participants felt due to the impact that abuse, manipulation, lack of cooperation and the general nastiness of church members, especially church lay leaders, had on them. However, their shock extended beyond the behaviour to a deeper dynamic, that of the struggle for control.

The word 'shock' conveys the idea of 'sudden upsetting or surprising event or experience'[21], or 'a sudden or violent mental or emotional disturbance'[22] and it means more than 'surprised'. The unexpectedness of encountering such underhanded and ill-mannered grabs for power not only surprised participants but disturbed them enough to unnerve them and throw them off balance. Paul Boers defined such difficult behaviour as,

> …patterned and sustained behaviour that is abusive, irrational, hostile, adversarial, or distorted. It reflects the kinds of problematic behaviour and distorted thinking enumerated in the Level III through V categories of conflict (Boers, 2002, 4).

The levels of conflict to which Boers refers were drawn from Speed Leas' five levels of conflict (Leas, 1985) which were previously outlined in Table 3[23].

The participants encountered these types of behaviour in people's reactions to their leadership and they spoke of them so frequently and forcefully that a large portion of each interview was dedicated to this theme. The difficult behaviour was, in

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[21] Oxford online dictionary, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/shock

[22] Miriam-Webster online dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shock

[23] Level III refers to 'contest', level IV to 'fight/flight', and level V to 'intractable situations'.

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many cases, merely a means to an end and some participants were aware of this and articulated it in their interview.

The following material provides selections from each participants' interviews which describe the types of tactics that were used in their churches to either gain or maintain control.

Control-orientated behaviour

Robert expressed it succinctly by saying,

> It was an effort to control the rector.
>
> I think the way people related, particularly how parish council related to each other was such a stark contrast to what I had experienced…[*that*] was the big one I think.
>
> The parish council I inherited was dysfunctional.

This was in "stark contrast" to his experience of the "love-ins" at parish council meetings in his previous church, characterised by a calm and cooperative atmosphere and lacking in emotional volatility. Although Robert and his wife did not arrive in the new parish with the 'wool pulled over their eyes', he confessed, referring to the way people related to each other, "I don't think we were prepared for how tough it was going to be". Robert conveyed his surprise at the behaviour of leading people in the church through expressions such as "I had no honeymoon", "I hated going to parish council, just dreaded it", "I was flabbergasted", "I was floored", "I was in shock' and "it was dreadful". These comments were not confined to one or two isolated incidences but Robert recounted at least five stories of conflict which indicated chronic behaviour patterns.

Robert recalled there were "fights" over parking on the grass and over his suggestion to a parish council member that she consider standing for election as a church warden at the AGM. The latter incident caused an eruption at the AGM when the three existing wardens resigned in dramatic fashion. Robert explained that these three wardens regularly "dominated discussion" at parish council meetings and generally "kind of had the run of the place". They had been elected unopposed for years and Robert said "it was one of those moments after the AGM we escaped to the beach".

When the interviewer asked, "So people, you feel, would fly off the handle?", Robert responded,

> Yeah. It didn't take much particularly when you brought up the sacred cows
> for it to foster fairly emotive and less objective…

Some parish councillors withdrew from these 'strong personalities', fearing retaliation by way of verbal abuse, harassment or public embarrassment, similar to that experienced by Robert at the AGM. Other councillors seemed to draw closer to them, in a fused sort of way under the guise of friendship, and empowered the wardens' behaviour:

> …they'd been very close-knit, and the treasurer as well, and they'd been
> allowed to get away with a whole lot of stuff.

Robert identified "the way they related" as the issue that shocked him the most and he recognised that they related this way because it was their means of gaining control.

Wanda mentioned her hair had "turned white" within five years of commencing at her small country parish. The researcher suspected this was not a flippant remark

but held significant meaning and asked if she believed the parish had caused the white hair. "Yeah", she replied. She added,

> I've had to take time out twice in that five years because of um……coming
>
> close to burnout and I've had to step back and not allow myself to hit the
>
> wall.

She said this was despite being "warned by a darling old lady that this church breaks vicars and has been a vicar-breaker for a long time" and warned by Mary's sister "never to cross Mary…if you cross her, she's an enemy for life". Wanda simply summed up her shock by saying, "they were just unbelievable. I've never met people who behave like this".

Alan's surprise came as he was thrust into the senior minister's role when the rector defaulted ethically. His church was suffering shock and grief and Alan suddenly found himself in the middle of a relational mess he described as "chaos". He commented,

> I never imagined that I was going to come out of college and doing what I
>
> was doing...it was a total contrast to my experience.

Although his parishioners did not attempt a covert grab for control, in their panic they searched for a lightning rod on which to vent their anger. Alan was the target and he soon found himself utterly disempowered to the point of requiring professional therapy.

Malcolm was thrown into shock by the sudden backflip by the leaders and others after they discovered he had retrenched the youth worker. It also precipitated a hostile reaction in the wider congregation and Malcolm said the mood quickly shifted from a "two-year honeymoon" to "carnage". He couldn't understand

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…how you can go from being in such a great frame of mind and ministry

to being completely and utterly belted...

The protest amounted to a tussle over who had the final word on hiring and firing

staff and the opposing parties intimidated Malcolm by ostracising him. He said,

…no one wanted to have anything to do with me…

You are very disposable and we know that from human nature but when

you live through it, it's pretty awful.

Tina's conflict centred on one warden who secretly listed Tina's shortcomings

and passed it around the church, unbeknown to her. She said,

I think he enjoyed having this power in this community and I think it went

to his head and I think he acted like a complete jerk.

The warden even used sexual harassment as a form of power over her. "Like he

put his hand on my leg and stuff like that", she said.

She was so impacted by the behaviour that it affected her health and marriage:

You know I'd feel nauseous all the time and I just wouldn't want to go

in...urgh! what am I going to find today?

Unfortunately, it caused a lot of conflict between me and my husband.

Neil described his experience as "wild" as he negotiated a "steep learning curve"

because the church culture differed radically from the culture with which he was

familiar. It became clear, as he recounted his story, that the "culture" to which he

referred amounted to "immature" and "unacceptable" conduct. What he found

"horrendous" was to observe people's entrenched reactions designed to keep things

the way they had been for years. Some tried to insult him such as the woman of

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whom he said, "Wow, I think she just called me Satan". But it was the branch church that offered the most resistance. He said,

> …the relationship between the principal church and the branch church was highly... full of animosity.
>
> Someone actually said from the front 'we know that Neil doesn't love us as much as he loves the other congregation'.

Wayne, Ron and David were more disturbed by uncooperative resistance and compliance in their churches. Richardson argues that compliance can be a form of distancing and resistance (Richardson, 1996, 93).

Wayne was struck by how his new church was "genuinely different" and his feeling of cultural dislocation was partly due to the lay leaders' resistance to change, albeit in an amicable manner, evidenced by his failed attempts to engage his parish council in more hands-on ministry. It caused him to admit, "I've really struggled".

> I tried to make more of the vestry…it was never going to happen...it never just transpired.

Ron's people were too indolent to rise to the vision he lay before them. It seemed that, in Ron's case, the church was not just paralysed by lethargy or weariness. Because of its history, it seemed more like control-by-inertia. He said,

> And getting people to move is really hard and time consuming.
>
> These people are some of the most cynical about the vision statement.

David, struggled with a "drained" congregation at his church plant, and he felt "disappointed in not having a bigger turn up" to activities. The congregation was not antagonistic in its passivity but they had reached a stage where they didn't want to go

where David thought he needed to take them. Although less 'shocked' than others, he was bewildered by the waning support.

Tom and Don encountered some of the most severe types of behaviour.

Tom described his experience as "wild", as did Neil, but Tom related very different stories of incest, rape, fights, drug addiction, drunkenness, emotional volatility and family dysfunction in the church. He commented that the minister who acted as locum tenens prior to his arrival said to Tom,

> You need a psych degree to run this place!

Tom didn't possess a psychology degree, but he did come from a military background which rendered him somewhat un-shockable when confronted with difficult behaviour. At times, it bore some unfortunate similarities to his army experience. He said,

> So, there's often screaming matches at church.

The theme of "conflict" was not restricted to power struggles between clergy and parishioners. Sometimes it related to the exercise of power between church members which the rector witnessed and necessitated his mediation. Such was Tom's case, although he did recount stories of some heavy disagreements between himself and some members that almost became physical.

Don seemed the least shocked of all the participants, even though he encountered some of the strongest opposition that was clearly an attempt to control the vicar. Nevertheless, he was still unnerved. He described his first year as "absolute hell" having suffered at the hands one particular woman who attacked his integrity

> …with false accusations of lewdness on my part, saying that I had done a whole paedophile sort of stuff.

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This section has given a brief overview of the types of conduct that participants encountered and were shocked by and much of which contained a functional purpose of arresting control and power in some form.

The following section presents data that revealed two sub-themes relating to the issue of control: 1) attempts to control, disempower or manipulate the minster by lay leaders and 2) the ministers' lack of control over trouble spots in their churches.

Control over the minister

Five of the eleven participants spoke specifically of a small number of lay leaders who had employed some scrupulous tactics in their attempts to dominate and exercise control over the vicar. These examples stand out as significant because the participants were aware that their authority was under attack.

<u>Wanda's</u> battles centred on a longstanding family at the branch church and its powerful matriarch, Mary:

> Its parish council was four people who were all in one family and they'd been in control of the place for decades.
>
> It was part of the way they control ministers…they warn you, don't cross…anyway...the sister took up where her sister left off and they were just unbelievable.
>
> …but the controlling family used the plate…they would try to starve them out…

When <u>Robert</u> attempted to undertake part-time postgraduate studies, "particular people on parish council", namely the wardens, "just couldn't handle it". Robert said,

> …they tried to push an ex gratia leave motion through and they'd say it was the most important decision the parish council was going to make.

The "nonsense" to which Robert referred related to the wardens

> …trying to control...it was basically trying to control me...he's not turned
> out to be the person we thought he was going to be.

In addition to this was the episode, discussed above, when the wardens stood down at the AGM. The incident was triggered by Robert's encouragement of a woman to stand for election as a warden. Robert did not state explicitly that it was an attempt to exercise control over him by the three wardens, but he believed it was implicit in the actions they took to embarrass and discredit him publicly.

Don felt that he was harassed by one particular woman with her small group of followers, who controlled much of the church, and wanted to manage him.

> …these people took control and it was their parish and they were used to
> doing things their way…a campaign…to discredit me and get me out of
> the parish.

> …she's found this new sense of power and decided this is how she can
> exercise it by having control…over the church.

It culminated in the accusation of paedophilia noted earlier.

After the woman left the church, Don confessed that he had forgiven the woman because "if I don't forgive her she *still* has control over me", implying that he felt she previously did have control over him.

Tina said, in regard to the lecherous warden who used sexual advances as a means of control,

> …he was very controlling as a warden and inappropriately so, I think,
> because I'm a woman and I think he just really like having a woman pay
> attention to him...

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…he became very controlling so every time I didn't do something that he thought I should be doing I would get a mean little email or a nasty phone call.

Alan contended with the immoral actions of an adulterous boss that dominated his thinking, time and emotional energy. It seemed he couldn't get away from it. Although this feeling of being dominated was not the result of an intentional grab for power by anyone in particular, it nevertheless left Alan feeling that he was at the mercy of somebody else,

My whole existence was completely dominated by this guy's sin.

As previously mentioned, Alan was also victimised as the scapegoat in a blaming system and it had devastating results.

Uncontrollable

Other participants felt there were central aspects of their parishes that were completely out of their control, not because they felt targeted, but due to the uncontrollable chaos of church life.

Tom described his entire parish experience in one word, "the best word to describe it was 'wild'". Under the previous minister the church was wilder but, Tom said,

…you had people that weren't particularly good at handling difficulties or conflict in relationships in disagreements or differences of opinion…volatility driven by that inability to consider the other person's perspective and inability to negotiate.

For example, Tom received almost unanimous approval to renovate a forty-year-old kitchen hall, except for one person. Tom recalled,

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He blows up 'you can't do this you're a bully boy', screams, shouts, storms

out of Parish Council.

Other examples of "wild" living Tom reported were:

Morale in the church is already low because there are four families, high

maintenance, dysfunctional, confused, wild and are sucking the life out.

Life's a disaster. Anyway, this particular weekend he boots her, takes off,

we're called in, come down, he does a runner and we call the cops in.

Malcolm's word for the rapid transition from paradise to mutiny after he decided

to retrench the widely-loved youth worker was "carnage". He experienced

…a lot of cold-shouldering…lots of little conversations with disgruntled

people and kind of being that those conversations were negative and

critical. So that was just a really weird period. I don't think I've ever felt

like that, ever in church life before...

The cold-shouldering included a house blitz while the youth worker was away on

holiday. His supporters moved all his family's belongings to another house and when

he returned threw a large party for him. Malcom wasn't invited to either. Malcolm

also talked about being abandoned by the church leaders:

[*The wardens and parish council*] they want to distance themselves from

you even though they kind of supported you through the decision-making

process. So that was hard like it felt like you've been hung out to dry.

David was aware that emotions can flare up quickly and he felt responsible to

prevent them from doing so:

I saw...like the constant spot fires that are there, if you don't control them,

they start to flare up and so it's kind of…like that back-burning for a

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positive…it's like the fire goes out of control and then you've got to do a lot more work to try and control it again.

Neil, in response to the researcher's question, "do you have any control over the branch church?" said,

No. I have made some attempts to be in the conversation… but the wardens… just recently…. ahhhhhh [*cry of frustration*].

Alan, who was thrust into leadership because of an ethically compromised rector, described his first year as "annus horribilis". In recounting the turmoil of a shocked and grieving church he described the church as "everyone was a basket case up there" and said,

…people feeling like there were insiders, people feeling like they were outsiders…

Don felt that the disorder in his church was a spiritual problem:

Basically, it was the first twelve months. It was absolute hell. We just felt like…I knew God was there but it just felt like the church didn't have God because of the people.

The issue of shock emerged as having significant importance to all of the participants. In particular, attempts to control the rector, control the church's culture overtly or covertly, or control other members, all directly impacted each rector and required a response from him or her. Each participant responded with shock and, sometimes, horror at the unethical and uncivil lengths to which people went in order to gain the upper hand, especially in a Christian church.

Theme 2: Inadequacy

A second major theme which emerged from the data related to the participants' feelings of personal and professional inadequacy. This theme flowed out of the first theme because their feelings of inadequacy arose from the struggle for power and its accompanying conduct. They expressed feelings of inadequacy over their lack of skills, their inability to cope emotionally and, generally, over their lack of personal resources to meet the challenges with which they were presented.

Wanda felt her situation was "very frustrating" and "quite depressing". She came "close to burnout" and needed time out "twice in five years" lest she "hit the wall".

Neil's sense of inadequacy was felt in two areas. Firstly, despite his competency at many levels, he was prone to set expectations beyond his ability to achieve and felt "overwhelmed". Secondly, he admitted that he had no control over his recalcitrant branch church.

Alan felt totally out of his depth as he faced a major moral crisis:

> I was still try to figure out how to write good sermons and I tried to carry too much and too many burdens, I wasn't realistic.

> They [*the staff*] looked to me to provide that great pastoral support for them…mate, I don't know what you want from me… I'm way out of my depth here.

Malcolm was bewildered by a reversal of support and became reclusive and over-sensitive to criticism. He recognised his own idealism was also a shortcoming:

> So, we then suddenly went from forward progress in the church to just carnage, you know just survival mode…

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It was just now something that we just don't know how to handle, Leanne, my wife and I were at the point where we don't know where this is going.

…my own personal resilience is so low that I feel like the little old lady with the critical nature can just absolutely hammer me and bring me to a place where I don't want to go anymore.

Wayne was self-conscious about his lack of experience:

…it probably was the first major expose or revelation of incompetence on my part.

I didn't know who to turn to, I was sort of floundering and at that point I think they thought 'well it's not all his fault but we've got a lame duck here!'.

I was scrounging around in the bottom of my toolkit bag finding I haven't got a lot.

Tom appreciated the military training he had received and its usefulness for leading a "wild" church, but he acknowledged his limitations in other areas, like trying to "fix" broken family relationships:

But I always thought we could do more you know to help, but there's only so much you can do in a complex parish.

He also felt the pressure of keeping the parish financially viable and of his lack of experience to lead and advance a complex parish:

[the branch church] has got to make money for you otherwise you're bankrupt…so you've got all these complex situations, complex people…

So, you knew these things needed to be fixed but, in my mind, I had no idea whether we'd get there.

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<u>Ron</u> was frustrated that he couldn't motivate a passive congregation to get more actively involved.

> We're in a church in decline so this pressure on me as minister to try and turn that around and you can feel that personally.

He was also frustrated by his inability to help an underperforming staff member:

> It wasn't like 'I'm coming down hard on you' but it didn't work. She disappeared. What do I do? I find those weaknesses really hard.

A number of times, Ron spoke of problems needing to be 'fixed' in the church and regarded this as his responsibility. Two examples reveal his inability to do so, one regarding a parish group, the other his wife's over involvment:

> There are little things like that, they just seem to dissolve…and I haven't been able to work out how to fix it.

> I couldn't get her *[his wife]* to slow down.

> I was telling her, 'ok you need to drop one thing from school and one thing from Church', but she ended up taking on an extra thing at church.

<u>Tina</u>'s battle with a malicious warden highlighted her struggle to stay on top of things emotionally:

> ...I was just trying to deal with my emotions thinking well what do I do now?

> And it really, sort of, triggered all of my anxiety, you know I'd feel nauseous all the time and I just wouldn't want to go in...urgh! what am I going to find today? What it did and what it does, that sort of conflict, is it distorts your view of reality.

If someone else had offered me a better offer I would have considered walking.

Robert felt overwhelmed by conflict:

I don't think we were prepared for how tough it was going to be.

My lack of experience in running meetings, points of order, I was getting points of order being called on me.

But yeah, I think we just felt overwhelmed.

David felt emotionally drained because he lacked the ability to mobilise a disengaged congregation. He also felt himself descend into a 'hole' and he struggled to care for his own personal health at times, let alone that of others:

When you kept hitting these road blocks, I would experience drain…

…they could see that I was tired or short-tempered or, you know a bit despondent.

Most of them would turn around and say, 'I don't feel I am being cared for' and my response in my head was 'you're right, I don't really want to care for you at the moment...go away'.

Don appeared to be an exception to this theme of deficiency. He did not express any feelings of inadequacy and appeared to have met each challenge with courage and strength. That is not to say that he did not feel his own shortcomings, he just did not reveal them in the interview.

Clergy feelings of inadequacy across a range of challenges emerged as a major concern for the participants and affected some deeply and altered their sense of competence.

Theme 3: Alienation

A sense of alienation or isolation emerged as a major theme from the research and many of the participants expressed that they felt alone, unsupported, segregated, companionless, ostracised or targeted. As bleak as this may sound, their feelings did not constitute the sum total of their experiences. They did have happier things to share, but these were the prominent responses given in answer to the research question inquiring into the most challenging aspects of their pastorate.

Wanda said,

> I'd never realised that we were going to go somewhere where it was almost
>
> dead. That is very much the reality of these three churches.

Wanda was confronted with an aging congregation in which she was nearly the youngest person. She even appointed a ninety-three-year-old to parish council! When she described the church as "dead", she wasn't speaking figuratively because she had already buried some of her most supportive people.

> I seem to have buried a lot of my really best people…and that's frustrating.
>
> I have buried so many of the good ones and the ones who cheered you on
>
> from the side line.

She struggled with being the only person left with the youth and energy to reconnect the church with the newer generations. The field branch church made her feel unsupported and unwanted and Mary, as the "aggressive-aggressive" matriarch, led the antagonistic charge. By not re-appointing Mary, Wanda distanced herself further.

She experienced the excitement of seeing new families move into town and show some promise. But then her excitement turned to disappointment:

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I thought "I wonder if they will get involved?", someone warned me that they wouldn't because they were very opposed to women's ordination.

Then there was Wanda's tense relationship with her bishop which made her feel isolated from her diocese:

> I've been frustrated by the lack of support from the bishop who...how do I even describe the bishop? But I felt a total lack of support from the bishop. In fact, the bishop has interfered on a number of occasions and he's made situations that were being managed reasonably well…He's made them impossible.

<u>Alan</u>'s profound sense of isolation stemmed from being the only clergy person, indeed the only staff member, suited to ministry in the parish. He felt that the weight of pastoral responsibility fell on his shoulders as he faced ostracism, being regarded with suspicion, dehumanised, misunderstood, lonely and lacking the support of the denomination. He said,

> I felt incredibly isolated at the time. I think I didn't really have much support at all…I had no relational credibility with them at all.

> I was the only member of staff who had a continuity…they just were not suited to ministry and they were beaten…

> ...I was the only clergy person left in the parish and so for a lot of people I was the bunny who represented the team.

> So... I understood they were hurt and upset but I don't think they took the time to understand that I was on their aside…

> …there was such an inherent distrust.

> And there was just an inability to see us as human beings…

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[*The diocese*] sent one of the parish recovery teams to help the parishioners

work through but they didn't send any extra staff…

Malcolm lacked staff members who could share the load of a rapidly growing

church and overworked himself. But the impetus for his isolation from the

congregation came after he made a controversial decision. He was "cold-shouldered"

by church members and abandoned by the lay leaders, even by his initial supporters,

and he knew the loneliness of the senior minister.

> … no one wanted to have anything to do with me.

> …do a huge backyard blitz and then do a big surprise party, like I wasn't
>
> involved in any of that.

> *[The warden],* even though he helped me make decisions and helped me
>
> work out how to do it, he back-flipped…he made it pretty clear that he
>
> didn't want to be associated with it.

> So that was hard like it felt like you've been hung out to dry and been left
>
> alone to be the bad guy...

> If you haven't been in this seat, like in the senior minister's position it's very
>
> hard to understand what the senior minister is really going through.

Tina's sense of alienation stemmed from a controlling church official whose

clandestine and manipulative tactics were designed to embarrass her and to induce

guilt. This was exacerbated for Tina by the empathic treatment he received from

other church members who "validated" his behaviour and who gagged her side of the

story. She was the sole person who believed Ivan's behaviour was unacceptable and

who was prepared to act. It also resulted in a rift between Tina and her husband.

> Unfortunately, it caused a lot of conflict between me and my husband.

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So, I took it to the bishop and he lost some hair I think and he was really worried that I'd just get up and walk out because I really felt like getting up and telling them all to shove it.

There was a female warden, and I think she just went 'Oh well, that's just Ivan being Ivan, let's just not worry about it' and tried to push it under the carpet.

The problem is that he got to tell his side and I never got to tell my side.

Tom felt a sense of alienation because his church didn't grant him the same level of respect or friendship he had experienced in the army. Early in his pastorate, he lacked able people who could have helped him make decisions and carry the ministry load, the bulk of which was born by himself and his wife.

In the army, too, the diggers love ya, there's a very high level of respect for you. A young digger would come to you with something and you chat it through and ask what you reckon and he takes your word as gospel and does it…here, you're nothin' to a lot of people. So that was a big change.

I still get on with everyone but there's no one I really click with or am really close to. I had a couple of mates in the battalion that I just clicked with and was really close with, similar, got on really well. They were good deep friendships. You just don't have that here.

You just lack capable people to help you do stuff and fine tune your decisions. [*My wife*] and I carry the bulk of the load.

Ron moved to an area with a high degree of transition and it grieved him to welcome new people only to see them move to other places or churches. He felt that it was his responsibility to turn this trend around and to do the ministry that a lethargic church wouldn't attempt.

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So, we find that when we reach out just to anyone could be that they will

move or that they just haven't settled on a church and then they pick another

church. So, we've actually found to be very hard.

One of the things I've been grieved over and has caused me a lot of pain

last year was that we saw a number of people who, if they'd had stayed,

would have been a huge asset because they had just retired.

We're in a church in decline so this pressure on me as minister to try and

turn that around and you can feel that personal.

Robert's sense of alienation came via the different ministry philosophies held by himself and the parish leaders which led to some serious conflict. He also felt estranged from the culture of "how people related" to each other in the church, which was quite foreign to him, given his previous parish experience. The AGM incident was a watershed moment during which the wardens shamed and abandoned him publicly. It was an attempt to put him in his place and it seemed to be pitched at getting the congregation to takes sides.

…so, I had no honeymoon.

By and large there's this massive disconnect between how parish council

operates and how I want ministry to happen.

No, I'm not baptising everything and for that I'm getting...and I'm requiring

people to do stuff which gets me hammered.

David's "drained" church plant congregation had waned in its enthusiasm and David felt like he was the lone person left to motivate the church. This was compounded by the personal loss of relatives and friends which he had suffered and, although he maintained an external support network, it seemed loneliness was a

contributing factor to his near burnout. He also felt that the diocese had left him stranded with its lack of communication about future funding for the project.

> Probably what has been more of a frustration is the lack of attendance and support.
>
> So, when you try to run an event of some sort they won't sign up for it, they won't get involved.
>
> This year I've also had...my grandad passed away, my great aunt passed away and then my spiritual mentor, father-figure also passed away from cancer this year…and a number of other stuff in church...so 'drained' is a really appropriate word for this year.
>
> …you know what? This sucks, I'm tired, I'm getting sick of these guys, whether its church people or the diocese.

Some exceptions to this theme included Wayne, Neil and Don for whom a 'sense' of isolation was not prominent. The data revealed that they did undergo some degree of isolation, but it was not something that loomed large for them or affected them as much as it did the others.

Wayne had lost most of his staff in his first year, and felt he wasn't part of diocesan network and didn't have the connections to know how to get replacements. He said,

> I was not at all well connected, I didn't know who to turn to, I was sort of floundering.

But the congregation was very supportive and "loved" him and his family and they developed a strong sense of belonging in the church. The interviewer was left

thinking he must have experienced some distance from his parish council when they resisted his attempts to change their modus operandi.

Neil did not explicitly mention feeling alienated, but it did seem to occur at a number of levels. First of all, in the church's theological and ecclesial culture which differed to that with which he was accustomed. Secondly, he faced initial hostility from some parishioners, such as the woman calling him a snake/Satan. Thirdly, Neil was utterly alienated from the branch church from the start, due to no fault of his own but to the history of tension between the branch and principal churches and, for that matter, the diocese.

> …the principal church and the branch church was highly...full of animosity…the student minister would say to me 'they are just filled with loathing for you, for nothing that you've done'.

Don did not raise alienation as being an issue for him but it was thought the data revealed that he experienced it to some degree. It's hard to imagine that someone could be charged with paedophilia without feeling some sense of marginalisation in a country town:

> …she didn't like that and that's where the real sort of nastiness started to come out of her.

It can also be speculated that, not having his wife attend church, would also make him feel somewhat lonely.

Alienation took many forms including geographical, denominational, familial, psychological and adversarial. It emerged from this study as a major issue for these new incumbents.

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Theme 4: Relinquishment

A fourth core theme that came to light from the data related to participants who reached a low point, where they considered relinquishing their incumbency or their clerical orders. As mentioned later, the data may not have registered a high volume, but the gravity of the subject was such that it was deemed a significant concern.

The data surfaced in direct response to an interview question that was asked of all participants: "Was there any part of your experience that caused you to doubt your calling to this parish or ministry or your future?". Five participants explicitly answered in the affirmative and one gave the impression that she had considered a move.

Alan said he was at a low ebb when church behaviour and pressure caused him to doubt his faith:

> I remember sitting in study thinking 'am I really a Christian? Like, do I really believe in the resurrection?' Kind of crazy, isn't it? And I knew deep down I did but I also knew deep down that there was something wrong at the moment.
>
> And that was it for me. I've gotta get out.

Malcolm had considered ditching ministry altogether:

> I'd have to get up to the microphone and say things and I just wanted to get the heck out of here.
>
> I feel like I don't know what to do and it's at those points where Lee, my wife and I, would say how much longer can we bear this? [*Interviewer: Now when you say that do you mean here in this parish?*] At all. [*Interviewer: Ok, in ministry?*]. Yeah.

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Tina had given serious thought to leaving the parish:

> I think earlier this year there was about 6 months there where I would have walked. If someone else had offered me a better offer I would have considered walking.
>
> [*The bishop*] was really worried that I'd just get up and walk out because I really felt like getting up and telling them all to shove it.

David stayed in his parish only because he was buoyed by a support network:

> So those have really been good sources of support...yeah entirely agree...without that I would not be in this place at all.

Robert said there were moments when he considered leaving the parish but he had never questioned his call to ministry:

> We've often asked ourselves would we still be here if we didn't have that kind of outlet? I don't know, it's hard to know I guess.
>
> I've never questioned my calling.

Wanda felt that she had failed at attracting new people but didn't explicitly say she had doubted her calling or commitment. In answer to the question posed above, she said,

> Definitely. The lack of new people. The fact that I'm five and a half years in, I did have some new people last year, but the difficulty in getting the next generation to actually come along to church.
>
> But just that difficulty in the lack commitment that I see makes me sometimes feel like, you know, it was my fault.
>
> I haven't seen great conversion growth and that makes me feel like am I doing something wrong?

[Interviewer: Have you ever felt like a failure?] Oh yeah.

Neil, Don, Tom, Ron and Wayne gave no indication that they had doubted their call to ministry or to their particular parish nor gave any clue that they had wanted to leave. On the contrary, they each affirmed their conviction and commitment, except for Wayne who made no comment either way.

Neil:

> I'm enjoying what I'm doing; it's just that it's different to what I went into ministry for…which was to be an evangelist.

Don:

> I've never doubted my ministry and never doubted my faith, which surprises some.

Tom:

> God may have something some else to drop on our plate, but we're thinking a longer term.

> I never was under the illusion that it was going to be easy. I've always been conscious of the fact that it's a spiritual battle going on.

Ron:

> I think for me and my style of personality I've got to be here for a while.

Theme 5: Hopelessness

Hope is an abstract concept that is difficult to quantify. For the purposes of this study the measurement of a participant's hopefulness or hopelessness was determined by three criteria: the incidence rate in the data (see below), significant statements that expressed despondency or optimism and whether the participants had established hope renewing strategies.

Participants with little hope

Malcolm's sense of hopelessness arose from a controversial decision he made that invited a strong backlash which all but paralysed him. Within two weeks his emotional state moved from euphoria to despondency. Of the eleven participants, he displayed the highest incidence rates in all five themes. This would suggest that shock, inadequacy, alienation and relinquishment were very important issues for him, but they were aggravated by a lack of optimism or plans to improve his circumstances either psychologically or vocationally.

Alan gained hope from the courageous archdeacon who publicly called the adulterous rector to account and to repent. Alan said that he had witnessed, in action, a leader taking a principled stand to set boundaries and do the right thing. It gave Alan a different model for handling conflict and he said,

> I think in calling him [*the rector*] out as a liar and the push hard, in pushing really hard. You just don't necessarily see people do that…absolutely, one hundred percent, he did it right. And that profoundly changed me.

However, beyond that, Alan felt trapped in a confused and blaming parish and he felt powerless to change it. He could see no way out of being "dominated" by the

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rector's conduct or acting as the lightning rod for the church's angst, except to seek professional help and, ultimately, move to another parish.

Participants with strategies for renewing hope

Wanda, Tom, Tina and Don experienced renewed hope in the form of the departure of a person or group that had, in Friedman's words, "held the whole system hostage" (Steinke, 2000, 59) by their oppressive behaviour. In all four cases, a passive-aggressive character had stunted the church's growth both numerically and relationally and these four vicars noted a marked improvement in congregational life and in their own functioning once these negative influences had removed themselves. The outcomes had not been choreographed by these clergy but were consequential to their courageous stand against unacceptable behaviour.

Wanda noticed an immediate improvement after Mary left:

> …the average weekly congregation at [*branch church name*], this is after Mary left and others had died, was seven over the whole year, but… [*after Mary left*] the family services were tripling the congregation.

Don observed a new liveliness enter his church after Elsie left:

> …because with her went all the gossiping and backstabbing and negativity, all of a sudden, the parish had become welcoming and warm and we haven't looked back, it's been fantastic…within a month the numbers had doubled.

Tom said the heavy mood dissipated after certain people departed:

> For me, within that 2 or 3 months I feel like a million bucks. It's as though whatever lid there was has been taken off and slowly but surely things start to lift and change...

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That's the lid on the place that sucking the life out of that place and when

they go it's like that life-sucking parasite has left and it can get healthy.

<u>Tina</u>'s church became happier after she challenged Ivan:

The last 6 months have been very good and everything is positive so there

are higher numbers, we're financially quite viable, everyone seems to be

happy, there's a joy on a Sunday instead of...

Others had established strategies for self-regeneration.

<u>David</u> became involved in a mentoring program for young ministers and he

revived his interest in motorbike riding, sports and family after a near burnout.

<u>Robert</u> frequented the beach, which was close by, found in the bishop someone

in whom he could confide, and he had enrolled in a doctor of ministry degree

programme. Although his overbearing wardens did not depart the parish, Robert's

hopes lifted when other parish leaders began to stand up to them:

Anyway, in the end when it failed and was defeated they stepped down

again...I think they saw the writing on the wall with what happened there

and decided that it was really time. They [*parish council*] thought he was

overstepping the mark.

<u>Tina</u> had taken up reading in the area of psychology.

<u>Ron</u> sought out more experienced clergy for advice and fellowship and belonged

to a clergy support group.

<u>Malcom</u> had a senior clergyman in the congregation who, he said, had

…been very, very helpful, because he's seen the issues in ways that other

people haven't and he's seen certain aspects of what happens that other

people just can't see and that's been really good for me to know that I'm not crazy.

David's burnout led him to realign himself through a self-defining and recovery process. This seemed to have helped him lower his anxiety levels and limit his tendency to overwork. He was also involved in a clergy mentoring program.

> I've done a few things pretty intentionally just to come back on track and…that's been good...that's more under control... I enjoyed movies, I enjoyed spending time with the family, I made sure I tried not to overwork...some ministries we ran, I just pulled back from.

Alan, whose wife was a medical officer, realised he was not coping with the pressures of parish life and encouraged him to seek professional medical help.

Ron wife was hospitalised due to "fatigue sickness", because she over-extended herself in the parish. The outcome, apart from her welcomed recovery, was that she took on less which, in turn, relieved Ron's anxiety and gave them both a chance to design a better arrangement for their family's ministry.

> …it got her [his wife] to a point where she said 'okay I think I get it'. So, she's taken on less and she started doing some good ministry.

Neil, Wanda, Robert, Malcolm and Alan discovered that, by redirecting their energies into wider and more positive parish activities, their perspectives broadened and their spirits lifted.

Neil:

> … we have been growing, our staff is growing and the number of people in [*the main*] church has grown, our evangelistic fervour has grown, offertories have grown...

Summary of the Findings

Eleven clergy were interviewed and were asked to respond to the main research question, 'what was your experience of entering your first parish as the lead minister?'. They were asked to focus their responses on relational processes rather than matters of content and each research participant described, in detail, the significant aspects of their experience.

Each of them reported that they had witnessed and been subjected to incivility, manipulation, power struggle, cold-shouldering, unfairness, accusations, threats, insults and they felt these reactions represented the most challenging aspects of their experience. The participants did experience successes and positive aspects in their ministries, but the discussion was dominated by their memories of these more challenging moments. This was due partly to their own choice to speak freely and partly due to the nature of the research question.

Five major themes emerged from the data: shock, inadequacy, alienation, relinquishment and hopelessness.

Theme 1: Shock. Most participants reported that they encountered difficult behaviour of a type described by Boers (Boers, 2002). Many of them reacted with shock which left them feeling disoriented in some way.

Their experiences can be categorised into three main groups. Participants who:

1. Endured severe and aggressive conduct but who responded with a 'thick skin', i.e. they were able to function with more resilience. Two of the three participants in this category attributed their ability to cope to their vocational backgrounds, namely Tom, who served in the army, and Don, with his training in human resources. Additionally, Tom, Don and Neil

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gave no indication that they had doubted their call to parish ministry or to ministry generally.

2. Suffered aggressive behaviour, and were personally affronted or injured. Five participants admitted they had experienced depression, burnout, loss of confidence and had entertained thoughts of resigning from their church or of leaving ministry altogether.

3. Encountered more passive resistance, inertia and compliance which shocked them. Although they did not encounter an aggressive or combatant style of opposition, these participants still regarded it as uncooperative conduct. Three participants in this category struggled to cope at times, responding with burnout, depression or over-functioning.

In studies previously cited such as Berry, Francis, Rolph and Rolph (2012) and Strümpfer and Bands (1996), the findings identified factors like person-role conflict, workload and role insufficiency as the main triggers for clergy stress. This study discovered something different, however, namely, inter-relational conflict.

Theme 2: Inadequacy. This was a major theme for eight of the participants who felt they lacked the skills, competence or energy to manage the variety or the intensity of the relational system. Some, faced with congregational inertia, believed it was their responsibility to manage or fix the lethargy, but felt they had failed to do so. Others felt at a loss to know how to handle aggression or manipulation. On the whole, although all participants were competent in many areas, all felt they were ill-prepared to meet the challenges of inter-relational conflict.

Theme 3: Alienation. All participants in the study felt isolated or alienated in some sense and, for all but three, this affected them deeply. Their sense of isolation was derived from four main sources:

1. Geographical isolation – they were isolated by distance, especially those in rural areas.

2. Emotional isolation – they lacked moral support, empathic understanding or friendship in their churches.

3. Functional isolation – a systemic dynamic relating to differentiation. Richardson's (1996) functional style graph[24] identifies two types of isolation and both were evident among the participants:

    a. Leaders who, by taking a thoughtful, differentiated stand, found themselves 'alone' as the congregation distanced itself from them. This type of isolation was not a chosen position but one that was consequential.

    b. Leaders who chose to distance themselves, physically and/or emotionally, in order to avoid closeness with the congregation and gain a sense of self.

4. Vocational isolation – they lacked staff, peer or professional support or enough able volunteers who could share the load.

Wayne, Wanda, Tina, and Don were located in more remote communities and knew the tyranny of distance, but they were more concerned about social alienation than geographical. David, Tom and Ron struggled to lead their church with few able

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[24] See Appendix D.

volunteers to help. Wanda and David were concerned about ecclesiastical

disengagement, Wanda because of an unhelpful, interfering bishop and David

because of an uncommunicative diocese. Wanda, Don, Tom, Tina, Neil and Robert

took differentiated stands and did not tolerate destructive behaviour and found

themselves stranded by certain groups in their congregations. They also found

themselves isolated from congregations who capitulated to difficult behaviour, thus

empowering it even further. In some cases, a sense of alienation was generational

and chronic, as in Don's parish, which had a history of ousting its ministers.

Malcolm seemed to be the only participant who chose recluse, albeit partial, in order

to escape the criticism.

Theme 4: Relinquishment. Five of the eleven participants experienced moments

when the trauma of engaging in conflict resulted in a dislodgement of their faith or

occasioned a reassessment of their calling to the parish or to ministry generally.

Although only half of the respondents expressed doubts in this way, the fact that

clergy had reached a point of contemplating a forced resignation, was considered to

be of such substantial concern so as to qualify as a major theme. One participant,

Alan, had already begun leading a new parish, but this was understandable since his

first charge was the result of a crisis situation in which, under normal circumstances,

he would have functioned as an assistant. One participant, by the time of his

interview, was still nursing his doubts about continuing in his parish or, for that

matter, parish ministry altogether. The other four had established some strategies that

helped them persevere in their role.

Theme 5: Hopelessness. Two participants reported reaching a stage in their

ministry where they held almost no hope for a positive future. Three participants

showed no signs of a sense of hopelessness and the remaining six reported

diminished hope and optimism but they had developed strategies for self-renewal. Some discovered that a fortuitous change in circumstances lifted their spirits, such as when an antagonist departed. The hope renewing strategies and circumstances fell into five main categories:

1. The departure of troublemakers from the church.

2. External interests and relational support structures – this supports Doolittle's (2010) findings.

3. Self-evaluation and change in attitude and personal routine.

4. Medical or professional treatment.

5. The pursuit of new energising parish ventures.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences of Anglican clergy encountering emotional systems in their first parish. Five main structural themes emerged from the data collected from the participant interviews and revealed that most clergy were shocked by difficult behaviour, experienced feelings of inadequacy and isolation, had cause to reassess their calling but were able to persevere via hope renewing strategies, while two felt they faced a bleak future.

The following theme distribution chart illustrates the distribution and incidence of the five themes among the participants.

Table 4 - Incidence of themes among participants

Participant	Shock	Inadequacy	Alienation	Relinquishment	Hopelessness
Tom	◆◆	◆	◆◆	◆	–
Don	◆	◆	◆◆	◆	–
Neil	◆◆	◆◆	◆◆	◆	◆
Tina	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆
Wanda	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆
Robert	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆
Alan	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆
Ron	◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆	◆◆	◆◆
Wayne	◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆	◆◆
David	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆	◆◆
Malcolm	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆
Legend:	◆◆◆ *High incidence*		◆◆ *Moderate incidence*		◆ *Low incidence*

The diamonds indicate the incidence of data that related to a particular theme. The incidence includes both the frequency and the density of the data:

1. The frequency with which the data occurred. That is, frequently occurring data were rated 'high incidence', while less frequent data earned a 'low' or 'moderate' incidence rating.

2. The density of the data. Density refers to data that was deemed significant but was not frequent. For instance, Malcom mentioned only once and briefly that he had seriously considered resignation from the parish and from ministry, but it earned a 'high incidence' rating because it was regarded as a significant statement for him.

3. Additionally, non-verbal gestures, animation, tone of voice, mood, body language, facial expressions, etc. were considered. These added to the record in a way that could not sufficiently be conveyed in the transcribed texts alone. For instance, Tina became teary-eyed when she spoke of the impact that uncivil conduct had on her family. It was a powerful expression of pain that warranted 'high incidence'.

Aspects of these criteria were subjective in nature and relied on the researcher making judgments, but phenomenology permits this in the explication process.

The graph revealed the themes were distributed as follows:

1. Shock – a major theme for six participants and moderate for four.

2. Inadequacy – a major theme for eight participants.

3. Alienation – a major theme for seven participants.

4. Relinquishment – a major theme for five participants.

5. Hopelessness – a major theme for two participants and moderate for five.

CHAPTER 8: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS WITH BFST

Some aspects of BFST have been touched on previously, but this chapter will introduce BFST to the hermeneutical discussion in more detail.

Bowen commented on the usefulness of systems theory for studying human interaction (Bowen, 1976, 416):

> Systems thinking provides no magical answers, but it does provide a different way of conceptualising human problems.

This study found BFST was useful for conceptualising human drama in Anglican church settings. Also, employing Bowen as a conversation partner satisfied the terms of Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons'.

Data collected from the interviews showed evidence of behaviour which BFST perceives as 'triangling', 'over-functioning', 'under-functioning', 'distancing' and 'cut-off' etc. However, these terms depict behaviours that are tributaries which flow from their main sources, namely, anxiety and differentiation. This chapter limited itself to considering these two key aspects of BFST in the participants' experiences.

Anxiety in the system

Anxiety is Bowen's term for human tension and each of the participants encountered both acute and chronic anxiety in their churches. Anxiety, according to BFST, escalates when the balance between the life forces of 'togetherness' and 'individuality' is upset and invariably manifests itself through reactive behaviour such as triangling, backstabbing, gossip and other forms evasion and coercion. Emotional distancing, cut-off, the withdrawal of support, leaving the church, accusations, cold-shouldering, secrecy and scapegoating were all evident in the

participants' descriptions[25]. Behaviour that was consistently abusive, malicious, manipulative and callous echoed Bowen's understanding of poorly differentiated[26] individuals who reacted automatically, instinctively, thoughtlessly and with little empathy for others who differed from them.

In some cases, anxiety was generated by an individual or a small group who felt threatened in some way. If these individuals didn't generate the anxiety, they amplified it to a point where minor issues loomed large in other people's imaginations. They also passed on their anxiety to others who were not differentiated enough themselves to repel their influence and who succumbed to the pressure to think and act similarly. An atypical example would be Robert's parish council meeting, during which members finally opposed a controlling warden who, for years previous, had secured their compliance.

In the churches led by Tom, Don, Tina, Wanda, Malcolm and Alan, anxiety was systemic in that it spread to and affected others in the church. For instance, in Malcolm's case, he discovered people had stopped talking to him directly which mystified him until he learned of the connections – who had been talking to whom.

Some anxious behaviour was virus-like[27]. A virus is an invading entity that enters a host and disguises itself to fool the immune system into treating the virus as part of the body. Thus camouflaged, the virus then attacks and destroys the bodily cells. This illustrates Friedman's description of the low-functioning church member who is 'passively-aggressively holding the whole system hostage', and of religious

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[25] Compare Appendix E, Table 8 for Steinke's listing on low and high differentiation behaviour types.

[26] A reminder: Bowen (Bowen and Kerr, 1988) regards low-differentiated types as those whose thinking and emotional processes are not well 'differentiated' and whose responses are more emotionally driven. They regress into aggression, selfishness and avoidance behaviours. It is a description of functioning position and does not add moral value.

[27] An idea developed by Steinke (Steinke, 2006, 85).

institutions that are notorious for enabling immaturity and irresponsibility. (Friedman in Steinke, 1990, 59). Participants such as Wanda. Alan, Tina, Tom and Don not only suffered at the hands of their antagonists, but they witnessed their infectious influence on the whole church as they spread discontent, suspicion, lies, and intimidation.

Other types of reactive behaviour encountered, such as compliance and resistance, were not aggressive but more passive. Richardson wrote that compliance is a type of reactivity that 'is an outward and perfunctory appearance of going along with the wishes of the other, while inwardly (maybe unconsciously) resenting being "forced" into this behaviour', and 'compliance can be a form of distancing' (Richardson 1996, 93). Both Ron and Wayne experienced parishioners who were polite and non-combatant, but Ron's 'glory days' people compliantly tolerated any form of behaviour, while Wayne's parish council deliberately resisted the changes he sought to introduce because it affected them. Their congregations' passivity was more than mere indolence and would seem to confirm Richardson's theory that it was evidence of anxious reactivity, if not opposition.

Clergy as part of the congregation's anxiety: BFST, as a theory of interrelatedness, would not be content to examine the congregation without including the leader as an integral part of the emotional system. The participants' own reactivity became evident explicitly or implicitly through the accounts they gave. The participants responded to the congregation's reactions with varying levels of resilience, or in Bowen language, varying differentiated functioning positions. Some participants reacted by over-functioning (e.g. Ron, who was prepared to do what the church would not do and whose wife was hospitalised due to fatigue), or distancing and cut-off (e.g. Malcolm, who retreated into his office) or burn out (e.g. David,

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Wanda, Alan). These constituted the leaders' anxious and emotional responses to their church's own anxiety. Their responses were not so much reasoned as instinctive. Others, however, seemed to have maintained enough emotional composure so as not to absorb and internalise the congregation's anxiety, but made calmer, more calculated responses while remaining connected to people, even to their opponents (e.g. Don, Tom and Neil). Using BFST concepts to monitor the interplay of emotional responses provided the researcher with an added dimension for understanding the essences of the phenomenon encountered by the participants. The responses of the vicars and their levels of differentiation is discussed in more detail below.

The systemic nature of anxiety: Clergy also seemed mostly unfamiliar with the systemic nature of emotional reactivity in church life and were left bewildered by its orbit. At least six participants demonstrated surprise over the secret formation of coalitions and over ambushes that seemed to spring up from 'nowhere'. They seemed unaware of the underlying connections between one person's anxiety and another's. They appeared unfamiliar with the reciprocal relationship of over and under-functioners. At times in the interviews, when participants over focused on the 'problem' people, the researcher felt compelled to ask a systemic question: 'So what was the rest of the congregation doing?'. By their responses, it became clear that this was not an aspect that had formed part of their thinking process. Some even commented that it was a good question to ask, as if it was a new angle they had not considered.

Differentiation of the clergy

Of the eight key concepts of Bowen theory, differentiation of self stands out from the rest as the most pivotal for leadership. Roberta Gilbert called it the "cornerstone

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concept" because it is so central in Bowen theory and she used it as the title for one of her books (Gilbert, 2008). Much of the data up to this point has focused on poorly-differentiated reactions within the congregations. The study also revealed some important data on clergy responses, which will now be discussed.

Differentiation is a key determinant of clergy functioning in this study, but it is necessary to employ some measurable criteria to allocate levels of differentiation that are not just arbitrary or subjective. Peter Steinke (Steinke, 2006, 67ff) suggested a number of indicators that signal a person's level of differentiation from which three have been distilled for this study:

- Courage – leaders who operate from their 'solid' self will gather the courage to challenge the system to change.

- Calmness – refers to the leader's "non-anxious presence" by which he or she is able to maintain their composure in a nervous system.

- Contact – differentiated leaders choose not to isolate themselves in an anxious system but remain connected to people, even with their antagonists.

Participants who were thought to meet all three of these criteria were deemed to function with 'higher' differentiation. Those who met any two of the criteria were allocated 'moderate' differentiation and those who met one or none earned 'lower' differentiation. The participants possessed little or no awareness of BFST and consequently shared their narratives artlessly. However, the features of courage, calmness and contact were discernible across their accounts and, therefore, highlighted the usefulness of Steinke's criteria.

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Figure 4 below is an adapted version of Ronald Richardson's functional style graph[28] introduced in chapter two. It is reintroduced here with the addition of participant placements. Employing Steinke's three criteria for assessing differentiation, the participants were positioned towards the upper half for 'higher', the lower half for 'lower'[29] and the middle for 'moderate' levels of differentiation.[30] Positioning the participants left to right, according to their emotional closeness to or distance from their congregations, was a more subjective task. The researcher relied on the data received from the participants and made an informed judgement. Those on the lower left side had challenged their churches less and developed friendships. Those on the lower right had distanced themselves as a result of group pressure. Those on the upper right were distanced by others because they challenged their churches.

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[28] Including a more complete explanation of the quadrants in Figure 3 in chapter two.

[29] "Lower" and "higher" are preferred terms over "low" and "high" differentiation. The latter can imply "lowest" & "highest".

[30] These ratings are only estimations of differentiation because observations were limited to a short time frame.

Figure 4 - Richardson's functional style chart with participant placement
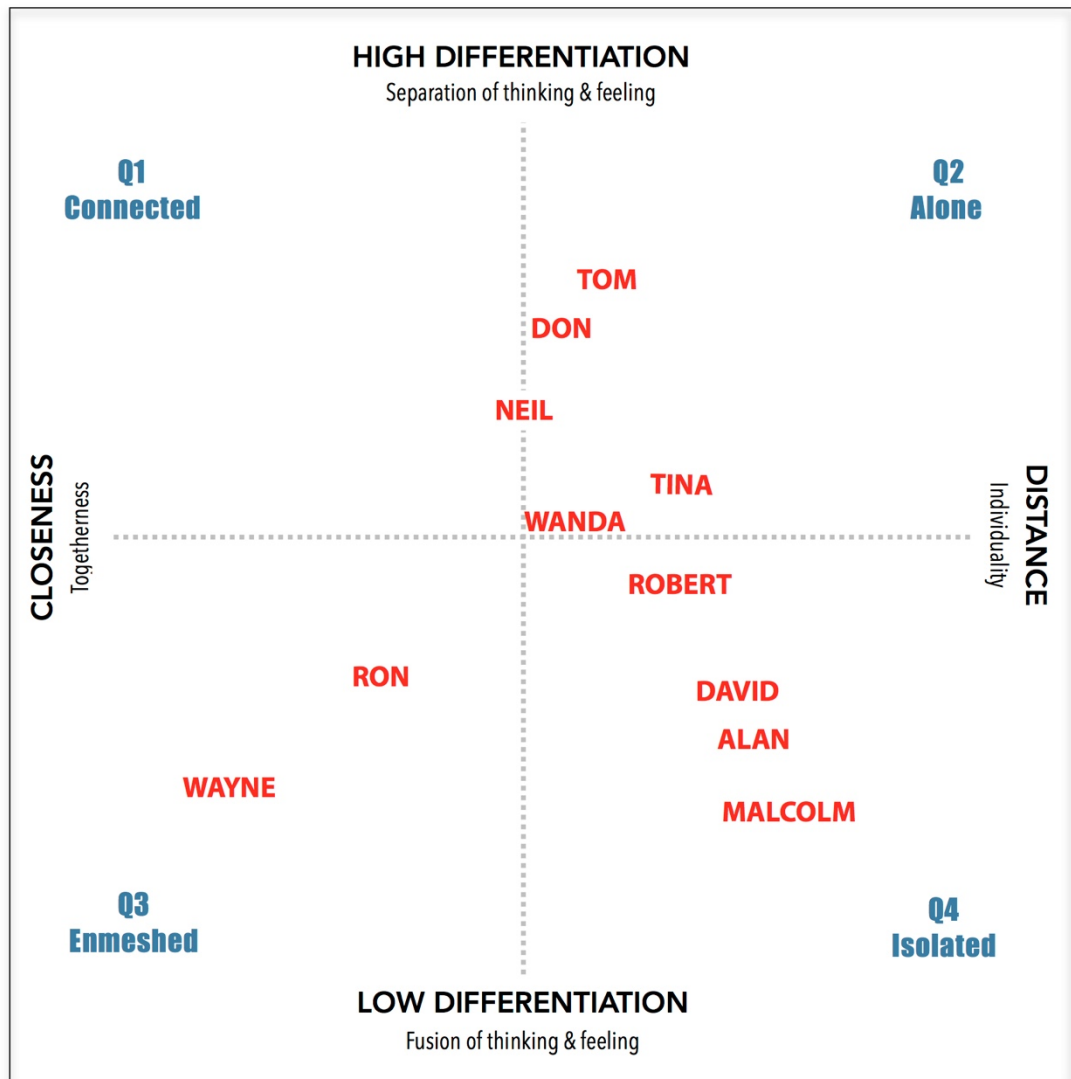
PARTICIPANT POSITIONING JUSTIFICATION

Higher differentiation (3 Steinke indicators):

Tom (Q2):   Courageous, calm & connected; challenged unethical behaviour; some left the church.

Don (Q2):   Courageous, calm & connected; operated from conviction; some left the church, others "had his back".

Neil (Q1/Q2):   Courageous, calm & connected; branch church cut-off; signs of some anxious over-function.

Moderate differentiation (2 indicators):

Tina (lower Q2):   Courageous, connected; not so calm but challenged abusive behaviour; distanced by congregation.

Wanda (lower Q2): Courageous, connected; not so calm but challenged abusive behaviour; branch church cut-off.

Lower differentiation (0-1 indicators):

Robert (upper Q4): Challenged power-brokers but system reverted; tenuous connection and calm.

Ron (Q3):   Connected but over-functioning linked to wife's sickness.

David (upper Q4): Mood shaped by congregation's; distant; after breakdown, starts to self define.

Alan (Q4):   Anxious; loss of faith; disconnected; little hope.

Wayne (Q3):   Connected & loved; capitulated when resisted; nervous about inexperience.

Malcolm (Q4):   Mood shaped by congregation's; despairing; withdrew; no hope-renewing strategies.

Table 5 below, correlates the intensity of conflict experienced with the participants' level of differentiation, using Speed Leas' benchmarks and Steinke's indicators for differentiation.

Table 5 - Correlation of conflict level & differentiation

Conflict level: (from Speed Leas)	III Contest	IV Fight/flight	V Intractable situation
Higher Differentiation	-	Neil	Don Tom
Moderate Differentiation	-	Robert Tina	Wanda
Lower Differentiation	David Wayne Ron	Alan Malcolm	-

Don, Tom and Wanda faced intractable conflict that was unmanageable and evidenced by destructive intent.

Neil, Robert, Tina, Alan and Malcolm faced opponents who were not trying to destroy them but the objective was punitive and factions had solidified.

David, Wayne and Ron faced conflicts that were neither merely a problem to solve nor punitive in intent.

Table 6 below gathers into one single chart the data from table 5, the distribution of themes, the levels of differentiation for each participant plus the type of systemic change they achieved.

Table 6 - Effected change, conflict level, themes & differentiation level

Participant	Systemic Change	Conflict Intensity	Shock	Inadequacy	Alienation	Relinquishment	Hopelessness
Tom	Lasting	V	◆◆	◆	◆◆	◆	–
Don	Lasting	V	◆	◆	◆◆	◆	–
Neil	Temporary	IV	◆◆	◆◆	◆◆	◆	◆
Tina	Temporary	IV	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆
Wanda	Temporary	V	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆
Robert	Temporary	IV	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆
Alan	Changed by	IV	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆
Ron	Changed by	III	◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆	◆	◆◆
Wayne	Changed by	III	◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆	◆◆
David	Changed by	III	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆	◆◆
Malcolm	Changed by	IV	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆
Legend:	Higher differentiation	Moderate differentiation	Lower differentiation		◆◆◆ High incidence	◆◆ Moderate incidence	◆ Low incidence

Overall there is a higher incidence rate across all five themes for clergy in the moderate to lower differentiation ranges than there is for the three clergy in the higher range. Those rated with higher differentiation, encountered levels IV and V conflict but conveyed little or no signs of depression, emotional paralysis, backing off or backing down, nor of entertaining thoughts of resignation. They were less shocked by bad behaviour even though they faced the worst it had to offer. They stayed in touch, even with their antagonists, challenged their bad behaviour and endured with high hopes. Neil's sense of hopelessness only extended to his recalcitrant branch church. Beyond that he remained optimistic.

Four vicars at the lower end of differentiation admitted they had periods of depression and burnout and five had considered resignation from their parish,

including one who only survived because of his external interests, and one who had considered resigning from ministry per se. All the clergy in this range felt strongly about their inadequacies and rated high on hopelessness.

Only those with lower differentiation encountered level III conflicts and yet they scored comparatively high incidences of inadequacy, alienation and hopelessness. They pose a risk of experiencing greater distress should they be confronted with more intense conflict, such as those which Don, Tom or Wanda faced.

The two vicars who earned a moderate differentiation rating scored high for all themes, yet they expressed a degree of hope. One might say their hopefulness gave rise to greater resilience. However, Bowen would argue conversely, that even their moderate level of differentiation generated some hope.

BFST generally predicts that higher differentiated individuals will generate more hope, will be less troubled by what happens around them and contribute less to that trouble by their exercise of emotional restraint. It also generally predicts that lower differentiated people will experience the opposite. So far, this generalisation would appear to reflect most of the data from the sample and confirm Bowen's claim that the theory is a valid way to conceptualise human experience.

Clergy who achieved lasting change

Consideration is now given to the correlation between differentiation and the systemic change that clergy achieved.

Tom and Don experienced the worst type of conflict, yet the outcomes they described were remarkable. In both cases, the pathogens who were 'sucking the life out' of the church (Tom's phrase) departed as a direct result of the challenges by their vicars to their behaviour. The churches experienced an immediate and lasting

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mood shift from heaviness to lightness as if 'the lid had been lifted', Tom said. Tom and Don did not achieve the change by panicking and rushing in to counter-attack their opponents. Rather, they set boundaries on what they would and would not accept, treated people with respect, even though it was not reciprocated, and stood by their principles. Neil displayed the same attitude, except he showed signs of distancing from the independent branch church, a major source of resistance, and left it in the care of his assistant. He fought battles in the traditional main church and his self-confessed style was 'principled' and 'consultative'. Although he only brought temporary change to the branch church, he achieved lasting change at the principal church, relocating the family service off site which culminated in rapid growth numbers and also changed the culture.

The researcher's subjective observation was that these leaders stood out from other clergy in the study. In the interviews, they appeared self-confident but not self-congratulatory, optimistic, uncomplaining and generally happy.

Bowen would conceptualise these examples as differentiated leadership and Bowen proponents would say that a differentiated leader will ultimately change the whole system. They would therefore not be surprised by this sort of outcome.

Clergy who achieved temporary change

Tina and Wanda had moments of bravery when they 'came out fighting' by challenging the agitators and disempowering them. However, they also reacted emotionally at times in ways that didn't appear among the clergy just mentioned. The change they achieved was profound in that no one before them had attempted what they had done in their churches. For years, the systems in both churches had functioned to keep the most dependent people happy, those who reciprocated by

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holding the church hostage with their guilt-tripping and emotional blackmail. But, unlike Tom and Don, their opponents did not leave the church, so it remains to be seen whether the changes to their functioning positions become permanent. Added to this doubt is the fact that Tina and Wanda scored high on 'relinquishment' and, if they were to depart, the disenfranchised parties might resume their roles and return the church to its old ways.

Wayne attempted to change the structure and function of his parish council but his challenge met with resistance and a lack of cooperation. Wayne, not being one to 'look for a fight', relented and things went back to the way they were. Although this was a low-level conflict, Wayne scored a high incidence on the theme of inadequacy indicating his lower tolerance for opposition. Ron also tried to inspire his indolent church with a new vision statement, new logo and new evangelistic tools but the response was 'been there, done that'. Ron's reaction was to do what the church wouldn't do, as did his wife and it impacted her health. Robert tried to introduce new blood into the lay leadership. The wardens reacted strongly by resigning but they were promptly re-elected the following year and things returned to 'normal'.

These leaders attempted to change the culture of the church and succeeded in some areas for a time. But when strong resistance was encountered, they backed off or redirected their energies somewhere else.

Bowen suggested that, those with a lower level of differentiation tend to obscure clear and convicted thinking. This functional style is not likely to bring deep and lasting systemic change and it seems a valid way to conceptualise the outcomes among these leaders.

Clergy whom the system changed

Two clergy, Alan and Malcolm, scored high in all five themes, more than any other participant. They were deeply affected by the conflicts they faced and their mood and behaviour altered substantially. Rather than change their culture, the culture changed them.

Alan, the assistant minister who was thrust into a crisis and became a reluctant rector, was so emotionally traumatised by the parish, itself caught in the grip of grief and anger, that he descended to a point of doubting his faith and needing professional help. His "life was dominated" by one man's sin.

Malcolm's emotional state seemed to be married to the congregation's. During the "honeymoon" period, Malcolm was popular, successful and praised and he was on a high. But, unpopularity and a hostile church cast him to despair, a state in which he went so far as to question his ministry calling. The shift was dramatic, from centre stage limelight to a hermit-like recluse. His conflict level was rated IV but could possibly have been less intense than that. But it is not so much the intensity of conflict that determines the outcome, it is how the leader responds that is pivotal and this is where differentiation makes a difference. Alan's and Malcolm's lower differentiation made them more susceptible to instinctive, automatic reactions. BFST maintains that emotional leaders cannot lead effectively if they are as anxious as the people they serve (Steinke, 2006, 34).

Differentiation makes the difference

The responses of these clergy to their challenges can be explained in many ways using many models that shed light on human interaction. This study set out to explore the experiences of vicars and whether BFST concepts and language could

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adequately and meaningfully describe those experiences. What the participants

described had strong emotional content and the emotion was systemic in that it was

transferrable, moving in cycles of reaction. Furthermore, they revealed their own

emotional side by divulging their vulnerability to opposition and their responses of

strength or weakness depending on their inner resilience. BFST's concept of

differentiation not only resonated with the experiences but added a whole new

dimension for understanding the dynamics and, therefore, the essences of the

phenomena. Some significant conclusions can be drawn from the data above:

1. Lasting change only occurred with a more highly differentiated leader
   who challenged a low functioning system by their very presence and their
   principled leadership. This is a predictable element of Bowen theory as
   Friedman confirmed (Friedman, 1985, 229),

   > If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position
   > as 'head' and work to define his or her own goals and self, while
   > *staying in touch* with the rest of the organism, there is a more than
   > reasonable change that the body will follow.

   Steinke added that this is especially true in times of crisis (Steinke, 2006,
   71),

   > At times of crisis, a congregation functions best when its key leaders
   > are differentiated.

2. Moderately differentiated clergy were able to achieve some change but
   were more prone to personalise the opposition. They were not as
   successful as the higher differentiated leaders at effecting lasting change.
   Moreover, temporary change meant that the system was at risk of
   reverting to its old ways after a clergy person had moved on.

3. Lower differentiated leaders were more prone to emotional paralysis in the face of intense conflict.

4. No lasting change occurred without conflict. Conflict was the catalyst for change but only when matched with a differentiated leader. The combination of conflict and a more highly differentiated leader brought systemic change that was astounding. Nancy Tatum Ammerman wrote, 'congregations that systematically avoid conflict are also very likely to avoid change' (Ammerman in Steinke, 2006, 80).

5. Low differentiated leaders and their families are at risk of psychological damage if they are situated in churches that have a history of intense conflict.

It can be seen that the five essential phenomenological themes and BFST, especially the aspects of anxiety and differentiation, move roughly parallel to each other. However, there were two anomalies to this generalisation. Firstly, BFST would anticipate those of low differ differentiation to score high on the five themes. However, Ron and Wayne scored less than the other lowly differentiated individuals, meaning they were troubled less. But, they also confronted less intense conflict and this may have been a determining factor in the difference. In Bowen theory, a person's differentiation and functioning style are more obvious when anxiety is high. In scenarios of relative peace and calm, they are not as obvious. Pastorally, however, Ron and Wayne's responses indicate there is still cause for concern. Secondly, the themes of relinquishment and hopelessness exhibited the most variation among moderate to low differentiated individuals and could not be fully explained by levels of differentiation alone.

However, there was enough evidence in this study to accept that BFST speaks to real experience in local Anglican churches and in the experiences of clergy. BFST offers a unique dimension for understanding the relational dynamics of parish life. Anxiety and differentiation are vague concepts and difficult to measure, but this study has provided, with some detail, what they look like in these settings.

That being the case, the five core themes of shock, inadequacy, alienation, relinquishment and hopelessness constitute key work areas for denominational authorities and others involved in clergy formation to consider. The gravity of these new vicar narratives alone, regardless of the helpful insights of BFST, is enough to warrant strategies that prepare clergy to recognise and respond to control, feelings of incompetency, isolation and resignation by strengthening their resilience and solidifying their sense of calling.

CHAPTER 9: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Thus far, this thesis has provided stories and offered social commentary on what happened and why it happened. This section adds a theological commentary by attempting to address the normative task (Osmer, 2008) by asking questions such as: What ought to be happening? How should these churches and their pastors be functioning? How is God working in this?

Churches flourish better under differentiated leaders

The parishes that were led by more highly differentiated ministers, demonstrated healthier functioning despite experiencing more intense conflict. Parishes led by less differentiated clergy exhibited little or no change in their functional styles. This begs the question, was this merely an anecdotal coincidence or a manifestation of some undergirding principle? Two key biblical themes, namely the figure of the shepherd and the qualifications for church leaders listed in the pastoral epistles, reveal some interesting paradigms.

Firstly, the pastoral figure of the shepherd in biblical literature referred metaphorically to the leaders of God's people, who were commonly referred to as God's flock (1 Pet. 5:2). The figure found its derivation literally in the sheep-herders of the ancient near east and paralleled the caring and protective role they exercised over their flocks. Different types of shepherds were evident and these can be classified into three groups:

1. Good shepherds: a good shepherd was depicted as a self-effacing person who was willing to surrender his life for the wellbeing of the flock. For this reason, Jesus described himself as *the* good shepherd *par excellence*

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(Jn. 10:11). A good shepherd's typical responsibilities included protecting, feeding, nurturing and guiding the flock (Ps. 23). However, their leadership was not always welcomed and they often faced retaliation from those whose intention was to exploit the flock. There is a correlation to be recognised here between 'good' and 'differentiated' because, without being differentiated, the shepherds of old would not have stood defiantly as God's representatives. Differentiation does not mean they were perfect, it just means they stood for God and refused to capitulate to crowd pressure that, ultimately, would harm the flock.

2. Bad shepherds: some Israelite kings (Jer. 23:1-2) and hired servants (Jn. 10.12) cared little for the people under their care. Instead, they abandoned them, scattered them and exposed them to predators (Matt. 7:15). They acted as minders or thieves who exploited the flock in order to satisfy their own ambitions and tastes (John 10:11-13). They resembled poorly differentiated leaders[31].

3. Underdeveloped shepherds. It is possible to trace a development in the character and leadership of some biblical figures over time. For instance, the apostle Peter, who denied knowing Jesus (Matt. 26:70-74), boldly preached to the crowd that had, only weeks before, chanted for Jesus' crucifixion (Acts 2:4ff), then defiantly defended his claim of a resurrected Christ before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29-32). Paul's mysterious detour into Arabia and Syria for seventeen years prepared him for his

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[31] See Kerr and Bowen's quote on p16 which correlates low differentiation with selfish, aggressive and avoidance behaviours which break down cohesiveness, altruism, and cooperativeness. Such behaviour patterns align with the bible's description of bad shepherds.

missionary journeys (Gal. 1:17-20, 2:1-2). Moses, Elijah, Jonah and Timothy showed signs of emotional weakness in their ministries. They were not disqualified, but continued in the service of God (Ex. 4:10-17; 1 Kgs. 19:3-16; Jonah 3:1; 1 Tim. 1:3, 4:11-16).

As a general rule, the flock of God faired best under good shepherds, survived under undeveloped shepherds and suffered under bad shepherds.

Secondly, the qualifications for appointing church leaders contained in the pastoral epistles[32] indicate God's intention to furnish the church with differentiated leaders. Many of the qualities listed by the apostle Paul are remarkably similar to Bowen's idea of differentiation. For example, a leader must be "sober-minded", "disciplined", "self-controlled", "not arrogant" and "able to manage his own family well". These are traits that BFST would regard as branching from a highly-differentiated individual. Paul urged Timothy to advance in these qualities (Frith, 2014), for Timothy was portrayed as an evolving leader and a somewhat timid and poorly differentiated young pastor (2 Tim. 1:7). Stressed by various pressure groups and his own insecurities, he had considered abandoning his post (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul's counsel centred on Timothy's own development as a stronger, more resilient leader (2 Tim. 1:7), by means of recalling his heritage (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim 1:5, 3:15), his ministry calling (2 Tim. 1:6), the model ministers to emulate (1 Tim. 6:13; 2 Tim. 1:11, 2:8, 3:10-11) and his security in the gospel (1 Tim. 1:15-19; 2 Tim. 1:8-10, 2:1). Paul's words read like a fatherly pep talk, inspiring his son to cultivate a more solid self for his own personal welfare and so that the church would be better served (1 Tim 4:16).

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[32] 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

In God's economy, good shepherds and high functioning leaders enable the church to thrive. However, there is another side to thriving churches and that is the proper functioning of members.

Flourishing churches self-regulate

Some participants were confronted by immature congregations which tolerated and excused the few who spread lies and discord. Some clergy were strong enough to confront them, but most over-functioned because they, unwittingly, shouldered their congregations' responsibilities to intervene and self-correct. For example, some clergy over-functioned by acting as rescuers or fixers and their congregations under-functioned reciprocally by spectating. Conversely, other members over-functioned as de facto rectors while their clergy felt powerless and their congregations opted for passivity.

God's intention for flourishing church life relies heavily on his children to function according to his design. For example, Jesus declared that he would build his church based on Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 16:15-19), confirming that his plan for the church's future development involved both divine and human participation. Likewise, Paul wrote of church building as a joint enterprise. The godhead who created (Eph. 1:3-14) and who permeates the church (Eph. 4:6) partners with his people in nurturing the body of Christ toward the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:4-16).

Furthermore, the human side of responsibility is twofold. Firstly, Christ gives various types of leaders to equip his people for "works of service" or, literally, ministry. Secondly, the ministry in which Christ's people are meant to engage is described specifically in relational terms as "speaking the truth in love". As they do

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this, they actually imitate the godhead, for within the godhead the Father, Son and Spirit relate to each other in truth and love. Hence, truth (doctrine) balanced with love (ethics) are the essential ingredients for church life and progress. The body of Christ is intended by God to function as a self-regulating entity as it "builds itself up in love as each part does its work" (Eph. 4.16), thus cultivating its own culture of truth and love. Leaders fulfil their role by equipping members to develop this environment (Eph. 4:12).

This is a challenging task because the balance between truth and love can easily be upset, as demonstrated in the participants' churches. Speaking the truth without love leads to callousness while love without truth leads to misguided sentimentalism and acting without truth and love is just plain evil.

Speaking the truth in love is so important that God may even abandon churches which prefer lies and lust (e.g. Rev. 2:4-5)[33] or, at least he may sentence them to succumb to their own destructive devices (Gal. 5:15). Just as Jesus moved on from towns because of their sheer unbelief (Matt. 13:58), God can bypass churches that persistently fail to function according to his design.

The body is also meant to function like an organic immune system (Steinke, 2000) as it identifies and combats viral elements that do not belong to the body but invade it and threaten its wellbeing, including pathogens. John noted that there were some in his churches who had departed from apostolic doctrine and wrote "they did not really belong to us" (1 Jn. 2:19). Jesus warned that the church would contain a blend of wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30), sheep and wolves (Matt. 7:15-20). He cautioned his disciples not to judge people by regarding them as unredeemable (Matt.

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[33] Ironically, this warning was issued to the church at Ephesus.

7:1-2), but he also taught them to set ethical boundaries and isolate the unrepentant if necessary (Matt.7:6, 18:15-17). Paul had similar words to say about expelling the immoral brother (1 Cor. 5:1-5). The point being made is not *how* action might be taken but *who* is to take action? These instructions were aimed at the congregation at large. Likewise, in many New Testament letters, instructions for ethical correction are directed to the congregation, rather than the leaders[34]. In biblical grammar the regular use of the plural form, particularly that of the second person personal pronoun, in the NT letters reinforces this thought. The references address the community and underscore the corporate nature of the church's responsibility to act, a feature that is lost in English translations[35].

In flourishing churches, Christian maturity is understood as a communal goal and progress towards it is not left to providence alone or to the church leadership. Rather, every member is expected to contribute to and protect a truth-telling and loving culture. Leaders train and enable members to do so and neither party confuses their responsibilities.

Systemic change summons conflict

The participants of this study expected to encounter conflict in their church but the manner with which people fought and the power tactics they employed shocked the clergy. In some cases, churches had avoided major conflict for years in order to keep the peace but had become complicit and so empowered some severe pathogens.

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[34] For example, Matt. 18:15-17; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Gal. 6:1-5; Col 2:6-8. In Phil. 4:2-3, by naming Euodia and Syntyche in a public letter, Paul has announced their conflict to be a matter for congregational concern and action.

[35] English translations invariably translate the second person personal pronoun as 'you' whether singular or plural, thus obscuring the distinction. In many NT letters an exhortation in plural form implies communal action. However, modern churches, guided by the English anomaly, individuate these references resulting in personal application rather than corporate.

When the system was finally challenged, their churches managed conflict poorly which resulted in traumatised clergy.

The bible recognises that God can turn crises into positive outcomes. The clashes between Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 15:19-20), Israel and the nations (Josh. 1:10, 11), prophets and kings (1 Kgs. 18:36-38), Jesus and Pharisees (Matt. 3:7), apostles and authorities (Acts 4:8-11), often resulted in ground breaking change, but not without conflict.

The church is not immune to conflict because it lives in two kingdoms, the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God, the present evil age and the age of the Spirit. The church lives between the *now* of Christ's spiritual blessings and the *not yet* of God's unconsummated promises. Christians live midstream in the salvific process of justification-sanctification-glorification, as dual citizens of both earth and heaven. They struggle with the tension between sins of the flesh and the life of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18) in a spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-17). This is not simply an internal battle which the individual believer fights. Sin can be a communal phenomenon, as the participants' churches have demonstrated. Challenging whole communities that have enculturated sin as the norm (Gal. 5:19-21) will inevitably result in resistance.

However, differentiated leaders and self-regulating churches can make a difference by how they process themselves during disputes and this will determine the depth to which leaders are impacted.

Systemic change impacts leaders

Sin should come as no surprise to the Christian and especially to the theologically trained pastor. And yet, as the participants of this study discovered,

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shock over witnessing the ugly side of human nature can be felt by even the most differentiated of leaders. Consequently, most participants experienced the five core theme responses with some recoiling to the point of collapse.

Their experience, however, was not unique. Moses was so appalled at the speed with which Israel traded Yahweh for a golden calf, that he broke the two stone tablets in fury and disgust (Exod. 32:19). Jesus flogged the temple traders in righteous rage (Matt. 21:12) then wilted a fig tree in despair because it symbolised the fruitlessness and corruption of Jerusalem (Matt. 21:19). Paul was astonished that the Corinthian church celebrated a member's incestuous behaviour (1 Cor. 5:1) and that the Galatian church had adopted a surrogate gospel (Gal. 1:6).

If sin was rational, leaders might be able to predict its fallout and prepare themselves better. But, "cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do" (1 Jn. 2:16) ambushes us when we least expect it. However, being shocked by sin may not be all bad because, by feeling it, leaders can empathise with the grief felt by God's own Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

Shepherd trauma, resulting from conflict, appears as a biblical theme. While all Christians can expect various trials (Jms. 1:2) and to share in Christ's sufferings (Rom. 8:18; Phil. 1:29), shepherds face additional trouble due to their role. Jesus warned his disciples, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn. 15:20), and sent them into the world to emulate his own mission (Jn. 20:21)[36]. Paul invited a reticent Timothy to accept his share of suffering for gospel ministry (2 Tim.2:3).

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[36] Chapters 13-17 in John's gospel are John's version of the great commission. By the time John wrote, the early church had begun to question the Apostles' accurate transmission of Jesus' teaching. John 13-17 is John's defence of Apostolic integrity by recording

Biblical leaders responded to opposition with mixed feelings. Some, such as Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:14), Moses (Ex. 32:19-21), Jesus (Mk. 14:50) and Paul (2 Tim. 1:15, 2 Tim. 4:16) were abandoned by their supporters because they displayed quadrant 2 type leadership[37]. Others, such as Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:3-5), Jonah (Jonah 4:5) and Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3-4), anxiously retreated from others, resembling a quadrant 3 reaction. Either way, they ended up feeling isolated and alienated. Biblical leaders also experienced a sense of inadequacy at times and felt overwhelmed by their circumstances. Jesus, faced with imminent arrest and death, was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Matt. 26:38). Paul and his companions despaired of life itself and felt the sentence of death (2 Cor. 1:8-9). Others wanted to relinquish their commission, such as Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:4) or Jonah who prayed that they might die (Jonah 4:3) or Jesus who asked his Father to remove his cup of suffering (Matt. 26:39) or Timothy who wanted to surrender his leadership of the Ephesian church (1 Tim. 1:3). God's leaders will get injured because they are only human, but differentiated leaders and high functioning churches can and should minimise the injuries.

It remains now to address the ramifications these insights have for clergy training and ministry support.

Jesus' endorsement of them. Hence, the references to persecution would apply specifically to the twelve rather than to Christians generally.

[37] See Richardson's graph in Appendix D.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This research developed from the researcher's own parish experience and from private discussions with clergy serving in their first parish. The stories that emerged resonated with the experiences of North American clergy described by church leaders in correspondence with the researcher. In both hemispheres, clergy recounted experiences of intense anguish and disillusionment that warranted investigation. This researcher was keen to investigate the world of Anglican inaugural rectors, especially as they encountered the emotional systems in their respective churches.

Eleven willing participants were interviewed and were invited to share their experiences of taking charge of their first parish. Hermeneutical phenomenology was chosen as the preferred research method because it illuminates lived experience and documents deep issues that are only contained in oral form. It was also chosen because it validates the contribution that the researcher's own horizon makes to the interpretive task. Five core themes emerged from the interviews which centred around ethical conduct and controlling behaviour. They were *shock, inadequacy, alienation, relinquishment* and *hopelessness*. Bowen's family systems theory was consulted during the data analysis phase in order to conceptualise the human drama and detect the emotional systems at work. Using the diagnostic tools of Bowen's scale of differentiation, Steinke's differentiation criteria, Leas' levels of conflict intensity and Richardson's functioning style graph, an estimate of the types of change effected by the rectors was proposed. The results indicated that higher differentiated clergy achieved lasting, systemic change even though they encountered more intense conflict and that the change they achieved was partly due to the departure of pathogens. Moderately differentiated clergy achieved only temporary

systemic change. Their pathogens remained in the church and the system reverted. Lower differentiated clergy, who faced the least amount of intense conflict, were changed by the system and were more prone to emotional paralysis.

Biblical texts were then consulted in order to add a theological perspective to the core themes and the determinants on systemic change. This revealed four theological norms for consideration:

1. Churches flourish better under differentiated leaders.

2. Flourishing churches self-regulate.

3. Systemic change summons conflict.

4. Systemic change impacts leaders.

The study concluded that BFST adds another dimension to understanding the experiences of clergy in their first parish by revealing the distribution of anxiety in parish settings and the impact made by differentiated leadership. However, exploring the families of origin of clergy, although a central aspect of BFST, did not fall within the scope of this study.

The findings in this study will be uniquely useful to church authorities, clergy formation procedures, theological institutions and aspirants to the pastorate because of their focus on the emotional and systemic dimensions of church life. The study challenges a number of existing assumptions such as the adequacy of conventional training for parish leadership, the innate self-sufficiency of new incumbents and that emotional resilience is instinctive. It also challenges the assumption that problems, which are deeply rooted in generational patterns of emotional nervousness, can be quick-fixed with techniques, talent or programmes.

The eleven participants strove to treat people, even their opponents, with fairness and dignity, while being treated unfairly and with disrespect. They worked hard to advance their church's welfare, they were mission oriented and proactive while juggling the complexities of their own family life. And they love the Lord Jesus. Through all this they persevered, not without emotional, mental and physical cost to themselves and their families. This researcher was humbled by their ordeals, inspired by their courage to challenge church bullies and is grateful for their candidness. He was able to empathise with their stories as he laughed with them and, at times, was nearly driven to tears with them. Their plight resonated with his own experiences at points and, having been someone who was survived being a new rector once, he continues to pray that they will look back on their experiences to see the footprints of God[38].

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[38] A reference to God's sustaining care in the poem *Footprints in the Sand,* author and date disputed.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to offer some positive proposals that, if implemented, could help to minimise clergy shock, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, alienation and attrition rates. This study has shown that clergy differentiation has the potential to be the singular influential factor that could bring maximum benefit for clergy and churches as they negotiate anxiety and seek to improve the relational culture. The study makes recommendations in the areas of clergy training/formation, clergy deployment, the coaching of new incumbents, and church health.

Clergy Training and Formation

This study recommends that clergy educators incorporate emotional systems theory into clergy training and development curricula. This recommendation is not made just to reduce the shock factor for new vicars, but out of a desire to supply congregations with strongly differentiated clergy, who can respond appropriately and effectively to the complexity of human drama in parishes. Education should include personal reflection by clergy on family of origin influences that shape their own responses and training to think systemically about church relational dynamics. This may prove to be a paradigm shift from the oversimplified, cause-and-effect thinking which tends to dominate problem solving in church circles and which often results in diagnosing individuals as 'identified patients', 'problem people' or 'difficult personalities'. According to Friedman, such labelling will only lead to a more paranoid system (Friedman, 1985, 209).

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Clergy deployment and redeployment

This study recommends that ecclesiastical authorities examine their selection criteria for deploying clergy to known conflicted parishes and assess a clergy person's level of differentiation before the appointment. Authorities are encouraged to exercise caution when appointing clergy of lower levels of differentiation to parishes where there is a history of conflict. If these appointments are pursued, additional practical and emotional support measures should be supplied wherever possible. Consideration should also be given to establishing short-term intentional interim ministries headed by skilled, experienced and differentiated clergy who are able troubleshoot conflicted parishes before a permanent incumbent is appointed.

It is also recommended that ecclesiastical authorities familiarise themselves with the dynamics of emotional systems and consider their own contribution to parish systems within their jurisdiction. Practices, such as hasty clergy appointments in order fill a vacant parish, high turnover of clergy in troubled parishes or improvised conflict resolution interventions, may be anxiety laden reactions that do not address deeper issues. A more systemic understanding of parish disturbances could also alleviate the typecasting of clergy as scapegoats, troublemakers or failures which can exacerbate their trauma and influence their prospects for future employment. Some participants in this research displayed symptoms indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder due, in part, to their loss of confidence. In such cases, recovery therapy is recommended before redeployment to another location or vocation.

Coaching New Incumbents

This study recommends that denominational authorities provide an induction process for first and second year incumbents, similar to the excellent proposal by Celoria and Roberson (2015) in their article on new school principals. Specifically, this would mean assigning coaches or mentors who would 'explore the emotional dimensions' (p. 86) of leadership with newly inducted incumbents. A well differentiated clergy person with parish leadership experience who could function as a confidant/consultant, independent of hierarchical authority would be desirable for the mentoring role.

Church Health

This study recommends that Anglican church leaders conduct research into and develop strategies for promoting church health that is relationally based and for helping church members navigate conflict fairly and constructively. This study has observed the systemic manifestation of sin through unregulated emotional reactivity and its corrosive consequences. It has produced evidence that congregations and authorities can, unwittingly, harbour and empower dysfunctional relational systems. Healthy, ethical and godly functioning in local churches is a matter of first importance for church authorities to consider. The criteria for assessing church health also needs to be revisited because health that is defined by correct doctrine, successful programmes, inspiring worship, powerful preaching or enterprising mission is inadequate, if these ventures are consistently sabotaged by the relational system. Quick-fix solutions by church authorities that simply relieve anxiety will not stem the tide of chronically dysfunctional congregations and church authorities

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would do well to explore more thorough strategies that produce deep, systemic

change. Church leaders should never be content with a Corinthian-type church[41].

Soli Deo gloria.

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[41] A reference to the Corinthian church's relational and spiritual immaturity portrayed in 1 & 2 Corinthians.

APPENDIX A: INVITATION LETTER FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear John,

Greetings and thank you for your willingness to consider this information and request as a result of our phone conversation.

As I mentioned, I am currently enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry degree with the [*relevant sponsoring institution*] and am about to commence a research project that intends to explore the experiences of Anglican clergy in their first charge. Hence, I am looking for rectors, vicars or curates-in-charge who would be interested in and willing to participate in the research by sharing their experiences. The involvement will not be onerous, just one or more interviews with me. At the outset please be assured that such interviews will be conducted in complete confidence and will follow the strict ethical guidelines set down by the [*relevant sponsoring institution*] for researchers. I would like to invite you to participate in this research. But first, let me introduce myself a little more, so you can know where I'm coming from.

I have been ordained for over thirty years in the [*relevant authorising institution*] and, in that time, I have pastored four parishes ranging from two church plants to a rural ministry and an inner city ministry. I also served as the senior assistant minister in a large church on [*relevant location*] for four years. Currently I work in a mental health facility as a chaplain employed by xxxxxx. As you can imagine, this breadth of experience has exposed me to a wide range of responses and reactions to my leadership in parish life, both positive and negative. It has also led me to take a special interest in the plight of other clergy and especially of those in charge of their first parish.

This research will afford me the opportunity to draw alongside inaugural church incumbents and see 'what's out there' and what are the main challenges that new incumbents face in parish ministry. To some extent I have already listened informally to other clergy relate the ups and downs of their stories over many years, but this research will allow me to add some academic rigour and document the findings which, I hope, will eventually be of some practical use to the participants and others.

So what would this research involve? First of all, my chosen research method is qualitative and phenomenologically in nature and would therefore involve a collaborative effort between myself and the participants. That is to say, I would not take the role of an expert who guides but rather as a fellow navigator with the participants, the two of us 'exploring the territory' together as it were.

Secondly, I would gather data via stories, narratives, memories etc. initially by a one-on-one recorded interview lasting up to two hours but extending to subsequent interviews if necessary. The interviews would be conducted, preferably, face to face or, if distance proved problematic, by using some other appropriate form of recordable dialogue, e.g. over Skype. Interviews and data collection will be held in the strictest confidence between myself and the participants and the identity of each

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participant and their church will be coded by me and kept secure to ensure anonymity.

Thirdly, reflection on and analysis of the gathered data will involve a collaborative process of information looping, i.e. transcripts of the interviews will be made available to participants for review or correction so that we could agree that the information I have gleaned is a true and accurate record.

And fourthly, the scope of the research will be limited to gathering information from the clerical participants alone. I will not be consulting with other bodies such as congregational members, colleagues or denominational officials.

However, it needs to be noted that there is the slight possibility, during the course of the research, that some participants may choose to share personal information which could be distressing to them. Participants need to be aware of this possibility and, should it eventuate, participants will have complete liberty to redirect or even terminate the process.

If, during the course of the research, any issues of concern arise for participants, they will be able to contact the following if necessary:

- the Dean of Postgraduate Studies at my sponsoring college [*relevant sponsoring institution*] by contacting the college on xxxxxxxxx.

- emailing my supervisor xxxxxx at xxxx@xxxxx.

- the Secretary, [*relevant sponsoring institution*] Ethics Committee. *Contact details*.

I appreciate the demands on your time and energy because I know from experience how frantic parish life can be, but I am convinced there is real potential in this research to gather some rich data that may assist you and other clergy in similar situations. I would therefore very much appreciate your participation in this research and I love the opportunity to hear your story.

If you have any questions please contact me via email or on my mobile (listed above). I would warmly welcome the opportunity to discuss this important research further with you should you feel the need for more information. Otherwise, if you are willing to participate in the research can I contact you again in, say, a week so we can make further arrangements? Many thanks.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX
D.Min. Candidate, [*relevant sponsoring institution*]
Contact details

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Participant Consent Form

Researcher's name:
Research participant's name:
Interview Date:
Place of interview:

I, the undersigned, am willing to participate in the research being conducted by xxxxxxx under the auspices of the postgraduate program of the [*relevant sponsoring institution*]. I declare that I am over 18 years old, and I participate voluntarily with no pressure or coercion from the researcher or other sources.

I understand that:

- No payment is expected for any interview or communication with me.

- I may withdraw from the interview process at any time, and do not have to answer any questions that I consider inappropriate or distressing.

- This interview will be conducted in the strictest confidence and none of the information I volunteer will be made known to any other participants. I understand that my personal identity or any identifying characteristics and the identity of my church will be obscured in the research.

- If anything I say is included in the final research submission I reserve the right to edit it or request its removal.

- I will be shown the final submission of the research or a prepared summary of the research findings.

- The researcher may interview me in this session and contact me later if the information I have given needs further clarification.

If, during the course of my participation, issues arise for me that are disturbing or of concern to me, or if I have any complaints about the research or the researcher I understand I may contact the Dean of Postgraduate Studies at his sponsoring college [*relevant sponsoring institution* on xxxxxxxx or email his supervisor xxxx@xxxx or contact the Secretary, [*relevant sponsoring institution*] Ethics Committee, [*relevant contact details*].

Signature of research participant: Date:

I, the researcher, acknowledge the participant's rights and wishes and commit myself to abide by this understanding.

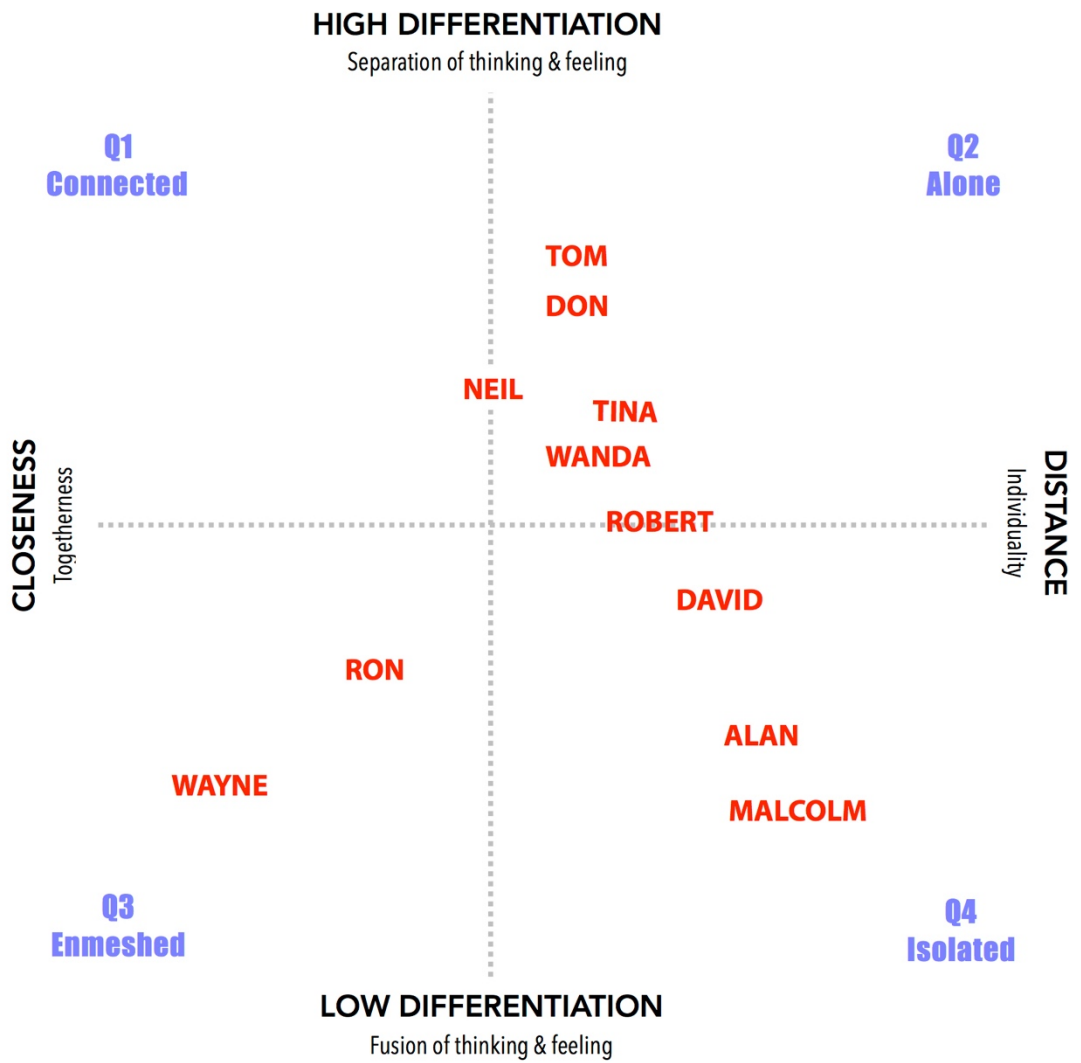Signature of researcher: Date:

APPENDIX C: MURRAY BOWEN'S EIGHT KEY ELEMENTS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY[43]

Differentiation of self	Social groups affect how people think, feel, and act, but individuals vary in their susceptibility to a "group think" and groups vary in the amount of pressure they exert for conformity. The less developed a person's "self," the more impact others have on his functioning and the more he tries to control, actively or passively, the functioning of others.
Triangles	A triangle is a three-person relationship system. A two-person system is unstable because it tolerates little tension before involving a third person. A triangle can contain much more tension without involving another person because the tension can shift around three relationships. If the tension is too high for one triangle to contain, it spreads to a series of "interlocking" triangles. Spreading the tension can stabilize a system, but nothing gets resolved.
Nuclear family emotional processes	The concept of the nuclear family emotional system describes four basic relationship patterns that govern where problems develop in a family: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, emotional distance.
Family projection process	Describes the primary way parents transmit their emotional problems to a child.
Multi-generational transmission processes	Describes how small differences in the levels of differentiation between parents and their offspring lead over many generations to marked differences in differentiation among the members of a multigenerational family.
Sibling position	Bowen incorporated Walter Toman's work on sibling positions. A child's sibling position in their family of origin will result in predictable adult roles. For example, oldest children tend to gravitate to leadership positions and youngest children often prefer to be followers.
Emotional cut-off	Describes people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them. Emotional contact can be reduced by people moving away from their families and rarely going home, or it can be reduced by people staying in physical contact with their families but avoiding sensitive issues.
Emotional processes in society	Describes how the emotional system governs behavior on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in a society
Work on a ninth concept, involving the functional aspect of human spirituality, is referred to in a footnote in Wolman and Stricker (1983, 139). No publications were found describing Murray Bowen's further development of a spiritual concept. The first five concepts are part of Bowan's original working concepts. The sixth was based on the publication of Walter Toman's first edition of Family Constellation: It's Effect on Personality and Social Behaviour, published in 1961, and which is now in the fourth edition. Two concepts, seven and eight, were added in 1975 (Bowen, 1976 in Rabstenjek, n.d., 4).	

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[43] Adapted from The Bowen Centre for Family Studies website, *http://thebowencenter.org/theory/eight-concepts*.

APPENDIX D: RICHARDSON'S FUNCTIONAL STYLE GRAPH

HIGH DIFFERENTIATION
Separation of thinking & feeling

Q1
Connected

Q2
Alone

TOM

DON

NEIL

TINA

WANDA

CLOSENESS
Togetherness

ROBERT

DISTANCE
Individuality

DAVID

RON

ALAN

WAYNE

MALCOLM

Q3
Enmeshed

Q4
Isolated

LOW DIFFERENTIATION
Fusion of thinking & feeling

APPENDIX E: DIFFERENTIATED/UNDIFFERENTIATED BEHAVIOUR

CONTRASTED

Source: Peter L. Steinke (2000, 91).

Table 7 - Undifferentiated and differentiated behaviour contrasted

Undifferentiated (instinctive, reactive, defensive, thoughtless behaviour)	**Differentiated** (intentional, responsive, responsible, thoughtful behaviour)
Quickly offended, easily provoked, too sensitive, slow to recover	Self-managing, shapes environment, resourceful
Reactive, instinctive, automatic	Responsive, intentional, thoughtful
Underhanded, covert, flourishes in the dark	Open, light-shedding, aware
Demanding, wilful, stubborn, resistant (especially to reason and love), unbending	Resilient, has sense of proportion
Think in black/white, or yes/no, intolerant of ambiguity, seek final solution, want all or nothing	Have breadth of understanding, allow time for things to process
Blame, criticize, displace, fault finding, have poor discrimination	Take responsibility for self, learn when challenged, define self from within self
Uptight, serious, defensive	Relaxed, at ease, sensible
Competitive, either with or against, see life as a contest, contemptuous	Take turns, collaborate, stay in touch even when tension grows
Vague, non-specific, cloaked	Clear, objective, purposeful
Create too much or too little space and one sided solutions	Create space, options and common goals

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APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS' KEY VOCABULARY

Table 8 - Participants' key vocabulary

Wanda	Breaks vicars, nasty, passive-aggressive, aggressive-aggressive, abuse, resign, tantrums, control, starve out, not us, ownership, bullied, time out.
Neil	Wild, culture, triangles, criticism, snake, negativity, anathema, unacceptable, immaturity, control, shot gun, won't talk, manipulated, resignation, cranky, cut-off, animosity, loathing, doesn't love, cannibalise.
Don	critical, discredit, control, want me out, her turf, nastiness, pedophile, gossip, backstabbing, negativity, godless, bad, infantile, burden, attack, sick, bi-polarish, crap, resign.
Alan	Traumatic, adulterous, no win, immature, overdid it, anger, grief, upset, hurt, distrust, attack, crazy, wanted out, chaotic, I never imagined, disaster, worst year, rampant, baggage, foetal position, dominated, annus horribilus.
Malcolm	Carnage, survival, belted, cold-shouldered, negative, critical, attack, hammered.
Wayne	Expected, lame duck, stack the decks, difficult, ugly, grubby, deficiencies, massive frustration, failed.
Tom	Volatile, blows up, prickly, instability, egg shells, high maintenance, dysfunctional, sucking the life out, wild, violence, mad, accusation, psych, battle, survival.
Ron	Callousness, holding back, failing, apathy, backlash, upset, cynical, pain, grieved, fatigued.
Tina	Offended, conflict, rumours, poison, controlling, in love, nasty, punch to the face, accusation, demise, bullet-makers, mean, shove it, inappropriate, hugged, paternalism, bullying.
Robert	Dysfunctional, fight, ill feeling, shouting, accusations, easily riled, hotpot, attacked, heat, hammered, way they related, floored, shocked, flabbergasted, resigned, ugly, awful, control.
David	Draining, spot fires, out of control, not caring, overwhelmed, lack of support, resign, unacceptable, nasty, dismissive, immaturity, nerves, react, back away, dysfunctional.

APPENDIX G: CLUSTERED UNITS OF MEANING

Table 9 - Clustered units of meaning

Theme	Invariable constituents (nodes)	
Shock	Abuse Bad behaviour Brick wall Bullying Church officer behaviour Clergy depression Clergy feeling drained/burnout Clergy feeling gutted Clergy grief and loss Clergy shock at behaviour Coalitions Cold shouldering/Abandonment Conflict directed at clergy Criminal Criticism Culture shock	Deception Emotional reaction Gossip Immorality Impact on family Incivility toward clergy Justice – lack of Maturity/immaturity Over-reactivity Passivity Power struggle Resistance/rebellion Shock/surprise Trust/Suspicion
Inadequacy	Clergy depression Clergy feeling drained/burnout Clergy feelings of inadequacy Clergy feelings of incompetence Clergy self-doubt Clergy support (or lack thereof) Failing Health/sickness	Lack of skills Overwhelmed Overworked Powerlessness PTSD Uncertainty Unpreparedness Weakness
Alienation	Belonging (sense of) Betrayed Cold shouldering/Abandonment Diocesan officials Family distancing Honeymoon Isolated Lonely Rescuer/fixer Taking a stand	
Relinquishment	Clergy reassessment of calling Clergy self-assessment Clergy wanting to get out Despondency Disillusionment Future ministry Loss of faith Trapped	
Hopelessness	Circumstances Clergy coping strategies Clergy self-assessment Coping strategies External interests Hope renewal Vision renewal	

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