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**‘Evangelistening’ – Listening as Evangelism in Caring Concern for Community**

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By

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## Chapter 1.

### INTRODUCTION

Anglican congregations throughout Western countries are struggling with the decline of membership numbers as the societal context becomes more secular. Members at Henderson Anglican Church in Auckland, New Zealand, are faithfully seeking their spiritual growth as they experience God in a Christian context. The members are evangelical in that they are welcoming to the community and hoping for new members that they might experience the blessings of the Christian life. Listening is an evangelism tool that works well in a secular and increasingly multi-cultural society like New Zealand. Church members can share the Christian experience without needing to assert Christianity's preeminence, and it has the added benefit of encouraging the Christian community and personal growth.

My thesis does not intend to redefine evangelism or the call of the church anew; instead, it provides some practical guidelines to help the church fulfill its vocation. My parish benefitted from learning to listen with one another. My goal for this thesis project is to offer a method through which churches might approach evangelism for ministry and mission to their members as well as connecting them to the broader community. The title itself “Evangelisting” is a direct reference to a book by Tim Sumpter *Evangelisting: Recovering the Art of Listening in Evangelism*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sumpter, *Evangelisting: Recovering the Art of Listening in Evangelism* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2011).

## **Ministry Context and Background**

To understand the chosen methodology, it is essential to give an overview of the ministry context and background. This thesis project is rooted in the context of my community, the Anglican Parish of Henderson. This chapter describes the context of the parish with the first section highlighting the surrounding community of Henderson and the background of St Michaels and St Mark's Churches. The second section discusses issues that St Michaels experienced between 2010-2014, such as the church split influenced by wider church politics. The third section describes church decline and how this has resulted in a significant decrease in congregational ministry to the community at large. Finally, I briefly explain the project design, and why I thought, as Vicar, it was the appropriate choice.

I have been the Vicar of the parish of Henderson since August 2017. The Parish has two churches, St Michael's and All Angels in Henderson and St Mark's Church in Swanson. St Michaels is a suburban church with the capacity to seat three hundred and fifty people. On a typical Sunday, we have two services with thirty people at the 8:00 am service and ninety-five people at the family service. St Mark's is a small rural church with a capacity to seat seating about 70 - 80 people comfortably. While the thesis includes both churches as one Parish unit, there will be times that I will refer to them as individual Churches.



## **1.1 Section one Henderson Community - Population and Ethnicity**

The Anglican parish of Henderson sits in the heart of Henderson, West Auckland. Having been set up in 1914, it is part of the Henderson-Massey Local Board area, situated between the foothills of the Waitākere Ranges in the west and the Waitematā Harbor in the east. Its location is close to the commercial center of Henderson in the foothills of the Waitakere Ranges. It is a multicultural community representative of people from many all over the world. The parish values relationships, friendships, and has a strong sense of family and fellowship based on their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Its members try to support each other in the faith, to provide a welcoming place for visitors, newcomers, and those who are curious or desire to learn about the Christian faith.

In the past, parish clergy were known to reach out to local schools and retirement villages. For instance, in 1982, the vicar at the time volunteered to hold a carol service for the local schools. Currently, the clergy offer services to surrounding retirement villages, the local Police Station, and the parish is involved in community outreach by opening its facilities for use to community groups in exchange for a small fee or, depending on the circumstances, at no charge. Apart from the church groups, our facilities are home to thirteen other community groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous, which has met in our building for over forty years.

Henderson-Massey Local Board area has experienced strong population growth between 2006 to 2013.<sup>2</sup> The local board area is one of considerable ethnic diversity, with

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<sup>2</sup> Auckland Council.govt.nz -How Auckland Council works, <https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/about-auckland-council/how-auckland-council-works/local-boards/all-local-boards/henderson-massey-local-board/Pages/about-henderson-massey.aspx>, Between the 2006 and 2013 censuses, population growth was 9 percent compared to 8 percent regionally. Medium population projections suggest that Henderson-Massey could be home to 156,600 residents by 2033

a large proportion of residents born overseas (33%), and 61% of the people born abroad have been in New Zealand for more than ten years.<sup>3</sup> The median household income in Henderson-Massey was \$66,900 in 2013, significantly lower than the regional median of \$76,500. Analysis of individual income levels in 2013 shows that there was a smaller proportion of persons earning a high income (over \$100,000 per year) in Henderson-Massey (3%) compared to the region (7%). In 2013, (19 %) of households in Henderson-Massey derived self-employment or business income, compared to (26%) across all Auckland households.

West Auckland, with its ethnic diversity and low economic status, presents an opportunity for the church to be the good news. The most proper way to engage with these issues is by sensitizing the congregation to the many matters affecting our community. As Vicar, I have identified many of these issues within the community surrounding our parishes, and I believe that some of our congregants might be aware of these issues but are unsure as to how to provide solutions.

### **Issues prevalent in the area**

Social issues prevailing in the area vary. Henderson-Massey has one of the highest unemployment rates in Auckland, of which the majority are young people with no education or training. Most businesses are small to medium enterprises, and automation and decline of retail are affecting the future of work, thus lowering household incomes, and resulting in poverty. While Henderson's challenges are undoubtedly related to local,

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<sup>3</sup> Compared to Auckland, Henderson-Massey has a slightly lower proportion of residents of European (56%) ethnicity and a higher percentage of people of Māori (16%) and Pacific (20%) ethnicities. Europeans made up 57.8%, Maori 14.9%, Pacific people 17.6%, and Asian 15.6% of the Henderson-Massey population in 2006. The figures represent a lower percentage of Europeans and a higher percentage of Maori and Pacific people than within the population throughout the Waitemata board region.

national, and international trends, some issues have pastoral implications and the church can take some responsibility for the current state of the wider community; thus, collective church efforts are necessary to address matters such as addiction, violence, poverty, homelessness, vision, and hope for the future.

## **1.2 Section Two – Issues Experienced within the Parish**

The Parish’s vision is “to grow a family of thriving and enthusiastic communities in which people of all ages and all cultures wholeheartedly, love, serve and obey Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> To this end, the parish had set up programs such as fellowship groups and community outreach programs. However, in 2014, the Parish saw a reduction in numbers when the vicar left with a third of the members because they felt they could not stay in a church that was moving towards the blessing of same-sex relationships. The split affected many of the daily activities that were set up to facilitate a realization of the vision. Affected activities included home groups, fellowship groups for young adults and young families, healing services, community outreach, and evangelism.

A key concern for St Michael’s is to recover aspects of Parish life that enabled members to engage with one another as well as minister to the surrounding community of Henderson. When searching for their next Vicar, the parish profile highlighted the parish’s desire to find a person who was able to help in growing the church again. Their next Vicar needed to be interested in re-establishing the different ministry groups that existed before the 2014 split. The desire to grow is understandable; however, at what cost? What methods are we to use for growth, and what motivation drives the desire to

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<sup>4</sup> Anglican Parish of Henderson, St Michael’s and All Angels and St Marks Swanson, Parish Profile 2017, 2.

build the church? Who grows the church? Is it by human efforts or the work of the Holy Spirit?

It was clear that the church wanted to engage with the broader community.<sup>5</sup> Since joining this church, I have seen that the missing link in recovering and reviving outreach activities is the capacity to listen and extend sincere hospitality. The Parish has the potential to grow again and engage in its mission to spread the gospel by relearning to listen and use hospitality as a bridge that will take us where we need to be - at the center of the community.

Consequently, in August 2018, we ran an Evangelism/Listening Project called God Space as part of my thesis research.<sup>6</sup> The project created opportunities for parishioners to interact with each other and get to know each other better. Essential skills that we engaged in during this project were listening, noticing, serving others, and telling our own stories. It became clear that if the parish embraced the knowledge and skills provided by God Space, they would listen to each other, and in so doing, revive evangelism and engage well with the broader community.

Our understanding of the skill of Evangelistic listening is that, when practiced, it produces a feeling comparable to that of being loved.<sup>7</sup> The aspect of being loved or people feeling they are loved is central to the work of spreading the gospel and engaging unchurched communities in the life of the local church. Reframing evangelism will make the Anglican Parish of Henderson more relevant to its community. Evangelistic listening will draw St Michael's people outside of themselves to notice other people and identify

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<sup>5</sup> Anglican Parish of Henderson, St Michael's and All Angels and St Marks Swanson, Parish Profile 2017, 18.

<sup>6</sup> The method used in God Space/Listening Project is laid out in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>7</sup> Ping. David, "Are You Listening," *OUTREACH Magazine* [www.Outreachmagazine.Com](http://www.Outreachmagazine.Com), 2006.

their needs. Our church will undoubtedly become the ears, hands, and feet of Christ in Henderson. In other words, intentional listening can transform our church and beyond.

John E. Fuder urges in the book *Neighborhood Mapping* that it is imperative the church not only knows how to interpret the Bible but also how to engage with and adapt to those whom the gospel message addresses.<sup>8</sup> It means that we need to exegete the community as much as we should exegete the Bible because both practices inform our ministry to the community. This interpretative work helps churches to minister with meaning and impact. Reading the community, through listening and noticing, helps us to understand the underlying history, context, and culture of that place and its people.

I hoped my project would allow the parish to recover and to grow some of the ministries and community engagement that existed before the split of 2014. The fear of the unknown and misguided information was the driving force of the fallout in 2014. Many parishioners were fearful that the denomination's discussions of blessing same-gender couples would eventually lead the church astray. There was an expressed concern that blessing same-gender couples would somehow remove God from the church. St Michaels, as an evangelical, conservative congregation, did not find this move by the diocese to be something they could support. There were discussions held within the congregation to find a way forward. The Vicar then proposed that the parishioners leave and start another church. While some felt moving away was a good idea, others felt this was not right. In the end, one-third of the congregation left with the Vicar to join a Pentecostal church.

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<sup>8</sup> Fuder, John, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community*, Kindle (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 13.

In 2018, while the diocese waited for the General Synod to meet, St Michael's and St Mark's were on edge, as some members contemplated whether to stay or leave the Anglican Church. Their decision depended on what the General Synod decided. The listening project was done during this time of waiting, which made it challenging in some ways, but it also provided members an opportunity to gather and listen to each other in ways they had not done before. Participants in the project later shared how they did not know each other very well but were glad that after the project, they did. Besides, others thought they knew each other well and made assumptions about their theological views but later found they had opposing views.

Amidst this exploration, the congregation was threatened again with a potential split when the General Synod 2018 passed the motion to bless same-gender couples. As we faced this dilemma, tensions grew within the congregation in what I saw as three theologically different groups. Two of the groups were, as they called themselves, Conservatives and Liberals. A third group I called the "whatever." In 2018, St. Michael's congregation had two men leave; however, St. Mark's lost eleven members, including the minister, whereas none had left St. Mark's in 2014. Those who chose to leave felt they could no longer stay in the Anglican church while it went against the word of God by blessing same-gender couples.

As I saw the conversations and interactions unfold, my perception was that the parishioners who were leaving were not listening as much as they were sharing their views. The groups, especially the conservatives, were not willing to listen to others' thoughts. The conservative group believed that it was sinful to bless same-gender relationships, and the way forward was to leave the Anglican denomination and start

another church. Some in this group felt that as the Vicar, I should shepherd the flock away from the infectious environment that the Anglican Church had become. Their view was that the Anglican Church had become heretical, and God had left it to its demise.

This view is the situation that gave birth to the Listening project. Learning to listen is the best way to get to know others. St Michael's church has people from many different cultures and backgrounds; therefore, before we can begin to extend hospitality to the broader community of Henderson, we need to offer that same hospitality to those we sit with in our pews. Our collective efforts will be meaningful to the wider community if those efforts reflect authenticity. We cannot give to others what we do not have. We expect society to listen to us when we are bad at listening. If we are to grow as a church, we need to relearn how to listen to each other and to hear other's viewpoints. Brené Brown, in her book, *Dare to Lead*, urges us to listen with the same passion with which we want to be heard.<sup>9</sup> The lack of desire to listen to others is the challenge for the Henderson parish and the western Christian church and is imperative today because it also impacts the communities where we live and worship.

### **1.3 Section Three - Church decline and the decline of community ministry**

There are several denominations in the Henderson area. For example, in my neighborhood, there are fifteen churches in the radius of one mile of each other.<sup>10</sup> The decline in church attendance and membership of the Anglican Church and other mainline churches has been evident over the years. While implications of these declining numbers

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<sup>9</sup> Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations*, Audio (Random House Publisher, n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> Localist, "Churches in Henderson," n.d., accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.localist.co.nz/henderson/churches>.

often create panic among denominational planners and church leaders, the focus has remained on the impact the decline will have on congregations rather than how it affects the entire community. As they envisage their uncertain futures, church leaders do not have the energy to worry about what happens beyond their church walls to which they are called to minister and be the good news. And yet, if the church is the good news, then the decline of the church is also a considerable loss to the community at large. To encourage my congregation to engage in community outreach, I have often asked them this question, if our church suddenly disappears, will the community notice or make a petition that they want us back? How much does the community know about us? A handful seems to think that we are well known. There is a sense of nostalgia about the good old days as people remember how the church used to be known, but the reality now is that things have changed, and the church is no longer as influential or well known.

The church used to be both a spiritual hub and a social agency in society; however, those days are gone and replaced by government social agencies. The church has moved away from a leadership role on the social issues presented by our communities. The poor and the needy are often referred to the central government for welfare and care; however, leaving the government to address the social problems of the community is contrary to the belief that Christians are called to be their Brother's Keeper. Instead, a sense of neighborliness has been replaced by a mentality that each person is responsible only for her/himself.

Church decline has also affected Local Ministers Associations, Good Friday joint marches, Ash Wednesday joint services, Joint Carol services, and similar ecumenical collaborations. As church attendance declines, fewer churches work together; each



congregation becomes inward-focused on the maintenance of their current programs. The lack of ecumenism is understandable as churches deal with diminishing human resources; however, it comes at a time when the broader community needs are increasing. The proverb “more hands make light work” is suitable now more than ever. The words of Jesus ring true as well, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37).<sup>11</sup> The harvest needs laborers who will respond appropriately, laborers with evangelistic listening skills.

### **Overview of the Listening Project**

My thesis tests the idea that the church that learns to evangelize within itself will be able to engage well with others beyond its walls. Learning and practicing evangelistic listening will draw St Michael’s people outside the church to notice other people and identify their needs. The parish of Henderson was able to draw wisdom from listening to others and see how listening opens doors to get to know others as well as to understand how it may create a platform for people to, in turn, listen to Christians. The participants appreciated their time together and the opportunities created to reach out to those theologically different and the local community. They found the courage to approach strangers with the desire to know them without any hidden agendas. This boldness is shown in some of their voices when asked to describe their experience during the **God Space** sessions. The program was offered to the parish by the name of God Space, and the overall thesis project is the Listening Project.

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<sup>11</sup> This quotation, and all subsequent biblical quotations, have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation.

One participant said:

I appreciated the social context as much as anything, a chance to get to know different people better and talking with them and sharing. The fellowship was my favorite part, getting to know people, who they are and what is important to them.<sup>12</sup>

Another expressed:

I felt good, and I have to say I certainly enjoyed the dessert, great fellowship, an opportunity to mix, hear, and share with others in small groups, that was particularly good. For me, the sessions highlighted that relationships are essential, and the key is listening, and that was not new to me but very good to be reminded.<sup>13</sup>

Part of the project aimed to remind and teach participants ways on how to create **God Space** in practical, doable, and authentic ways in our day-to-day worlds. Therefore, the teaching sessions focused on five practices that involve using our bodies for God's work. Each practice focused on a different body part and its function as we explore ways to Notice, Serve, Listen, Wonder, and Tell our way into spiritual conversations. As such, some of the participants began to put the training into action and reported back to the group about noticing and talking to strangers. I will include a couple of highlights:

I did manage two conversations last week. One with a lady on the train. She looked like a closed book when we first spoke on the platform, but she opened when I sat beside her on the train. We did not make it to faith subjects but it was a good experience, and I am liable to run into her again. The other one was a young woman, born in India, living alone, who is in our knitting group. She indeed opened-up too so I can build on that. Blessings and a big thank you for all yours and Andy's hard work.<sup>14</sup>

The other exclaimed:

I am just smiling as I read your email about trying to speak to a stranger because only this morning I was walking back home after taking Suzy to school. I was holding an umbrella as it was showering slightly. I heard a sound and turned back, and I saw a mum pushing her child's pram, and I said hello and carried on walking

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<sup>12</sup> Simms., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 15 November 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Davidson., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 28 September 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Dayna., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 25 October 2018.

but after a few steps I thought, wait for her and talk to her but then another voice said 'she probably wants to have time to herself, leave her alone. We chatted a bit, and I learned that she is from South India, and she has been in New Zealand for the last nine years, with two children. We parted as she made way to her house and I went ahead to mine. I felt happy that I tried to talk to her, and I look forward to catching up with her again sometime in the future. Thanks to you and Andy for doing **God Space**. I am learning a lot.<sup>15</sup>

In summing up, the **God Space**/Listening Project managed to meet the goal of equipping our church members to reach out to others in compelling ways, relating to each other, for that matter, including listening and how we are to treat and serve other people in a variety of ways. One participant remarked that creating **God Space** takes one humbling self before God and before others. The project was a valuable reminder of the importance of listening and the value that listening instills in the speaker, such that they feel valued. One young man commented on how he had always assumed that evangelism could only be done through talking though he soon realized in the project that listening is evangelism too, and we need to value people whom we encounter.

And another added:

This project has put into words what we should do and its things that anyone can and some of the resources were reminders of things we had known but did not have courage and language for it.<sup>16</sup>

Catherine, known as an evangelist, appreciated the project in saying:

I am glad I took part, I realized that my approach was not always the right one and I probably had been too direct sometimes when I talk with people, and God Space gave alternative ways to reach people truly.<sup>17</sup>

Daisy, who also does her fair share of evangelism, appreciated the project saying:

I found that the series was precisely what I was looking for, and what surprised me in the process of listening was realizing that listening is what God had been trying to get me to do all along. God had been trying to tell me that I had to listen to

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<sup>15</sup> Techas., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 11 October 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Cabener., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 13 November 2018.

people, but I did not know what sort of questions to ask, and now we have the questions to ask, the wondering questions I certainly feel were what I was waiting for. Very precious empowerment.<sup>18</sup>

Others felt that what dominated the project was togetherness and sharing of food; they learned to be more aware and to notice their surroundings and felt they were now vested in evangelism than what they were before. Shana, a woman in her sixties who grew up in the Henderson area expressed:

I now notice the shops around me, what they deal with, and I can walk up to them and say, hello, I am from St Michaels, and I have noticed that you deal with such and such. I guess the evangelism project has given me boldness to be nosy!<sup>19</sup>

### **Thesis Overview**

My experience as a vicar of a parish that had a recent split in membership because of a theological disagreement led to selecting a Listening Project. The project's benefits to the church include assisting the congregation to stay in dialogue with one another during a time of continued stress, spiritual growth of the members, and the beginning of an awakening to the needs of the community. This chapter has covered the background and context of my Thesis, including the church split; the second chapter explains the methodology and the process used for implementation and chapter three explores the post-Christendom context in New Zealand and western culture. Chapter four places Evangelisting in a theological and ministerial perspective leading to a call to action in Chapter 5. The conclusion includes some final analysis and recommendations for fellow pastors.

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<sup>18</sup> Dayna., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 25 October 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018.

The aspects of how the project was executed, the processes and methodology that was used are covered in detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2. Ministry Project

### What is going on?<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1 The Listening Project - Methodology and Processes

The project undertaken was titled God space, an Evangelistic listening process inspired by Doug Pollock from his book with the same title where he suggests non-threatening ways in which spiritual conversations can happen naturally.<sup>2</sup> The project was a series of six sessions done over six weeks, covering different stages of activating and equipping people to be the church in everyday life. The six sessions were - (i). Start from the heart, (ii). Noticing (iii). Serving (iv). Listening (v). Wondering (vi). Telling Stories. Data was collected via several methods including group dialogue, discussions before and during the God Space series, and before and after the participants engage in Evangelistic listening.

Further, participants reported back to the larger group after they had done evangelistic listening in the community, surveys filled out by participants in the first and last discussion sessions,<sup>3</sup> also, recorded questions and answers during the sessions, accounts of conversations and personal narratives from participants, observations on how they interacted and responded to each other and I also kept a diary of the process and any interactions. Also, Interviews were done out with participants (this was the primary

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008). 4. As part of the methodology I have used Osmer's process of practical theological reflection which has four essential tasks (see figure 2). These four tasks are, What is going on (descriptive empirical)?, Why is this going on (interpretive)?, What ought to be going on (normative)?, How might the leader respond in strategic actions that are desirable (pragmatic)?

<sup>2</sup> Doug Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally* (Group Publishing Inc - A. Kindle Edition., 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Appendix A - (surveys for week 1 and 6).

method of collecting data). Finally, action research method was applied and this phase included first and foremost the essentials of Evangelism that is: Learning to listen, in sharing faith speaking is involved, however, before one speaks, there is need to learn to listen because, without proper listening, even the best efforts in evangelizing can only address questions people stopped asking and will inevitably fail to address issues currently being proposed. As such, God Space created space for church and the non-church to share their faith and beliefs, to listen to the other without the need to change them.<sup>4</sup> Also, learning to speak: Sought to engage in a dialogue in which the Church not only listens in profound ways but also to tell our own Christian story in such a way as to speak the good news and to be heard. Additionally, action research that is sincere and empowering was involved: a). Listening: The listening process included six sessions of participants sharing their stories as well as listening to others in groups. The God Space series aims to teach people how to create opportunities to speak about God without killing the conversation.<sup>5</sup> b). Practice God Space: i) Following each session, participants were encouraged to practice listening in groups or pairs; after the second session, participants went out to practice noticing the surroundings and then to report their findings at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> week.<sup>6</sup> ii) Participants had opportunities to practice God Space skills with those they interact with on their day to day life as well as to speak to strangers and then report back to the group at the beginning of session four.

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<sup>4</sup> Andy Banks our outreach and evangelism coordinator and I facilitated the sessions that included us speaking at times and watching the 'God Space' DVD with Pollock's talks.

<sup>5</sup> Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*. 9. The invitation to take part in the project extended to the whole congregation. Each evening we listened first to Pollock's use of practical stories that revealed solid biblical principles for engaging people in spiritual conversations

<sup>6</sup> Midway through the training series (week 3) participants were asked to go in pairs and practice talking to at least one person they did not know well while the other observed and recorded how the other carried themselves in the process.

The outline of God Space Sessions took two hours.<sup>7</sup> iii) At the end of God Space sessions, participants, including the rest of the congregation, were invited to take part in the HOSPITALITY MONTH in which members were encouraged to offer someone a meal, morning or afternoon tea, lunch, dinner, and hiking.<sup>8</sup>

### **Ethical Issues**

From the very start of the research through to the final recommendations, I, as the researcher, took the importance of considering ethical questions seriously. The **God Space** project did not pose any risk of causing harm to participants as it was targeting adults who would voluntarily take part in the **God Space** series as well as the interviews. For this research, five ethical guidelines from Davidson and Tolich were given serious consideration.<sup>9</sup> As part of the process of paying attention to any critical sensitive issues of a pastoral nature that might arise during the study, arrangements were made for participants to talk to me or Andy Banks, my colleague who facilitated the project with me. Other Parish clergy were also available to offer pastoral counseling and guidance.

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<sup>7</sup> We gathered from 7:00 pm, starting with dessert and catch up. At 7:30 pm we began the formal sessions usually with findings and encounters of the week. This would be followed by watching Doug Pollock's talks on DVD. People then had guided discussions in pairs or in groups. The evening ended with praying for each other. Each week, participants were given some form of homework or readings in preparation for the following week.

<sup>8</sup> The aim was to give hospitality to another person and to create space where genuine listening would take place. Hospitality month was well received. Participants' voices will be covered in detail in chapter three.

<sup>9</sup> Martin and Davidson Tolich, Carl, ed. *Social Science Research in New Zealand: Many Parts to Understanding* (Auckland: Pearson Education, 1999), 376-77. i. the investigation should not harm the participants, ii. participation should be voluntary, iii. there should be informed consent, iv. participant anonymity and confidentiality must be assured as the safeguard against unwanted exposure, v. the research should be free of active deception, faithfully analyze and document data such that data is accurate. Kvale Steinar on ethical issues and qualitative research, explains, "ethical decisions do not belong to a separate stage of the interview investigations, but arise throughout the entire research process."<sup>9</sup> It is well known that some research topics and methods are more likely to cause harm to participants than others and there is always a potential to injure the participants in some manner.<sup>9</sup> In saying that, Marshall and Rossman also advise that, "the qualities that make a successful qualitative researcher are revealed through an exquisite sensitivity to the ethical issues present when we engage in any moral act."<sup>9</sup>



## Recruitment Criteria and Rationale

The contributing factor to the selection of the research criteria was a purposeful selection of participants as critical in a qualitative study.<sup>10</sup> As the Parish of Henderson is a multicultural congregation, participants were chiefly sought from different ethnicities and cultures to hear the different voices and experiences from across multi-cultural and multi-ethnic contexts that had formed the God Space participants. The research also sought participants who were accessible, willing to provide information-rich data that would shed light on the issue being explored, in this case, creating space and opportunity to share our stories of faith with others.<sup>11</sup>

## Challenges

The recruitment stage had unforeseen circumstances in that having planned to do interviews at the end of the project; it turned out that not all who had taken part in the God Space series could be interviewed because some were unwilling to take part. Essential to the participant choice was to have equal gender representation, age, different

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<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. A Participant Background Information sheet and Consent form (Appendix C) and an Interview Guide (Appendix D) were used to assist in the collection of data for this research. The approach in recruiting suitable participants included two phases. An advertisement was emailed to the congregation inviting them to take part in the God Space series. Over several weeks the notice and invitation were given in the three different services on Sunday mornings at St Michael's and St Mark's. Word of mouth also played a part as the invitation snowballed with interested congregants inviting their friends who might not have considered the advertisement request.<sup>11</sup> As the researcher, I also spoke to different people who could be participants. For the interview phase, I chose people of different ages, ethnicities, race, gender including new arrivals to St Michaels as well as one who had been attending for over 70 years. I was conscious of seeking access to the stories from those who had taken part in the 'God Space' series and a good representation of the 40 participants. In so doing I sought to establish quality assurance measures (criterion). When deciding on the final participants, I settled for seven women and four men with the youngest being 20 years old and the oldest being 75 years old and they were of several ethnicities that included South African colored, African black, White European, New Zealand European/Pakeha, in the hope that there could be a comparison of experience in the way they had viewed evangelism from their different cultures and backgrounds.

ethnicities, languages as well as multiple generations represented.<sup>12</sup> A significant highlight of the project was that forty people took part in the God Space series. The project aimed to go beyond merely informing but to equip people and to instill the courage to take their learnings outside our church walls to having spiritual conversations using their new-found ways of evangelistic listening.

## **2.2 Introduction to Qualitative research, Phenomenological and Action Research**

This section presents a detailed outline of the qualitative research approach used in this study. Provided is an explanation of the methods used in critically examining how people respond when the church does evangelism well and goes to the community. According to Merriam and Associates,<sup>13</sup> along with Marshall and Rossman,<sup>14</sup> there are several qualitative research genres within the overarching qualitative research method. I have chosen to use phenomenological and action research as critical approaches because these tools look to interpret the data collected in the interviews.

### **Qualitative Research Method**

The project used Qualitative research methods that offer a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. Its various genres are naturalistic and interpretive, and they draw on methods of inquiry.<sup>15</sup> Qualitative was selected because of its characteristics that

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, there were few young people available to participant in the interviews even though a third of the *God Space* participants were youth. Most parishioners expressed the desire to do the project, responses were mostly positive from when I started talking about it and through recruitment, *God Space* and the interview process. Seeking out suitable participants took six weeks.

<sup>13</sup> Sharan B. and Associates Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine and Rossman Marshall, Gretchen B., *Designing Qualitative Research*, vol. Third (United Kingdom/California: Sage Publications, 1999), 1-18.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1999), 2. The participants were able to carry out evangelistic listening during the Project/God Space, and at the end of the training sessions, were interviewed; on the one hand to tell how

take place in the natural world while it uses multiple approaches that are interactive and humanistic. It is also emergent rather than tightly prefigured and is fundamentally interpretive. Another main reason qualitative was deemed the best method for this research is that qualitative methods offer a particular way of seeing and discovering that other approaches, such as quantitative methods, do not have.<sup>16</sup> In *Qualitative Research In Counselling*, John McLeod defines qualitative research in a way that draws out and illuminates this suggestion: Qualitative research is a process of careful, rigorous inquiry into aspects of the social world.<sup>17</sup>

As a practical theologian utilizing qualitative research methods, this drawing out is reached by developing an elicited and multi-method approach which seeks to make the best of what is available within the accepted models of qualitative research rather than being confined to just one method and model.<sup>18</sup> As such, pursued as being the most appropriate ways to proceed and achieve quality research outcomes in this research were the phenomenological method through interviewing participants after they had participated in an action research process. Uri Flick recommends that qualitative research is done best when it uses multiple approaches.<sup>19</sup> Besides, practical theological interpretation is used to continue the action research beyond the project allowing the congregation to apply their new learnings and way of life.<sup>20</sup>

### **Phenomenological method**

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they felt when they engaged with evangelism and on the other to compare this experience with how they had viewed evangelism in the past.

<sup>16</sup> Swinton, John, and Mowat, Harriet., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research.*, Kindle edition. (SCM Press, 2016). Location 636

<sup>17</sup> McLeod, John, *Qualitative Research in Counseling* (Sage Publications, 2011), 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Uri Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1998), 229.

<sup>20</sup> Swinton, John, and Mowat, Harriet., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Location 1269-71.

Within qualitative research, I have chosen to engage with three other approaches that are the phenomenological method, action research, and practical theological interpretation.

The significant procedural steps in the process were phenomenology interviewing steps drawn by Creswell 2007.<sup>21</sup> See figure 1 below.

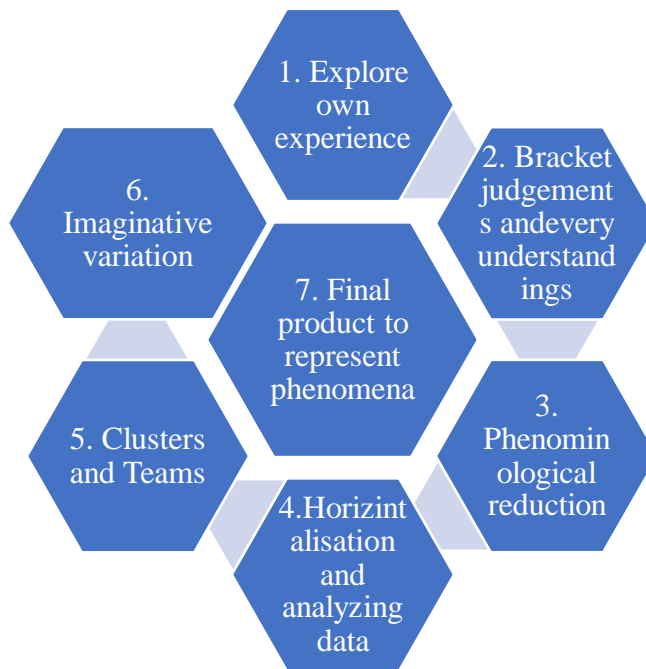


Figure 1.

### **In-depth interviewing**

Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations rather than formal events, predetermined response categories. The interviews are done in a way

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<sup>21</sup> John W. Creswell and John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 62. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of several individuals lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. In the research, I sought to focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience an event (e.g., evangelism or conversations about God). It is essential to understand these shared experiences to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding of the features of the phenomenon to minister better to our community in Henderson. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research technique that aims to understand, identify and describe phenomena by how its members perceive the experience. In this case, how do participants perceive the idea of evangelism or having conversations about God?

that the researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants' views but otherwise respects how participants frame and structure the responses.<sup>22</sup>

In this research, I have chosen Phenomenological Interviewing since this method is a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in the tradition of phenomenology that is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview.<sup>23</sup> The primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it allows an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience, combined with those of the interviewees. It focuses on the event, lived meanings that events have for individuals and if these meanings guide actions and interactions.<sup>24</sup>

### **Action research**

Another aspect of qualitative research applied in this study is Action research. The participants practiced listening to each other, went out to explore and minister to outsiders as they choose to make this a new way of their life. Action research includes post-research analysis to examine the effects of the intervention. This method is a family of research

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<sup>22</sup> The assumption is that the participants' perspective on the phenomena of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it. The most important aspect of the interviewer approach, however, concerned conveying the attitude that the participant's views were valuable and useful. Interviews may, however, evoke ethical dilemmas for the interviewer and some weaknesses that I highlight in the next section. Interviews have strengths as well as weaknesses that one must be aware of when using this method of research. An interview is a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly; however, interviewing also has limitations because it involves personal interaction; thus, cooperation is essential.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 112. Three in-depth aspects of phenomenological inquiry were applied. The first focuses on past experiences, and the second focuses on the present experience while the third joins these two narratives to describe the individual's essential experience with the phenomenon. Also, phenomenological interviewing rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be recounted, thus, the purpose of this form of interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share

<sup>24</sup> Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 113. Action research was the most proper method of inquiry for the main reason that it can be responsive to the situation in a way that other research methods cannot be, at least in the short term. Since qualitative research relies quite extensively on in-depth interviewing, I interviewed twelve participants for this study.

processes whose flexibility allows learning and responsiveness.<sup>25</sup> It is most effective when the result emerges from the data.

### **Practical Theological Interpretation**

Practical Theology is a critical theological reflection on the practices of the Church as it interacts with the practices of the world to ensure and enable faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world, and takes human experience seriously.<sup>26</sup> Osmer refers to this process of practical theological reflection as the four essential tasks of practical theological interpretation (see figure 2). That is, what is going on (descriptive empirical)? Why is this going on (interpretive)? What ought to be going on (normative)? How might the leader respond in strategic actions that are desirable (pragmatic)?<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Swinton, John, and Mowat, Harriet., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Location 3950-53. Swinton explains, action research is a method of inquiry and a form of practice that encourages controlled and focused change using the knowledge and ability of those involved in the research setting. One of the unique aspects of action research is that it seeks to build community and address issues in and through communities through both action outcomes and research outcomes at the same time. The conclusions drawn are data-based, preferably drawing the data from multiple sources in the case of evangelistic listening, twelve participants were interviewed after their participation in the God space. The project is ongoing as action research conclusions appear slowly throughout the study.

<sup>26</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology and the Qualitative Research*. 6-8. Swinton emphasizes that Practical Theology takes seriously the idea of performing the faith and seeks to explore the nature and in particular the faithfulness of that performance.

<sup>27</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology*. 4.

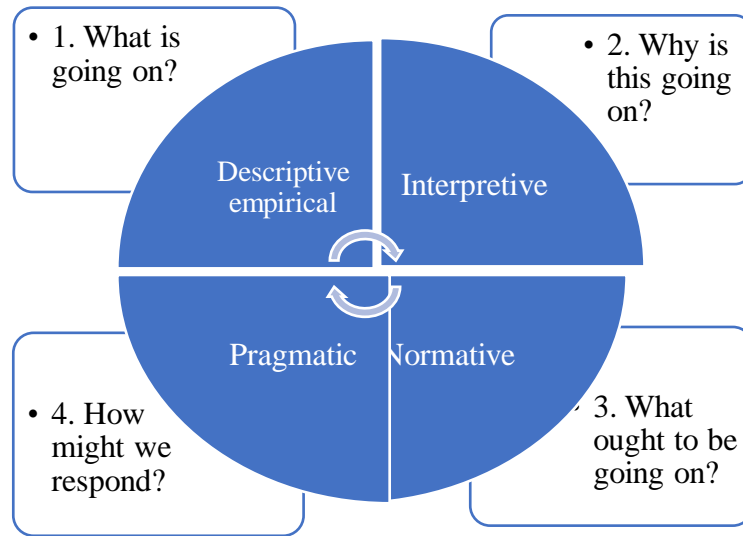


Figure 2.

Following this critical review, the data gained from the interviews are brought into a mutual conversation with the analysis that functions dialectically to produce recommendations of practice that enable the earlier condition to transform into ways that are authentic and faithful. The recommendations then facilitate the ongoing action research as the conversation seeks to take the gospel into the wider community.

### 2.3 Project Outcomes Analysis and Learnings

It was a good time to learn about other people whom I had known but did not know much about them or what they do. So, I was surprised to learn about them and to hear them talk about their passion. You would not know much about people if you do not speak with them because morning tea alone after the Sunday service is not enough.

Techas.<sup>28</sup>

Techas’ sentiments above sum up the aim of the project as well as participants’ experiences. As such, this chapter summarizes how participants experienced the ministry project. The findings of this study underscore the assertions made in the problem statement

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<sup>28</sup> Techas., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 11 October 2018. All interviews were confidential, the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. The transcript for this interview is included in Appendix E.

at the start of this thesis and also highlighted below. First, all the participants acknowledged that current evangelism tools needed improvement; hence, **God Space Project** was timely as they were able to spend time with other parishioners, listening, noticing their community and learning ways of creating spaces where spiritual conversations happen naturally. The twelve interviewees supplied substantial data during the project, which is captured mostly in chapter four but are extensive in this chapter as well. The findings suggest that with the right skills and tools, people are willing to engage with others about spiritual matters. Also, the data points to ways in which participants were transformed in the process and ways in which their reflections have led to healthy avenues for the church to engage its members in evangelism as well as the wider community in secular New Zealand society.

By the end of the six weeks, attitudes had changed slightly towards accepting outsiders. Participants were much more aware of their reactions to others and their impact on relationships. The score at the end was much higher, reflecting how transformative the project had been. If these positive attitudes are the tools that we take out into the community, then the church can grow because outsiders might give ear to what the Church has to offer.

#### **2.4 Challenges to the project and ministry opportunities**

The methodology section in chapter two included some of the challenges that the project encountered. I had hoped the project would encourage people with different theological views to listen to each other and stay together. Though this desire was achieved in part, however, two men who had extreme conservative views soon resigned from the congregation because they could not reconcile with the General Synod decision to bless



same-gender couples. It was sad to see them go; hopefully, they can action some of the evangelism principles that they learned from the project.

Another challenge was the lack of completing tasks because the participants felt they needed more time. Since one of the methodologies applied to the project was action research, the hope was that participants would be able to continue their tasks even after the project had ended. Some were able to continue; for example, Techas mentioned in chapter four that she approached someone on the beach and managed to listen to her while she narrated her grief of losing a friend. Some other feedback came at the end of the project when a participant was asked to give an overall rating of the project said the project had been an enjoyable experience, but what prevented it from being outstanding for her was the closeness of the tables which meant that people were unable to hear each other at times. Also, she would have wanted more time in the sessions. Similar struggles were expressed by three other senior members of whom I felt they did very well to come out in the evenings and give their time to the project.

The project required participants to go into the community to notice the life around them, businesses, transport systems, schools, people walking by, or other ministries happening. After observing, they were to approach the different organizations to understand how they function, and if there were any ways, we could serve the wider community together. The participants took notice; however, some felt a lack of time to follow up with conversations to these organizations was a factor. All hope is not lost because we can still follow up as a year on after the project, we are doing a sermon series on the same **God Space** principles that will involve the rest of the congregation. Then together, we can explore possibilities to serve the community.

Going out into the community to notice what is going on was appreciated by the group as summed up by one of them:

The whole idea of finding out what the community needs, I felt this way of being a community is organic as we find out in our community what we should do, not to follow some rules that somebody has written. That is the best way one can contribute to your community in your way. Unlike when we go into the community already with preconceived ideas and with a set of rules on what the people should do.<sup>29</sup>

Another expressed:

I learned the approach of noticing, observing, befriending before you can bring God into the conversation, and I was intrigued that Pollock always asks permission from the listener before he can talk about God. I think very few people would say no if asked politely, so it is crucial to ask. Asking for permission from the listener brings a sense of being respected and valued rather than someone who budge in, with no respect or regard for your feelings.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of our contribution to evangelism, our parish youth pastor felt that if he had unlimited resources, the most natural way he would evangelize is to focus on the passion of the people and creating a good connection with those people. He finds that quite a number of the local youth enjoy basketball so he would buy a basketball hoop, some cool basketball, and use the church car park as a court. That will be tapping into their interest and what they enjoy as they show off their skills. Another contributed:

I would like to have the experience and the creative imagination to ask questions as

I think questions are important and can be very liberating. I think we learn more when we question.<sup>31</sup>

Following God Space sessions, we moved to hospitality month, where the congregation was invited to take part. Hospitality month was an excellent opportunity for those forty who had done the project to put their learning into practice by inviting fellow

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<sup>29</sup>Tech, 3 October 2018.

<sup>30</sup>Cabener, 13 November 2018.

<sup>31</sup>Dayna, 25 October 2018.

parishioners for a meal to get to know each other. The initiative was well-received, as many took to asking others for a meal.

This chapter has covered the methodology and the processes used in the project **God Space**, an Evangelistic listening process inspired by Doug Pollock suggesting non-threatening ways in which spiritual conversations can happen naturally.<sup>32</sup> The following Chapter discusses the notion that New Zealand is a secular society, the decline in church attendance, the causes of the lack of interest in church and the effects that decline in membership has to evangelism.

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<sup>32</sup> Doug Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally* (Group Publishing Inc - A. Kindle Edition., 2009).

## **Chapter 3. Sociologically: Why is it going on?**

### **3.1 New Zealand Secular Society**

The central thought explored in this chapter is the decline of Church attendance and the notion that New Zealand has become a secular society; thus, posing challenges to evangelism. Section one looks at the state of religion in New Zealand and engages with the idea that New Zealand is a secular society. Section two explores further causes of church decline and the negative attitudes towards God as well as the source of the disinterest in church attendance in this country. Section three focuses on the place of religion in secular society, the mission of the church to the broader community, and how membership decline has affected community engagement in general.

Noticeably most western countries, including New Zealand, are in a secular age. Before we go any further, let me explain what I mean by secular. Like Taylor, I believe that a secular society is one in which people are happy living for purely immanent goals; they live in a way that takes no account of the transcendent. Taylor observes that the notion of secularization has three different meanings: First, Secular in the Classic definition is that hundreds of years ago, in a time when religion touched every part of life, when all public space was considered religious at least in some sense, the word secular referred to the earthly activities that were not regarded as sacred.<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, the majority of religious people busied themselves with secular tasks.

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<sup>1</sup> The spiritual work of prayer, fasting, and Scripture meditation was largely the work of the priestly class, while the secular work of farming, distribution, industrial efforts, and domestic chores belonged to the common people. Fulfilling secular work said nothing of your belief or disbelief in God. The vast majority of people were religious, even though their daily roles and responsibilities were separate from the sacred activities of religious leaders.

Second, Secularism is a prescription for Non-Religious Neutrality, and this second definition shows up after the Enlightenment. Secularism consists of the falling away of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God and no longer going to church and public spaces being emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality. In this sense, secular moves from being an adjective that distinguishes it from the sacred and becomes an –ism, a philosophy that sees humanity on an upward journey that entails the shedding of religious beliefs and practices in favor of universal neutrality. According to this definition, secular people have abandoned or at least marginalized their religious beliefs.

Third, Secularity is an age in which belief is one option among many. This third secularity sense describes the Western nations of today, and it focuses on the conditions of belief as Taylor explains, “The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”<sup>2</sup> In this third sense, religious and non-religious people alike are secular because they inhabit an era in which faith is one of many options.

New Zealand falls in this third meaning of secular as religion is promoted not banned like other places such as France. Also, New Zealand is secular in the sense that the State is not aligned to any one religion but allows all religions to coexist. New Zealand, like other Western nations, has moved from secularism to secularity, in that

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Secularism - People who consider themselves secular by this definition are not religious people distinguishing their tasks from the sacred (as in the classic definition). Instead, they are usually referring to their lack of religious affiliation or beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

Christian faith is one among many things people may believe and is at times hostile to faith, or if encouraging to religion, then without a preference for Christianity. New Zealanders often say our country used to be a Christian nation, and this usually is synonymous with cultural diversity and uneasiness with religious diversity, but not necessarily an interest in rekindling a faith of their own. Religion has become individualized and privatized, so, this nostalgia for New Zealand as a Christian nation does not result in more people taking part in the church community. These are serious challenges to the church's engagement with contemporary society, where there is a decline of religious belief and practice, the retreat of religion from the public space, while Christian belief has become one among many.

The three meanings enable us to differentiate between the two theories on the process of secularization. The first kind of theory claims that the decline of personal faith is the engine of secularization and sees the disappearance of religion from the public space because of that. The other kind of theory reverses the relationship. Here it is claimed that the marginalization of religion in social life was the main factor, resulting in the decline of personal faith.<sup>3</sup> Taylor concludes that secularism is about more than just ideas: it's a phenomenon on the level of our social imaginary, defined as the way "ordinary people imagine their social surroundings which are often not expressed in theoretical terms."<sup>4</sup> Like many, Taylor is concerned that culture now has less space for the sacred moving from a condition in 1500 and 2000 years ago when it was impossible to not believe in God. The lack of interest in sacred spaces was summed up by one older participant in the project. He noted that the people in his group, of whom were all

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 423.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 143.

younger than thirty years old, could not express their Christian identity confidently as compared to young people of his time. He revealed:

During the group sessions, I was shocked at how a lot of the young people had no confidence in their faith. I have been coming here for twenty years, and I am just finding out where a lot of people are in their faith journey; there is so much holding people back. We need more teachings like the God Space program or similar to move people along from where they are at now. When I was growing up, young Christians did not have that lack of confidence in their faith as spaces were readily available for them to learn about God.<sup>5</sup>

He continued...:

Their lack of confidence left me thinking, how can they go out in the community and talk to others about their faith in God when they cannot even talk about their faith with their fellow church members, how can they talk about their faith to others if they do not know themselves. In my twenties, I was involved in Outdoor campaigners on the platform telling my story and encouraging people to think about their situation and where they are.<sup>6</sup>

Every civilization in history until recent times has been rooted in religion or mythology.

As Taylor writes,

“If we go back a few centuries in our civilization, we see that God was present in the above sense in a whole host of social practices – not just the political – and at all levels of society: for instance when the functioning mode of local government was the parish, and the parish was still primarily a community of prayer; or when guilds maintained a ritual life that was more than pro forma; or when the only modes in which the society in all its components could display itself were religious feasts, like, for instance, the Corpus Christi procession. In those societies, you could not engage in any public activity without ‘encountering God’ in the above sense. But the situation is different today.”<sup>7</sup>

As indicated by the participants’ views above, the theory of New Zealand becoming more secular because of fewer people experiencing a personal faith in Christ is more persuasive. Fewer people are expressing their faith as Christians or looking to be a part of the Christian community. As a result, fewer people are bringing their Christian faith in the public square or expecting space to be made available for it. In New Zealand,

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<sup>5</sup> Pitts., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 2 October 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Pitts, 2 October 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*. 1.

it is further made complex by intentional efforts to be inclusive of other cultures and other religions; therefore, all faiths and ideas of spirituality seen as equal. When people express sentiments such as New Zealand used to be a Christian nation. They are often nostalgic for a time when there was less diversity, more than they are saying they are experiencing hostility toward their faith.

Now that the term secular is defined, we can look at Taylor's definitions and evaluate how secular New Zealand has become. We engage with the numbers that explain why people may say New Zealand has become secular to the point of secularity.

### **3.2 Section One - Post Christendom**

“If the numbers are to be believed, New Zealanders have in recent decades become a pretty godless lot.” -Geoffrey Troughton.<sup>8</sup>

As shown by Troughton's sentiments above, New Zealand researchers have offered current thoughts on the state of New Zealand religion, which, as Troughton suggests, the numbers are telling a story of a society that has become Godless. However, New Zealanders are divided on the state of religion in this country. On the one hand, some say this country once was a Christian nation and has only now become secular, while others contest that this country was never a Christian nation and, therefore, could not be moving towards secularism. Though it is debatable that New Zealand was ever a Christian nation, many agree that it had Christian influence in its formation. The condition of belief has

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<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Troughton and Stuart Lange, eds., *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ: Victoria University Press, 2016). 11.



evolved as Shagan clarifies, and the resulting configuration has shaped the requirements of religion in a Post-Christendom societal context.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Taylor shows, the term secular can take different meanings, and my view is the majority of New Zealanders who say that the nation has become secular refer to the second definition in people turning away from the sacred and no longer going to church. I agree with Taylor that we are all secular in the third sense, including New Zealand, where Christianity has become one among many religions.

The 2013 census figures show that church attendance is declining. Similarly, Troughton presents a scary warning to the church in New Zealand saying if these numbers are to be believed, according to the recent Pew Foundation survey of 234 countries and territories, New Zealand is one of just eight nations in which Christianity is likely to no longer have a majority status by 2050.<sup>10</sup> As I finalize the project, the 2018 Census was released, and Troughton's prediction had been realized sooner than expected as Christianity has fallen now to 37% while other religions remain on the rise.<sup>11</sup> Globally, religion remains an important dimension of human experience, and this is true in New Zealand new people arrive to settle, religions grow as well, thus calls society to adapt and change. Accordingly, Troughton advises that to bother with religion is, therefore, to bother with a significant factor in the world where we live, meaning understanding religion is

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<sup>9</sup> Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief: Faith and Judgment from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). Kindle edition, 1. "Between the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, successive revolutions in religious knowledge refashioned what it meant to believe, dissolving old certainties and producing a distinctively modern space of belief. The transformation of belief, rather than the rise of unbelief, propelled Western thought into modernity."

<sup>10</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Statistics about religion are about religious affiliation in New Zealand. They show the number of people who associate themselves with each religious group or denomination. They also measure the importance people place on religion and spirituality. A religion is a set of beliefs and practices that usually involves acknowledging a higher power, and guides people's conduct and morals. A denomination is a subgroup of a religion. For example, the Catholic Church is a Christian denomination

essential to understanding the current state of any human society. In New Zealand, it is various forms of Christianity that have been central to the religious life and identity of this country. As such, the stories of these traditions remain crucial for understanding our past, and subsequently, our present condition.<sup>12</sup> Take, for example; the Wilberforce Foundation Report concludes that more than half of New Zealanders (55%) do not identify with any main religion. One in five has spiritual beliefs (20%), while more than one in three (35%) do not identify with any religion or religious belief. A third of New Zealanders (33%) identify with Christianity (either Protestant or Catholic), while another 6% identify with other major religions.<sup>13</sup> These results show that New Zealand is mostly a secular nation in which belief is one option among many.<sup>14</sup>

Peter Lineham, a church historian, agrees on one hand with the census figures that New Zealand over the last two centuries compared with its first Christmas service in 1814, has been losing its religious element towards a more secular society. The 2018 census showed the percentage of non-believers had risen to 49 percent, from 38.5 percent in 2013. That was a much higher percentage of people declaring "no religion" compared with countries like Australia, which had 30 percent non-believers in its 2016 census. In the United Kingdom, it was 25 percent, and surveys usually put the United States percentage in the low 20s.

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<sup>12</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Wilberforce Foundation, "Faith and Belief in New Zealand," n.d., accessed May 3, 2019, <https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org>.

<sup>14</sup> *Www.Stats.Govt.Nz. Statistics New Zealand (2014). 2013 Census*, n.d. Secularization has been steadily increasing over the last decade or so, hence the 2006 Census revelation that half of New Zealand's population (49%) identified as Christian, and three in ten (31%) identified as non-religious. Seven years later, in the 2013 Census, the proportion of Christians had dropped to 43% while those identifying as non-religious had increased to almost two in five (38%).

On the other hand, Lineham, warns that the issue is more complicated than saying New Zealand is a secular nation or not. It is not a journey from interconnectedness to separate religious and cultural themes, but one of cultural, religious modification in the face of changed local and international circumstances.<sup>15</sup> This modification could mean that our society is neither secular nor religious but is both. As we will see later, culture is changing, thus influencing religion. The culture change is not towards a secular society but rather towards a multi-religious society, not a godless one, as some would like to believe. In other words, this is what Shagan calls the influence of modern belief.<sup>16</sup> Where belief has changed from what it was in ancient times. Yes, figures show Christianity declining, but other religions are growing, and this is my argument that New Zealand is not secular as in Godless, but that religion has become privatized and church and state divorced, but other faiths are growing more markedly. What this means is what Taylor describes as not a single, continuous transformation, but a series of new departures, in which earlier forms of religious life have been dissolved or destabilized, and new ones created. Secularization is the transformation of a society from close identification with ethical values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions. The secularization thesis refers to the belief that as nations progress, mainly through modernization and rationalization, religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance.

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<sup>15</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 9. "Modern belief represents a new form of order rather than simply a descent into chaos, because while of course people today believe vastly different things, they generally accept the epistemic status of one another's beliefs as beliefs. They argue about whether given beliefs are justified, warranted, true, or good, whereas premodern Christians routinely denied that other people's claims were beliefs at all. This is not merely a semantic shift, it is about access to a fundamental marker of sovereign personhood, creating the conditions for peace in a diverse society."

I agree with Taylor that God is still very much present in the world if only we look at the right places and allow the mind to open itself to moral inquiry and aesthetic sensibility rather than traditional theology as the gateway to religion. Taylor challenges the ‘subtraction theory’ of secularization, which defines it as a process whereby religion falls away, to be replaced by science and rationality. Instead, Taylor sees secularism as a development within Western Christianity, stemming from the increasingly anthropocentric versions of religion that arose from the Reformation. For him, the modern age is not an age without belief; instead, secularization is a move from a society where faith in God is unchallenged and indeed, unquestionable, to one in which it is understood to be one option among many. The result is a radical pluralism which, as well as offering unprecedented freedom, creates new challenges and instabilities.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.3 Church decline**

Ward notes that the critical year in which decline was felt in most denominations, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodists was in 1963. The decrease got experienced as far as Australia, Britain, and the United States. He attributes the decline from this time primarily to disruption of the cycle of inter-generational renewal of Christian affiliation.<sup>18</sup> Ward believes that the religious landscape in New Zealand was transformed during the period from the 1960s, broadly conforming to patterns experienced in other western societies. As mentioned earlier, Taylor shares the same sentiment that secularization was the offshoot of the reform movement that transformed religion in most of the western world.<sup>19</sup> For example, in New Zealand, in 1961, Christians made up almost 90% of the population; by

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*. 427.

<sup>18</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*. 173.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*. 425.

2001, that number was down to about 60%, and by 2013 to 49% of those who answered the religion question. The influence of Christianity on New Zealand society until the mid-sixties was extensive. But since then, as in all western societies, there has been a considerable decline in Christian identity and church involvement with weekly Church attendance falling from about 20% of the population in 1960 to about 10% in 2000 and has even gone further down since then.<sup>20</sup> Ward points out that these changes are better understood as expressions of religious transformation rather than of the decline of religion. Ward's point is precisely my view that the church has declined, but that does not make New Zealand a secular nation void of belief.

With the rapid growth of migration, we have also seen the arrival of different religions. Subsequently, New Zealand policymakers are making every effort to present a more welcoming society that embraces difference, and Christianity which was once at the forefront, has become one among many others. While government policymakers explore ways to cater for these much-needed differences and viewpoints, the church has become inward focused in that it is no longer exploring ways of spreading the gospel to the community; instead, its efforts are concentrated in ways that will keep the institution afloat, that is a survival mode kind of attitude. Hence, the decline in creativity and motivation to further the gospel and less community involvement are in evidence.

New Zealand can be regarded as secular in that the government has always distanced itself from aligning with any one religion because an accommodating of all faiths will promote unity and collaboration to better our society. I believe Christianity will do

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<sup>20</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*. 173.

well by listening to what other religions have to say because we can then serve our communities better by responding to what they view as needs. In an environment where Christianity has been dominant for decades, it will do us good if all religions are acknowledged in our nation and be encouraged to work together to serve society, to create Ubuntu. As it is, not many interfaith interactions happen; thus, our efforts to better communities are disjointed with what appears to be competition among the different religions, similar to sectarian wars referred to in previous chapters.

One of the many positive outcomes from the unfortunate Christchurch Mosque shooting is seeing the nation uniting in grief; political leaders, different religions, people of all creeds came together and condemned violence and racism. Women of New Zealand of all races and creeds chose to wear a Hijab on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March in solidarity with the Muslim women who had been fearful of being attacked when wearing this cultural and religious symbol as many had experienced in the past. We were stronger and better together. Further, Prime Minister Jacinda Arden led the country in a way that spoke volumes about humanity. She asked the country to observe a moment of silence as the *Imam* leader of the Christchurch Mosque said prayers broadcasted in most communication platforms. The coming together was a watershed of our identity as a nation, uniting together in grief and showing everyone is welcome in New Zealand, and space is there for religion to grow.

Of particular interest to me was witnessing the way Christians' response by crossing religious and theological boundaries and choosing to stand with the Muslims brothers and sisters in their time of grief. Their grief was ours, and there was a powerful

sense of Ubuntu in what actions people took to comfort and offer space for the grieving to do that safely. The Muslim community was hurting, humanity was hurting and Christians chose to show up and be counted among brothers and sisters.

The following section explores the decline in church membership, what could have been the cause of the decline, and the hope there is in Post – Christendom New Zealand.

### **3.4 Section Two - Post Christendom - decline in church attendance**

This section explores further causes and the negative attitude towards God and the disinterest in church attendance in this country. If secularism is to blame for the decline of church attendance in New Zealand, then it is a case of chicken and egg. What came first, secularism, or the realization that society did not need God?

As critical studies have demonstrated, the idea of secular emerged from within Christian thought and culture. The most widespread contemporary understandings of the terms religious and secular were fashioned in the modern era through the discipline of sociology. These understandings encourage us to think in terms of discrete, stable, and separable domains: the sacred and the secular. Historically, however, these categories have not been entirely stable or divisible, and the various meanings of the terms are also deeply intertwined. Therefore, what people mean by secular remains tied to their conceptualization of religion. Recognition of this intertwining of religion and secularity is especially significant in a country like New Zealand, where the most prominent narratives of religion in recent decades have arguably been reputed secularity of New Zealanders, the secularization of society and the growth of non-religion. Those narratives are intrinsically

bound up with the story of Christianity in New Zealand.<sup>21</sup> In my view, the decline experienced by the Church could be a result of what Taylor calls believing without belonging, which means people who are happy to be called religious but don't feel the need to belong to that religious institution or organized religion.

Furthermore, Taylor observes, many people have taken a distance from their ancestral churches without altogether breaking off. They retain some of the beliefs of Christianity, for instance, or they retain some nominal tie with the church, still identifying in some way with it: they will reply to a poll by saying that they belong to a particular religious group and again believing without belonging.<sup>22</sup> These are people who are happy to say they believe, attend church at Christmas, Easter, or funerals but not to commit to regular Sunday worship or to give towards the ministry of the church. Taylor stresses that the dominant religious form of the mobilization age has been destabilized by the current cultural revolution, even as the ancient regimes were destabilized by the onset of an Age of Mobilization.<sup>23</sup> Taylor insists that unbelief has been made possible by theological shifts associated with the Reformation Movement that taught how to distinguish the transcendent from immanent.<sup>24</sup> He insists that this is a particular way of understanding the individual and the world, profoundly shaped by the enlightenment, and comes to us "since time out

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<sup>21</sup> Troughton and Lange, 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 518.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.507 The **Ancien Régime**, French for "former regime") was the political and social system of the Kingdom of France from the Late Middle Ages (*circa* 15th century) until 1789, when hereditary monarchy and the feudalsystem of French nobility were abolished by the French Revolution.<sup>[1]</sup> The Ancien Régime was ruled by the late Valois and Bourbon dynasties. The term is occasionally used to refer to the similar feudal systems of the time elsewhere in Europe. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancien\\_Régime](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancien_Régime), accessed 7 November 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.



of mind.” Smith agrees, “in our mother’s milk, so to speak, to the extent that it’s challenging for us to imagine the world otherwise.”<sup>25</sup>

Smith points out, though, that when you get any significant change in what we thought was our identity as a society, then multiculturalism and multi-religious growth can be a source of insecurity. For example, New Zealanders who say we do not need this change because they feel insecure, threatened and the idea of anything different shatters their identity. The presence and arrival of Muslims and Hindus, Confucianists, Buddhists, and Atheists are a further reason to reinterpret the society as not Christian. All these together can make Christians react very negatively to the new kinds of people they were not used to before. This adverse reaction to people of other faiths is wide-spread and happening in all western societies, which used to be Christian or Jewish and nothing else. Even though the arrival of a variety of religions is unsettling to those who hold the view that New Zealand is a Christian nation, that does not mean we are secular in the sense of being non-religious, instead, as stated earlier, religion is on the rise, however not many identify with Christianity any longer.

Secularism did not arise because modernism stripped belief away from society; our social imaginary has been transformed: our feel for the world, our way of perceiving and reacting to the world without thinking about it has changed because the formative stories of our culture have changed. Modernism disenchanting our world, flattening what once had spiritual depth, what was once “sort of haunted—suffused with presences that are not natural.”<sup>26</sup> It becomes even clearer when Taylor traces secularization to its religious

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<sup>25</sup> James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, 27.

sources, that is, the process of reformation and the turn to personal religion. One of the central points of the Reformation was the rejection of any form of external mediation. Instead, the concentration shifted towards the inner personal commitment of the believer. In this process, the real locus of religion became identified with the individual experience, and not with corporate life. The stress on personal commitment, together with a rejection of external conformity, made it possible that religious traditions became fragile and contested. The description fits a broad cultural pattern that arose during modernity and that Taylor refers to as the ethics of authenticity.

### **3.5 Section Three – Place of Religion in Secular Society**

The place of religion in our societies has changed profoundly in the last few centuries. The question is, what do these changes mean to the church? Smith and Taylor think we are all secular now, whether we like it or not. “The question is not whether we inhabit the immanent frame, but how. That ‘how’ is rich with possibility because the defining feature of secularity is not the impossibility of belief; instead, it is the dizzying array of competing options in the pursuit of meaning and fulfillment.”<sup>27</sup> Smith and Taylor are implying that there are good and bad ways to be secular. The bad habits, engaged in by fundamentalists of Christian and atheist persuasions alike, use spin to oversimplify the complex realities of our present age, airbrushing out the difficulties of either belief or unbelief.

As stated earlier, I believe New Zealand is not a purely secular nation; instead, it is a multi-religious society. Though many argue and have accepted that New Zealand is secular, nevertheless, Christianity has played an essential role in shaping New Zealand’s

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, 93.

life and identity and, in many ways, continues to do so. For example, Christian prayers are heard, and the Bible is read in National Commemoration services such as the ANZAC day and Treaty of Waitangi observances, which are Christian based. Despite recent declines in church attendance, the persistence of religious tolerance, spiritual belief, and celebration of Christian festivals and ideals suggests that Christianity plays a more enduring and significant role in New Zealand society than the country's secular/godless reputation would show. Those who argue that New Zealand was never a religious nation, neglect aspects of our history that was very much influenced by Missionaries and Christian Maori, charismatic preachers, and from sectarian conflict and competition to increased cooperation and unity. New Zealand's history was interwoven by Christianity and culture, thus the interplay of the sacred and secular.

Even though New Zealand is increasingly no longer aligned to any one religion, it is still very much influenced by Christianity; for example, some State funerals are conducted in the Anglican Cathedral. Also, when the Christchurch earthquakes happened in 2011, church and society were brought together, and amazingly, all religions came along, with prayers being heard all over the nation and prayers said on memorial gatherings. The Anglican Cathedral of Christchurch got damaged severely in the earthquake, and the people of the city, including non-believers, wanted to see it reinstated against the Church's decision not to do so. Similarly, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, fifty-one people were shot while praying in a Mosque; and as the nation came to grips with what had happened, many took to praying, led by the Prime Minister and religious leaders. The unity in prayer alone shows that New Zealand is a religious nation even if many would like to believe otherwise and is an example of what Taylor calls secularism where people take to religion even if they

sometimes distance themselves from it. Unlike other places such as France where secularism means no religion at all, in New Zealand, religion is thriving.

Also, as a former British colony, New Zealand still celebrates the Queen of England's birthday, the Anglican Church says prayers for the Monarchy, and much of its religious state in the past was very much influenced by the Neo-Durkheimian mould of Britain where Church and State infuse though did not stay this way for long to be noticed as such. That is the traditional social and religious ties, but now, these ties are no longer assumed as new social institutions have come into being. What we are seeing is New Zealand is moving towards religious pluralism. The increase in religions has opened more choices for ordinary New Zealanders who do not feel they want to be associated with the church. An increase in religions has not helped the cause of the Church because now it has to compete for attention with many more religious beliefs than it has ever had to deal with in the past.

So, the Church has the significant task of navigating relationships in a now religious pluralistic society because the expressions of religious transformation, as Ward calls them, offers not only challenges but also opportunities.<sup>28</sup> What I see as a problem for Churches is learning to contribute to the values of conversation and public life more generally, in a world in which there is no return to Christendom. Christians need to know that they are no longer the only voices in the arena, thus a need to learn to listen now more than ever, as new voices arrive with migration. Another challenge for the church is that as society's interest in organized religion declines, it is getting harder to find adults who can pass down

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<sup>28</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, 173.

the religious traditions. Some will not only declare some faith in God, identifying with a church, without attending a service but happy to participate in Christmas and Easter celebrations as well as ceremonies for rites of passage such as baptism, marriage, and death.

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It is of concern that the church continues to mourn how things used to be rather than embracing how things are and finding ways to remain effective in its mandate to bring good news to people. For instance, instead of being good news, I fear that St Michael's church was becoming a judgmental place, a place where to be liberal is to be against us, a place where those who are different from us feel excluded. This unpleasantness has been deeply felt over the issue of human sexuality. The church's focus on this issue has taken precedence over the mission of the church. As highlighted in the introduction, the parish experienced a split in 2014, and again in May 2018, the Anglican General Synod passed a motion that same-gender couples can now be blessed, and as a result, the parish saw sixteen people leave St Mark's congregation to worship elsewhere. Before then, opportunities were created for the church to meet and listen to each other. There was no real interest in listening to the other as each side thought they were right. I want to believe that if the opportunity to listen to the other had been embraced, some people might not have left. The focus on human sexuality consumed the congregation to the extent that it became inward-focused. While focusing on its internal issues, ministry to the broader community of Henderson became minimal. Instead, the message was that people must meet some standard of perfection if they are to be welcomed in the parish.

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<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Religion Today, a Secular Age*, 514.

The split and decline in church attendance, has falling membership, leaving a handful of people to do at least 99% of the ministry work; thus, efforts from these people spread thinly. As a result, there is not much creativity left, and lack of human resources then means church resources are limited to maintenance, thus keeping the status quo. Consequently, the lack of creativity disables church growth.

### **Church's decline in engagement with society**

The issue at the center of the church is how can it fulfill its calling if society is no longer open to the church? One way of answering this question is to look at what has brought this lack of interest from the community. In this section, I grapple with the question of how should the church act now? It has always been the role of religion to provide social norms. Ward quotes, Durkheim's thesis on the function of religion that there did not need to be any real God behind religion, but throughout most history, it is the belief in some transcendent being which has been the source of these social norms.<sup>30</sup> Many would agree with Ward that those who have tried to build societies without religion, as some part of New Zealand society would like to try by calling the nation secular, will continue to struggle with ways to construct an ethical framework that registers widely with young people. Christianity has much to offer in the conversation concerning common values as we find a way forward in a multi-faith society.

Was New Zealand ever a Christian nation? Davidson, in his well-researched New Zealand church history, affirms that Church and society intertwined in Colonial New

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<sup>30</sup> Troughton and Lange, 185.

Zealand.<sup>31</sup> In the colonial environment, Christians were actively involved in lobbying government at all levels. Davidson points out that the Christian faith and practice played a fundamental role in the shaping of colonial society. Consciously or unconsciously, the higher proportion of the population acted according to what was a Christian code. Whether viewed positively or negatively, the Christian faith contributed seriously to colonial society, and they were concerned about the shaping of the moral and social order so that it would reflect their understanding of what society should be.<sup>32</sup> As such, the church contributed immensely to society through education in schools and public and social morality but we are now living in a post-colonial context.

### **The Churches and education**

It is fair to say that established churches monopolized education in the nineteenth century. The first missionaries established schools as a means of evangelization and training in Christianity as the first governors were sympathetic to Church involvement in both Maori and missionary education.<sup>33</sup> However, some debates that impinged on the relationship between Church and education, such as the debate on education in 1877 that took place against the background of increasing sectarian tension with the need to decide on the national role of both the Church and the state in education.<sup>34</sup> The result was a secular clause in the Education Act, which stemmed more from sectarian disagreement than doctrinaire secularism because of the separation of Church and State. Denominational misunderstanding and distrust prejudiced the chances of religious teaching and observance,

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<sup>31</sup> Allan K Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington [N.Z.: Education for Ministry, 2004), 64.

<sup>32</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 65.

forming a prominent part of any education system. Thus, religion was relegated to the private sphere because, for many, it had no place in the public philosophy and would influence the character of education in state schools. As seen here, that debate has been going on since 1877, and the program Bible in schools faced opposition not long after it had started, and the question of its presence in schools, is still being questioned by others to this day. Also, it seems the place of religion in the public forum was debated not long after Christianity arrived on these shores. If that is the case, then there is reason to argue that New Zealand was never a Christian nation, but if it was then it was for sixty-three years only.<sup>35</sup>

Between 1877 and 1935, the use of the Bible in schools was an extensive debate. Due to the fear that religion would be excluded from primary schools, Rutherford Wadell, a Presbyterian minister voiced concern:

“if we take away from the roots of a child’s character the great verities of religion which are summed up in the bible, and which are its natural foods, and substitute the bold aridities of secularism, you will look in vain for those fruits of the Spirit that have raised men above the level of emigrating rats and free-loving baboons.”<sup>36</sup>

The 1877 Education Act represents a significant point of departure for colonial Christianity as Churches were excluded from participation in the state primary education system. The churches were divided, and hostility grew over education issues, different methods of schooling and socialization that went with this. Underlying the debates and divisions was the fundamental question of how to communicate religious values and truths. For many

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<sup>35</sup> Christianity arrived in New Zealand in 1814 and in 1877 the discussion about the place of religion in society started. There is a gap of 63 years, of which the nation might have been Christian before society began questioning.

<sup>36</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 66.



Protestants wanting the Bible in schools, faith was an essential part of life; thus, exclusion of it from education in the name of neutrality or non-sectarianism was in itself adopting a humanist or secular approach to learning.

Religion in school was fundamental to human development, as expressed by P.B Frazer's strong sentiments. In 1892, P.B Frazer, a teacher and later a Presbyterian minister, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Mental mutilation of the People's children by the exclusion of the Bible from schools*. He argued that the use of the Bible ought to be permitted in schools because the Bible is of singular value as an instrument of education, and is a creative influence in modern civilization so that to grow up in ignorance of it is to be not educated in that civilization.<sup>37</sup> While the division over churches' involvement in state education continued after World War 1, the intensity of the debate gradually moderated with the church failing to find a recognized role for Christian instruction in state education. Allan Davidson summarizes,

The painful realities of sectarianism and religious pluralism in colonial society, combined with denominational hostility and suspicion, meant that institutional Christianity and the Christian faith were marginalized in an area where traditionally, the church had claimed a monopoly.<sup>38</sup>

The church has been fighting ever since to get back to this monopoly position. However, in a multicultural society that is fast becoming multi-faith, the struggle of the church will only increase unless the church accepts the change and finds ways of servicing the nation together with other religions rather than wishing that other faiths disappear. As Archbishop Justin Welby highlights, other faiths might not be the way to the Father, but

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<sup>37</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Davidson and New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 67.

they bring communities together and bring some light.<sup>39</sup> Here Welby refers to the biblical passage, John 14: 6, Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." But, Welby is saying that it will benefit the church and society as a whole if interfaith dialogues and collaboration happen more. Provocatively Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his book *God is not a Christian*, stresses that "To claim God exclusively for Christians is to make God too small and in a real sense blasphemous. God is bigger than Christianity and cares for more than Christians only."<sup>40</sup> God is undoubtedly not a Christian; he existed before Christianity and revealed himself and guided his people before the incarnation of Christ. His concern is for all his children. By his ways, God reveals himself to people, and Tutu goes on to say, "Every one of God's human creatures has the capacity to know something about God from the evidence God leaves in his handiwork (Rom 1: 18-20); this is the basis for natural theology and natural law."<sup>41</sup> God is always at work in our societies, and we will be wise if we join him in what he is doing rather than presume to know who fits in his plan and who does not.

Church decline, it can be argued, has also been influenced by materialism and the autonomy of the individual, consequently shaping what we find plausible. Many options are now available for belief or faith among people who would usually not believe in anything as the primary option had been Christianity for many years. As Taylor asserts, secular is not what we believe, but that our options for belief are more numerous, optional, and contestable than at any previous time in history. He continues; we are "caught between

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<sup>39</sup> Justin Welby, "Sharing Jesus: The Revolution of God's Love," n.d., accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/priorities/evangelism-and-witness>.

<sup>40</sup> Desmond Tutu and John Allen, *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocations*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

a myriad of options for pursuing meaning, significance, and fullness.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the increase in migration has also introduced other religions that the New Zealand Church did not have to deal with in the past. For example, census 2013 showed that Hinduism is the fastest growing among non-Christian religions in New Zealand, while Christianity is declining.<sup>43</sup> However, some institutions can even say prayers at events. For example, the New Zealand parliament opens their sessions with what used to be a Christian prayer, though, in 2018, it abolished the word Jesus from its prayer. Some Christian groups protested this change and demanded that the name Jesus be re-inserted into the prayer but no change yet.

In 2014 New Zealand celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of the gospel in these shores. For a century and a half, the church had a strong voice in society, but in the last fifty years or so, that has changed to the extent that New Zealand is now considered as a secular country. How did we arrive at this conclusion? What has caused the shift? What is the mission of the church? How will the church move forward in a secular society? The decline in membership could impinge on the church’s essential calling of spreading the good news of Christ through evangelism. In his chapter in *Scared Histories*, Kevin Ward points out,

sociology maintains that faith is socially sustained and socially transmitted. As such, local churches have been vital channels through which Christianity has been

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> “www.Stats.govt.nz. Statistics New Zealand (2014). 2013 Census” (n.d.), accessed March 1, 2019. Statistics about religion are about religious affiliation in New Zealand. They show the number of people who associate themselves with each religious group or denomination. They also measure the importance people place on religion and spirituality. A religion is a set of beliefs and practices that usually involves acknowledging a higher power, and guides people’s conduct and morals. A denomination is a subgroup of a religion. For example, the Catholic Church is a Christian denomination.

sustained and spread. History and recent research show that if participation in churches declines, then eventually Christian believing and identification also decline.<sup>44</sup>

### **Possible future in a secular age**

The church has a possible future in a secular age by staying together and passing on its Christian rituals to younger generations. As Bellah reminds us, solidarity in early human groups was certainly enhanced by their ability to keep together in a time of the beginning of rituals. The gathering to worship that we do is ritual, and ritual is a bodily process that requires the presence of the body.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Bellah insists, there would not be a funeral or wedding without physical presence and interaction or participation of persons. So, if rituals are the channels for passing on tradition, then in a secular age where society has divorced from rituals such as going to church, praying together, reading and studying the scriptures together, then the passing-on of religion as we know it will not last much longer unless secularism is the onset of other forms of tradition the same way Mobilization was to the ancient regimes.<sup>46</sup> Secularism in New Zealand is multifaith, not the absence of religion. As such, if religion is a system of beliefs and practices that unites groups, then there are some traditions created and passed-on in this secular age. These are new traditions such as groups gathering together to watch a sport, going to a health and fitness club on a Sunday morning, and so on. However, it all depends on how sustainable these new traditions are. Also, belief has shifted from believing in God to trusting in

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<sup>44</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor, *Religion Today, a Secular Age*, 507.

systems, faith in governments and the continuing multiplication of new options which individuals and groups seize to make sense of their lives and give shape to their spiritual aspirations.

This Chapter defined secularism, secularity and clarify which secular category New Zealand falls. It has also covered the issue of decline and the possible causes as well as exploring the place of religion in secular society and possible future in a secular age. In the flowing chapter, I engage with theological and ministerial perspectives exploring ways in which the church ought to respond to the old methods of evangelism in an attempt to engage well with the broader community.

## Chapter Four. Theological and Ministerial Perspectives

In other words, the ways we do evangelism need to change with the times and the cultures and contexts we are —Simms, Participant, 65 years old, and grew up in the area.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter looks into what ought to be happening, or ways in which the church can better engage not only among itself but with the wider community. The church ministers to the world, bearing in mind that Jesus ministered in a hostile world similar to ours. Moreover, what I like about Jesus' model of evangelism is that he related to the secular world by taking himself where the people were, to relevantly reach those who would not come to the Church for answers. Jesus used symbols and images that would be seen as secular or of the everyday. The images Jesus used when he spoke of his vision were not sacred images, and he didn't sound religious; instead, he used worldly images and sounded secular. Jesus used concrete daily images such as the land, animals, money, human relationships and ministered to human physical needs.

The four gospels in the Bible tell of Jesus' way of meeting people where they were at (Matthew 25:34-40 - Meeting others people needs, Luke 3:11 - Share with those in need, Mark 1: 29-34 - Healing at Simon's house, John 2: 1-11 Jesus turns water into wine). His way was not about converting people to any religion, but to draw them closer to God through word and action. By using metaphors, Jesus showed that by using what is considered secular, the complex could be simple and easy to understand. I appreciate Jesus' model of evangelism as it sits in the secularist model where Christianity is one

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<sup>1</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018. All interviews were confidential, and the names of interviewees withheld by mutual agreement. Names mentioned in the study are pseudonyms.

among many beliefs. However, the post-Christendom moment has moved us away from Jesus' ways of evangelism as the church sees itself as the holder of truth and an icon to which society should imitate.

The skills gained by parishioners from the project enabled participants to explore relationships within the congregation as well as in the community.<sup>2</sup> Learning and practicing evangelistic listening drew St Michael's and St Mark's people outside themselves to notice other people and identify their needs. Simms's statement above represents the sentiments of most of the project participants. They agreed that ways of evangelism need to change to speak to culture now. The legacy of these six weeks should be a positive change to the ongoing ministry of the church, as the participants seek to know each other better. Another by-product is a greater awareness of the community at large, which will guide the church's ability to offer the most needed services. For example, at the end of the research project, Tech, with a Pentecostal background, said, "before I participated in the listening project, I would never have had the guts to approach a stranger to talk to them."<sup>3</sup>

#### **4.1 The Normative Task - What ought to be happening?**

What ought to be happening in the life of the parish is for members to understand evangelism as the calling of all believers, not only the chosen few. The normative task is to engage in evangelism to bring good news to the broader community of Henderson. Accordingly, Paul Chilcote and Lacey Warner point out that conceiving evangelism as

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<sup>2</sup> For more details on the Research Project refer to Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018. One afternoon, Techas, who is new to the congregation, was walking on the beach. Techas notices another woman who looked distressed. just received a message that a friend had died. The woman needed to talk to someone, and Techas was there at the right time. Techas credits the Listening project for giving her the courage to approach a stranger in a way that she would not have done before her involvement in the God Space training.

an essential practice that involves the whole people of God, and not merely the peculiar vocation of select experts, will enable many Christians to embrace the calling anew as a critical aspect of God's mission in the world.<sup>4</sup> They emphasize that it is every Christian's calling to engage in spreading the good news. As such, the next section discusses the meaning of evangelism and how we use it in spreading the Gospel.

A theological assumption that undergirds this section is that "Listening is a primitive act of love in which a person gives himself to another's word, making himself accessible and vulnerable to that word."<sup>5</sup> Societal transformation will happen when we understand that the true essence of evangelism is found through intentional listening and loving people enough that they will one day want to join the movement of God to spread the good news to others, too

(1 Tim. 2:3-4). We do not determine the timing and decision for them to join, nor should it be our main reason for sharing the good news with them. My thesis is arguing that the Church is the social strategy, a response that brings social transformation to communities. Because the Church is people, therefore, if people put others at the center, then no one will be left behind feeling judged and excluded. Jesus expects us to go out and spread the Gospel of his salvation (Matt. 28:18-20), to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16), to listen, to speak, and put these words into action. The old saying that talk is cheap is profound as we are judged by our actions more than our words.

As such, an African social theory informs my research. The African concept of UBUNTU is a belief that we are better together. The Ubuntu social theory proclaims the

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Wesley Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), xix.

<sup>5</sup> William Stringfellow, "Quotable Quote," n.d., accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1256192>.



inherent interconnectedness of humankind. The philosophy recognizes our humanity together. Ubuntu desires to enhance the life of the other through social change, physical, and spiritual are what motivates the sharing of the good news through every way possible, including Evangelism. Concerning Ubuntu, Desmond Tutu stresses that we can be human only when we are together;

In a happy family, you do not receive in proportion to your input; instead, you receive in proportion to your needs. If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up in one another's, that we can be free only together, that we can survive only together, then a glorious world would come into being where all of us live harmoniously together as members of one family, the human family.<sup>6</sup> The concept of Ubuntu is a motivating theology of church and mission and not merely a social strategy but an ethic to live by. It is not something one does but is a way of being. If you allow differences with others to define a relationship with people instead of the things you have in common, you would always be at odds with others. Focus on differences creates a situation of us against them. Instead, Ubuntu seeks the commonality that people have and find ways that they can use the shared values to work together to better society. Ubuntu says it's a must to treat others with respect, to treat others as you would like to be treated. If we put Ubuntu at the center of how we approach others, we find that people respond positively when they know they are respected despite their beliefs. Ubuntu cares about human connection not isolation.

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<sup>6</sup> *Believe: The Words and Inspiration of Desmond Tutu, Me, We* (Boulder, Colo: Blue Mountain Press, 2007), 36-37.

Where ever we are in the world, it is not our differences that connect us rather it is our humanity together – I am because you are. People are people wherever you find them, the need to be loved, listened to, respected, included, are the same. The human connection is such that what affects one human being affects the rest of us, whether we like it or not. Humanity was created for the community; we can only be human with other humans. Evangelism will be richer when we understand that to diminish another, is to diminish self, thus the need to rethink the way we present God to the world. The Church, through its ministry, has an opportunity to personify Christ through Ubuntu in word and deed leading to what it means to be a community with others. Ubuntu embodies the ideas of connection, community, and mutual caring for all. It is to say that each individual human is inextricably bound up in the humanity of the other.

While Ubuntu encourages respect of others it does not mean that people should not address issues. Instead, if one is addressing the other to do so in order to enable the wider community to improve. In other words, Ubuntu demands that whatever one does must be with the best interest of the greater good of all. In this same manner, the theology of Ubuntu when applied to evangelism, seeks to understand the other for the main reason to contribute to their wellbeing.

Though the Ubuntu concept is aspirational, theological unity is difficult to achieve as people have different deep-seated ways of looking at the world. As George Lakoff writes, reflecting on the 2016 America's presidential elections, he notes that conservatives and liberals hold two different conceptual models of morality. He uses two metaphors in his definition, meaning Conservatives use the strict father model where good is made

possible by strictness, self-discipline, and hard work. To conservatives, moral self-interest is a virtue to emulate, and everyone is taken care of by taking care of themselves.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Liberals use the nurturant model whereby everyone is taken care of, thus helping each other. These are deep-seated ways of looking at the world, and a change in attitude will be gradual. At best, it will be like learning a new language and evangelistic ways that will open doors to other forms of communication will enhance our life together. To engage well with evangelism, an understanding of evangelism ought to be established; therefore, the section below will discuss the meaning of evangelism in the context of this thesis.

#### 4.2 What is Evangelism?

In this thesis, evangelism is interchangeable with spreading the good news in practical ways and, if necessary, using words as St Francis of Assisi instructed; that whether one has permission to preach or not, all must preach by their deeds.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the definition from Archbishop Justin Welby captures the essence of evangelism in this study;

Evangelism is joining in the work of God to bring redemption to this world. It is proclaiming the revolution of love that has rescued God's world from darkness to light. The God who created the universe has acted to save the world from itself. Moreover, he has done that in history through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is the setting forth of the good news of Jesus so that all can hear and respond.<sup>9</sup>

The term *evangel* is a rendering of the gospel that is, in turn, a rendering of good news. John H. Westerhoff observes the most succinct usages of the term *evangel* in the Old

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<sup>7</sup> Lakoff, George, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, vol. 3 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 94

<sup>8</sup> Tim Meadowcroft, *The Message of the Word of God: The Glory of God Made Known*. (Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 207. These words are attributed to Francis of Assisi, but no written record has been found to support this. “If there is a basis to the quote, it may be from his instruction about preaching in the earlier rule of 1221

<sup>9</sup> Welby, “Sharing Jesus: The Revolution of God’s Love.”

Testament are in Isaiah: “Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings lift it. Do not fear; say to the cities of Judah here is your God” (Is 40.9). And, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns” (Is 52.7).

Westerhoff clarifies the good news of the gospel in this context as, here is your God, your God reigns.<sup>10</sup> The early church understood proclaiming God to the community as its primary mission. Proclamation meant sharing the news of God’s salvation through word and example, offering it to those who did not know it or who had not accepted it. The goal was to attract persons to the church with this good news concerning the reign of God. Such evangelism took place in a society where people lived and worked.

Being the good news to the community is the kind of evangelism that we long to experience as congregations in this post-Christendom age if we are to fulfill our potential as God's representatives on earth. At this moment, the few members at St Michael's who engage in evangelism do so in old ways, as members who have opportunities to share their faith are usually pushy and judgmental: Are you Saved? Repent of your sin or go to Hell! Such language implies that people must clean up themselves or achieve a standard of perfection to be welcome in the parish. The jargon that usually goes with old evangelistic efforts builds walls that perpetuate us vs. them standoff thus pushes neighbors away. Thus, the gospel message rarely gets through because, as Pollock notes, what people are hearing is, "My worldview is better than yours, so let me tell you why I am right, and you are

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Wesley Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 235.

wrong."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the old evangelistic ways paint our parish as a judgmental place, a place where to be liberal is to be against us, and a place where those who are different from us receive harsh judgment.

It seems human sexuality discussions have taken a toll on the congregation, diminishing how the parish does evangelism. It appears that the atmosphere has become so judgmental that the sexuality discussions often take precedence over and above other ministry areas. Being in the parish now for two years, I find that most of the congregation wants to get on with ministry and feel that there has been enough time spent debating one issue. The congregants are now ready to move on and listen to the community as our project results revealed. Concerning serving others, John Perkins urges that instead of using our preconceived ideas to share the good news of Christ, let others be your guide, use your ears carefully, and words sparingly, to identify and meet their felt needs.<sup>12</sup> In making this comment, Perkins urges us to listen to others so that we effectively meet their needs and serve them better, and consequently, we fulfilling the vocation of the church through evangelism.

The listening project, among other things, explored the basics of evangelism as well as people's understanding of evangelism and the reasons that hinder members from engaging in such a virtue. Through interviews, the project tried to discover the phenomenon of evangelism from a variety of people's experiences of being evangelized or being evangelists. Many expressed that the way they had experienced evangelism in the past had

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<sup>11</sup> Pollock, Doug "Wondered into Anyone's Heart Lately?" OUTREACH, August 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Perkins, John, ed., *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1995), 20.

put them off from trying while others expressed disappointment that they had learned bad habits of going about evangelism that they, in turn, imposed on others.

When asked, what comes to mind when you hear the word evangelism? The sentiments from one participant sum up the experiences of all: I think of people who try to evangelize in often pushy and insensitive ways.<sup>13</sup>

Another said I think of Billy Graham and Bill Subritzky: And the crusades were a bit harsh. I do not think people would respond well to that kind of military and second world war style.<sup>14</sup>

### **4.3 Listening as Evangelism**

This section includes the voices of participants' experiences as they were listened to by others, and in turn, as they were able to listen to others as well. The twelve participants valued their involvement in the listening project. Ultimately, the members express a common theme that they appreciated their time with other parishioners, primarily whom they had known but never spoken to at length. Consequently, the project created opportunities for parishioners to get to know each other better, to give time to the other, and to do something meaningful together. When asked, can you describe your experience of the God Space sessions, a young European man expressed:

God Space brought a whole chunk of church members together, young, old, and were on different stages in their spiritual journeys.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, a middle-aged woman who is a missionary overseas expressed:

God Space was excellent. I appreciated the social context probably as much as anything, it was a chance to get to know different people better, talking with them,

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<sup>13</sup> Heja., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 28 September 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Pitts., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 2 October 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Tanks., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 14 November 2018.

and sharing the fellowship was perhaps my favorite part. Indeed, just getting to know people and asking what makes you who you are?<sup>16</sup>

Also, another exclaimed: I found it really challenging as I realized how judgmental and selective, I am with people, I realized that I didn't have the capacity for people different from me.<sup>17</sup>

And Virginia's honesty is worth noting too:

God space made me realize that there is too much of me in my life and less of God. It was encouraging. We talked about noticing people and our surroundings, and I thought yes that's right; that's where we must start. I am not sure I do that very well. So, it was encouraging me to do more to notice my surroundings.<sup>18</sup>

Evangelisting is evangelism through listening, and if embraced by the parish, the results are likely to create more opportunities, thus deepen relationships not only among St Michael's members but also with the broader community. Personal relationships will become meaningful and form a bridge for people to foster long-lasting relationships with Jesus Christ. Having heard how participants appreciated the God Space Project, the following section touches briefly on ways in which St Michael's church can be sent out to tackle some of the critical social issues in West Auckland where it is situated. In many respects, we do not need to reinvent the wheel because evangelism can be carried out in ways that do not demean, judge, belittle the other, and so forth.

Nonetheless, something is broken and needs fixing; thus, my focus on reframing evangelism. People's negative experience of evangelism and subsequent failure to engage evangelism themselves is a clear picture that evangelism is in urgent need of a facelift to enable the Church to remain loyal to its calling of bringing the good news to the world. Evangelisting is the key to reaching out to our neighborhoods and can be done well

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<sup>16</sup> Heja, 28 September 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Virginia, 16 November 2018.

regardless of the negative stereotypes of the past. For example, statements like the one below make a case for reimagining evangelism. One lady in her sixties experienced (door-to-door) door knockers who would force themselves into the house:

The one I remember is when I was 8yrs old where my grandmother and my aunt telling me to go to the door and tell them (Jehovah's Witness) that we were Catholic and that I go to a Roman Catholic school and I go to chapel every day. I was scared and uncomfortable. They were quite aggressive. From their point of view, they genuinely believed that they were there to save my soul, and anything was acceptable if they could save my soul, even pushing their way into our house.<sup>19</sup>

Sadly, this way of doing evangelism gives all evangelists a bad name, thus my argument that we can do things differently. Reimagining evangelism can be achieved in many ways, so in this thesis, I have chosen listening and hospitality.

#### **4.4 Evangelisting like Jesus**

Jesus's way of evangelism was taking the good news to the people, and such is the character of the gospel not to wait for the people to come to him to receive help, comfort, and compassion. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matt 4:23-25). In some rare cases, he would tell the healed person to go and show him/herself to the temple priests (Lk 17: 14). For Jesus, it was not about proselytizing or filling the church pews, but about being the good news in the world. He demonstrated that Christians are to go out and minister to the needs of society, by loving those in our wider communities in such a way that it compels them to come to faith, not by force but willingly desiring to encounter Christ and to follow him on a personal level. But, Post Christendom, Evangelists used scaring tactics to proselytize people by threatening them, and the choice often would

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<sup>19</sup>Simms, 15 November 2018.



be presented like this - if you do not turn to Christianity, then you will go to hell and burn in a massive fire of eternal punishment. Simms, with a Catholic background, sadly added:

And to be told you are going to go to hell if you do not comply, it is so not the way to do it. It is the old fashion fear of God teaching, which I experienced a great deal as a child in the Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup>

As people from different backgrounds, cultures, races, and languages shared similarities of how their experience of evangelism had been unpleasant, the impression of the church as pushy and scary seemed universal. Another aspect of pushy evangelism shared by a New Zealand born *Pakeha* woman in her sixties was the misuse of the Bible to intimidate people during evangelism, and she recalls:

Evangelists for me were people quoting verses of the Bible at you so rapidly that all you can hear are numbers, and I did not like it at all. It is quite forceful that they raise their voices. They almost squeeze you into a corner till you say yes, to get some peace. That was my experience, mostly Jehovah's Witness doing door-knocking evangelism. It was and is extremely uncomfortable; it was sort of like it is tremendous to be on the receipt of this volume of information and quotes coming at you.<sup>21</sup>

One gentleman remembered:

What comes to mind when I hear the word evangelism is the Salvation Army with the wake or battle cry and the Mammon who could be very overpowering as well. So, I have had a few experiences of being evangelized the wrong way around, and it put me off. They would push and quote Bible verses that just put me off.<sup>22</sup>

In saying that, however, not all who took part in the study had experienced negative evangelism. For example, Davidson, a *Pakeha* gentleman in his sixties, recalled how his friend's gentle ways of evangelism spoke deeply to him, managing to steer him towards conversion as a result. Subsequently, he spent most of his life serving as a missionary overseas. Davidson says:

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<sup>20</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Sharonn, 15 November 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Pitts, 2 October 2018.

For a while, my friend was sharing God with me. It was a very gentle way she did it, she chose the moment, and I guess she prayed about it and God was good. I know others had negative experiences of evangelism, but I did not experience pushy evangelism at all.<sup>23</sup>

Davidson's view is that evangelism is necessary; otherwise, some people would never come to Christ. Yes, that may be true considering that his experience of evangelism is positive; however, my argument and that of other participants is that evangelism, when done insensitively, does more damage than good, such as the way many experienced evangelists in the Twentieth Century. These sentiments are shared by another member who remembered how, in the end, she appreciated that her uncle evangelized her but did not like the way he went about it. She felt judged:

I felt pushed by a family member who was being very direct. One day my uncle said to me, are you saved? What is going to happen with your life without faith? She later appreciated her uncle evangelizing to her and says, I also think that my uncle might have been following the prompting of the Holy Spirit about my life. I would probably not have become a Christian if he had not been pushy. Another tactic that my uncle used was to give me a book as a gift when I was going away overseas on an exchange program. The change of tactic worked! In other words, the ways we do evangelism need to change with the times and the cultures and contexts we are.<sup>24</sup>

The results and findings of the project challenge the common assumption that evangelism is where evangelists know best, and they talk while others listen. On the contrary, good evangelism involves doing with others and not for others while also attending to their views and how they can contribute to better themselves. The goal is for all to know that God loves them. The following section explores Jesus Evangelisting.

In many respects, Jesus' way of ministering to people was Evangelisting. Jesus was the best model of Evangelisting as, on many occasions, he listened and asked

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<sup>23</sup> Davidson, 28 September 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Heja, 28 September 2018.

questions to strangers to understand their needs. For instance, in Lk 24:17-20, Jesus listened to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus before he could reveal his identity. Again, in Jn 3:1-21, he had a conversation of rebirth with Nicodemus, and in the chapter that followed, Jesus had a dialogue that changed the Samaritan woman's view of herself (Jn 4:1-29). Over a cup of water, they discussed theology, her personal life, and the fact that she had no husband but had been married five times or had had five men in her life. During this exchange, the woman realized that Jesus knew her well, but despite what he knew about her, his interest was in her as a person. By listening and asking probing questions, Jesus showed love to this woman who appeared to have been alone and marginalized. Full of gratitude, she went back to the village to invite others to come and meet this man who had told her everything about herself, the good and the bad.

#### **4.5 Theological Support**

A fundamental principle driving this chapter is that the Church is called to be our brother/sister's keeper (Gen 4:1-9), which is the spirit of Ubuntu, being called to the ethic of being interdependent. This biblical passage shows how the two brothers missed the point while they were giving their offering to God. Cain and Abel took their different offerings to God, and Abel's were found to be acceptable to God before Cain's. In anger, Cain killed his brother. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother?" he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" God's question to Cain assumes that he should know where his brother was because they were expected to keep an eye on each brother. Likewise, one's humanity is inseparable from another's humanity; as such the church is called to know and care for its community in practical ways that include creating spaces for conversations to happen as well as meeting its needs. As such, the research explores various responses the Church might adopt in an attempt to be the community's keeper as we share the good news

of God in contemporary ways. The project seeks to engage in new ways of evangelizing as we endeavor to respond to what it means for the Church to be good news and brother/sister's keeper. It seeks to reframe evangelism to serve in this post-Christendom New Zealand.

With the above in mind, while the parish seeks to grow, it is imperative to engage in ways that not only focus on increasing roll numbers but in ways that seek to nurture spiritual growth in its members, which then becomes a springboard that launches them into the community at large. Spiritual maturity will produce a community that cares for others in ways that Jesus Christ would. Even more significant, the parish can achieve growth through several ways that include engaging in evangelistic listening, hospitality, creating spaces where others can feel safe to voice out their religious beliefs and taking the Church to the community, rather than waiting for the public to seek out the Church. In his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Peter Block highlights ways in which organizations can design physical spaces and structures that enable belonging. This way of thinking about our places creates an opening for authentic communities to exist, as each person contributes to making that happen.<sup>25</sup> In making this suggestion, Block urges us to think seriously about how we present our spaces to others and to give serious thought to how we create our meeting spaces.

As such, the **God Space Project** was a proper response to what ought to be happening in the parish, that is, creating safe spaces not only for parishioners but also beyond our walls. **God Space** was aiming to reframe the outdated evangelism that had been going on. The type of evangelism that members had been accustomed to was universal, as reflected

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<sup>25</sup> Block, Peter, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 161-163.

in the responses they gave when asked, what is your experience of evangelism? They all responded using such words as:

Door knockers, they would push and quote bible verses that just put me off. The salvation army with the wake or battle cry, Mammon, could be very overpowering as well. I have had a few experiences of being evangelized the wrong way around, and it put me off. Their attitude was superior, like saying you do not know Christ, and they know Christ, and no one else knows. They would ask questions like, did you accept Jesus as your Lord and savior? Even when you explain to them that you were a Christian, they would criticize the way you were baptized, and say you should have done full immersion, and if not, therefore, you were not a Christian.<sup>26</sup>

Others said:

I think many people, when they hear the word evangelism, they think scary stuff, threatening, like people quoting verses of the Bible at you so rapidly that all you can hear is numbers. It is quite forceful they raise their voice and almost squeeze you into a corner till you say yes, to get some peace.<sup>27</sup>

Most participants had experienced harsh and judgmental forms of evangelism and, in turn, had used the same ways to communicate the gospel to others. Several times I overhear members of our congregation asking visitors whether they are saved or not? This question assumes that one must have said certain kinds of prayers to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. However, in all fairness, it is not all doom and gloom as St Michael's is still engaging in some form of evangelism even if its engagement is traditional like inviting someone to a church service and events.

One participant shares her experience of being evangelized, where she was asked to repeat specific prayers of conversion to Jesus. She recalls:

My experience of being evangelized was that of continually being asked whether I said a prayer to receive Jesus? After repeating the prayer, I still come out of there wondering when I have done something wrong, yet that meant the next time they ask, I will have to receive Christ once again, and I was often afraid and exhausted.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Simms, 15 November 2018

<sup>28</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

Peter Block is adamant that the Church should aim to let people belong before they can believe. He clarifies, “the traditional conversations that seek to explain, study, analyze, define tools, and express the desire to change others are interesting but not compelling. They are forms of maintaining control. But questions open the door to the future and are more influential than answers in that they demand engagement. Engagement in the right questions is what creates accountability.”<sup>29</sup>

Block asserts that the right questions give the means to start a community where responsibility and commitment are ingrained. They are the key to understanding the mechanisms and architecture for gathering people in a way that will build relatedness, which in turn creates communities in which citizens will choose accountability and commitment.<sup>30</sup> While old methods of evangelism focused predominantly on the proclamation of the word and focusing on converting people to Christianity, experts in this topic believe, evangelism is more than that, as it also involves actions that demonstrate that God is interested in the spiritual as much as the physical aspects of human life. For example, the congregation has had many opportunities to engage in evangelism through programs such as *Beyond Borders*, where we serve the local community in practical ways. Also, the *Feast Café* informal style worship where members are encouraged to invite friends and non-church people to this non-threatening gathering. However, we find that not many members take part in these programs, and we rarely have new people join us. While they do not admit as such, the congregation appears inward-focused, often taking for

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Block, “Notes on Peter Block’s book on Community” (<http://www.chaosmanagement.com/images/stories/pdfs/Notes%20on%20Peter%20Block%27s%20book%20on%20Community.pdf>, n.d.), accessed October 15, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Block, *Community*, 111.

granted that if we run our Sunday worship services, morning teas, and other events well, then people will come to us, and this is the Christendom model.

Though regular gathering is right, Christianity is much more than a Sunday only religion. On the one hand, I agree with Hauerwas, in *The Study of Evangelism*, where he affirms that Sunday morning worship can be evangelism as the church's sole reason for existence is to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, one way the church wins converts is by making us faithful worshippers of the God who alone is worthy of worship. On the other, my argument is that we ought to do more than gather in our building but go out to be the Church in the neighborhood. For example, at the beginning of the Listening Project, participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form, and at the end of the project, the evaluation form was completed again to compare the differences that the project had made in their lives. The overall score of the evaluation form was 69.57%, with 85-100 being the preferred outcome of a congregation. 85-100 score meant that the not-yet-Christians in your life, are undeniably drawn towards the heart of Jesus formed in you.<sup>32</sup> Our congregation fell on the 65-85 rating, which means, you must decrease, Jesus must increase, and change one heart at a time. Embrace the people and situations in your life as God prunes those heart attitudes that are not bearing fruit for the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> These results show that the congregation had judgmental and self-righteous attitudes towards people who are different; however, by the end of the project participants expressed positive approaches that will propel us towards the community.

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<sup>31</sup> Chilcote and Warner, *The Study of Evangelism*.

<sup>32</sup> The scoresheet is included in Appendix 1.

<sup>33</sup> The scoresheet is included in Appendix 2.

It is fair to say that to begin the process of serving our community, St Michael's Church should start by building relationships with the broader community. One way to build relationships is through active evangelism, active listening, making connections, and meeting the physical and spiritual needs of people. For example, West Auckland, with its ethnic diversity and low economic status, presents an opportunity for the Church to be the good news. People need to be told and shown the love of God, and the church can do this through evangelism in action. The lack of evangelism has resulted in a lack of engagement with the communities that need help. People in need are more likely to be referred to the Central Government welfare Agencies for aid when the church can as well assist them. Jesus is our example, for, on many occasions, he ate with people who were considered sinners, unclean, and the marginalized. The following section discusses how Jesus brought good news to communities.

#### **4.6 The Church's Vocation as a Social Strategy**

Participants agree that evangelism is harder now in this secular age as Christianity is no longer the culture of society, and the result is that people are being pulled in several different directions, far more than in decades past. Also, what makes evangelism difficult now, as noted in Chapter Two, is that belief has evolved, and people question more now than in previous years why they should believe in Jesus. Christendom got it wrong by institutionalizing Christianity and made it the official religion of the State/Empire, and that is Stanley Hauerwa's point. He stresses: "The church does not have a social strategy; the church is a social strategy."<sup>34</sup> That means the Church does not need an evangelistic strategy if the Church is true to itself as the body of Christ in the world. Bryan Stone in

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<sup>34</sup>Stanley and William Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens 1989* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 1989).



*Evangelism after Christendom* also adds that the very shape of the church in the form of its practices and patterns of social process constitute its witness in the world in providing a visible and material foretaste of God's Kingdom - love, community together, listening to one another, and sharing hospitality.<sup>35</sup>

As well as being the body of Christ, Christians are called to be ambassadors of Jesus to the world, to offer peace where there is conflict, to be love where there is hatred, to feed the hungry, to heal the earth and to contribute in practical ways that bring heaven to earth. As it is, since the Fall in (Gen 3), the universe is not as it should be. As such, the act of noticing the world around us to see what God is doing and how the church can join in the creation will bring heaven to earth where creation can be as good as God intended. Accordingly, participants found it enriching to go out into the community and notice, explore, and discover what is happening in our area to determine how the Church can serve those around us. For instance, one person commented:

One thing encouraging during the God Space project was to go out and talk to others about life. First, we had to talk about our faith among ourselves to know who we are first because if we do not know who we are, we cannot tell others about it.<sup>36</sup>

Also, another felt,

God Space was excellent, and I also think the whole idea of finding out what the community needs, and for me, I felt this is organic, being in a community, to see how one can contribute to the community in their way.<sup>37</sup>

Christians are the closest thing to Jesus that the world shall see. We are the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouthpiece for Christ. However, many have been hurt by Christians

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<sup>35</sup> Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2007). 15.

<sup>36</sup> Virginia., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 16 November 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

assuming the mouthpiece of Christ while we pour out words of hatred that stem from our humanity and unChristlike.

When we understand evangelism, we will appreciate the heart of God for the world, and that understanding will enable the church to take the good news to the people and hope that they will want to join the movement of God to spread the good news in their way and context. For it is God's desire for all to come to know the gospel and to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Jesus called his disciples to go and make more disciples (Matt. 28:18-20), to engage the world and spread the gospel since the Great Commission was a command to His disciples, including generations of disciples that followed. Chapter Five will deal at length with the notion of the Great Commission in trying to learn whether it was a command of Jesus or an expectation. His expectation, however, is clear that as disciples, we become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Accordingly, to be effective in promoting the obedience to the faith, Christ desires that we apply the three essentials of evangelism - that is listening, speaking, and putting words into action – however, not in our strength but through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Participants agreed that evangelism was the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes healthy evangelism possible. I would like to believe that the atmosphere in New Zealand is ripe with the possibility of ministry. For example, as migration rises, the church can be the good news to new immigrants as they settle, inviting others to Church, and providing outreach programs that take the Church to the people in the community, and more.

The question is still, though, what is the Church offering that shopping, watching sports, or time spent at the gym does not give to people? People are searching for spiritual encounters and experiences in many places and ways other than inside a Church building

as such, old evangelism ways that focused predominantly on proclaiming the word, no longer appeal. Evangelism is much more than a proclamation to the word. It also involves actions that show that God is interested in the spiritual as much as the physical aspects of people. The congregation cannot afford to be inward focused, waiting for people to come to us. It is fair to say that even to begin the process of engaging issues in the area, St Michael's Church should first and foremost build relationships within its members and then the wider community. One way to build relationships is through active listening, making connections that will enable us to prioritize the needs of the surrounding community.

Researchers in the field of evangelism and spirituality agree that with society continually changing, it is imperative that those trying to share their faith in this context, regularly review their programs and progress.<sup>38</sup> In particular, Steven Croft reminds us that the fundamental principles of the evangelistic message do not need to change; instead, the Church needs to remember and recover the basics since this ever-changing climate demands a transformation in the way the Church engages in evangelism. Rob Frost, in *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*, argues that,

In an existentialist culture, which my truth is considered sacrosanct, and your truth is respected as right for you, many people consider it politically incorrect for anyone to challenge this status quo. It is little wonder, therefore, that many traditional forms of spreading the Word are proving ineffective in such a culture.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Steven J. L Croft, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture* (London: Church House, 2005), 126.

<sup>39</sup> Croft, 99.

Overcoming stereotypes of evangelism are achievable if St Michael's Church takes the lead through evangelistic listening that requires one to use all their senses in new and insightful ways.

### **Christian theology needs Evangelisting.**

The project showed that evangelistic listening creates deeper relationships that open endless possibilities to engage with the communities. After participants had been out in the city, one woman reflected on her listening and noticing skills:

I have to extend myself in that area. However, I also learned about paying attention, and the more I pay attention now, the more people share about what is going on in their lives. It is interesting that the more you talk to people, you realize that a lot is going on, so it is one thing I learned.<sup>40</sup>

Another spoke about the conversation she had with a stranger at the playground and realized that even strangers could share their stories if listened to:

I talked to strangers at the playground. One stranger shared something personal about not wanting to have children. She said, but after observing nature and how it is so beautiful, she felt God speaking to her that she should join in creating human beings.<sup>41</sup>

There was a strong sense that members of the congregation would love to spend more time together as one noted after speaking with two people on his table,

I had seen these women before but had never spoken to them until God Space. It is unfortunate that people who worship in the same church but had never spoken to each other before the Listening Project.<sup>42</sup>

Evangelism, when approached with an attitude of gratitude and love for the other, is exciting and fulfilling. As Gortner reminds us, evangelism is motivated by gratitude.<sup>43</sup> Our

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<sup>40</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Heja, 28 September 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Kirt, 13 November 2018.

<sup>43</sup> David Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism*, Transformations the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century (New York: Church Pub, 2008), 1.

sense of gratefulness for what God is doing in our lives motivates us to show and tell others what it is that God has done for us. Our motivation is that we want to see many others enjoy firsthand the goodness of God's transforming love for them. Archbishop Justin Welby also adds, "Not every Christian is an evangelist; however, every Christian is a witness. A witness is someone who says what they have experienced, meaning what they have seen and heard for themselves."<sup>44</sup> We give testimony to this because every follower of Christ has witnessed for themselves the abundant love that God has for them, and every one of us is sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives and speak words which testify to that.

Further, being aware that Jesus met not only spiritual needs, but people's physical well-being as part of his agenda should make us want to see people holistically. I hope the project will also challenge church leaders to take risks in their preaching and to give the Church a nudge to move out of its comfort zone into the unknown territory of community involvement. For grace is to be proclaimed in its personal and prophetic power, the emphasis at all levels of Church leadership must shift from survival mentality and preservation of the institution to faithfulness rooted in grateful response to God whose grace seeks the transformation of the world. Understanding the call for listening involves letting go of the outcome of the encounter. Croft emphasizes that the outcome of our acts of kindness to the other is unknown but left to the grace and love of God. It is the church learning to listen again to the society with the understanding that God is already at work in

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<sup>44</sup> Justin Welby, "<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-justin-welbys-deo-gloria-trust-lecture-evangelism-and>" (March 15, 2019).

our communities and desires that we join in what He is already doing rather than approaching with an attitude of having all the answers and a sense of superiority.<sup>45</sup>

This thesis project was timely in trying to get the parishioners of all different backgrounds to listen to each other while sharing their own stories. St Michael's is known as one of the most evangelical parishes in the diocese, and this brings with it an assumption that every member speaks with the same view. I find it problematic to lump together more than one hundred and fifty members under one understanding. The assumption concludes that being evangelical means not being liberal and holding fast to a literal translation of the Bible. The generalization should not be so at St Michael's as members are from different Christian backgrounds, thus holding different theological views and open to other ways of interpreting scripture. The parish of Henderson is home to members from evangelical, charismatic, Anglo-Catholic, liberal, and non-denominational traditions. The composition of these different traditions has the potential to bring so much experience to the growth of the parish if nurtured in an open, safe, and non-threatening space. Often in sermons, I encourage our members to take advantage of these differences because variations are not meant to isolate but to enrich.

Sumpter, speaking about Church, in general, suggests that each different tradition must seek humility. He concludes that moving towards the center can nurture and create opportunities for different cultures to share resources and opportunities to complete each other rather than competing.<sup>46</sup> When we draw closer, we find that mostly what we regard as differences are similarities that should bind us and not divide us. Finding common

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<sup>45</sup> Croft, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*, 133.

<sup>46</sup> Tim Sumpter and Church Army (Church of England), *Evangelisting: Recovering the Art of Listening in Evangelism* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2011), 13.

ground and starting from there will take society further together as the primary common ground for all to start from is that of our humanity and existence. Borrowing from the African concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu says I am only human because of other humans – I am because you are. We are also humans that embody stories that have shaped who we are and influence our future. Everyone has a story, and no story is like no other. Therefore, working together in areas of agreement is of fundamental importance in any group. One participant who is usually a talker expressed: I did appreciate listening to others because everybody has a journey and a story.<sup>47</sup>

Also, another added:

My wife says that I talk more than I listen. It is true because sometimes we do not listen to people, we jump in before they even complete their sentence. Sometimes we complete the sentences without knowing what they wanted to say. We assume, and we get it wrong. It is vital to be quiet and listen, not to say anything to interrupt others.<sup>48</sup>

A young theological student who is also a youth leader had this to say:

The best teaching that I got from the project was the importance of listening. Because often before God Space, I would have thought that it is more critical for me to do the speaking at the youth group as the youth leader. Now, I let them speak and learn from them and try to remember what they would have mentioned and inserting it in a conversation the next time I meet them. That way, they know I was listening when they spoke to me.<sup>49</sup>

#### **4.7 Listening as a Bridge**

As I explored what I would title my thesis project, the image of a bridge kept coming to mind. I passionately love bridges. I will include in the appendix some pictures of bridges that I came across during this period of study. My thoughts are summed up by this short poem that I wrote:

Bridging the Gap! I am Bridge, and I am listening.

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<sup>47</sup> Dayna, 25 October 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Kirt., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 13 November 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Tanks, 14 November 2018.

I mean, Listening is my name.  
My name is Listening, and I am a bridge called listening.  
I bridge all barriers. I connect listeners to the past and the future.  
I am listening!

A conversation moves in two directions. Both listen. Both speak. It breaks down when it moves in only one direction. The Church speaks, and the world listens, and this way of relating to the world might have worked in generations past, but it is now outdated. Miscommunication occurs because the bridge is broken, and the bridge is old; the bridge can no longer sustain the amount of cargo and traffic going through it since the users only use it to go one way it is weighed down on one side. Those on the receiving end feel inferior and unappreciated; thus, they do not want to be part of the conversation. What ought to be going on is that the bridge ought to be used as two-way traffic to serve both sides of the terrain. A bridge is a link, a connector between two ends, not a one-way arrow. So, the Listening Project acknowledges that the old ways of evangelism need reframing. This Project seeks to foster active listening among church members so that we can engage with the broader community. Active listening is the bridge to excellent communication. It is committed to listening based on good habits and self-control. Good listening is purposeful and productive because it allows the listener and the speaker to reach an understanding.

### **Evangelistening Church**

When we go into the community already with a set of rules of what we should do, then we are telling the community what they should do, and we are not listening to what they need.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Tech, 3 October 2018.



Tech's words above encourage Christians to listen to the communities that we seek to serve. Similarly, the Bible in James warns, "be quick to listen and slow to speak" (Jas 1:19) because there are beauty and power in being slow to speak. Good listening transforms relationships and allows us to hear the Holy Spirit communicate to us before we talk to others. In other words, when we wait to respond to someone, it gives the Spirit time to prompt us on what is proper to say in response if we need to. Often people react when a reply is unnecessary; instead, the speaker only needed to know that they are heard. Jesus modeled good listening. He listened because he loved people; thus, he treated others with dignity and respect. Therefore, evangelistic listening is about developing a Christ-like character.

The experience of Evangelisting is the main contribution that my research has offered to the Church. The project shows that evangelism, when approached in an attitude of gratitude and love for the other, brings people together rather than isolates them. It is not something that the Church does, but it brings the Church alive because the church is people, not the buildings. The research shows that evangelism is not a scary, or intimidating or daunting task, but it is an exciting adventure that is easy to do when we have the right language as one woman commented: For me, the listening project has helped me in finding the right language for what we want to say.<sup>51</sup>

It is at the center of Christian theology to want others to listen to us. We expect Jesus to listen when we pray (which He does). Where we fail is when we do not listen to how then Jesus responds to our petitions. The lack of listening then spreads to our

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<sup>51</sup> Kirt, 13 November 2018.

relationships, where we do not hear as much as we speak. This lack of listening was voiced out by a concerned participant, she says:

It makes sense that we pay attention because if you do not listen well, you cannot respond accurately. Moreover, we want to respond to the people out there correctly; it is not what we think they want; instead, what is it that they want the Church to do. Yes, those who evangelized me years ago wanted me to convert, but how can I be converted to something that I do not understand.<sup>52</sup>

Further to the knowledge that Jesus not only met our spiritual needs but that people's physical wellbeing was part of His agenda should make us want to see people whole. Jesus not only met people's physical and spiritual needs, but justice was also on His plan. Therefore, when the church seeks to listen and give others a fair hearing, whether they are religious or not, we are about the laying out of the fabric where it is possible to bring about justice. Consequently, justice becomes the Church's agenda. By being a community of justice and peace, the Church helps the world to understand what it is to be the world. The world is God's world, God's good creation as such for the Church to be the Church; it ought to show care to God's good creation. The world is not as it should be, not in its current state, which is marred by pain and suffering; thus, the church must rise to the challenge and be a channel of healing. Hauerwas points out that the world has no way of knowing it is the world without the Church, pointing to the reality of God's kingdom.<sup>53</sup> The essence of Hauerwas's statement is that the church sheds light on the world and is the gospel in the world.

Theology is what the Church does when it checks that it is entirely passing on the word it receives from God; by living-out the tradition it has received and passes to future

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<sup>52</sup> Cabener, 13 November 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Hauerwas et al. *Living out Loud*, 104.

generations the good of that tradition, then it has something to say about the world. The church offers a coherent and public voice about who God is to the world. When the Church is functioning at its best as the bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ, it gives the world a glimpse of what the world should be and presents a listening ear rather than assuming what the world needs to hear. Often forms of evangelism used in the past decided what the needs are instead of letting the world tell the Church what it needs. For example, Perkins, in *Restoring our Communities*, encourages organizations to meet what he calls felt needs and highlights the dangers of outsiders assuming people's needs. He recalls some well-meaning sponsors who gave farm machinery to the African country of Nigeria. Years later, the donors went to visit Nigeria to assess how the community was doing. The donors were surprised to find the expensive machinery rusting and rotting in the fields with none using them. The story is a typical example of how not to assume the needs of others.<sup>54</sup> The givers had not asked whether the Nigerians needed this kind of equipment. As they later found out, the Nigerians did not need that kind of material as they first did not know how to use them, and second, found them expensive to keep. If only the donors had inquired from the people what help they needed, they would have known that more cows and seeds were what was required. Most African villagers depend on animals for survival and not on machinery.

Like ethical counselors, we ought to listen to others well to know how to effectively communicate the unsearchable riches of Christ in a way that speaks to their contexts.

Another story is of a homeless man in Alexandria, Virginia. The man had been visiting the local soup kitchen for a while. One day he came asking for money, and the attendant said

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<sup>54</sup> Perkins, *Restoring At-Risk Communities*, 18-20.

he would not give him money until he has told his story. Basically, why was he on the streets? Who was he? From where did he come? What skills did he have? In the conversation, the attendant found out that this homeless man had lost his job and home during the 2008 financial crisis, which led him to live on the streets. In the conversation, he mentioned that he was an engineer and named some of the significant infrastructures that he had been part of, and some of them were iconic structures in that city. The attendant decided to give this man a job to redesign their soup kitchen in exchange for the money that he needed. In the end, it paid off to listen as this man ended up being the answer to their need.

Perkins is adamant that "living the gospel means desiring for your neighbor and your neighbor's family that which you desire for yourself and your family. Living the gospel means bettering the quality of other people's lives – spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally as you better your own."<sup>55</sup> This living the gospel means not leaving the needs of our community to the government when we can meet that need for each other.

For our evangelism to be believable, it must be biblical. So, when we communicate the gospel of grace, we must draw on biblical truths, stories, and images. If we stop there, however, we will fail to communicate effectively how the gospel is good news for others. Speaking the truth but not applying it, we think that it is enough to tell people the gospel, that is not true. Jesus not only preached, but he also walked the talk. We ought to make our actions believable. Take, for example, after Jesus had finished his interactions with the people, the disciples said Master send them home its end of the day. Jesus said you give them something to eat (Matt 14:13-21). Many times, the Church is like the disciples; we

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<sup>55</sup> Perkins, 21.

like sending people home; we like referring the poor and the needy to the government. Since when were our responsibilities the problem of the government? We need to be love in action – that means sharing our resources with others. As Phil Reed highlights, "Evangelism brings us face to face with the physical needs of people as well as spiritual needs. Social action means that we must be willing to use our resources to meet people's needs, such as food, clothing, housing, and education."<sup>56</sup>

As such, the next chapter explores some of the church's responses to what is happening in the parish and around it as well as how the church can meet its desire to grow by reframing unhelpful forms of evangelism.

### **Community Service**

West Auckland, with its ethnic diversity and low economic status, presents an opportunity for the Church to be the good news. Evangelism is a fundamental tool for the Christian faith and the growth of the Church, bringing the gospel to the communities in practical ways. Looking at the poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and other destructive behaviors have led to my conclusion that the Church in New Zealand has lost the essence of the Christian virtue of evangelism. As mentioned earlier, people need to be told and shown that God loves them, and the church can do this through evangelism in action. However, evangelism can be a challenge as a society now regards faith as a private issue, which should be kept as such, and talking about religion is shunned and regarded as imposing one's belief on others.

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<sup>56</sup> Phil Reed, "Toward a Theology of Christian Community Development, 42," in *Restoring at Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right*, John Perkins, ed., (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1995).

Consequently, not many people share their religious views with others except with likeminded people. The lack of evangelism has resulted in a decline of engagement with the communities that need help. The result is that people are referred to the government for aid when the church ought to assist these people. In response to outdated forms of evangelism, a new way of doing Evangelism ought to be developed, thus, the next chapter suggests ways of reforming evangelism.

This chapter has covered the subject of evangelism in-depth as well as looking at Evangelistening like Jesus and listening as a bridge. Having acknowledged that the Church is the social strategy, participants spoke about barriers to evangelism. Attitudes and approaches to evangelism identified as barriers included pride, being judgmental, preachy tones, pushy behavior or dispositions, instilling fear, and intimidation. The following chapter highlights different ways the church may adopt to respond to the old evangelism ways.

## **Chapter Five. Pragmatic Task of Practical Theology**

### **5.1 How might we respond?**

The earlier chapters addressed the desire for growth that the Anglican parish of Henderson has and the challenges to achieving such in a Post-Christendom New Zealand. Chapter two discusses the context and background of the parish of Henderson. Chapter three grappled with the notion that New Zealand is a secular country, what secular means, and issues of belief. Chapter four dealt with the phenomenon of Evangelism, including voices of participants' interviews post the God Space project. Participants shared their views and experiences of Evangelism, and all agreed that the forms of Evangelism they had experienced were now outdated and unpleasant. Moving forward, Chapter five explores the theology of Jesus, Great Commission, Reframing Evangelism, Reframing listening, Reframing hospitality as Evangelism as well as looking at how Jesus responded and offered hospitality to people.

Many evangelists have discovered that, while some spiritual seekers shun any invitation to explore biblical truth, they are often open to explore the Christian experience.<sup>1</sup> Also, society is continually changing with great hunger for new experiences gripping our culture, even restaurants and shopping itself is being transformed into an adventure, consequently bringing challenges to the church that must not remain static in the way it engages with people. Church ought to present its products with a sense of offering experiences to people; as such if we are to do well in the field of the church, we need to

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<sup>1</sup> Croft, 99.

keep this in mind.<sup>2</sup> The starting point towards engaging well with our community is by reframing listening and hospitality as the flowing section will explore.

Hospitality is a major theme that came out of the project. When asked about how hospitable our parish is, most parishioners gave us a low rating. For example, Myra (from Germany) had this to say about her experience as a new person in the parish:

I believe our church is minimally polite but not as welcoming as we would like to think we are. When I arrived to join the community six years ago, I intended to settle at St Mark's, but I did not feel welcome. I moved on to St Michael's, where the Vicar was welcoming and allowed me to use my gifts in service, and I stayed. However, since then, my experience is that our church members criticize others' efforts more than they offer encouraging compliments.<sup>3</sup>

Participants agreed that we are good at putting on a good spread after morning tea, but the idea of inviting others to their homes and spaces were lost. However, we endeavor to explore how might our church experience change if God Space is activated in our church, and what might look or feel different? We acknowledge that hospitality becomes essential in a multifaith society unlike when we assume that everyone is a Christian. As we reach out to our surrounding communities, it is necessary to remember that hospitality is deeply valued in many societies especially in poor communities where lack of resources makes hospitable provisions necessary. As we find in modern society where many are lonely because of an individualistic culture, paying attention is scarce, which makes listening to an expression of hospitality. The comfort and safety of another, especially a stranger, is paramount and in the motivation for hospitality. Also, of importance is the love and respect for the other mainly in the fluidity of the guest/host

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<sup>2</sup> Croft, 99.

<sup>3</sup> Myra., Project Participant, St Michaels And All Angels Anglican Church Auckland, Interview by Nyasha Gumbeze, Auckland, 28 September 2018.



relationship and the concept of hospice or hospital; the idea of blessing and healing through partnership exchange.

The thesis project, as said earlier, was not trying to redefine Evangelism; instead, it was aiming at reforming the process of Evangelism by going back to the basics of listening, as well as observing, serving, and using hospitality as evangelism. One only needs to look at the number of books addressing the topic of evangelism; they have increased considerably, showing that there is a growing interest in the processes that engage, shape, nurture, and sustain persons and communities in their Christian faith. The ever-increasing interest in Evangelism is not confined to St Michael's only; instead, it is national and international. However, concern for Evangelism must not be simply for the sake of institutional survival in an increasingly multi-faith, post-Christendom New Zealand but as a constitutive part of the church and as a missional practice of community of faith.

Reviewing Evangelism will hopefully lead to better ways of sharing the good news as the church responds to its need to grow while in an environment where the virtue of Evangelism is lost and if it is happening at all, Evangelism is carried out through outdated forms that alienate people. Moving forward, participants, when asked, if you could do something different in Evangelism, what would it be? They were unanimous that current Evangelism methods needed to change.

Some of their responses were: I would take time to listen to people, hear where people are at, try to listen to the Holy Spirit to direct the conversation, and I will offer to pray for people more often.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Heja, 28 September 2018.

Another stated:

I would try to remember that when we meet people, God has already gone before us and is doing something in their lives, or maybe a mother has been praying for them. Therefore, I would approach the person with an attitude of wanting to hear their view of God.<sup>5</sup>

Further, another felt:

I would want to be prepared to do more listening than I usually do and to ask people to share about their lives and I should be utilizing the tools such as the wonder to get people to share and when it's my turn to share, I would like to share with greater awareness and be more confident.<sup>6</sup>

Another added:

I would like to hope that my life will count as part of Evangelism, and to become an earnest listener, it is imperative to do so. I want to be there for others, not necessarily saying anything because action speaks louder than words, and just living out Christ can make a big difference.<sup>7</sup>

One young man expressed how his way of Evangelism would minister to people through their passions and interests. He says:

If I had unlimited resources, the most natural way to evangelize is to focus on their passion; you can create a sound connection with that person if you take an interest in what they love. Several the youth quite enjoy basketball, so I think if I had unlimited money, I would buy a basketball hoop, some cool basketball and I think this would bring young people to show off their skills and stuff like that. It is tapping into what they like and what they enjoy.<sup>8</sup>

The participants' voices show that the proper and best response for the church is to remember that we are Jesus' representatives on earth; therefore, we approach Evangelism by asking ourselves, how Jesus would respond to the situations. The project has encouraged me to reread and reapply scripture anew as we take a closer look at how Jesus interacted with people. Therefore, the following section explores some of Jesus' responses to people in different encounters; thus, he becomes the standard on how we live life.

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<sup>5</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Cabener, 13 November 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Dayna, 25 October 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Tanks, 14 November 2018.

## **5.2 Section One - Jesus on the Great Commission**

In this section, I respond to the question of what are we to do differently in Evangelism to grow the church? As we explore this question, we do well by starting from what Jesus did: He loved unto death, and if the community of faith is about nothing else, we are about genuinely loving our neighbors as ourselves. We understand and celebrate that we are linked inextricably to each other in ways that are beyond ourselves, as exemplified by Jesus, who not only preached to crowds but also prioritized individuals. There are forty separate occasions recorded in scripture where Jesus spends time with an individual enjoying the art of conversation, listening with interest, asking questions, healing, befriending and instructing as well as feeding among many other life-giving services.

As discussed in chapter four the Gospel of John records some of Jesus' encounters with people including Nicodemus who came to visit Jesus in the night (Jn 3:1-21), the long conversation with the Samaritan woman, where talking with her was a culturally outrageous taboo for a Jewish man to do, but He did. (Jn 4:1-20). Jesus also spoke to the disabled man by the pool in a society where being in close contact with such people was considered a breach of culturally acceptable norms (Jn 5:1-15). Furthermore, Jesus spoke with a woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), He healed a man born blind, healed the sick on the sabbath (Jn 5:2-12), and He modeled a person-centered style of Evangelism. Jesus meeting the marginalized figures was contrary to Israel's understanding of the covenant. They believed that the covenant was only for Israel; therefore, gentiles fell outside this circle of blessings.

Similarly, the assumption that God is only in Christians is a deception. Thus, the main reason to reframe evangelism so that we minister to **All** because God has already gone ahead and is ministering to his creation before Christians appear on the scene. God is in every created being because God is not a Christian as Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminds Christians.<sup>9</sup> God is God and cannot be domesticated. However, we find with many in modern society, God is personal and private, and this privatization of God poses a challenge to Evangelists as it becomes difficult to access the private spaces without being intrusive. Jesus' way of evangelism was free from pushy coerciveness that evangelists often used. The way Jesus listened to people is what Tim Sumpter has named Evangelistening.<sup>10</sup> We will explore more on Evangelistening in section three.

### **The Great Commission**

Jesus' final message to the disciples was the Commission to spread the Gospel and witness to His name. The so-called Great Commission, in other words, was Jesus assigning his disciples to Evangelize in the sense of witnessing to what Christ has done and the love He has for the world. However, some scholars have questioned whether, in the Great Commission, Jesus was asking disciples to evangelize, thus questioning any biblical warrant for Evangelism. For example, George R. Hunsberger suggests that the commissioning words of Jesus variously reported at the end of each of the Gospels and the beginning of Acts is taken to be straight forward instructions sufficient in their clarity to provide a rationale for evangelizing, no matter what the circumstances may

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<sup>9</sup> Desmond Tutu, *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocatives* (Harper One, 2011), 6-8.

<sup>10</sup> Sumpter and Church Army (Church of England), *Evangelistening*, 5.

be in which the church finds itself.<sup>11</sup> The question begs that we examine our motivation for evangelism as evangelists past preached the message that we evangelize as a response to the Great Commission. Should we be doing something just because Jesus said we should, or should it be out of our conviction. I think we carry out Evangelism in response to who Christ is, and we want others to know about Him. Any other way of doing Evangelism, including the Great Commission, will fail us because the efforts may not be coming from who we are but what we have been told to do. As such, putting the Great Commission into practice in post-Christendom is proving harder; hence, the church has been sent searching for its identity beyond offering religious services. Hunsberger believes we are thrust in search of a sense of our mission in this era and for the meaning of being witness to Christ in it.<sup>12</sup> That means ancient forms of evangelizing that do not engage with post-Christendom issues will no longer work.

It is all right to take the words of Jesus as commissioning, but Hunsberger is arguing that while the commissioning word of Jesus is still relevant, we must apply them in a new way. The application begins by questioning why we focus on commissioning as the sole rationale for carrying out Evangelism.<sup>13</sup> My view is that if we pay lip service to Evangelism because Jesus says we should do so, then we have not done the work of fully applying our whole hearts and minds to believe in it. The result is that we impose a burden on each other that we are ill-equipped to carry because our conviction is lacking. Though, if we come to Evangelism taking the commissioning to mean that all will be given the power to evangelize when the Holy Spirit comes, we

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<sup>11</sup> Chilcote and Warner, *The Study of Evangelism*, 2008, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Chilcote and Warner, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Chilcote and Warner, 60.

have a better chance of getting the world to listen to us because our approach will not be motivated by filling church pews but by inviting others to meet Jesus who loves all. The words of Welby again clarify my point very well, “We are not committed to Evangelism because we are scared the church is dying. We do not make known his love because we want to look successful. We announce what God has done in Christ because His love compels us.”<sup>14</sup> Also, Chilcote and Warner emphasize that conceiving Evangelism as an essential practice that engages the whole people of God and not just a chosen few but is every Christian’s calling to participate in spreading the good news.<sup>15</sup> If we come to Evangelism motivated by the gratitude of what God has done in us, then we want others to experience this same goodness while we demonstrate this to them by how we live our lives. Their belief is not on our shoulders because it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings correction.

### **5.3 Section Two - Reframing Evangelism**

Sadly, many people do not know how much God loves them; therefore, Evangelism ought to spread the Gospel of salvation, telling everybody of the love of God. In most cases, the only way anyone knows of God's love is because someone tells them and shows them. There is no better enormous privilege in life than to see God at work in changing people's lives and reconciling them to their creator.

God desires that the message of reconciliation must be communicated to every creature which is under heaven (Col 1:23). To bring the good news of salvation is,

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<sup>14</sup> Welby, “<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-justin-welby-deo-gloria-trust-lecture-evangelism-and>.”

<sup>15</sup> Chilcote and Warner, *The Study of Evangelism*, 2008, xix.

therefore, to witness to the truthfulness of the gospel message involving (1) testifying to the reality of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. (Acts 10:39) Lk 1:2. (2) A second implication of ministering to the Gospel is witnessing the truth of the Gospel concerning the work of Christ, which is the meaning of Luke's Great Commission (Lk 24:44-48).<sup>16</sup>

The thesis project revealed that people could attend the same church for years, sit on the same pews, and share morning teas without fully knowing the other. Evangelisting, however, showed how people could understand each other when the communication is two way, where one speaks the other listens, and in turn, the other speaks while the other listens. Each is giving full attention to the other's viewpoint. The project also highlighted that as much as we want to grow the Church, if we do not know the person who sits next to us in the pews, we are unable to attract the outsider to join us. Until we can invest fully in those around us in the Church community, we will not have the resource to invest in those beyond our Church walls. People whom we are trying to reach outside our walls can read our motives, thus questioning our motivation for reaching out to people. People need to know that our motivation stems from our love of them and not because we want to fill the Church. So, a church that evangelizes amongst itself can evangelize outsiders because, as motioned earlier, we are motivated by gratitude to what God has done and is doing in our lives.

The project aimed to reform the current forms of evangelism by highlighting positive ways of having God conversations using techniques developed by Doug Pollock.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chilcote and Warner, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*.

The God Space project also emphasized the fundamental need to listen since, to be an evangelizing church, every member ought to make listening well a priority. Further to become an evangelizing person, one ought to nurture a listening attitude. Therefore, in the six weeks, the God Space project participants had opportunities to listen to others and those around the wider community.

Therefore, how do we reframe listening, and how do we name obstacles to listening? If listening is to attempt to hear something or pay attention to what is said or the speaker, then the old assumption of early Evangelism where an evangelist speaks while others listen has an ill-informed understanding. This way of Evangelism has the assumption that the evangelist has something that others would want to hear, and there is an attitude of pride, of being better, or knowledgeable than the listener. Why would people want to listen to us, we ask ourselves? We evangelize before a world that is watching us. For Jesus assumed that the world would be watching when He said, love one another as I have loved you, be community together, listen to one another and share hospitality with all because by this all may know that you are my disciples (Jn 13:35). While the New Zealand church feels marginalized, and that may be so; however, that does not mean the world has closed its eyes. If it is true that the world has shut its ears to the church, then it might have done so because of some attitudes of the institution that are judgmental, holier than thou, and voices coming from the church attacking outsiders for a long time. Nonetheless, I would like to think that society is still interested in the Christian principles of goodness and love that promote good morals.

Stone is adamant that the world is watching, and if the Church thinks the world is not watching just because the world does not give the same prominence to its voice as it



used to enjoy in the past regarding matters of nation-building, it would be so mistaken.<sup>18</sup> He reminds us that the very shape of the church in the form of its ordinary practices and patterns of social processes constitute its witness in the world in providing a visible and material foretaste of God's Kingdom. The world is watching, has not stopped, and wants to see what it is that the church can offer to the troubled world as well as how the church treats its members. After all, it has been noted that people do not care how much we know; instead, people care how much we care. Consequently, the following section will explore the nature of evangelizing in 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Zealand.

### **The nature of Evangelism in a Post Christendom Context**

In addressing Evangelistic ways that are proper in post-Christendom, there is a need to recognize that twentieth-century Evangelism worked because the culture was mostly familiar with Christianity. The atmosphere then included many assumptions, such as the brute fact of absolute truth, the existence of heaven and hell or God, and a widely held notion that sin keeps us from God. We can no longer assume this understanding because the cultural shift away from Christianity has resulted in a loss of theological vocabulary, and it also questions the previously held core assumptions. People do not understand what we are saying, and it is as if we are speaking a foreign language, thus we need to learn a new language that speaks to the context of our audiences no matter where we are in the world. Because the question in our current context where truth is subjective is what does the Gospel of the good news look like? Rob Frost in *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*

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<sup>18</sup> Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2007), 313.

concludes that in a culture like ours, where truth now holds multiple meanings, traditional forms of spreading the Word are proving ineffective as each holds what is truth to them.<sup>19</sup>

#### **5.4 Section Three - Reframing listening.**

To listen well, Sumpter coined a process, saying that it is necessary to start with defining listening, and according to the Cambridge dictionary, listening is to attempt to hear something or pay attention to what is said or the person saying it.<sup>20</sup> Evangelisting is a process of developing a listening culture by recovering the art of listening in Evangelism. As such, Evangelisting is an understanding and approach that values listening in Evangelism because often people have associated speaking and preaching with Evangelism; therefore, Evangelisting is putting listening back into Evangelism.

Pollock has developed Christian virtues that are essential to make the ministry of Evangelism possible; first, r-e-s-p-e-c-t = listen, second, l-o-v-e = listen, third, listening for belonging through the power of story, and fourth, stages of activating and equipping people to be the church in everyday life. Pollock emphasizes that when creating and activating God Space, one must (a). Start from the heart, (b). Notice, (c). Serve, (d). Listening, (e). Wonder, and (f). Tell Stories.<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, reforming listening may mean not only giving ear to individuals but also giving other Christian traditions a right to be heard. Therefore, in what ways can we live lives that attract others to Christ? Jesus, in John chapter thirteen, urges his followers to create God spaces that foster good loving relationships among Christians because, by

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<sup>19</sup>Steven J. L Croft, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture* (London: Church House, 2005). 99.

<sup>20</sup> Sumpter and Church Army, *Evangelisting*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*.

this, all may know that we are the disciples of Christ. We shall be recognized by our works; however, the Church has lost this essential element of love and is mostly known for its judgmental, prideful attitudes towards those of other beliefs. Reforming listening means that we will put people first, strive to be relevant, and we shall be active listeners as we build strong relationships.

It is worth noting that Evangelism, as done by the early church evangelists, was more of a conversation at times. For example, the apostle Paul approached Evangelism as a discussion (1 Cor 9:16). Paul had conversations with people in the synagogues as he argued his point of view, and his way of Evangelism was in the form of discussions (*dialogomai*). Dialogues allowed his audience to be participants, not just listeners, and John Stott calls this dialogue evangelism.<sup>22</sup> Reframing listening will not only make congregation members better listeners but will aid the church in becoming relevant to the communities we serve because, by active listening, we can offer the right responses to what people are looking for. Reframing listening will also create bridges across denominations as Christians foster teamwork with other Christian traditions, thus changing misconceptions and opening the hearts of people to the Gospel as we take the church out of the building.

Sumpter agrees and relates to a time when he did a seminar called Evangelism for amateurs. He asked the participants the question – in what ways can we live lives that attract others to our faith? The participants' responses included- "we must listen to Christians from other traditions, because if we do not listen to one another, why should

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<sup>22</sup> John R. W Stott and Graham Benzies, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 305

non-Christians listen to us?"<sup>23</sup> At St Michael's, listening to other traditions is readily available as the congregation includes people from different Christian backgrounds. I firmly believe that the split that occurred in 2014 was premature<sup>24</sup> and a result of failure to listen to other Christians' point of views and theological understandings. Some people were set in their opinions such that no one was listening to the other.

As is, past negative experiences hold us back from having an inspiring emphasis on Evangelism; however, naming these issues helps us come to learn new ways of doing things. David Gortner, in his book *Transforming Evangelism*, acknowledges that giving airtime to people's negative associations with the idea of Evangelism has helped him to validate feelings of inadequacy when it comes to doing Evangelism.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, highlighting these negative stereotypes of Evangelism has not been a waste of time in my case, too, as the Spirit guided the parish in paving new ways of growing ministry in our neighborhood. I appreciate Gortner's scholarly writing on Evangelism as he does not only focus on the negative attitudes that people have on the practice of Evangelism; instead, he offers support and skills on how Evangelism can be enjoyable. *Transforming Evangelism* highlights the habits of Evangelism as practicing gratitude, learning to listen, naming the holy in your life, and others. It is about what God has done in your life that you would want someone else to hear. It is gratitude and wonder, born of grace that drives us to do Evangelism, propelling us outward beyond ourselves to places we have not gone before. Our stories expressed in word and deed, the wonder, and delight of God's love for us and

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<sup>23</sup> Sumpter, *Evangelistening*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> I say premature, because General Synod had not decided but were suggesting discussing the possibility of blessing same-gender couples. More listening could have been facilitated within the parish while they waited for the decision.

<sup>25</sup> Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism*.

all humanity.<sup>26</sup> Agreeing with Gortner, the stereotypes of Evangelism are real, and it is true, we cannot move into a deeper formation of evangelizing communities motivated by joy and wonder if we have not first acknowledged the scripts of our shame and anxiety. Christians will find enjoyment in coming to Evangelism with the attitude of listening to the other because if we only expect to see God in Christians alone, we are mistaken. As one of the project participants affirmed:

Telling what God has done in my life is not so much about pushing a particular phrase to be said by the other person because God works in his way; when you meet someone, God is already in their situation. I probably am a link in a chain of people whom God has used in preaching and maybe through a grandmother's prayers for the salvation of the person in question. So, knowing that God has gone before me in this person's life has taken the pressure off me from wanting to make sure that people are saved.<sup>27</sup>

Listening to another is hospitality because you are giving your time to another. Without using words, you are saying to the other, what you have to say is important, and I want to hear it. Steve Coby suggests, seek first to understand than to be understood, consequently creating a new understanding of the use of and the importance of bridges to keep us together with other communities. Communities use the bridge to cross from one end to the other. A bridge has an entrance, an exit, and it leads somewhere, it does not move, though it remains static. Listening is a bridge that connects people as the second half of my poem emphasizes,

I AM BRIDGE. I connect people with places. I am the bridge; I am strong. All kinds of people use me. The lonely pass through me, the sad use me, the happy often rush through me. All sorts of sizes of people use me, the big, small, short/tall,

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<sup>26</sup> Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

smart/dumb, the weak/strong, the healthy/sick, and rich/poor. All people use me, and I am needed. I am the bridge, and I am listening. You might not see me, but you can hear me, I can be loud or quiet. I am a bridge, and people use me. I am a bridge, and I am more effective when used as a two way, by offering hospitality to those who use me, enemy or foe, I am a bridge and can be interchangeable with hospitality though I am listening!

#### **5.5 Section Four: Reframing Hospitality - The stranger as host**

This section engages with reframing hospitality as Evangelism, but before we can name what hospitality is for ourselves, let us explore the meaning in the ancient Near Eastern biblical culture. Hospitality had the highest value in the community because it was a sacred duty expected to be observed by all. In nomadic life, where there were few public places to lodge and eat, the practice of hospitality was necessary for survival. As Hershberger notes, while the traveler was at the mercy of the host, the host had the opportunity to hear news from the wide world through the stories of the guest.<sup>28</sup> The two strangers formed a friendship where the host was obligated to provide food, shelter, and protection in exchange for the stories from the outside world. In a hostile world, the guest and host alike depended on hospitality for survival. In the biblical story of Abraham, the guests were also divine. The story tells of *Abram* and his wife *Sarai* receiving three angels whom they entertained and who turned out to be Godsent. The strangers were fed, and they also brought the good news of a son for their host (Gen 18: 1-15). They told Abram and *Sarai* that their long-awaited child would indeed be born. In this story, we find that

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<sup>28</sup> Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises*, The Giving Project Series (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1999), 17.

hospitality was offered by the host, while the guests also brought good news as their hospitality to their host. The result, hospitality is given by guest and host alike, as portrayed by the *Shona* hospitality of *Zimbabwe*. When I was growing up, I loved when visitors came as they always brought a basket, covered up with a piece of cloth that left us wondering what sort of goodies were hidden underneath. My grandmother, in turn, would slaughter a chicken or a goat and made beautiful meals, we sang, children played games outside, and when it was dark, we got into the round grass-thatched kitchen where guests and hosts shared stories around the fire and sometimes this went on until dawn.

The *Shona* people view hospitality as the utmost gesture you can show to another. Now I have lived in New Zealand for sixteen years and have enjoyed similar hospitality as *Maori* hospitality is like *Shona* hospitality. *Maori* Hospitality, *manaaki* is a way of life – holistic, not compartmentalized, such as found in European/*Pakeha*<sup>29</sup> culture that can seem transactional at times. The *Maori* **Manaaki (verb)** (-tia) means to support, take care of, give hospitality to, protect, look out for - show respect, generosity, support, and care for others.<sup>30</sup> *Maori* hospitality ensures that visitors feel welcome and, its heart *Manaakitanga* reflects the need for mutual hospitality and respect between different people, groups, and cultures. I believe if Christians adapted *manaakitanga* hospitality principles above, our evangelism may become the best thing we could offer to society.

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<sup>29</sup> A white New Zealander as opposed to a Maori

<sup>30</sup> John C Moorfield, “Manaakitanga,” *Maori Dictionary*, n.d., accessed October 19, 2019, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=manaakitanga>. *Manaakitanga* is one of the most important Māori social principles (Hook and Raumati, 2011). In terms of defining *manaakitanga*, Hall (2012) and Hayen (2009) suggested that Māori hospitality is enmeshed within the concept of *manaakitanga*. As Hall (2012:13) suggested, *manaakitanga* reflects the custom of offering hospitality and kindness to guests, [and] is central to making people feel welcome and is inherent within the Māori ethos. While expressions of *manaakitanga* differ for Māori, its philosophy is shared by Māori within and outside of Māori culture. *Manaakitanga* is behavior that acknowledges the mana of others as having equal or greater importance than one’s own, through the expression of aroha, hospitality, generosity and mutual respect.

Also, religious beliefs strengthened and legitimized hospitality as protection or loyalty, especially when a stranger passes by your community, and you offer them shelter such as the story of Lot in Gen 19.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the death of hostility against a stranger will lead to steps that reframe evangelism as the Listening project proved, in creating a bridge that brought a quarter of our congregation together to listen and to learn from one another. It is action research that ended with most people able to say they knew other participants better than they had before the ministry project.

The death of hostility against a stranger cannot be more evident than in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman that highlighted earlier. The story shows that even historical enemies such as the Jews and Samaritans when they offer hospitality to each other, they can create an understanding that becomes a friendship. The woman hesitantly provides water for Jesus, who, in turn, gave her good news as she later referred to him as the man who told her everything she ever did. She went back to the village with joy to call the others to meet this wonderful man. Hospitality can turn an enemy into a friend.

We also find that hospitality is a must in many religions, Islam, Hindu, and Christianity. In particular, where Christianity is concerned, the reception of hospitality is a must for the Bible is clear that God offered hospitality to the world, that while we were yet sinners, Jesus came to a hostile planet to be among us as one of us, yet He was still God. He took the place of a servant to reach us. As such, we acknowledge that the current methods of evangelism are outdated; they are harsh; they scare listeners, show superior

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<sup>31</sup> The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. <sup>2</sup>“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”



attitudes that we are better than the other, and thus foster the idea that we know what the other person needs while trying to convert them to their beliefs. Russell likens current forms of Evangelism to colonialism saying “Churches that understand Christianity as universal truth and assume a dualistic worldview in which the others are inferior to us in every way, also believe those people need to be saved, dominated, and controlled by people in the churches of the former colonizing nations.”<sup>32</sup> Russell adds that decolonizing our minds means a beginning to listen that may lead to discovering that our assumptions are in error; thus, the listening may lead to new understandings that our previous methods prevented us from seeing or imagine that the other could be a host. Likewise, the voices of the participants speak about how decolonization from unhealthy ways of evangelizing is needed for everyone to feel welcome in the church. Consequently, hospitality will create a platform for tough conversations to happen. Over a cup of tea or a meal conversation taking place and allowing strangers to become acquainted thus allowing the bridge to facilitate communication.

### **Hospitality creates community**

Hospitality not only enables communication and gift exchange but involves the creation of a community that is welcoming of the other every day. The community is especially true at the table, where there are tangible acts of worship for the glory of God (Rom 15:7). For, the words used to describe hospitality in the scriptures are both - *philoxenia* and Latin *hostes*, implying a reciprocal relationship of giving and the take

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<sup>32</sup> Letty M. Russell, J. Shannon Clarkson, and Kate M. Ott, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

meaning host and guest sometimes exchange roles that promote, the guest/host relationship. Hospitality then is the Latin noun for *hospitalis* or *hospes*, meaning both guest and host.<sup>33</sup>

The direct translation of the Greek word for hospitality is composed of two parts, that is, love and stranger<sup>34</sup> The word literally means love for the stranger. This love for stranger is what the apostle Peter was urging in 1 Pet 4: 9 when he says be hospitable to one another without complaining. The root verb for stranger also means to be entertained or to be surprised.

Consequently, our love for the stranger brings us a delightful surprise. The ancient stranger vs the contemporary stranger can be a challenge where current cultures emphasize a lack of trust for a stranger, mainly because people have been hurt while practicing hospitality. From a young age, children are taught not to trust a stranger, and in New Zealand, the principle is referred to as stranger danger. So, who is a stranger? Hershberger says one who is neither friend nor acquaintance.<sup>35</sup> Offering hospitality demands radical hospitality as that portrayed in the book, *The Gospel Comes With A house key*, by Rosaria Butterfield.<sup>36</sup> She says radical hospitality is looking after a stranger in our Post-Christian World and while words are necessary, this kind of generosity gives the words context and weight. The world is thirsty for some kindness as hospitality is a crucial means that the Lord used to save each of us, and the right response for us is through gratitude that we in turn, offer that same radical hospitality to others so that they can experience the Gospel of

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<sup>33</sup> Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises*, The Giving Project Series (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Hershberger, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Hershberger, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*, Audio, 2018.

Christ. Since the project, some people find that they now provide more hospitality to others so that they can experience the love of God and Techas had this to say, “Since the God Space project I have been serving others by making dinner for those who are sick or are going through tough times just to lessen the burden a bit and my ability to listen has improved as well.”<sup>37</sup>

Borrowing from Butterfield, who uses the concept of ‘The Gospel Comes With A House Key,’ is the development of a theology of hospitality that every Christian is called to practice because the gospel falls short if it is spoken only, but good news should be in action. The gospel falls short when we expect one to convert to Christianity, and we do not offer them a home when they are no longer welcome in their household because they now represent a different religion than their family of origin. Where the negative forms of evangelism fall short are wanting someone to convert to Christianity but forget that their conversion, in many cases, comes at a cost to the newly converted. However, Evangelism becomes good news if the words are followed with action to offer the necessary support needed by the new convert. I appreciate Butterfield as she writes from a place of experience motivated by gratitude for Christ, who met her through hospitality that she offered to her by a Christian couple known by to mother.<sup>38</sup>

Stretching Butterfield's concept of Gospel comes with a house key; I would say the gospel comes with a family or meal, freedom to be who they choose to be, and whatever the person needs. For the gospel falls short when we expect people to come to our Churches and send them home hungry, that is if they have a home to go anyway. Most Church

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<sup>37</sup>Techas, 11 October 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*.

buildings are empty most of the time, some are used in the day, but nighttime, huge buildings are locked up while hundreds are sleeping in nearby streets. Opening our doors for the homeless at night would be my next level of hospitality to our neighborhoods.

In Chapter four, I mentioned a scene where Jesus, after preaching to the crowd, saw that it was getting dark and the people were beginning to disperse to go back home. Jesus asked the disciples to feed the masses, and while feeding them completed the good news, sending the crowd home hungry would have been the gospel falling short. I agree with Rosaria that we do not open our homes blindly, but we use the right channels to open our homes to others, especially if the people we are extending hospitality to are strangers. In her case, she uses the method of fostering children thus she is resourced in a thorough process with guidance and support. For, it would be foolish to open your home to a stranger who might end up hurting you and abusing the hospitality.

Radical hospitality comes with its risks; however, that is no reason to shy away from giving this gift to others. Some guests in our homes may take advantage, that may not be avoided sometimes. Tilly Dillehay's review on Butterfields's book, recommends the concept of the house key with a caution. She warns,

'House Key' is not primarily an indictment, but it is a kind invitation. The practical picture Butterfield paints give you a feeling of I can do this too and a sense that it can be done in any space, from a dorm room to a five-bedroom home. It will take planning, intentionality, and dialing back on commitments to create margins of time and money but will not require anything you do not have in Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Being resourced will further the theology of hospitality in our church. Let us take the concept of the gospel, which comes with a house key; for example, if followed, blindly

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<sup>39</sup> Tilly Dillehay, "Share Your House Key to Win Your Neighbors" (September 4, 2018), accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/gospel-comes-house-key/>.

can be damaging. Having a house open for strangers will not be enough if one lacks other resources such as the ability to offer hospitality in food, communion and different sorts. In the case of Butterfield, it worked well for her to foster children because she decided to be a stay home mother, which meant she had the time to give attention to the children. She did not only open her home she was available in many ways too. It is a resource to know where to find help when a stranger needs hospitality such as soup kitchens. In the context of New Zealand, there are places that offer help such as the Anglican City Mission and the Salvation Army that supply meals, clothing, beds, and sometimes medical attention. We can all offer hospitality even if we can only point the direction where people in need can get assistance. One of the aims of the God Space project was to train people on to have a God conversation with strangers or how to do contextual evangelism. Members, now take pride in what they learned in those six weeks as they can now put into practice talking to a stranger or choosing to listen whereas in the past, they would have preferred to speak instead. Evangelisting is a resource that many can use to become competent in taking the gospel to the communities.

This chapter has addressed how the church might respond not only to the desire to grow but also to the negative views on Evangelism as well as reimagining the great commission. The chapter concludes that reframing evangelism, reframing listening, reframing hospitality will move the church to engage with others and the community in a way that brings about a better society. The conclusion offers the analysis of the thesis and final recommendations.

## **Conclusion - Thesis analysis and recommendations**

The thesis includes the information needed to consider the application of a similar project in other Churches. Chapter One covers the introduction and background of the Parish. The second chapter explains the methodology and the process used for implementation. The third chapter explores the post-Christendom context in New Zealand and in western culture. Then, Chapter Four places Evangelisting in a theological and ministerial perspective leading to a call to action discussed in Chapter Five. The conclusion includes some final analysis and recommendations for reframing evangelism that can be adapted in other churches.

Feedback was sought after the project via questions such as which of the principles (noticing, serving, listening, and wondering) from the Thesis Project /God Space have been useful to your day to day life?

Techa's highlights:

For me, it was the principle of noticing; once we were at the beach, and I spotted a woman who looked like she was weeping, and she had two young kids sitting with her. I approached her to ask if she was ok and she told me she had just found out that her friend in France had passed away. She had come to the beach to process it all. I asked her to share about her friend, and she did. We sat a bit as I spoke to her kids briefly. In the end, she thanked me for talking to her, and then I went on my way as she went hers.<sup>1</sup>

The best intervention as we move forward is for St Michael's to embrace Evangelisting principles and go out and engage with the broader community of Henderson. Engaging in evangelism will not only take the gospel to our

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<sup>1</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.

surrounding areas, but it will also make St Michael's invaluable to the community. Intentional listening will be the best outcome of the project as researchers have said that being listened to is so close to being loved that people cannot tell the difference.<sup>2</sup> Evangelistic listening will draw St Michael's people outside themselves to notice other people and identify their needs. Our church will genuinely become the ears, hands, and feet of Christ in Henderson. Intentional listening will transform our church and beyond as John Fuder, in *Neighborhood Mapping*, stresses that it is imperative that the church not only know how to interpret the Bible but also how to engage with and adapt to those for whom the gospel message is addressed. We discover the underlying history, context, and culture of that place and its people.<sup>3</sup> That means when we exegete a community as we would a bible passage to draw meaning from it as demonstrated by the participants who took time to go into the community and notice what was happening around us and explore ways we can join in what is going on already and maybe offer improvement.

At the end of the project, participants felt they had been equipped to reach out within the parish as well as beyond the church walls. When asked if they could do something different in evangelism, what would it be? Several of them responded that they would take time to listen to people, hear where people are at, try to listen to the Holy Spirit, and direct the conversation to be there for others and to offer to pray for people more often. Another added that they would hope

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<sup>2</sup> Ping, "Are You Listening."

<sup>3</sup> Fuder. John, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community*, Kindle (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 78.

that their life would count as part of evangelism and to become a serious listener, and to share their own story with gratitude for what God has done for them.

A while later, after the project had finished, I asked this question, how has the listening project made a difference in how you approach spiritual conversations now? Techas' convictions are a true representation of most of the participants where she says:

I have learned the importance of noticing people around me and approaching them intentionally to listen to them to see how I might be able to understand them better and also share my faith with them. I have been offering prayers to people in different situations more than before, these prayers have been welcomed, and some have answered.<sup>4</sup>

### **Where to from here?**

Listening to others will be instrumental as society looks to move towards some standard norms. Rather than getting discouraged by the idea floating around that New Zealand is secular, our society instead recognizes that we are far from secular and stop dismissing other religions as we try to create a better civilization. Accepting where we are as Christians will be the best way forward to welcoming and respecting the views of others while still presenting a distinctively Christian perspective. While the Christian perspective will place the church in conflict with others who hold different values, the best description of the state of religion in New Zealand would be to say: we are one though we are many. The church has not always approached other voices with humility and respect but with a superior attitude, which now needs change if we are to survive the cultural shift in Western societies. The church must seriously consider how it is going to navigate the next decade

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<sup>4</sup> Techas, 11 October 2018.



because their attitude to other religions will determine the survival of the church and relevance for generations to come.<sup>5</sup>

There is potential for a turnaround if the church reflects on the tone, direction, and shape of its public and private discourse with an awareness that although the church was once intertwined in the affairs of nations and shaping governments, it no longer holds this level of influence. Accepting that the church is no longer at the center of political and cultural life and does not have an automatic audience for the gospel might help the church in moving forward even if it means moving further out from the margins where the church's voice is currently located. As Taylor emphasizes throughout, there is no real going back to the way things once were.<sup>6</sup> We will probably never live in a world again where everything colluded to make the transcendent irrepressibly present, bathed in the glory of uncreated light. In many ways, we could summarize the shift from the transcendent cosmos to the immanent frame as a shift from a typological reading of the world to a boldly literal translation of the world. Taylor's point is that we must make peace with this fact, and Smith emphasizes the point that evangelical Christians and leaders must make peace with this fact and use Taylor's insights to conduct outreach in light of it.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the church should re-evaluate its evangelistic ways. As most of the participants highlighted, the traditional pushy, fear-mongering techniques are outdated.

Though Taylor is adamant that there is no turning back, I would like to agree with Ward's emphasis that the trend that is positive for the future of Christianity and churches

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<sup>5</sup> Troughton and Lange, *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, 186.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 61.

in New Zealand is that of the new quest for values. He says that “there is increasing recognition that, since the 1960s, our society has seen the collapse of what was labeled the modern world (aided by the postmodern critique of modernity) and with it Christendom, which provided many of its values.”<sup>8</sup> People are on the quest for new values to hold society together. There is a possibility of going back to these values even if not entirely as they originally were but in new forms that can still give society the moral stability that we so need.

Ward points out that there are signs which might suggest we are entering a phase where the emphasis is on reconstructing new forms of society and with it the values that held society together. In light of the aftermath of the Christchurch Mosque shooting on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I would like to echo Ward’s sentiments that New Zealand society has entered a phase where interfaith dialogue can be fostered, thus creating values and understanding that hold society together in a multi-faith space, a space where we are no longer secular, but somewhat profoundly religious.

My key points of conclusion are the following: A Church that develops the capacity of its members to evangelize is better equipped and empowered to engage with its surrounding community. As such, learning and practicing Evangelistic Listening will draw the members of the parish outside of themselves and help them notice other people and identify their needs. The project was a valuable reminder of the importance of listening and the value that listening instills in the person being listened to, such that they

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<sup>8</sup> Ward, Kevin, Christianity in New Zealand since 1960: sociological perspectives, in *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, ed, Troughton and Lange (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 185.

feel valued. Members understood that the skill of Evangelistic listening when well-practiced, it produces feelings comparable to that of being loved.<sup>9</sup>

The parish of Henderson was able to draw wisdom from listening with others and saw how listening opens doors to know others as well as to understand how it may create a platform where non-Christians can listen to the message of God. The participants appreciated their time together and the opportunities created to reach out to those theologically different as they offered different kinds of hospitality to others. They found the courage to approach strangers with the desire to know them without any hidden agendas. Listening and generosity became a bridge between peoples.

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<sup>9</sup> Ping. David, "Are You Listening," *OUTREACH Magazine* [www.Outreachmagazine.Com](http://www.Outreachmagazine.Com), 2006.



**85-100**—Congratulations! The not-yet-Christians in your life are undoubtedly drawn toward the heart of Jesus formed in you. Keep walking in this light.

**65-85**—You must decrease, and Jesus must increase—one heart at a time. Embrace the people and the situations in your life as God attempts to prune those heart attitudes that are not bearing fruit for his kingdom.

**Under 65**—Jesus needs to do something *in* you before he can do something *through* you. Consider spending less time doing religious activities, and more time asking God to do the soul surgery needed to form the heart of Jesus in you.

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$$\frac{2087}{49} = 30$$

$$\frac{2087}{49} = 42.57$$

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1	5	10	6.9	6 (with 8)
2	3	9	7.43	8 (with 12)
3	3	9	6.83	7 (with 10)
4	3	9	7.06	7 (with 10)
5	3	10	7.26	7 (with 14)
6	2	9	6	7 (with 9)
7	4	10	7.03	7 (with 9)
8	4	9	6.86	8 (with 13)
9	3	9	7.26	8 (with 11)
10	2	10	6.6	7 (with 9)

$$\text{Ave Total} = \underline{\underline{69.57}}$$

## **Appendix B**

### **CONSENT FORM**

#### **Doctor of Ministry at Virginia Theological Seminary.**

Researcher: Nyasha Jasman Gumbeze.

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study project.

#### **Consent:**

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood it, and am prepared to take part in the research. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I also understand that the information collected will be kept anonymous.

It is my understanding that:

- I will be audiotaped but can request for the tape to be switched off at any time.
- I understand that the tapes will be transcribed in a confidential manner.
- I understand that I can be given the transcript of the recordings to edit if I so desire.
- I understand that this material will be used for no other purposes without my permission.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY Dr Ross Kane ON BEHALF OF VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, September 2018.

## **Appendix C**

### **Post God space/Listening Project Interviews**

#### **Interview Questions following the Listening process through God Space Series.**

1. What brought you to this church?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word evangelism?
3. What is your experience of evangelism in the past?
4. Would you please describe your experience of being evangelized?
5. Have you engaged in evangelizing others before? What would you say about the experience?
6. Can you describe your experience of the God space sessions?
7. What surprised you in this process of listening?
8. Where did you feel particularly good? Where did you feel uncomfortable?
9. Have you ever experienced something like this before?
10. Please describe your experience of talking to a stranger.
11. What drew your attention to this particular person?
12. What feelings or memories or images come to mind as you reflect on our God space series? What did you learn from these sessions?
13. What was your assumption of evangelism before this encounter?
14. What do you think was the most important thing that we did during God Space?
15. If you could do something different in evangelism, what would it be?



## **Appendix D**

### **Interviews- Evangelisting Project 2019**

#### **What brought you to this church? What draws people to join/settle in a church?**

**Participants** responded: The Vicar of the parish had something good to say

It was a walking distance

Vicar allowed people to ask questions

I was a migrant and was referred to this church because people could help me find a job

We were migrants, and church people were welcoming and hospitable; they filled our cupboards with food for weeks after we arrived here.

My husband had started coming here and enjoyed the morning tea, so he invited me, and I enjoyed the morning tea too. The hospitality and the liturgy were similar to my denominational background...I was welcomed and told that I could partake Holy Communion with others

#### **What comes to mind when you hear the word evangelism?**

**Heja:** I think of people who try to evangelize in often pushy and insensitive ways.

**Tanks:**... scary stuff, threatening.

**Pitts:** The Salvation Army with the wake or battle cry and the Mammon who could be very overpowering as well. So, I have had a few experiences of being evangelized the wrong way around, and it put me off. They would push and quote Bible verses. I also think of Billy Graham and Bill Subritzky, and the crusades were a bit harsh. I do not think people now would respond well to that kind of military and second world war style.

**Simms:** For me, I think of evangelists:...quite forceful, and they raised their voices. They almost squeeze you into a corner till you say yes, to get some peace. That was my experience, mostly Jehovah's Witness doing door-to-door knocking evangelism. It was and is extremely uncomfortable; it was sort of like it is tremendous to be on the receipt of this volume of information and quotes coming at you.

**Tanks:** Though the word evangelism brings connotations of aggressiveness, I experienced a healthy way of doing evangelism.

#### **Have you engaged in evangelizing others before? What would you say about the experience?**

**Heja:** When we are in Singapore on a mission, we have a weekly outreach in a local park...with the purpose of inviting people into the church to hear more. I relate to each person, making connections, shared interests, inviting them along to events that we think might suit them. I do not like pushy people, so I try not to be pushy about areas of faith...or philosophy of or something.

**Pitts:** Going to people's homes, those new in the area, and invite or point them to church ...like hospitality to the settling migrants.

**Pitts:** I am always involved in practical ways to improve other people's lives...I was involved in building people's homes with Habitat for humanity.

**Techas:** I did, and I am embarrassed, looking back because I was evangelizing in a certain way where you ask people whether they gave their lives to Christ. I was made to believe that if one had not said a particular prayer then they might not have met Christ. I evangelized my mother, who is an Anglican; I phoned her, and I said you need to say this prayer otherwise, you are not saved...so my mum was like what do you mean?

### **Would you please describe your experience of being evangelized?**

**Davidson:** For a while, my friend was sharing God with me. It was a very gentle way she did it, she chose the moment, and I guess she prayed about it and God was good. I know others had negative experiences of evangelism, but I did not experience pushy evangelism at all.

**Heja:** I felt pushed by a family member who was being very direct. One day my uncle said to me, are you saved? What is going to happen with your life without faith? ...I would probably not have become a Christian if he had not been pushy. Another tactic that my uncle used was to give me a book as a gift when I was going away overseas on an exchange program... in other words, the ways we do evangelism need to change with the times and the cultures and contexts we are.

**Kirts:** Door knockers, they would push and quote bible verses that just put me off. The salvation army with the wake or battle cry, Mammon, could be very overpowering as well. I have had a few experiences of being evangelized the wrong way around, and it put me off. Their attitude was superior, like saying you do not know Christ, and they know Christ. They would ask questions like, did you accept Jesus as your Lord and savior? Even when you explain to them that you were a Christian, they would criticize the way you were baptized, and say you should have done full immersion otherwise you are not a Christian.

**Techas:** My experience of being evangelized was that of continually being asked whether I said a prayer to receive Jesus?

**Virginia:** The vicar who stood at the door when we leave the church, and he said are you saved.

### **How do you describe your experience of God Space sessions?**

**Simms:** I appreciated the social context as much as anything, a chance to get to know different people better and talking with them and sharing. The fellowship was my favorite part, getting to know people, who they are and what is important to them.

**Davidson:** I felt good, and I have to say I certainly, enjoyed the desert, great fellowship, an opportunity to mix, hear, and share with others in small groups that were particularly good. For me, the sessions highlighted that relationships are essential, and the key is listening, and that was not new to me but very good to be reminded.

**Tanks:** God Space brought a whole chunk of church members together, young, old, and were on different stages in their spiritual journeys.

**Heja:** God Space was excellent. I appreciated the social context probably as much as anything, it was a chance to get to know different people better, talking with them, and sharing the fellowship was perhaps my favorite part.

**Techas:** I found it really challenging as I realized how judgmental and selective, and I realized that I didn't have the capacity for people different from me.

**Please describe your experience of talking to a stranger.**

**Dayna:** I did manage two conversations last week. One with a lady on the train. She looked like a closed book when we first spoke on the platform, but she opened when I sat beside her on the train. We did not make it to faith subjects but it was a good experience, and I am liable to run into her Again. The other one was a young woman, born in India, living alone, who is in our knitting group. She indeed opened-up too so I can build on that. Blessings and a big thank you for all yours and Andy's hard work.

**Simms:** I now notice the shops around me, what they deal with, and I can walk up to them and say, hello, I am from St Michaels, and I have noticed that you deal with such and such. I guess the evangelism project has given me boldness to be nosy!

**Techas:** The whole idea of finding out what the community needs, I felt this way of being community is organic as we find out in our community what we should do, not to follow some rules that somebody has written. That is the best way one can contribute to your community, unlike when we go into the community already with preconceived ideas and with set of rules on what the people should do.

**Cabener:** I learned the approach of noticing, observing, befriending before you can bring God into the conversation, and I was intrigued that Pollock always asks permission from the listener before he can talk about God:...Asking for permission from the listener brings a sense of being respected and valued rather than someone who budge in, with no respect or regard for your feelings.

**Techas:** I have to extend myself in the area of talking to strangers. However, I also learned about paying attention, and the more I pay attention now, the more people share about what is going on in their lives. It is interesting that the more you talk to people, you realize that a lot is going on.

**Heja:** I talked to strangers at the playground. One stranger shared something personal about not wanting to have children. She said, but after observing nature and how it is so beautiful, she felt God speaking to her that she should join in creating human beings.

**Dayna:** I did appreciate listening to others because everybody has a journey and a story.

**What surprised you in this process of listening?**

**Simms:** Finding the right language for what we want to say.

**Dayna:** I did appreciate listening to others because everybody has a journey and a story.

**Virginia:** God Space made me realize that there is too much of me in my life and less of God. It was encouraging. We talked about noticing people and our surroundings, and I thought yes that's right; that's where we must start. I am not sure I do that very well. So, it was encouraging me to do more to notice my surroundings.

**Kirt:** I had seen these women before but had never spoken to them until God Space. It is unfortunate that people who worship in the same church but had never spoken to each other before the Listening Project.

**Can you describe your experience of the God Space/Listening Project?**

**Tanks:** The best teaching that I got from the project was the importance of listening. Because often before God Space, I would have thought that it is more critical for me to do the speaking at the youth group as the youth leader. Now, I let them speak and learn from them and try to remember what they would have mentioned and inserting it in a conversation the next time I meet them. That way, they know I was listening when they spoke to me.

**Techas:** For me, it was the principle of noticing; once we were at the beach and I spotted a woman who looked like she was weeping, and she had two young kids sitting with her. I approached her to ask if she was ok and she told me she had just found out that her friend in France had passed away... I asked her to share about her friend, and she did. In the end, she thanked me for talking to her and then I went on my way as she went hers.

**Simms:** This project has put into words what we should do and its things that anyone can do, things we can all do, some of the resources were reminders of things we had known but did not have courage and language for it.

**Catherine:** I am glad I took part, I realized that my approach was not always the right one and I probably had been too direct sometimes when I talk with people, and God Space gave alternative ways to reach people truly.

**Dyna:** I found that the series was precisely what I was looking for, and what surprised me in the process of listening was realizing that listening is what God had been trying to get

me to do all along... but I did not know what sort of questions to ask, and now we have the questions to ask the wondering questions .... Very precious empowerment.

**Techas:** It was an excellent time to learn about other people whom I had known but did not know much about them or what they do. So, I was surprised to learn about them...morning tea after Sunday service is not enough.

**Cabener:** It makes sense that we pay attention because if you do not listen well, you cannot accurately respond. Moreover, we want to respond to the people out there correctly; it is not what we think they want; instead, what is it that they want the Church to do. Yes, those who evangelized me years ago wanted me to convert, but how can I be converted to something that I do not understand.

**What was the most important thing that we did during God Space?**

**Heja:** The main thing for me was spending time with others.....the social aspect of it.

**Cabenar:** I think equipping our church members to reach out to others in practical ways, relating to each other for that matter

**Techas:** I assumed that talking is evangelism now I have learned that listening is evangelism too.

**If you could do something different in evangelism, what would it be?**

**Dayna:** I would like to have the experience and the creative imagination to ask questions as I think questions are essential and can be very liberating. I think we learn more when we question.

**Simms:** In other words, the ways we do evangelism need to change with the times and the cultures and contexts we are.

**Heja:** I would take time to listen to people, hear where people are at, try to listen to the Holy Spirit to direct the conversation, and I will offer to pray for people more often.

**Techas:** I would try to remember that when we meet people, God has already gone before us and is doing something in their lives, or maybe a mother has been praying for them. Therefore, I would approach the person with an attitude of wanting to hear their view of God.

**Dayna:** I would like to hope that my life will count as part of Evangelism, and to become an earnest listener, it is imperative to do so. I want to be there for others, not necessarily saying anything because action speaks louder than words, and just living out Christ can make a big difference.

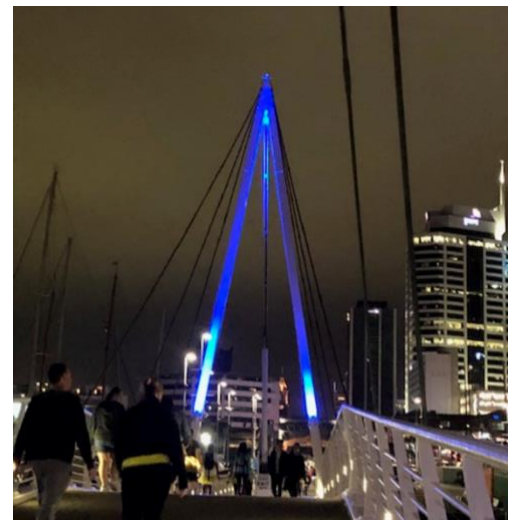
**Tanks:** If I had unlimited resources, the most natural way to evangelize is to focus on their passion; you can create a sound connection with a person if you take an interest in what they love. Several of the youth quite enjoy basketball... I would buy a basketball

hoop; some cool basketball and I think this would bring young people .... It is tapping into what they like and what they enjoy.

### **APPENDIX E – Pictures of Bridges**



Alan Woods Reserve NZ



Auckland Central- NZ



Richmond, Virginia -USA



Harpers Ferry – USA



Point Chevalier, Auckland NZ



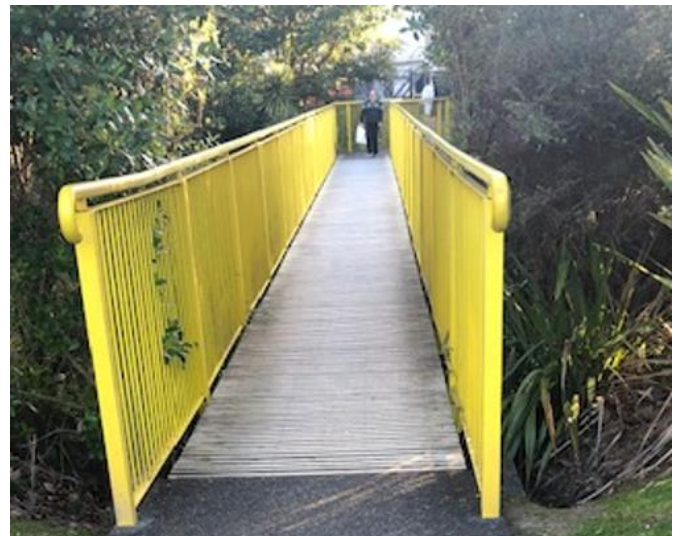
Whangarei – NZ



Richmond, Virginia -USA



Sharpsburg Maryland – USA



Oratia stream, West Auckland NZ



Alan Woods Reserve, Auckland -NZ



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