

Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes

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Table of Abbreviations

AAPB	<i>An Australian Prayer Book</i>
APBA	<i>A Prayer Book for Australia</i>
CE	Common Era (previously Anno Domini [AD])
CRA	Christian Research Association
EfM	Education for Ministry
FED	Formation, Education and Discipleship (Unit) (UCA). Previously Uniting Education in 2000.
NCLS	National Church Life Survey/s
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
rho	Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient
TCC	Total Community Catechesis
UCA	Uniting Church in Australia
UK	United Kingdom
USA/US	United States of America

Abstract

Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes

In this thesis I argue that the learning community processes—of holism, collaboration and theological reflection—when intentionally practised in parishes, enhance learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Two research questions guide the narrative of the thesis: firstly, is there evidence that parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, used learning community processes and, secondly, is there evidence that these learning processes, when used, enhanced faith learning outcomes in these parishes?

Using a mixed-methods research design, I investigated the enhancement of faith learning within the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. Parishes were surveyed during the year 2013. Forty-seven (47) of the 61 parishes responded to Survey One, while 45 parishes responded to Survey Two. Focus groups were conducted in six of those parishes during the year 2014; one focus group in each of the six parishes.

The research showed that a positive association existed between the enhancement of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith and the use of holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes. Parish survey results revealed a spectrum of responses from across parishes in the Diocese. Parishes with multiple learning community processes reported much growth in faith learning outcomes. Parishes at the other end of the spectrum with fewer learning community processes reported some or little growth in faith learning outcomes.

To express it another way, the information from the research data revealed a definite tendency. Parishes which had a high ranking in terms of the learning community processes reported very much or much growth and enhancement in faith learning, while parishes that had a low ranking in terms of learning community processes reported some or little growth in faith learning.

Faith learning, as defined in this thesis, is a process of growing in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith in and through Jesus Christ.

Learning community processes have been widely used in other educational contexts, in schools and higher education. Research conducted in those contexts showed the positive impact of those learning processes on learning outcomes. The eight evidence-based research findings in this research project show that the three learning community processes used in the church context had a positive impact on learning outcomes in parishes. These findings on parish learning contribute in return to the general learning community literature.

This study of parish educational ministry through the lens of a learning-community approach provides a template from which to gauge future directions in parish learning. The study shows that a learning-community approach in parishes is an effective means to enhance learning outcomes and to foster much growth in the Christian faith. Six strategic attitudes in parish ministry practice help to foster this growth in the faith. Enhanced faith learning outcomes in parishes become an achievable goal.

As demonstrated in this thesis, a moderate, positive and clear association existed between the learning community processes and faith learning outcomes in the parish contexts investigated for this research project.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Thomas John Harvard Littleton

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Thank you.

Chapter One: Introduction

Parishes and congregations in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide are communities of faith and practice, seeking to love God and their neighbours as themselves. Parish ministry activities are done in the name of Christ: the ministry activities of worship, proclamation, fellowship, pastoral care, faith education, service and witness through community engagement leading to outreach. The ministers or priests, the local ministry leaders and parishioners relate to each other and encourage one another in the cause of Jesus Christ.¹ Each parish, its clergy and local leaders connect with other parishes in the Diocese, the wider church and 21st century society in its own unique ways.

This thesis gives an account of research conducted with these parishes. The research focused on an examination of parish educational ministry through the lens of a learning community perspective. The contemporary context of learning and teaching in these Anglican parishes is the subject of the thesis.

As the author of the thesis, I am a retired Anglican parish minister, who is a Christian educator with an ecumenical outlook and one who has written on the parish as a learning community.² Having lived and ministered within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, it was a convenient and appropriate context in which to conduct research. This thesis is the fruit of that research.

I conducted the research project in the geographical area of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia. The Archbishop of the Diocese informed the parishes about the research project. The Diocese of Adelaide is one of the 23 Dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia. A Diocese is a geographical region in which there are many parishes and other educational and welfare agencies working together under the oversight and leadership of an Archbishop or Bishop in collegiality with a Diocesan Council and Synod.³ A map of the Diocese is available in the Appendices. Most of the parishes in the Diocese are located in urban areas. The remainder are in adjacent rural

¹ The words “the cause of Jesus Christ” derive from words used by Hans Kung in *On being a Christian* (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperback, 1978), 380-382, 480, 524.

² John Littleton, *Learning in a Congregation: A Learning Community Perspective for Christian Formation and Christian Education* (2003-2015). Retrieved on 25/11/2015 from <http://www.tjhlittleton.com.au>

³ A Bishop is the “chief minister and pastor in Christ’s Church”. The Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Australia: Broughton Books, 1995): 802.

areas and Kangaroo Island.

The following general information about the Diocese serves as a background for the research project and places the project within its context. The demographics and research snapshot described below provide a basis by which to see the research project in perspective and to consider the research findings within the Diocesan situation.

In 2014, the Diocesan Church Office reported that there were 65 parishes in the Diocese with 9,212 Sunday attenders in that year.⁴ Those 9,212 attenders comprised 1.6% of the population of South Australia.

To place the Diocesan statistics in the context of the State of South Australia (SA), in 2011, Anglicans comprised 12.6% or 200,419 of the population of SA, which was 1.5 million. The total Australian population was 21.5 million.⁵

The details of the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Snapshot of the Diocese of Adelaide as a whole are also available. For the 2011 survey, 3,877 forms from 63 churches in the Diocese were returned and analysed. The average age of the attendees in the Diocese then, according to the NCLS forms, was 59 years and one month. The majority of attendees were female (61%) with the minority male (39%). Attendees with a tertiary educational background comprised 41%.⁶

The NCLS research findings on growth in faith in the Diocese indicated that 28% said that “in the last year they had experienced much growth in their faith through this church” (their parish); 6% said that they had experienced “much growth” through other churches; 8% reported “much growth” through private activity; 45% reported “some growth” through their church; and 13% reported “no growth”.⁷

This research examined the degree of association between learning processes and learning outcomes.

The thesis of this research is that the intentional use of the learning community processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection by leaders and

⁴ Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, Diocesan Office email 19/12/14 from Keith Stephens, registrar@adelaide.anglican.com.au

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

⁶ National Church Life Survey (NCLS Research), *Snapshot*, 1, Diocese of Adelaide, 2011, <http://www.ncls.org.au>

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

members in parishes enhances learning outcomes for individuals and the parish, in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

The topic of this thesis is embedded within the study area of Christian education in parishes in the Anglican Church.

In the parish context, the traditional term for Christian education is now, more often than not, replaced by the use of other terms, including Christian formation, faith formation, intentional faith development,⁸ catechesis,⁹ Christian religious education,¹⁰ and teaching and learning in parishes.¹¹ The words “teaching and learning” name the activities of Christian education in parishes and enable the discussion to consider, at different points, one or the other with the recognition that they are closely connected. The emphasis in the thesis is upon the “learning” aspects of parish life.

Two key research questions guide the narrative of this thesis: first, is there evidence that parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide used learning community processes and, second, is there evidence that these learning processes, when used in parishes, enhanced faith learning outcomes for individuals and the parish community?

⁸ United Church of Christ, USA, *Foundations, Findings and Futures: Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ, Executive Summary*, September 2012, retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/CFFE-ExecutiveSummary.pdf>; Episcopal Church, USA, *Legacies, Lessons & Lifelines: The Past, Present, and Future of Theological Education & Christian Formation in the Episcopal Church, 1967-2008*. PEALL, 2008. Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from

<http://www.archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/legacies.lessonsandlifelines1967-2008.pdf>; Craig Mitchell, “Christian Education in the Uniting Church of Australia, Executive Summary,” retrieved on 26/7/2013 from http://craigmitchell.typepad.com/mountain_masala/; Simon Oxley, *Creative Ecumenical Education* (Geneva: WCC Publications, Risk Book Series, 2002), 9-10; John Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020* (Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith Associates, 2010); Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 59-78; John Westerhoff, “Formation, Education, Instruction” in *Religious Education* 82, 4 (Fall, 1987): 578-591.

⁹ Jeffrey Driver in “Christian Education in the Mixed Economy of the Mission-Shaped Church.” *Learning in a Congregation*, <http://www.tjhlittleton.com.au> 2003-2015, 2-3; John H. Westerhoff, *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal* (East Malvern, Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1979), 57-60; Thomas H. Groome “Total Community Catechesis for Lifelong Faith Formation,” in *Lifelong Faith Journal*, 2, 1 (Spring 2008): 30-38.

¹⁰ Jeff Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education* (Alabama, USA: Religious Education Press, 1994); Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1980)

¹¹ John Littleton, “Learning and Teaching in Congregations” in *Learning in a Congregation*, <http://www.tjhlittleton.com.au>; John H. Westerhoff, *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide To Church Renewal*, 61-62.

The answers to these questions revealed the effect that the processes of a learning-community approach had on the growth and enhancement of faith learning outcomes in the parish context.

The research strategy sought to identify the degree to which parishes in the Diocese had a learning-community approach, and then to find evidence, in these parishes, as to whether the use of learning community processes was associated positively with enhanced faith learning outcomes. A mixed methodology was used.

Phase One of the strategy, carried out during 2013, was quantitative. To assess the degree to which the characteristic learning processes of the learning-community approach were present, a questionnaire was distributed to the 61 parishes in the Diocese, to be completed by a small group in each parish.¹² A second questionnaire on learning outcomes distributed to the 47 parishes that responded to the first survey was to be completed separately by five individuals in each parish.¹³

In Phase Two, which was qualitative, six parishes were selected from across the spectrum of parish responses for further exploration by means of focus groups. These six parishes represented a subset of the 45 parishes that had responded to the second survey. The six focus groups met during the period May-July 2014.

This chapter introduces the context, the purpose, the framework and the strategy of the research.

Chapter Two begins the research journey with a review of learning community literature in a variety of contexts. Three aspects of the literature are discussed: a short overall picture of learning communities in many contexts; a focus on the learning communities in the parish context and the current state of thinking in this area; and then an analysis of learning communities in schools and higher education. The final section of the chapter explores five related issues as well as the similarities and differences that exist between the literature on learning communities in the parish and learning communities in schools and higher education.

As the review progresses, two major themes—the core characteristics of learning communities and their impact on learning outcomes—begin to provide

¹² Survey One consisted of 37 questions of which four were qualitative.

¹³ Survey Two consisted of 28 questions of which two were qualitative.

solutions for the two research questions about learning community processes and their effect on learning outcomes in parish contexts. The parish as a learning community in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide is the subject of this thesis.

A key result of this review is the identification of a gap in the research literature on the parish as a learning community. The review identified the need for evidence-based research on learning outcomes in parish-based learning community contexts.

Chapter Three provides a definition of a learning community in the parish context and details the background, the development and the significance of the learning-community approach used in this research. The approach is characterised by learning processes that are holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective. I developed this approach from my own experience in and writing about parish ministry, and from building on the thinking and writing of other learning community practitioners who are mentioned in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four provides a biblical foundation for the learning-community approach and this research project by studying the key biblical image of the “body of Christ”. The image is explored through the use of a conversational method of Bible study. From that study, five foundation principles that give expression to the “body of Christ” image of the church are established. The foundation principles are that ministry practice is to be holistic; interdependent; inclusive and accessible; Christ-centred; and Spirit-guided in mission. The chapter concludes with a section that draws attention to an affinity between the biblical image of the “body of Christ” and the components of the learning-community approach.

I will argue that a “body of Christ” understanding of the nature of the church is a prerequisite for an appreciation of the parish as a learning community.

Chapter Five focuses on learning, learners and learning outcomes in the parish context in order to provide an answer to the second research question on learning outcomes. Definitions of education, teaching and learning are considered. I offer a definition of faith learning. The centrality of the learner is emphasised. Learning outcome assessment methods are investigated. The chapter concludes by considering the value of that investigation. I will argue that leaders in parishes who have a learning community perspective are motivated to focus on learners, learning and the recognition of faith learning outcomes.

Chapter Six gives an account of the methodology used to test the premise of this research. Broadly speaking, I adopt a mixed-methods approach. Phase One of the research strategy is quantitative while Phase Two is qualitative. Data and information are gathered from a number of different angles through a mixed-methods approach. That methodology gives rigour to the research process and strengthens the case for confidence in the findings.

In Chapter Seven, I present the research findings. The results confirm the positive association of a learning-community approach with the growth and enhancement of faith learning. Graphs (as figures) and tables are presented and discussed. The findings showed a spread of parish responses, ranging from a number of parishes with multiple learning community characteristics to a number of parishes with few of those characteristics. A descriptive case study includes quotations from some of the focus group participants where they express their thoughts and feelings about learning processes and learning outcomes.

Chapter Eight interprets and discusses the convergence of the findings from Phases One and Two of the research strategy. I discuss the lessons learnt from the research and present the eight main findings, which indicate that enhanced faith learning is happening within parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. Across the spectrum of parish responses, the research revealed a moderate, positive and clear association between learning processes and faith learning outcomes. The research data reveal a definite tendency across the range of responses from the participating parishes. Parishes, which have a high ranking in terms of learning community processes, reported much growth in faith learning, while those with a low ranking reported the opposite.

In the final chapter, I reflect on the practical implications of the research findings. These findings leave us with a question: “where does that take us?” A response to that question about future directions involves the task of transforming parishes into learning communities where much growth and enhancement of faith learning can occur. Those leading the learning communities in parishes become reflective learners. The chapter discusses six strategic attitudes for parish ministry practice. These strategic attitudes originated in a learning community perspective and grew out of the research findings presented in this thesis. A learning-

community approach is a practical way to enhance faith learning and to foster much growth in the Christian faith in parishes.

Summary

This thesis offers new evidence-based research findings about faith learning in the parish context associated with the use of a learning-community approach. The next chapter reviews the literature on learning communities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This review of the literature details the contextual diversity of the settings in which learning communities are situated. Three aspects of the literature are discussed: firstly, a short overall picture of learning communities in many contexts; secondly, a focus on the learning communities in the parish context and the current state of thinking in this area; and thirdly an analysis of learning communities in schools and higher education. The final section of the chapter explores five related issues as well as the similarities and differences that exist between the literature on learning communities in the parish and learning communities in schools and higher education.

As the review progresses, it becomes clear that two major themes—the core characteristics of learning communities and their impact on learning outcomes—begin to provide solutions for the two research questions about learning community processes and their effect on learning outcomes in parish contexts. The parish as a learning community in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide is the subject of this thesis.

A key result of this review is the identification of a gap in the research literature on the parish as a learning community. The review affirms the need for evidence-based research on learning outcomes in parish-based learning community contexts.

1. Learning communities and their contexts

Learning communities are formed in a variety of ways, in differing contexts and in accord with several models. They are located in Australia and internationally: in schools¹⁴ and higher education institutions,¹⁵ local government departments,¹⁶ in

¹⁴ Susanne Mary Owen, “Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: ‘ah hah moments’, ‘passion’ and ‘making a difference’ for student learning,” *Professional Development in Education Journal*, 41, 1 (2015): 57-74.

¹⁵ *Learning Communities Journal*, Volumes 1-6, (2009-2014) Miami University, USA.

¹⁶ L. Wheeler and S. Wong, *Learning as a Driver of Change for Local Government* (Sydney: University of Technology, 2013).

business,¹⁷ in community networks,¹⁸ in churches,¹⁹ online and in e-learning.²⁰ An extensive body of literature is available on the theory and practice of learning communities in these and other contexts.

For example, the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania recognised the potential and benefits that learning communities could offer. In 2003, the faculty sought to define the term “learning community” in the university context as a guide for research and as a means for conducting research collaboratively with interaction between researchers as a key aspect.

During the process of exploring definitions, the faculty presented a composite definition of a learning community, prepared by *Adult Learning Australia*. That definition applied to diverse situations: namely, a city, a region, a community or an organisation.

The definition reads:

A learning community is any group of people sharing common beliefs, values and purpose which collaborates and reflects in order to create a vibrant, participative and skilled community, while respecting a variety of perspectives and using active promotion of learning opportunities to enhance the potential of all members that may create new knowledge.²¹

The definition can be applied to a congregation or parish. Such a definition draws attention to the common features or core characteristics of learning communities in general: people with beliefs, values and purpose in common; collaboration and reflection; participation by all but respect for diversity; a focus

¹⁷ Dennis T. Jaffe, “Building Communities of Learning in Family Business Programs,” in *Family Business Review*, XL, 4 (December, 1998); Alan Redropp, “Family Business Engagement” (unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Management, University of South Australia, 2012); Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (Australia: Random House, 1990).

¹⁸ *Adult Learning Australia*. Retrieved under learning communities on 28/10/14 from <http://www.ala.asn.au>; examples of community networks are available on the internet under *Australian Learning Communities Network*.

¹⁹ Barbara J. Fleischer, “The Ministering Community as Context for Religious Education: A Case Study of St. Gabriel’s Catholic Parish,” *Religious Education*, 101, 1 (Winter, 2006): 104-122.

²⁰ Duncan Macleod, “Being a Learning Community Online,” *Australian Leadership* 2, 3 (September/October 2009): 4-6; Stephen Wright, “Excellence in E-Learning: E-Learning to Enhance Learning and Community,” *Journal of Christian Education*, 54, 1 (May, 2011): 57-63; Mark A Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities” in *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep and Mary E. Lowe, eds. (Charlotte, NC, USA: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2012): 31-40.

²¹ Sue Kilpatrick, Margaret Barrett and Tammy Jones, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania “Defining Learning Communities” in Conference Paper Australian Association of Research in Education, (Auckland, 2003): 6 and 1-13; retrieved on 28/10/2014 from <http://www.CRLRA.utas.edu.au> under Discussion Papers 2003.

on learning with many opportunities available; an inclusive and holistic approach; and the enhancement of learning towards new knowledge.

Customisation

The principle of customisation is highlighted in the literature. The learning community concept is customised and defined for various contexts. Patrick Hill states that:

[t]he concept of learning communities is not a rigid one: there are a great variety of ways in which learning communities can be conceived. The successful ones are all adaptations to the peculiar context of this or that institution.²²

Nancy Frazier commented that “[u]nique as snowflakes, learning communities are formed in countless ways.”²³

The principle of customisation applies to the parish context as much as it does to other situations.

My focus is on the parish context. Literature from the other contexts has been mentioned briefly by way of introduction to the wider scene. It is not proposed to explore the many aspects of all those learning contexts. It is enough, at this stage, to recognize the previously stated common features or core characteristics that exist amongst the various forms of learning community.

This sets the stage for a parish-focused study.

2. Learning communities in parish contexts

The learning community literature in the parish context represents an ongoing international, ecumenical and educational conversation on the topic. The conversation about this literature began from around 1972 and increased from 1990 and onwards. The discussion went across national, religious and denominational boundaries; in the USA, Europe and Australia, within both the Jewish and Christian religions, although primarily from the USA and from educators across various Christian traditions.

²² Patrick Hill, “The Rationale for Learning Communities,” at Inaugural Conference on Learning Communities of the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education, 1985, retrieved 28/10/2014 from <http://www.evergreen.edu/washingtoncenter/new-era-les/resources1/>

²³ Nancy Frazier, in David Jonassen and Susan Land, eds., *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 268; Nancy E. Frazier “One Librarian’s Experiences Teaching within First-Year Learning Communities,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 13, 1 (2006): 21-31.

In the parish context, three major topics dominate the literature about Christian education.

Topic one: Formative influence of parish life on faith education

Christian educators discussed the formative power of the parish in relation to faith education. David Merritt commented that it was a “common assertion (amongst professional Christian educators) that everything the Church is and does teaches”.²⁴ He outlined the “educational dimension” of many of the activities in the life of the church: baptism interviews, budget planning, the liturgy and explaining the sacraments, to mention some examples. Merritt argued that the renewal of Christian education and the life of the churches would be through:

a way of thinking about the task of education in local churches that affirms the powerful influence of the church’s corporate life and argues within that for a very specific and deliberate education activity.²⁵

Contemporary professional Christian educators, Merritt noted, were very keen on the idea that “an educational contribution to the life of the church could be conceived much more broadly than as study group activity”.²⁶ Parish-based Christian education had moved from individualistic and study group frameworks towards a faith community emphasis.

In recognising this shift, Merritt reflected the thinking of Christian educators worldwide and sowed seeds in the Christian education landscape for the growth of learning community thinking in the Australian context. The whole life of the parish community had become the focus for education in the faith. Christian educators from the USA had been emphasising the formative power of the congregation for many years.²⁷ For example, C. Ellis Nelson wrote that the community of believers was where faith begins and matures.²⁸ Using biblical

²⁴ David Merritt, *Towards Renewal of The Church: The Urgent Task of Christian Education* (Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Council of Christian Education, 1984), 15-16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²⁷ Nelson 1971, 1989; Westerhoff 1979; Seymour 1982; Craig Dykstra, “The Formative Power of the Congregation,” *Religious Education*, 82, 4 (1987): 530-546; Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco, USA: Harper, 1991); Ronnie Prevost, “Editorial: The Congregation as Educator,” *Religious Education*, 92, 3 (Summer, 1997): 294-296; Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*. (Danvers, MA, USA: Chalice Press, 2000).

²⁸ C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1971); C. Ellis Nelson, *How Faith Matures* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

examples, he presented “the congregation as the primary society and faith in God as the goal”.²⁹

In a similar vein, John Westerhoff wrote:

Catechesis implies that the whole life of a congregation offers times and places in which Christian learning may occur. It is holistic; that is, it is a broad-visioned approach aimed at discovering and developing the many ways that learning and growth occur in the community.³⁰

Craig Dykstra also wrote about this consensus on the formative power of the congregation in forming faith.³¹ To appreciate that the whole life of the parish community educates is a foundational understanding for those who hold a learning community perspective.

Topic two: A shift to the community of faith model

Christian educators recognised the necessity of a shift from a schooling model to a community of faith model in parish education. From about 1976, Christian educators in parishes began to take a community of faith approach to Christian education, compared to a schooling model. In 1976, Westerhoff sought to move the discipline of Christian education from a “schooling-instructional paradigm” towards a “community of faith-enculturation paradigm” which was holistic and focused attention onto “our understanding of education on every aspect of congregational life,”³² including liturgy and outreach. This vision for Christian education moved the emphasis from a reliance on the processes of schooling and instruction in the society’s schools,³³ towards the acknowledgement of an educational approach, which was indigenous to a community of faith.

Christian educators outlined contemporary approaches to Christian education on the basis that new approaches were replacing the traditional schooling ways of conducting church education. Jack Seymour wrote that “[t]he faith

²⁹ Nelson, *Where Faith Begins*, 193.

³⁰ John H. Westerhoff, *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal*, 58-59.

³¹ Craig Dykstra, “The Formative Power of the Congregation,” *Religious Education*, 530-546.

³² John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* A Third Revised Edition was published (New York, USA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 130; More on John H. Westerhoff, <http://www.christianeducators20.com> (Retrieved 29/1/2016).

³³ John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (East Malvern: Dove Communications, 1976), 7, 14. A Third Revised Edition was published (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 7.

community is the locus of Christian education”.³⁴ Authors enthused by the holistic, inclusive community of faith approach described the range of ways in which the whole community life of the parish had its own educational dimensions.³⁵

The focus in Christian education on the whole life of the community of faith opened the way for seeing the parishes as learning communities. Christian educators with a whole life of the faith community educational strategy insisted that parish learning be viewed holistically.

Topic three: The parish as a learning community

Thirdly, the parish and congregation began to be seen as a learning community. Christian educators focused on the whole life of the parish community as a means for education in the faith. Within that community of faith learning context, an appreciation of the parish as a learning community began to be articulated. Learning community frameworks were being proposed for parish educational ministry practice.

An early reference to learning community thinking in the church was made in 1974, when a “Learning Community” report based on a 1973 European consultation held in Switzerland became available. That consultation evaluated the Sunday school contribution to church education in Europe. The report presented the argument that the churches should think of the church programme as an integrated activity: education, service and worship.³⁶ Information about this 1974 report surfaced again in 1997, when John Sutcliffe, from the United Kingdom (UK),

³⁴ Jack Seymour and Donald Miller, *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1982), 12.

³⁵ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects* (Dublin, USA: Gill and Macmillan, 1983, Fifth impression); Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission* (San Francisco, USA: Harper & Row, 1983); Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989); Charles R. Foster, *Educating congregations: The future of Christian education* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1994); Denham Grierson, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: A congregational workbook* (Melbourne, Australia: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1995); Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York, USA: HarperOne, 2011); Loren B. Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Bethesda, MD, USA: The Alban Institute, 1994); Roberto 2010; John Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages & Generations* (Naugatuck, CT, USA: LifelongFaith Associates, 2015).

³⁶ John Sutcliffe, “Learning Community” in *World Council of Churches Education Newsletter*, 1, Geneva (1997): 2-4; Two other early references: John M. Larsen, “The Individual and the Learning Community,” *Religious Education* 67, 4 (July-August, 1972): 272-276; W. Kent Gilbert, “The Parish as a Learning/ Teaching Community,” *Lutheran World*, 23, 2 (1976): 127-131.

elaborated on the report in arguing for an integrated church programme. Sutcliffe, in 1997, suggested that the notion of the parish as a learning community might not be widely adopted; many churches in the UK would not know about the term “learning community”.

From 1990 onwards, writing on congregations as learning communities increased. In the literature three main strands emerged: a community of faith model, a learning organisation model and a model based on core characteristics of learning communities.

A community of faith model

Firstly, a community of faith strand emerged in the literature, based on an understanding that the whole life of the parish was the focus for education in the Christian faith. Educators claimed that an educational component existed in every aspect of a parish’s life. An educational ministry for the whole parish developed. Norma Cook Everist, writing from the Lutheran tradition, and Thomas Groome, writing from the Roman Catholic tradition, articulated this approach. They envisaged the parish as a learning community (Everist) and as the context for “Total Community Catechesis (TCC) for Lifelong Faith Formation” (Groome). Other authors³⁷ also endorsed the community of faith perspective.

For example, Seymour wrote that “[t]he learning community is an ecosystem in which each person contributes to the whole,” and it is “operating out of a co-learner paradigm”.³⁸ Everist explored the theme of the congregation as a

³⁷ Thomas Downs, *The Parish as Learning Community: Modelling for Parish and Adult Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); John Seraphine, “Reworking a Congregation into a Learning Community,” In *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 1, 4 (1994): 253-266; Joe Marlow, “Beyond Teaching: The Congregation as a Learning Community,” *Christian Education Journal*, 16 (Fall, 1995): 63-77; Jack L. Seymour, Margaret Ann Cain and Joseph V. Crockett, *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1993); Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2002); Isa Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners* (Woodstock, Vermont USA: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000); Isa Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation* (Woodstock, Vermont, USA: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002); Thomas H. Groome, “Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always,” in *Horizons & Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell, eds., (New York: Paulist Press, 2003): 1-29; Littleton 2003; John Littleton, *A Handbook for a Learning Community Perspective in Congregations: Christian Formation and Christian Education* (Magill, Adelaide: TJH Littleton, May 2008a); John Littleton, “A Learning Community Focus for Christian Education,” *Religious Education*, 103, 5 (October-December, 2008b): 553-578.

³⁸ Seymour et al., *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation*, 145-147.

learning community in *The Church as Learning Community*. The purpose of her book was threefold:

To put forth a vision of the entire parish as learning community; to help faith communities create and maintain learning environments that facilitate us being different together in a pluralistic world; and to provide a comprehensive guide for religious educators leading a congregation toward becoming a learning community.³⁹

The author wrote that “locally, the learning community includes not only the people gathered in the church on Sunday, but all the arenas of their daily lives all week long”.⁴⁰ Everist’s inclusion of the daily and weekly arenas of life in the learning community expanded the appreciation of a parish education to include the important Sunday experience and life as a whole: in the family, at work, at school, at college or in the general society with its issues.

In her writing on faith education from a Jewish perspective, Isa Aron articulated a learning-community approach.⁴¹ Instead of the term “learning communities”, Aron used the term “self-renewing” congregations.⁴² She selected four collective capacities as the cornerstones to congregational self-renewal: being reflective and proactive; practising collaborative leadership; creating community among diverse individuals; and balancing tradition and change.⁴³

A learning organisation model

Secondly, a learning organisation strand emerged in the literature, based on the writing of Peter Senge. A number of Christian educators drew heavily on Senge’s learning organisation model.⁴⁴

³⁹ Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*; Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*.

⁴² Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*, 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9-10

⁴⁴ David Clark, “Engaging in Mission – the church as a learning organization,” in *Changing World, Unchanging Church: An Agenda for Christian Public Life* (London: Mowbray, 1997); Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Paul M. Dieterich, “Becoming a Learning System,” Module 7, Topic Three in Resources provided for the “Working Together for Profound Change” Seminar, Adelaide, 3-7 August 1998 (Chicago, Illinois: The Center for Parish Development, 1998); Dennis Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities - Tools for Shaping Your Future* (USA: Alban Institute, 2000); Jane E. Regan, “The Aim of Catechesis: Educating for an Adult Church,” In *Horizons & Hopes: The Future of Religious Education* (Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell. eds. New York: Paulist Press, 2003); Barbara J. Fleischer, “From individual to corporate praxis: A systematic re-imagining of religious education,” *Religious Education*, 99, 3 (2004): 316-333.

The work of Senge⁴⁵ highlighted five core disciplines for building a learning organisation: personal mastery; mental models; shared vision; team learning; and systems thinking. Christian educator Barbara Fleischer considered that these five disciplines provided a way to explore the learning dynamics in a parish.⁴⁶

Even though Senge used many corporate business examples to illustrate his learning organisation framework, some Christian educators considered that the five disciplines provided a potential approach to educational ministry in parishes.

For example, Thomas Hawkins made direct reference to the work of Senge in naming his book *The Learning Congregation*. Hawkins emphasised that reflective leadership in learning congregations would assist those congregations to grow forward in the fast-changing contemporary world.⁴⁷ He contributed significantly towards the understanding of congregational learning within a learning community parish, by enumerating ways in which leaders are challenged to enable congregations to go on growing into the future, helping parishes learn how to learn to be church in times of change.

Dennis Campbell adapted the tools that Senge had created and claimed that Senge himself came to use the term “learning community” in place of the term “learning organisation”. Campbell suggested that leaders who wanted their faith community to become a learning community would need to understand Senge’s five disciplines of the learning organisation. He agreed with Senge that “the future of every organisation depends on its ability to learn together as a community”.⁴⁸

In response, Campbell offered a set of tools that would enable a congregation to be holistic and “remain open to what God is calling it to be”.⁴⁹ The four tools offered were for: systems thinking, appreciative enquiry, congregational cultural analysis and scenario planning.

Fleischer explored the systemic perspective and the disciplines of learning organisations in order to reimagine the role of the religious educator in congregational development and to illustrate the communal and corporate aspects

⁴⁵ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*.

⁴⁶ Fleischer, “From individual to corporate praxis,” 325.

⁴⁷ Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 140.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities – Tools for Shaping Your Future*, 1-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

of religious education.⁵⁰ She conducted a research study on a parish using the five core disciplines developed by Senge. She noted that the learning organisation model, as used in relation to the fostering of faith communities, had been explored by a number of other authors.⁵¹

In summary, from this review so far, it should be noted that Christian educators moved in their understanding of parish education from individual and study group learning methods towards a more corporate and parish community-based approach. The whole life of the parish community became the focus for education in the faith. Such a holistic approach opened the way for the vision of the parish as a learning community. A learning-community approach with a community of faith model began to appear in the literature from the 1970s onwards. From 1990, the learning-community approach with a learning organisation model emerged. From the late 1990s, a learning-community approach based on the core characteristics of learning communities appeared in the literature.

A core characteristics model: Holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective

A third strand in the literature summarised and customised the core learning community characteristics to a community of faith model in an Anglican parish context. While having the community of faith model as its central focus, this strand occasionally drew on approaches from other contexts to complement and illuminate aspects of the educational focus based on the whole life of the parish community. This contemporary learning-community approach in parishes has a threefold framework. It is holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective and is fully outlined in Chapter Three.

This model grew from the literature on Christian education and summarised the core characteristics of learning communities as described in earlier parts of this chapter, namely: common values and purpose; participation by all involved; inclusive and holistic approaches; collaboration; reflection; and a focus on learning. The four capacities Aron selected as essential for self-renewing congregations have much in common with these core learning community characteristics. The framework confirmed my own experience in and writing about parish ministry and

⁵⁰ Fleischer, "From individual to corporate praxis," 316.

⁵¹ Fleischer "The Ministering Community," 108; Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 1997; Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); Regan, 2003.

builds on the thinking and writing of others already mentioned in this chapter.⁵² The framework was also chosen due to its affinity with the biblical image of the “body of Christ,” a key image for a learning community perspective in parishes. This affinity is elaborated more fully in Chapter Four. The holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective processes are indigenous to the practical realities of life in Anglican parishes.

Shared understandings

Shared understandings exist within the literature on the parish or congregation as a learning community.⁵³ Writers on the parish as a learning community share all or some of these understandings about the nature of learning communities in the parish context. The understandings serve as a background store of practical wisdom from which authors draw as they explore the nature of the learning community in their different ways within a variety of parish contexts.

Some shared understandings are:

The parish or congregation is the primary setting for faith education.

The whole community of faith is the formative influence on faith education.

The parish is an educating community with holistic approaches.

Hospitable and safe learning spaces exist within a parish culture of learning.

Each person is valued as a member of the “body of Christ”, recognised as someone with abilities and gifts, and encouraged to participate and contribute.

The parishioners become lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learners.

The whole life of the parish community provides the means through which faith learning occurs, through worship, caring, education, and community engagement.

⁵² Littleton, *Learning in a Congregation*.

⁵³ For example: Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*, 1, 28-29, 267-268; Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*, 8-10; Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 9-17; Fleischer “The Ministering Community,” 104-106; John Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations: A Christian Learning Community Perspective Leadership audit included* (Magill, Adelaide: TJH Littleton, 2010). Jane E Regan, *Toward An Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago, USA: Loyola Press, 2002): 158-169.

Shared, collaborative and reflective leadership is practised.
Consultation, reflection and ongoing evaluation are built into parish activities.
Leaders are biblically literate and reflect theologically.
Through leadership a parish has the ability to be self-reflective and self-critical, to innovate and develop new behaviours, and create new futures in changing times.
Positive learning outcomes occur.

However, while they share all or some these understandings of a learning community in the parish context, researchers select different learning community models or frameworks or core characteristics for the practical purposes of research in varying contexts. For example, in her research, Fleischer selected Senge's learning organisation framework using the five disciplines of personal mastery; mental models; shared vision; team learning; and system thinking. Aron with others developed a framework of six core traits within a community of faith model. These examples of the different frameworks used in research are explored further during the next part of this chapter.

Research on learning communities in parishes and congregations

Up to this point in the chapter, I have briefly outlined the general learning community literature across many contexts and discussed the literature specific to the parish or congregational context. The previous sections in this chapter described learning community models and outlined shared understandings on the nature of a learning community in the parish context.

The stage is set for a review of empirical research on the parish as a learning community. Research findings are very important for the theory and practice of Christian education. Research informs and influences ministry practice. For example, over many years, research studies have been conducted on small groups;⁵⁴ ministry leadership;⁵⁵ community service and faith development;⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Kevin Lawson, "A Band of Sisters: The Impact of Long-Term Small Group Participation: Forty Years in a Women's Prayer and Bible Study Group," *Religious Education*, 101, 2 (Spring 2006): 180-203.

⁵⁵ Fleischer, "The Ministering Community," 104-122.

⁵⁶ Dennis R. Myers, Terry A. Wolfer and Diana R Garland, "Congregational Service – Learning Characteristics and Volunteer Development," *Religious Education*, 103, 3 (May-June 2008): 369-386.

conversation across differences;⁵⁷ the catechumenate;⁵⁸ the Alpha and Emmaus educational programmes;⁵⁹ and education for ministry and faith formation,⁶⁰ in Australia and internationally.

A National Church Life Survey team (NCLS), the Christian Research Association (CRA) and the Formation, Education and Discipleship (FED) Unit of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) conduct Australia-wide research on congregations. The valuable research findings from these organisations focus on local churches in general and not specifically on churches as learning communities. Reference is made to these very useful findings later in the thesis.⁶¹

Three examples of 21st century research on the parish as a learning community are now considered.⁶²

Firstly, Fleischer conducted research on a Roman Catholic parish in New Orleans, USA, and used Senge's learning organisation framework to explore the dynamics of a parish in a qualitative study. Structured interviews and a survey with content analysis were used as the data gathering instruments. Through this case study of 46 lay pastoral ministry leaders in a parish, Fleischer concluded that involvement in ministry, which included reflection on that ministry practice, was "a major pathway for learning in a congregation."⁶³

The study explored the learning dynamics in a "ministerially active congregation" with a focus on "the perceptions of those parishioners most involved in lay ministry leadership". In that context:

⁵⁷ Theresa O'Keefe, "Learning to Talk: Conversation across Religious Difference," *Religious Education*, 104, 2 (March-April 2009): 197-212.

⁵⁸ Paul Dalzell, "Two Paths One Process", Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2003, about Alpha and the Catechumenate; Patrick J. Cronin, *Encountering The Mystery of God* (Preston, Victoria: Mosaic Press, 2013).

⁵⁹ Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now? An evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, cell church and other contemporary strategies for evangelism* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).

⁶⁰ Raymond Smith, "An Evaluative Case Study of the Extension programme of the National Board of Religious Education for the Anglican Church of Australia," Master of Education Thesis, Department of Continuing Education, University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia, 1984; Gary O'Neill, Director of Education for Ministry (EfM) in the United Kingdom (UK), "Better quality straw for the bricks: towards a new manual for theological reflection," Draft Doctor of Philosophy Thesis in the UK, 2015. Information received by email on 18/3/15 from gary@exploringfaithmatters.co.uk; John Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation*.

⁶¹ Details on NCLS, CRA and UCA research are available in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

⁶² Fleischer, "The Ministering Community," 104-122; Isa Aron, Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman and Ari Y. Kelman, *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary* (Herndon, VA, USA: Alban Institute, 2010.); Elizabeth B. Price, "Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation," *Religious Education*, 99, 4 (2004): 358-370.

⁶³ Fleischer, "The Ministering Community," 104.

The primary vehicle for learning in the congregation ... was involvement in ministry praxis with others in the parish. For both the Pastoral Team members and the Ministry Team Leaders, involvement in ministry was a major pathway for their own learning, both for personal faith development and for moving toward a shared ministerial vision.⁶⁴

This example illustrated that, in the context of a collaborative and reflective parish community, leaders and parishioners, through team ministry, grew in their faith learning. The example affirms the importance of a corporate culture of learning in a parish context, indeed that “the parish community itself is the primary educator.”⁶⁵

Secondly, researchers from the Jewish education context investigated eight synagogues in the USA. Over a two-year period, researchers Isa Aron, Steven Cohen, Lawrence Hoffman and Ari Kelman interviewed 175 synagogue leaders and a selection of congregants. They found that visionary synagogue congregations unlike their functional counterparts shared six traits or core characteristics: sacred purpose; holistic ethos; participatory culture; meaningful engagement; innovative disposition; and reflective leadership and governance.

This study charted helpful ways in which functional synagogues, although declining in membership and facing difficulties, could become visionary, exciting and inspiring sacred communities in the Jewish tradition.

The authors wrote:

Functional and visionary are the names we give to the two extremes on a spectrum – no congregation is entirely one or the other. What matters is the valence and direction of the congregation. Are congregations stuck or are they advancing to visionary? We believe every synagogue can learn enough from our research to at least embark on the visionary path. First and foremost such congregations need a rough idea of what visionary is, and toward that end we have provided six dimensions, or scales.⁶⁶

These six dimensions of a visionary congregation affirmed the core characteristics of learning communities in the parish context: holistic, collaborative, participatory and reflective. The framing of a functional-visionary spectrum provided a practical guide for parishes as they travelled on the journey towards the visionary by developing the six dimensions.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁶ Aron et al., *Sacred Strategies*, Chapter Eight.

Thirdly, Elizabeth Price added another challenge by suggesting that a learning-community approach may be demanding too much from parishioners as they are expected to reflect theologically. Theological reflection requires a certain level of cognition and a capacity for critical thinking.

Inspired by the work of Hawkins on the learning congregation, Price recognised that learning congregations, through a process of shared praxis, were expected to have the ability to participate in critical thought.⁶⁷ She argued that “cognitive theory would assume that a complex level of cognition is required of persons who make up such a congregation”.⁶⁸ Her paper challenged that assumption and concluded that “cognitive complexity is not necessary for the membership as a whole of a learning congregation”.⁶⁹ However, a critical mass of flexible thinkers would be needed. Price argued that congregation members could become reflective thinkers provided that those in leadership were equipped to lead the way and enable others to develop a capacity for critical thinking. Parishes that operated as learning congregations, with well-equipped clergy and local leaders, would have an environment that encouraged people to reflect and act on individual and corporate ministry experiences.

The research methodologies used by Fleischer⁷⁰ and Aron et al.,⁷¹ provide examples of rigorous research through qualitative studies. In each study researchers sought to gather data from a number of different angles within the various approaches. Each study is a positive example of qualitative research methods to use when conducting research on learning communities in parishes. Fleischer used a learning organisation model for her research framework. The research conducted by Aron et al resulted in an outline of six core characteristics for visionary congregations.

The research examples above inform the discussion in four ways. Firstly, the research results from both parish setting and synagogue settings show that a learning-community approach had a positive impact in those contexts. Secondly,

⁶⁷ Elizabeth B. Price, “Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation,” *Religious Education* 99,4 (2004): 358-370. Price refers to the work of Robert Kegan. The ability to think critically corresponds to the fourth order thinking category that Kegan wrote about in his book: *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁷⁰ Fleischer, “The Ministering Community.”

⁷¹ Aron et al., *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from functional to Visionary*.

Price clarified the point that critical thinking is entirely possible across the membership of a learning congregation through the active presence of reflective leaders. Thirdly, investigators approach learning community research in parishes using different frameworks. Fourthly, these few examples of research illustrate that research on the parish as a learning community is minimal when compared to the many examples of research conducted on learning communities in other contexts. The issue of learning community research in other contexts is explored later in this chapter.

Related issues

In addition, writers on the parish as a learning community raise five other issues. The five important topics for discussion are: limitations and strengths; a distinction between a community of learners and a learning community; the influence of the learning community perspective on New Testament biblical studies; community development principles; and learning theory.

Limitations and strengths

The expectations for learning community participants, the clergy, local leaders and parishioners are mentioned in the literature by authors in the field.⁷² The clergy and local leaders are expected to be or to become multi-skilled and multi-faceted in their leadership within learning communities in the parish context. They are expected to be co-learners, adaptive leaders and facilitators of learning. Members of a learning community in parishes are expected to be or to become lifelong learners and to participate in collaborative and reflective practices.

These expectations may be limitations for a time for some clergy, local leaders and parishioners who belong to parishes that desire to function as learning communities. They invite growth and change in their ministry practice. Their growth and new learning would then become a strength and provide a means for parishes to develop as learning communities.

⁷² Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 1997; Aron 2000, 2002; Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities*, 2000; Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 2002; Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechesis/ Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always" in *Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, 1-29 ; Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations: A Christian Learning Community Perspective Leadership audit Included*.

In the literature, authors discuss the matter of reimagining parishes as learning communities and the reskilling of leaders and the enabling of parishioners to be reflective learners.⁷³

These authors also note that the clergy, local leaders in ministry including teachers help or hinder the formation and functioning of learning communities in parishes. Leaders do need to have the competencies necessary to help form parishes into learning communities.

In the literature, the competencies, capabilities and skills of leaders in learning communities are further discussed. Price identifies leader competency as an essential factor for the success of a learning community in a congregation. As learning communities are expected to participate in critical thinking, leaders are required to be reflective and flexible thinkers in order to set an example and lead the way forward by creating “an environment that encourages rather than undermines” the development of critical thinking.⁷⁴

The competencies, capabilities and skills (needed to be a learning community leader) may seem demanding, if not daunting!⁷⁵ Some may consider the need for leaders to be multi-skilled, through collaboration and reflection, and multi-faceted, through being holistic, as a limitation of the learning-community approach. On the other hand, this limitation can be overcome by the development of the competencies through initial ministry formation and in post-ordination activities that exist for clergy in Anglican Dioceses and other churches. Courses for parish leaders abound. Many parishioners are well educated and can make their own contribution to congregational formation. Developing new competencies may take time and require regular leadership audits.

As learning community participants, parishioners will be involved in the processes of working closely with others through reflective activity and critical enquiry. On the one hand, such activities may seem to be too demanding of ordinary members of the congregation. On the other hand, in her research, Price argued that the presence of competent leaders overcomes this limitation. High-quality, well-equipped leaders have the capacity to lead the way and, in due time,

⁷³ Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities*, 9-13; Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 241-253; Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 10, 47-57, Part 2, 141; Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 60-67.

⁷⁴ Price, “Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation”, 369.

⁷⁵ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 54-58.

enable others to reflect on ministry practice. A culture of learning can be formed in which there is a mentoring environment that encourages the movement from adult conventional thinking towards more complex and reflective thinking.⁷⁶

In a culture of learning and growth parishioners can be nurtured towards new competencies. The long-term advantage of having a culture of learning will be revealed in positive learning outcomes through the formation of a learning community.

Distinguishing between a learning community and a community of learners

This section arises from evidence in the literature which supports the need to sustain a distinction between a learning community and a community of learners. Aron raises this issue of differentiation through the titles of two books, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners* and *The Self-Renewing Congregation*.⁷⁷ Often teachers and leaders take a view that when parishioners or students are studying or considering a particular topic, they are a learning community when, in effect, they may be a community of learners.

A learning community, as previously indicated, consists of core characteristics. Aron, who wrote for the context of a Jewish synagogue, suggested that being a congregation of learners is the basis, almost a prerequisite, for becoming a learning congregation. For Aron, a culture of learning is developed in a congregation of learners, where “learning is seen as an essential part of being a member of the congregation”, where “learning is viewed as a lifelong endeavour”, and where “many possible learning styles” are acknowledged.⁷⁸ In Aron’s terms, a learning congregation practises shared leadership and has incorporated “deliberation, reflection and ongoing assessment into all of their activities”.⁷⁹ She wrote:

A congregation of learners that is not, at the same time, a learning congregation, will not retain the vitality of its learning for long. A learning congregation that is not, at the same time, a congregation of learners will have difficulty remaining rooted in the Jewish tradition. Jewish learning is both a process and a product.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Price, “Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation”, 367-369.

⁷⁷ Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*; Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*.

⁷⁸ Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*, 28-29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

A learning community congregation or parish is a Christian community which has the core characteristics like collaboration and reflection. Very often, however, those who use the term “learning community” attach the term to particular content. Jenny Byrnes wrote:

The concept of a congregation as a learning community is frequently misunderstood. A learning community is not only a community that embodies learning around particular content. It is a community that has in place the capacity to learn about itself.⁸¹

The definition of a “learning community” is therefore not to be limited to content or a topic or subject. There is a distinction to be made between content and process. A learning community has to do with processes and describes how the congregation functions or works or operates.

Aron came to the same conclusion about the importance of process when she stated that excellence in a congregation “resides not only in program but also in process”. In her writing, she focused on the “ways synagogues operate, rather than the content of their operations”. As she wrote, a focus on the process of learning is a “vehicle for synagogue renewal”.⁸²

This same distinction was picked up in Branson’s course “The Congregation as a Learning Community” at the Fuller Theological Seminary with its aim of creating a learning congregation formed and equipped “toward gospel faithfulness”.⁸³ The Uniting Church in Australia 2014 National Assembly’s vision for Christian education included “[c]ongregations as lifelong learning communities of discipleship for the sake of the mission of God”.⁸⁴ These are worthy aims. The congregation that is a learning community has Gospel aims and outcomes, as indeed it should.

However, even when topics like Gospel faithfulness or discipleship or mission are considered, the core learning community characteristics need to be recognised and the learning processes of a learning community used. The concept of a parish or congregation as a learning community is not mainly that of a

⁸¹ Jenny Byrnes, “Challenges in Creating Team leadership,” *Australian Leadership*, 1, 5, (January/February 2009): 25.

⁸² Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*, 2.

⁸³ Mark Lau Branson, Course CF526 “The Congregation as a Learning Community”, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010. Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.fuller.edu/academics/faculty/mark-lau-branson.aspx>

⁸⁴ Uniting Church in Australia, *FED News, Formation, Education and Discipleship* (FED) Unit. Retrieved on 30/3/2015 from <http://www.assembly.uca.org.au>

community that learns around particular content. It is a community that has special processes and ways of undertaking that learning (on whatever topic). Process is just as important as content. Chapter Five develops the significance of process and highlights the importance of a community where “[l]earning would permeate every aspect of the congregation”.⁸⁵

A learning community lens applied to New Testament biblical studies

A learning-community approach provides a lens through which to view and interpret educational situations. In the literature, New Testament biblical studies are referenced. In those studies a learning community lens has been applied to teaching and learning situations. Two examples illustrate this point.

Firstly, there is the study of Jesus as Teacher portrayed in the Gospels. Reading and reflecting on the Gospel accounts of Jesus through the lens of a learning community perspective caused me to observe the presence of the core characteristics of learning communities in the biblical portrayals of Jesus the Teacher.

A new description of Jesus as Teacher emerged from my study. Through this interpretation of the Gospels,⁸⁶ Jesus was, in 21st century educational language, a Teacher for all kinds of people in a range of different venues and situations. Jesus taught in collaborative ways, used an interactive teaching style, and facilitated learning for and from ministry practice. Jesus as the Teacher was a practitioner in theological reflection as illustrated in his many parables. The example of Jesus the Teacher, as portrayed in the Gospels, provides an inspirational, visionary and practical approach to teaching and learning today.

Secondly, a learning community perspective influenced Claire Smith in her study of the Pauline communities. She showed, by her analysis of the vocabulary of teaching in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Timothy and Titus, that those “early Christian communities portrayed in four letters of the NT might faithfully and productively

⁸⁵ Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners*, 30.

⁸⁶ Littleton, “Jesus as the Teacher: Facilitator of Learning” in *Learning in a Congregation*, 2014. This paper on “Jesus as the Teacher” was the result of reworking my Adelaide College of Divinity, Doctor of Ministry, 2013, Guided Reading Assignment, which received the grade of a Distinction.

be characterised as ‘scholastic’ or ‘learning communities’⁸⁷. In choosing the term “learning communities”, Smith noted that the term “has currency in theories and models of education, including in relation to Christian congregations”.⁸⁸

After describing the limitations of the term “scholastic communities”,⁸⁹ Smith outlined the advantages of using the improved term “learning communities”. Firstly, the adjective “learning” acknowledged that members of such communities learnt from God “who is the ultimate teacher from whom all learn”. As she wrote, “God himself [sic] was an essential participant in the educational environment of these Pauline communities”, and the “divine-human relationships provided the primary context”. Secondly, those who were teachers within the believing community were co-learners with others as all “are addressees of God’s teaching activities”. She then added:

Finally, ‘learning communities’ more faithfully reflects the purpose and result of the educational environment, which was not that people would teach, but that all would learn and be transformed in belief and conduct.⁹⁰

These two examples about Jesus as a facilitator of learning and the Pauline congregations as learning communities showed how learning community thinking has had an influence on biblical scholarship, which may be used in parishes. The issue explored in this section has a practical application for parish educational contexts.

Community development and learning communities

The recognition that community development principles undergirded the formation and sustainability of learning communities in parishes indicated that these principles also required some attention. The learning community literature exists within the study of community building and the application of community development principles.

The concept of *community* plays an important part in a thesis on learning communities. Working definitions of “community” were used in the literature.

⁸⁷ Claire Smith, *Pauline Communities as ‘Scholastic Communities’: A Study of the Vocabulary of ‘Teaching’ in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 390-391.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 390. In her footnotes, Claire Smith cited the following as learning community writers: Everist, Campbell, Sutcliffe, Downs, Hawkins, Littleton and Seraphine.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 388-390.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

Janette Hill defined the word “community” in a number of ways: as a physical or virtual space; a social group (an organisation); a generalised community of people in the society;⁹¹ and a group of people where things are held in common and there is a sharing of life (the Latin *communis*: things held in common, the sharing of life). Senge, with others, defined “community” in the following terms:

A community of people is a place, rooted in the biosphere, rife with activity, mutual respect and the recognition that everyone in that place is responsible for and accountable to one another, because the lives of all are interdependent.⁹²

Understanding the nature of human community and having the skills to build and grow the common life of a community are, from my experience in parish ministry, basic competencies for those involved in learning communities. The features of mutual respect and trust, accountability, connectivity and interdependence have to be built and sustained for a community of learning to function and flourish.

The stages of community building include: getting to know people; bringing people together; building relationships; involving as many people as possible; sharing common interests and needs; establishing a common vision with goals and roles; exploring strengths, forming and building the organisation with plans, strategies and resources; keeping it all going; and developing leaders, networks and sustainability with continued community ownership of any projects.⁹³

A piece of conventional wisdom for leaders summarises an effective attitude for building community: be where people are, give a lead but do not be too far ahead.

Learning theory and learning communities

Learning communities developed in association with new learning theories. The realisation that a paradigm shift in learning theory had significantly influenced the

⁹¹ David Jonassen and Susan Land, *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012): 268-269.

⁹² Peter Senge, Nelda Cambron-McCabe, Timothy Lucas, Bryan Smith, Janis Dutton and Art Kleiner, *A Fifth Discipline Resource: Schools That Learn* (London, Nicholas Brealey, 2003), 461.

⁹³ For example, the nine-stage process outlined by Peter Renkin, “From Segregated to Self-Managed Community: The Contribution of Community Social Work Practice towards Aboriginal Self-Management at Lake Tyers/Bung Yarmda, Victoria.” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, February, 2006); also, an eight-stage process, Wayne McCashen, *Communities of Hope: A strengths-based resource for building community* (Bendigo, Victoria: St Luke’s Innovative Resources, 2004): 31-33.

formation of learning communities highlighted the need to attend to learning theory. These new learning theories also underpin the appreciation of the parish as a learning community.

The development of learning community literature corresponded with a paradigm shift in educational learning theory and the associated literature. From the mid-1980s, there was a fundamental shift in learning theory from a traditional transmission of knowledge view to a “more social, conversational and constructive view of learning”.⁹⁴ There was a movement away from an “acquisition” metaphor, which had been dominant in schooling, towards a “participation” metaphor “in which knowledge is considered fundamentally situated in practice”.⁹⁵ Learning in this new paradigm was seen, not so much as communication or transmission of ideas to students, but as an active and reflective process of meaning making with others in the culture of a community. Learning happened as people thought about and did activities together.

For example, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger wrote about “situated learning”. They proposed that learning is situated in a particular context and takes place, not only as a process in the minds of isolated individuals, but through participating and engaging in the learning process as co-participants in a community of practice, involved in practice, reflection and discussion with others. Learning is a process of participating in a community of practice. They wrote that the learner is “more than an observational lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the culture of practice”.⁹⁶

David Csinos used the situated learning theory to explore the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus through the lens of “legitimate peripheral participation”,⁹⁷ a term which originated in the writing of Lave and Wenger. Legitimate peripheral participation is a process whereby a person joins a community and gradually, under guidance, identifies with it “through learning what it means to be part of the community and participating in its core practices”.⁹⁸ Learning happens through the

⁹⁴ Jonassen and Land, *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments*, vii-25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32

⁹⁶ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, Sixteenth printing 2007): 95.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁸ David M. Csinos, “‘Come, Follow Me’: Apprenticeship in Jesus’ Approach to Education,” *Religious Education*, 105, 1 (January-February 2010): 61.

apprenticeship “experience (of) full participation in a community by engaging in its practices”.⁹⁹ Csinos argued that Jesus gradually engrafted new disciples into his community by using “apprenticeship in the style of legitimate peripheral participation”.¹⁰⁰ The example of situated learning theory, proposed by Lave and Wenger and used by Csinos, illustrates the paradigm shift in educational learning theory, from an acquisition to a participation metaphor.

David Jonassen and Susan Land explained that the theoretical foundations of learning environments underwent a change towards student-centred and learner-centred learning frameworks. The learning community was one of those frameworks.¹⁰¹

Jonassen and Land explored the topic of learning communities, the theory and practice of those communities and the importance of using modern technology which provided multiple ways to engage in learning “so that everyone can find a way that works best for him/her”.¹⁰² They provided definitions and indicated that a learning community was a culture of learning where everyone, individually and collectively, worked and interacted together in an ongoing manner to facilitate the learning process.¹⁰³ Jonassen and Land outlined various theories from the social constructivist perspective: social presence theory (relating to others); social interdependence theory (collaborating and co-operating); situated learning theory (participation in the process of learning); self-directed learning theory (individuals taking the initiative for learning); and self-regulated learning theory (self-motivation in learning). Interaction was seen as the key element in a learning experience.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, another adult education facilitator Robert Burns recognised the new paradigm in learning theories as being one that underpinned learning organisation and learning communities in business management.¹⁰⁵ The Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania also drew attention to a shift in emphasis from a focus on individuals towards learning in community.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰¹ Jonassen and Land, *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments*, 269-285.

¹⁰² Ibid., 280

¹⁰³ Ibid., Chapter Eleven, 268-285.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 277

¹⁰⁵ Robert Burns, *The Adult Learner at Work: The challenges of lifelong education in the new millennium* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, Second Edition, 2002).

¹⁰⁶ Sue Kilpatrick et al., “Defining Learning Communities,” 1.

3. *Learning communities in other educational contexts and research*

In the previous section of this chapter I focused on learning communities as developed in the parish context; learning community frameworks and examples of research in the parish context. In this next section I focus on the learning community literature from the school and higher education contexts and the associated research.

In the school and higher education contexts, the use of learning community frameworks impacted significantly on learning outcomes. Awareness of the positive impact of learning community approaches in these educational settings drew my attention to the possibility that learning community processes might also have potential benefits in the parish context and impact significantly on learning outcomes there.

The two major themes come into prominence in this section, namely: the core characteristics of learning communities and their impact on learning outcomes. The research conducted on learning communities customised for the school and higher educational contexts demonstrated improved learning outcomes for the students, the teachers and the institutions. A few examples illustrate two themes: learning communities and their impact on learning outcomes.

The *Learning Communities Journal* from the United States (USA) focuses on “the scholarship of faculty learning communities” in higher education with articles about faculty learning communities, undergraduate learning communities and graduate student learning communities.¹⁰⁷ The pattern of scholarship indicates, “a learning community enhances the success of the venture”.¹⁰⁸

Susanne Owen conducted research in South Australian schools employing “teacher interviews within three innovative case-study schools”. In these innovative school contexts, the teachers were co-facilitators, co-learners and co-reflectors, and participated in professional learning communities. The research findings indicated “increased learning outcomes for students in terms of achievement, social skills, emotional aspects, independence and creativity”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Milton Cox, “A Journey in Scholarship Development: The Role of Learning communities – A Message from the Editor-in-Chief,” *Learning Communities Journal* 1 (1, 2009): 1-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Owen, “Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: ‘ah hah moments’, ‘passion’ and ‘making a difference’ for student learning,” 1.

Through her research, Owen defined the characteristics of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in a school context as follows:

shared values and vision; ongoing collaboration; practical activities focused on improved student learning; supportive and shared leadership; teacher inquiry; and collaborative learning.¹¹⁰

Such a definition provides another example of the features that learning communities have in common.

The research literature on the presence of the core learning community characteristics in the school and tertiary contexts presents evidence of the positive impact “on the achievement, retention and involvement of students; the ways teachers teach; and the manner in which organisations respond to change”.¹¹¹ Educational institutions (universities and schools) have been drawn to practise a learning community strategy because relational research showed that the approach improved student retention and had a positive effect on student learning and achievement.

Two more examples illustrate the fact that learning community core characteristics have been used in the educational field for many years owing to their significant impact on learning outcomes. The Hawkesbury Agricultural College Faculty members decided in the late 1970s to develop:

learning communities across rural Australia, through the direct involvement of our students and ourselves, in collaborative learning projects with members of rural families and communities. As faculty and students alike, we would learn how to become a learning community of scholar practitioners, through active participation in other emerging learning communities and critical reflection upon these engagements.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Susanne Owen, *Teacher Professional Learning Communities*, Power Point presentation to the Australian College of Education ‘Education on the Square’, 13 November 2013, Flinders University City Campus, Level 1, Corner Flinders St & Victoria Square, Adelaide, SA, Australia. Another reference on Professional Learning Communities: Louise Stoll, Ray Bolam, Agnes McMahon, Mike Wallace and Sally Thomas, “Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature” *Journal of Educational Change* 7 (2006): 221-258.

¹¹¹ Nancy S. Shapiro & Jodi H. Levine, *Creating Learning Communities: A Practical Guide to Winning Support, Organising for Change and Implementing Programs* (San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, 1999): 187; Brian J. Caldwell and Jim M. Spinks, *The Self-Transforming School* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 19-20; Derek Price “Learning Communities and Student Success in Postsecondary Education: A Background Paper,” (MDRC, USA, 2005, December) Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.mdrc.org> (refer to publications and type in author Derek Price).

¹¹² Richard Bawden, “The Community Challenge: The Learning Response,” Chapter Three, in *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, C. Blackmore, ed. (London: Open

This college faculty customised the learning community notion to its own circumstances and defined it for its own purposes in seeking to create a holistic integrated critical learning system. Richard Bawden wrote:

An effective learning community (among other things) is one which is self-referential, critical of its own processes and dynamics, and capable of self-organisation in the face of continual challenge of its environment.¹¹³

The core learning community characteristics noted from the Hawkesbury Agricultural College included: active involvement and participation of all, collaboration, critical reflection, being self-referential as an organisation and being capable of change in the face of challenges.

Other research on collaboration in the educational field indicated that collaborative learning enhanced critical thinking. Anuradha Gokhale wrote “[t]hat collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others’ ideas”.¹¹⁴

In summary, leaders in school and higher education contexts utilised learning community approaches for many years owing to their positive impact on learning outcomes. Research indicates that core learning community characteristics are associated with significant impacts on learning outcomes in these educational contexts.

Similarities and differences

This final section of the chapter explores the similarities and differences that exist between the literature on learning communities in the parish and learning communities in schools and higher education.

In the school and higher education contexts an abundance of research literature on learning communities exists. The literature indicates that the use of learning community approaches impacts positively on learning outcomes. In the

University, 2010), 39-40. Bawden was then Director of the Centre for Systematic Development, University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, Richmond, NSW, Australia.

¹¹³ Ibid., 54

¹¹⁴ Anuradha Gokhale wrote on her research findings in relation to students of technology. Students were enrolled in the subject Basic Electronics at the Western Illinois University, Macomb, USA. The article was entitled “Collaborative Learning Enhances Critical Thinking” in *Journal of Technology Education*, 7, 1 (Fall 1995): 5; see also, Sami Paavola, Lasse Lipponen and Kai Hakkarainen, “Models of Innovative Knowledge Communities and Three Metaphors of Learning,” in *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 4 (Winter 2004): 557-576.

parish context however, the research literature is minimal and the learning outcome evidence not explored to any great extent. A contrast between these contexts is evident. The use of learning community approaches within the school and higher education sectors for many years is evident. The use of a learning community approaches in the parish contexts is minimal.

This contrast and the evidence of the strong association between learning processes and learning outcomes researched in those school and higher education contexts provided me with the motivation to conduct a research project on the parish as a learning community using a core characteristic framework. The positive results from other research projects strengthened the case to conduct research in order to answer the second question in the current research project: to find reported evidence in the Adelaide Anglican parish context that the presence of core learning community characteristics also had a positive association with learning outcomes for clergy, leaders, members and congregations.

As demonstrated in this review chapter, while some literature is available on the theory and practice of learning communities in the parish context, research conducted on the parish as a learning community is scarce. The core characteristics model about learning communities has not previously been used as a research framework in relation to learning outcomes in Anglican parishes. This is the point of difference and the originality of this research project. Research on a learning-community approach to learning outcomes with Anglican parishes in Australia to date has not been undertaken. A gap exists in the research literature. This thesis recounts a research study that closes the gap.

If there were evidence that these learning community characteristics were positively associated with reports of growth in faith learning outcomes, another research study would then be added to the small amount of emerging literature on learning communities in the parish context. Such a study would affirm the value of a learning-community approach in parishes and provide information and guidance for church policymakers and parish leaders.

Summary: A gap in research on the parish as a learning community

The first part of this chapter provided an overview of the general literature on learning communities in a variety of contexts and, in particular, on the literature

relating to the parish context. The chapter then explored five issues raised in the literature and pertinent to educational practice in a learning community parish. After a summary of the research-based evidence on the impact that learning community characteristics had on learning outcomes in schools and higher education, the chapter considered the similarities and differences between the parish, school and higher education learning community contexts. The review identified a gap in the research literature on the parish as a learning community. The presence of the gap indicated the need to undertake evidence-based research on learning outcomes in parish-based learning community contexts.

The next chapter explains and explores the learning-community approach used for this evidence-based research project undertaken in parishes.

Chapter Three: A Learning-Community Approach

Introduction

This chapter presents the learning-community approach used in the research: a definition, a description, the development and the significance of the approach. A contemporary learning-community approach for faith learning in parishes is characterised by learning processes that are holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective. This approach confirmed my experience of parish ministry within Anglican parishes, and builds on the thinking and writing of others mentioned in this chapter and in Chapter Two where the approach is briefly introduced under the heading of “A core characteristics model: holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective”.

A definition

Drawing on the shared understandings, the various definitions and frameworks mentioned in Chapter Two, for the purposes of the research project recounted in this thesis, I define a learning community in the parish context as follows:

A learning community is a visionary community of faith where leaders and members, while respecting a diversity of abilities and perspectives, practise holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes.

This definition includes a core characteristics framework that is fully explored in this Chapter. The definition provides an overall description of a learning community in a parish context.

A learning-community approach: holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes

Where *holistic* processes are present, a shared vision of the whole parish exists, with an emphasis on the whole Gospel, the whole person and the human and divine relationship. The shared vision for the whole parish brings together the five parts of parish learning: individual learning; group learning; congregational learning; community engagement learning; and dialogical learning. There is an educational ministry for all kinds of people in the parish community and beyond. The degree of

holism depends upon the extent to which the five parts of parish learning figure in the profile of parish life.

Collaborative processes in parishes involve people in the sharing of leadership within the ministry and outreach responsibilities of the parish, when members work and learn together interactively, enjoying and respecting the abilities and contributions of others in achieving a common task and using collaborative discussion. The degree to which learning processes are collaborative depends on the widespread sharing of leadership and the regular use of teamwork, the gifts and skills of parishioners, and the extent of consultation and networking.

Theologically reflective processes in parishes involve people in reflecting upon or thinking about their present life actions in the light of the biblical story and traditions, and then moving forward, renewed for future action. The degree to which the learning processes are theologically reflective is indicated by the extent to which the leadership, the sermons, the worship services, the parish groups, the decision making of the parish and the membership show evidence of some form of theological reflection. Examples of theological reflection methods are mentioned in this chapter.

Teaching within a fully developed learning community is seen, in broad terms, as the intentional facilitation of learning. The teacher or minister or priest or leader is a facilitator of learning and a reflective practitioner.

The three components: Description and development continued ...

The learning-community approach used in this research is customised for the parish context. Those who articulate the community of faith model maintain the view that the whole life of a congregation offers times, places and various methods through which Christian learning may occur. The holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective framework is the best fit for an Anglican parish context.

Holism

The practice of examining the whole life of a parish in educational ministry is clearly expressed in the word “holism”. In consultation with others, the five aspects which constitute the practice of holism developed as a way of describing the total teaching and learning scene in a parish.

Hawkins and Everist contributed to this development by describing some of these aspects. Hawkins outlined how “learning occurs at three levels: the individual, the team and congregational levels”.¹¹⁵ Everist included these three aspects of learning and a section on learning and mission.¹¹⁶

The aspect of dialogical learning developed from an Anglican perspective.¹¹⁷ The worldwide Anglican Communion combines the Catholic and Reformed Church traditions in its Anglican Dioceses, amongst parishes and within parishes. The branches of the Anglican Church sometimes co-exist with ease and sometimes with difficulty. Anglican comprehensiveness seeks to include everyone and recognises that there is more than one way of seeing things. Seeing the whole parish scene is important. Word and sacrament inform in the liturgy. Diversity is part of parish life. Different points of view exist within parishes in the Diocese of Adelaide, for example, on the understanding and interpretation of the Bible, on the understanding of the Holy Communion or the Eucharist, on the understanding and nature of the resurrection and on some social issues. The unity-in-diversity issue is part and parcel of parish life and Anglican identity.

Co-existence and co-operation are possible through friendship, and the facilitation of respectful conversation and dialogue on the various views held by practising Christians. Fostering conversation across differences through discussion and reflection can lead to further faith learning. Dialogical learning is the learning that grows through dialogue with other parish members and discussion of their different viewpoints.

The component of holism sits easily, not only with the unity-in-diversity nature of parish life, but also with the organisational structure of an Anglican parish. Holism takes into account the five loci of learning which are available in a parish structure:

1. *Individual* learning, including private study, and independent or self-directed learning, occurs, for example, through intentional projects and preparation for leadership.

¹¹⁵ Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 257.

¹¹⁷ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations: A Christian Learning Community Perspective, Leadership audit included*, 32-39. Senge wrote on the discipline of dialogue. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 238-249.

2. *Group* learning occurs, for example, through study groups, parish council and team learning in ministry.
3. *Congregational* learning happens, for example, through worship, planning, projects, events, making major decisions, consultation and annual Vestry meetings.
4. *Community engagement* learning occurs in daily life, in the family, at work and in applying the Christian faith in society. This aspect is sometimes referred to as *service learning* when community service is volunteered through parish outreach activities.
5. *Dialogical* learning occurs within the diversity of parish life, through navigating differences with active listening and learning from dialogue about different viewpoints.

Collaboration

Collaboration in leadership and educational ministry developed as a key aspect in the life of Australian churches over many years. Many terms describe “collaborative ministry” in the Anglican church and other churches for several decades: mutual ministry, total ministry, ministry of enablement, every member ministry, priesthood of all believers, shared ministry and partners-in-ministry. In one definition, total ministry is described as “the one ministry of Jesus Christ in which all participate, laity and clergy, in roles that are interdependent and mutually affirming”.¹¹⁸ Books written by a number of people and groups encourage collaborative leadership in the church.¹¹⁹ For example, Hawkins recommended a “five step process for collaborative reflection” in congregations: name, analyse, relate, decide and plan.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Anglican Church of Australia, *Christian Formation Programme, Unit One: Ministry Development* (Melbourne: The General Board of Religious Education (GBRE), 1981), 4.

¹¹⁹ E. Walters and A. C. Hall, eds., *Laity and Clergy: Partners in Ministry*, Consultations (Coventry Cathedral Community of the Cross of Nails, Burlington, Vermont, USA: October, 1978); James C. Fenhagen, *Mutual Ministry: New Vitality for the Local Church* (New York, USA: Seabury Press, 1977); David Robertson, *Collaborative Ministry: What it is, how it works and why* (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007); Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009).

¹²⁰ Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, 44.

Theological reflection

Theological reflection is a well-established educational practice in the Anglican and other churches.

For example, the work of Thomas Groome is well known in Australian churches, within the Christian education courses available to Anglican ordinand undergraduates¹²¹ and within parishes. Groome's theological reflection process was used at the 1983 Adelaide Anglican Diocesan Clergy Conference and as the framework for the 1992 Ecumenical Lenten Bible Studies in South Australia.

Groome outlined "five main components in Christian Education by shared praxis: the present action, critical reflection, dialogue, the Story and the vision that arises from the Story".¹²² He wrote about five movements:

Naming present Christian action and reflecting up on it, then making present the Christian faith tradition as it relates to the focus of attention, followed by an opportunity for the participants to appropriate that to their lives and make decisions for a Christian response.¹²³

Groome stated that there should always be a sixth movement or step called "living the decisions made".¹²⁴ This shared praxis process encourages biblical knowledge and theological reflection with practical ministry. In her writing, Karen Tye recommends the use of Groome's reflective process.¹²⁵ In 2011, in a more recent publication, *Will There Be Faith?* Groome presents a further way of describing this process as a "life to Faith to life approach to educating in faith."¹²⁶

Other writers and groups developed various forms of theological reflection.¹²⁷ The variety of ways in which theological reflection is undertaken in

¹²¹ Littleton, "Learning and Teaching in Congregations" in *Learning in a Congregation*, <http://www.tjhlittleton>

¹²² Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 207-208.

¹²³ Ibid., 223-224

¹²⁴ Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 278

¹²⁵ Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*, 15.

¹²⁶ Groome, *Will There Be Faith*, 338. More on Thomas H. Groome <http://www.christianeducators20.com>

¹²⁷ Michael Trainor, *According to Luke: Insights for Contemporary Pastoral Practice* (North Blackburn, Victoria, Australia: CollinsDove, 1992); Alison Le Cornu, "People's Ways of Believing: Learning Processes and Faith Outcomes." *Religious Education*, 100, 4 (Fall, 2005): 425-446; Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Augsburg Press, 2006, Second Impression); John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011, Fourth Impression); Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008); the Christian Practices movement authors: Dorothy Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

churches was taken into account in this research project. A broad general description of theological reflection was used in Survey One Part C where questions asked about reflective learning and Christian ministry. Research participants were invited to report on evidence of some form of theological reflection.

Contextual issues

In a discussion on learning communities, a key issue is the matter of contextualisation, the adopting or adapting methods from other learning contexts.

Just as Westerhoff and Seymour, mentioned in Chapter Two, moved away from the schooling model towards a community of faith model for Christian education in parishes so, today, Christian educators need to keep closely aligned with the community of faith model and maintain the view that the whole life of a congregation offers times and places in which Christian learning may occur. This means that Christian educators need to be cautious when considering other contextual models and not completely adopt a learning-community approach from another context, whether it be a university, a school, a business organisation, a family business or in community networking.

Rather, each context has its own indigenous parameters, structures and approaches that are integral to its circumstances. Parishes from different denominations may have varying ecclesial structures that influence the shape of their learning-community approach. Some approaches in one context may assist the approach in another context. However, all approaches have the core characteristics as they are best, and appropriately and perhaps differently, applied in particular contexts. A learning community framework can indeed draw on aspects of the other frameworks and there may be overlap between them.

For example, the team learning discipline from Senge's learning organisation framework can easily be used in a group learning aspect of parish life,

Publishers, 1997); Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Geneva Press, 1999); Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming The Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2006); and Schnase 2007; and Education for Ministry (EfM), an adult programme with a distinctive theological reflection method. For more details on EfM, see: Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994). EfM was developed in USA from 1970 onwards and is, in a revised form, used in some Australian Anglican parishes to this day.

especially the life of a parish council or a ministry team.¹²⁸ On the other hand, Senge's framework does not have a strong outreach aspect as required for a parish context. The use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in the school context is another example of an activity that could be adapted to form professional learning communities for parish leaders.

The composite definition for learning communities, as stated in Chapter Two, is a reminder to all those involved in learning communities of one sort or another that there are core characteristics for learning communities, although they may be applied differently across the various contexts.

Significance

The parish-based learning-community approach has four significant uses.

Firstly, the threefold approach provides a framework for the research project recounted in this thesis. That approach is effectively translated into specific, measurable indicators of learning processes as outlined in Chapter Six on the research methodology.

Secondly, the threefold approach provides a way to structure parish ministry and mission around processes that foster growth in the Christian faith, where there is as much focus on the processes of learning as on the content or programme of learning. As already indicated, a learning community parish is a Christian community, which has the core characteristics of holism, collaboration and theological reflection. Chapters Eight and Nine elaborate on this significant use of a learning-community approach.

Thirdly, the approach provides three criteria (holism, collaboration, theological reflection) by which to clarify any issues in relation to parish-based learning community discussions. Examples of such discussions are outlined in this chapter in relation to contextual issues and in Chapter Two when a distinction is made between a community of learners and a learning community.

Fourthly, the approach offers a learning community lens through which to view and interpret educational situations as discussed in Chapter Two under the section on a learning community lens applied to New Testament biblical studies.

¹²⁸ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 19-20, 27.

Each of these four uses can be applied in the parish context to great effect through a research project or the parish structure or by clarifying issues or interpreting educational situations.

Summary

The learning-community approach provides a framework for the research project. The approach is also significant owing to its affinity with the biblical image of the “body of Christ”, a key image for a learning community perspective in parishes. This affinity is described and explained in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: A Biblical Foundation

Introduction

This chapter has two aims. Firstly, it provides a biblical foundation for the learning-community approach and for the research project through a study of the key biblical image of the “body of Christ”. Secondly, it draws attention to an affinity between the biblical image of the “body of Christ” and the learning-community approach used as a framework for this research.

A biblical foundation

After placing the biblical image of the “body of Christ” within a contemporary context, the image is explored through the use of a conversation method of Bible study.

Context: The “body of Christ” image in Anglican parishes

The biblical teaching of the “body of Christ” has a central position in the liturgical life of parishes within the Anglican Church of Australia. In one form of the weekly Sunday Eucharist or Holy Communion worship service, members of the congregation hear the greeting “[w]e are the body of Christ” and respond “His Spirit is with us”.¹²⁹ In the Australian Anglican Prayer Book the biblical “body of Christ” teaching is located in a central position in the communion service. All members of the congregation have a part to play in working together for “building up the body of Christ”. (Ephesians 4:12b) The modern Anglican Church has certainly taken this teaching on board in one of its main liturgical expression on Sundays. Parishes are being taught to be the “body of Christ” through the liturgy. Learning through the liturgy is an important aspect of Christian education.¹³⁰ Sermons on the topic of the “body of Christ” are common.

The “body of Christ” biblical image has for many years been an influence on ministry practice in Anglican parishes. The “body of Christ” understanding of the nature and functioning of the church is essential background for an appreciation

¹²⁹ Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Alexandria, NSW: Broughton Books, 1995) 127, in *The Holy Communion, Second Order*.

¹³⁰ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 23-24.

of the parish as a learning community. It can be viewed as a prerequisite and prepares people to be willing to see the congregation as a learning community. It becomes a readiness factor in helping people to accept and use a learning-community approach. Hence the “body of Christ” as a key biblical image for a learning community perspective in parishes is included within this chapter of the thesis.

In the current research, this meant that when seeking to assess or evaluate whether there is a learning community viewpoint in a parish, a statement about the biblical image was included in a questionnaire in order to determine whether the parish practised a “body of Christ” understanding of the nature of the church. Research participants were asked to respond to a statement by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The statement read “Leaders and members learn about, teach and seek to practise ‘the body of Christ’ understanding of the nature of the Church”. The results of the survey were: 33% strongly agreed, 49% agreed, 13% were neutral and 5% disagreed. That 82% agreed with the statement indicated the importance of the “body of Christ” teaching in the life of those Anglican parishes.

Bible study

Bible study is a usual activity in a parish with a learning-community approach. A study of the biblical image of the “body of Christ” provides an introduction to a Pauline and Paulinist understanding of the church.

The following exploration of the biblical image uses a conversation method of Bible study.¹³¹

In a conversation method of Bible reading, when considering a New Testament passage, for example, great respect is shown for the first century world of the Bible and great respect for our 21st century world. Then, a respectful conversation occurs between the two, the context of the first century passage and the context of our world today. This method allows for dialogue between two worlds, does justice to both contexts and creates new insights.

¹³¹ Michael Trainor, “Five Ways Australian Catholics use the Bible,” in *Inform 59* (Sydney: Catholic Adult Education Centre, 1998).

The term the “body of Christ” has in general three meanings: the natural and human body of Jesus; the consecrated bread in the Eucharist; and the church being seen as the community representing Christ on earth, the “body of Christ”.¹³²

In this chapter, the focus is on the “body of Christ” teaching about the nature of church community. The Holy Communion or Eucharist is however also central to the life of the church community. From an Anglican perspective, the Christ presence in the sacrament of Holy Communion is an essential aspect of the life of the church, as is the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ portrayed in the Gospels.

First century context

The idea of the church as the “body of Christ” is expressed in the following New Testament passages, 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:1-8; Colossians 1:17; and Ephesians 4:1-16.

The term “body” for a community of people was in use at the time of Paul in the first century. In their teaching, the Stoics saw the whole world as a single unity, a single state, and described this community as a body of which each person was a limb.

PHEME PERKINS wrote “Paul adopts an image frequently used in political rhetoric to urge harmony in a divided community, that of diverse members united in a single body”.¹³³ Paul’s idea of the church was similar but there was more to it. The church was not only similar to a body but it was Christ’s body. This idea derives partly from a Jewish way of thinking that a group of people, such as a family, constituted a single personality.¹³⁴ PERKINS wrote about this “difference between the body of Christ and a civic body”.¹³⁵

The letter, 1 Corinthians, was written by Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ, to the congregation of God’s people in the great Greek city of Corinth about 54 CE. Paul

¹³² Frank. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, revised by Elizabeth A. Livingstone (London: Oxford University Press, 1997): 218.

¹³³ Margaret Thrall, *1 and 2 Corinthians, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 89; *New Interpreter’s Study Bible (The NRSV)* ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2053; PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 148-149; PHEME PERKINS, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, Third Revised Edition 2012), 171.

¹³⁴ Thrall, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 89-90.

¹³⁵ PERKINS, *First Corinthians*, 149.

founded this congregation about 50 CE and wrote the letter from the city of Ephesus for two reasons. He had received a visit from members of the Corinthian congregation who told him about the troubles in the congregation, of disunity, quarrels and disagreements. He wrote about the need to overcome conflict by creating unity and order in church life. The second reason for the letter was that he had received a letter from the congregation asking for his guidance on matters of doctrine and conduct.¹³⁶ The aim of Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth was to build up the Christian community.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul wrote about the church as the "body of Christ". In the Holy Spirit, the congregation is "the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12: 27). Murphy-O'Connor commented that "[t]he Spirit is within the church" (1 Cor 12:13).¹³⁷ Paul explained the relationship of Christians to one another, a relationship similar to that of different limbs of a single human body. He referred to hands, feet, ears, eyes, noses and weaker parts of the body—all the body parts are essential. Margaret Thrall's commentary on this passage mentioned these points.

Every Christian is a necessary member of the community. Every Christian needs the help of every other Christian. Particular respect should be shown to those members of the community who appear to be less important than the rest. Every Christian is sympathetically involved in the prosperity or misfortune of their fellow-Christians. The gifts of the Spirit have been distributed by God to members.¹³⁸

Our relationship with Christ flows into the mutual interdependence of church members. We belong together in Christ to do Christ's work. In 1 Corinthians 12, the first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul explored the "body of Christ" metaphor from the point of view of the first century context in which he was writing.

This theme is further developed in Romans 12:1-7. In Romans, written about 58 CE, Paul wrote more generally about his theology. In Romans 12, he again explored the theme of the church as the "body of Christ". "We are 'one body' because we are in Christ," writes Joseph Fitzmyer.¹³⁹ Paul wrote that each member

¹³⁶ Ibid., 24-25.

¹³⁷ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary Student Edition* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 810.

¹³⁸ Thrall, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 90-91.

¹³⁹ Raymond E. Brown et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 863.

of the Christian community has a different contribution to make in using their God-given abilities and talents. Each person has their own charisma or God-given gift, and he listed seven different tasks. Many members make up one body in Christ and individually they are “members of one another” (Romans 12:5). Diversity is one of the marks of the church. Frederick Bruce commented that each part of a healthy body functions “harmoniously and interdependently for the good of the whole body. So it should be in the church, which is the body of Christ”.¹⁴⁰

In Ephesians and Colossians, Christ is seen as the head of the church. We think with the mind and brain. The head needs the body just as the body needs the head to co-ordinate the whole. Perkins wrote on Ephesians “[t]he “Body of Christ” is not just a nice metaphor for a particular collection of people. “Body of Christ” says that the church really does have some of the attributes that belong to Christ, her head”. These passages that refer to Christ’s headship of the church are considered to be Paulinist by biblical scholars. The letters of Colossians and Ephesians are considered Paulinist (J. Paul Sampley’s term), indicating that they were not written by Paul but by some of the post-Pauline school of thinking.¹⁴¹

Twentieth (20th) and 21st century contexts

This section continues the conversation method of Bible study and explores contemporary applications of the biblical image of “the body of Christ”. A dialogue occurs between the present situation and the biblical passage.

What then does this teaching about the “body of Christ” mean for us today in the 21st century as we have a conversation with the first century biblical passages written at that time for the church? The meanings derived from the image in Paul’s time have been described above, and we take them on board today in our church life as foundation principles. However, in our context, there may well be other meanings and applications which can be derived from the same image or metaphor, just as the Paulinist writers of Colossians and Ephesians developed Paul’s “body of Christ” image in a new way by mentioning Christ’s headship of the church. There may be other meanings which were not recognised originally because, at that time,

¹⁴⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1971), 227; Perkins, *Reading the New Testament An Introduction*, 161.

¹⁴¹ Perkins, *Reading the New Testament*, 185-187; J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, L. E. Keck., ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, Vol 19), 789.

they were not issues, but they are now. In other words, the “body of Christ” understanding of the church can also deliver new insights for today, continuing to challenge our church to live and act as Christ’s body.

What then are some of these insights and applications for the church in 2016?

I have selected five foundation principles. These principles are drawn from the biblical texts but are illustrated by examples taken from ministry practice within the contemporary church. The examples extend the use of the first century metaphor into the circumstances of the 20th and 21st centuries. The five foundation principles give expression to the “body of Christ” image of the church through a ministry practice that is to be holistic; interdependent; inclusive and accessible; Christ-centred; and Spirit-guided in mission.

Holistic principle

The first foundation principle, the holistic principle, includes a vision of the whole parish as a community of learners where there is an educational ministry for the whole congregation, relating to each member with their learning style and learning needs.

The image of an orchestra is another way of describing the holistic nature of a “body of Christ” approach to ministry and mission in a Christian congregation, and as a way of describing the leadership style. No analogy is perfect. However, the role of a priest or minister in a congregation can be compared to that of a conductor of an orchestra, as one who facilitates, enables and leads with a sense of vision. The congregation is not so much seen as “a community of people gathered around a minister but as a ministering community”.¹⁴²

Such an image brings to mind the whole orchestra—the whole congregation—where all members and their musical instruments are essential to the whole enterprise. Their diverse gifts and skills are shared: all are in need of equipping and training, with lots of practice; caring for one another, learning from one another, celebrating together and playing together according to a score or piece of music (Word of God in the Bible), composed by the composer (God the creator), and aiming to inspire the audience to a love of the music; partners in a mission.

¹⁴² Anglican Church of Australia, *Christian Formation Programme Unit 1: Ministry Development*, 4.

Leading a congregation is like leading (conducting) a highly respected orchestra in the name of Jesus Christ.

The violin, trombone, flute, double bass, drum and the occasional solo singer and choir, and an improvisation; what an orchestra! What a congregation with an every member ministry! Making the music of the Gospel widely and attractively available to the general society is a worthy mission aim for a Christian community.

This image of an orchestra highlights a ministry that is holistic (every member), collaborative (learning and playing music together) and theologically reflective (action based with reflection on the Bible and consideration given to the audience).

Principle of interdependence

The second foundation principle is interdependence: an interdependence of all the parts of the body; an interconnectedness of the many aspects in the life of the church; collaboration; networking; and interdisciplinary approaches.

At least five generations are involved in church life—the Builders, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z and Generation Alpha. Any ministry practice, in a church which understands that it is the “body of Christ”, takes into account the many generations and their interests, preferences and values in life.¹⁴³ Church intergenerational activity is one way of applying the “body of Christ” understanding today. Intergenerational worship is used in some churches. One resource used was the Australian *We Belong Together* programme. One of the units in this growing together all-age learning programme is called “The Body of Christ”. This programme is very well designed and enacts the teaching given, based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-28a that “[w]e are the body which is being described”.¹⁴⁴

The “body of Christ” image has been used as the theological foundation for collaborative ministry. Collaboration is a co-operative activity. In his book on collaborative ministry, David Robertson wrote about Christ as the head of the

¹⁴³ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 46.

¹⁴⁴ *Growing Together Program: We Belong Together*, Session 2 “The body of Christ.” (Melbourne, Australia: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1978), 10; Brian Hill also emphasised that interdependence was a key aspect of the “body of Christ.” Brian V. Hill, *The Greening of Christian Education* (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer Books, 1985): 19-20, 172-199.

church, that is, the “body of Christ”, and that “the gifts of the Spirit can be thought of as the ‘ministerial DNA’ of Christ applied to the church” for a wide variety of leaders.¹⁴⁵ “Ministry, though diverse is united because of Christ”, he wrote.¹⁴⁶ He emphasised the principle that “Christ is sharing ‘ministerial DNA’ with various individuals – which will shape each of them for an appropriate task”.¹⁴⁷ In his book on collaborative ministry, Stephen Pickard based his case for collaboration in ministry on the biblical passage in Romans 12:5 about being “members one of another” in the Church. He argued that Paul’s “main burden was to convince the church that its members need to learn to recognise the ministry of others”.¹⁴⁸

An interconnectedness and interaction exists between many aspects of church life and amongst various study disciplines. For example, in a learning community, there is an emphasis on biblical studies, church teaching and theological reflection, along with educational processes, learning theories, systems thinking theory, history, literature and more. There is interdisciplinary partnership. A learning community is like an organism. It is an open system and draws on a variety of disciplines.

Principle of inclusion

The third foundation principle of inclusion includes accessibility for all parts of the body, the weaker and the stronger, the able and those who are disabled, all ages and stages, all styles of learning. Multi-intelligences are taken into account as well as intergenerational aspects and recognition of the ministry of others.

Amos Yong wrote that ministry by, to and with people with disability has brought the insights of ministry practice to the embodiment theology of the “body of Christ”. Yong wrote about the vision of the church as the “body of Christ,” “as an inclusive and accessible fellowship of difference indwelt by the Holy Spirit”.¹⁴⁹ The church needs to embody the life of Christ. The strong and weak, the non-disabled and disabled constitute the fellowship, communion and ministry of the

¹⁴⁵ Robertson, *Collaborative Ministry What it is, how it works and why*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 124.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 126.

¹⁴⁸ Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, 229.

¹⁴⁹ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Texas, USA: Baylor University Press, 2007), 196; Joan Riley also emphasised that inclusion was a key aspect of the “body of Christ.” Joan Riley, “The Corinthian Body and the Preferential Inclusion of the Rejected” in *Pieces of Ease and Grace*, Alan H. Cadwallader, ed. (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013):151-168.

Church. Christian education, liturgy, discipleship, hospitality and church life need to use approaches appropriate for those who are disabled. In the church, inclusion matters. “All members of the body of Christ are empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to and accomplish the works of God in the world”.¹⁵⁰

Christ-centred principle

The fourth foundation principle is Christ-centred. In the “body of Christ” understanding of the church, Christ is the head. Many processes are encouraged: formation in Christ, biblical study, theological reflection and ministry practice. The biblical teaching of the “body of Christ” is centrally located in the liturgy. There is the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and Christ’s ministerial DNA in ministry. Maturity in Christ and Christ-likeness are desirable outcomes. Jesus’ teaching on the great relationships or commandments—love of God and of our neighbours as ourselves—is of primary importance.

Spirit-guided principle

The fifth foundation principle introduces the theme of Spirit-guided renewal and mission possibilities. The Spirit informs, energises and wells up in the biblical passages on the “body of Christ”—“Spirit of God” (1 Cor 12:3); “[t]he same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4); “[t]o each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7); and “[o]ne Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). We learn from John’s portrayal of Jesus that “[t]he Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26). Yves Congar wrote so clearly about the “Spirit of Christ” and “God as revealed by Christ in the Spirit”. As he wrote: “[t]he absolute fullness that is in Christ is made present here and now and fulfilled by the Spirit in our history”.¹⁵¹ The Spirit reminds us of all that Jesus said and did in the cause of God’s kingdom.

The early church leaders led by the Holy Spirit, as is recorded in Acts 10 and 11, accepted Gentiles into the church. Changes, mission and renewal happened. As Congar wrote, the Spirit builds up the “body of Christ”, “by various ministries,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 218.

¹⁵¹ Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 123, 131.

gifts (charisms) and activities”.¹⁵² The importance of apostles, prophets and teachers is noted (1 Cor 12:28).

There is an apostolic and outreach role for the “body of Christ”. The spirit or soul within each person responds to God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Church has the task in mission of “finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in”.¹⁵³ The task is to be “God and world focused” rather than only “church and task focused,” wrote Rosemary Dewerse. In the same article, Dewerse mentioned a common saying about mission: “[i]t’s not that the church of God has a mission but that the God of mission has a church”.¹⁵⁴

Foundation principles

These five foundation principles: holism, interdependence, inclusion, Christ-centred and Spirit-guided are important expressions of a ministry based on the “body of Christ”, and they inform the concept of the parish as a learning community. These five principles provide a clear focus for my research project when summarised as three topics, namely: a vision of the whole (holistic); collaborative ministry including interdependence and inclusion with accessibility; and the biblical references for theological reflection through Christ in the Spirit.

These three topics are derived from a “body of Christ” understanding of the church and are the core learning community characteristics consistent with a contemporary application of the image. In summary, the three topics are: a vision of the whole (holism), collaboration and theological reflection.

The affinity of the “body of Christ” image and the learning-community approach

A close connection exists between the biblical image of the “body of Christ” and the three components of the learning-community approach used as a framework for this research.

This “body of Christ” vision underpins the learning-community approach, as outlined in Chapter Three, with a biblical foundation. It confirms that the three

¹⁵² Ibid., 59.

¹⁵³ Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: Epworth Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁵⁴ Rosemary Dewerse, “An Ongoing Journey”, *Australian Leadership* (Unley, Adelaide: MediaCom Education, November/December/January, 2012-2013): 12-13.

core processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection are consistent with an exploration of this biblical image, inspiring confidence that a learning-community approach has a biblical foundation as well as an educational base. Chapter Two outlines the origins of a learning-community approach within the discipline of Christian education in parishes.

The outcome of the Bible study became a key factor in the decision to proceed with the threefold learning-community approach selected for the research framework. As already noted, the outcome of the Bible study endorsed a similar framework, namely: a vision of the whole (holistic), collaboration and theological reflection through Christ in the Spirit.

As with a human body, a learning community is an organism, holistic, interdependent, inclusive and accessible one part to another, reflective and joined together in the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In such a learning community, every member matters and has a contribution to make. Every member is a learner and has a vocation, ministry and mission as a disciple of Jesus Christ. All learners are important and each member needs and depends on others, as all, individually and together, build and grow community.

The following prayer is regularly prayed in Anglican parishes through the use of the annual lectionary. It focuses on every member of the church as a disciple. Involvement of every member is a mark of a learning community. Included in *An Australian Prayer Book*, this prayer serves to highlight the role of God's Spirit in Christ guiding every member of the congregation in their ministry and practice of Christianity for God's mission:

Almighty and eternal God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified: receive our prayer which we offer before you for the many different members of your holy church; that every one of them in their vocation and ministry may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.¹⁵⁵

The discussion about the foundation principles fleshes out some of the implications that a "body of Christ" understanding of the church has for the educational ministry of a Christian learning community in Australian Anglican parish life today.

¹⁵⁵ *An Australian Prayer Book AAPB* (Sydney: The Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia, 1978), 254.

There is perhaps a suggestion, discerned from this study, that the threefold pattern of educational behaviour described (holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective) is, in effect, also an outline of a behavioural pattern as seen from the “Godward side” of the situation. Michael Ramsey wrote that through prayer and discernment “[y]ou can be on the Godward side of every situation; for the Godward side is part of every human situation”.¹⁵⁶ Such a pattern can be discerned in Jesus, who was called Teacher in the Gospels. The Gospel portrayals of Jesus showed that he was holistic. He taught all kinds of people in many different situations, in a range of venues, using collaborative and theologically reflective processes.¹⁵⁷

Summary

The term “body of Christ” is central to the liturgical life of the Anglican Church of Australia. The study of the biblical image of the Church provides a biblical foundation for a learning-community approach. This image underpins the application of learning community thinking in a parish context and has a close connection with the learning-community approach used as a framework for this research.

The “body of Christ” understanding of the church supports an educational stance which affirms holism, interdependence, interconnectedness and reflective interaction. When a parish is viewed as a learning community, it practises a “body of Christ” educational ministry practice in the use of holistic, collaborative and theological reflective processes through Christ in the Spirit.

The next chapter explores the theme of learning. It moves the narrative of the thesis towards a consideration of ways to assess learning outcomes, resulting from the use of the learning community processes outlined in Chapter Three and in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (London: SPCK, 1972), 17; another theologian also reminded us of God’s active presence when he wrote about finding God “in, with and under the life of the world”, namely, Scott Cowdell, *A God for This World* (London: Mowbray, 2000), 55, 104.

¹⁵⁷ John Littleton, “Jesus as the Teacher: Facilitator of Learning.”

Chapter Five: A Focus on Learning in the Parish Context

Introduction

Teaching and learning are important aspects of faith education in parishes. Usually, there is a direct focus on teaching in parishes. Less often is there a focus on learning. This chapter has three aims. It focuses directly on learning, the learner and ways to assess learning outcomes.

This focus on learning, learners and the assessment of learning outcomes is necessary in order to answer the second research question on the growth and enhancement of learning outcomes in parishes. As reported during this chapter, an investigation is made into methods used to assess learning outcomes for research purposes, and methods used to recognise faith learning outcomes in parish educational ministry. The chapter concludes by considering the value of the investigation.

Defining

Definitions have an important function in directing research and parish ministry action. As Tye noted:

A definition (of Christian education) is a foundational building block in the educational ministry of the church. It is through our definitions that we become aware of the essential aspects of this important ministry and enable ourselves to be more effective at it.¹⁵⁸

The purpose of this section is to clarify that the focus is on learning rather than teaching; on learners rather than teachers; and on learning outcomes rather than the learning content or the topics taught.

In this preliminary investigation, definitions of education, teaching and learning are explored and clarified before a definition of faith learning in parishes is proposed.

The adult education literature and the philosophy of Christian religious education provide a sample of voices with authority to describe the distinctions between education, teaching and learning.

¹⁵⁸ Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*, 18.

Malcolm Knowles, Elwood Holton and Richard Swanson, after examining various theories of learning, noted the frequently made distinction between education and learning.¹⁵⁹

They wrote:

Education is an activity undertaken or initiated by one or more agents that is designed to effect changes in knowledge, skill and attitudes of individuals, groups, or communities. The term emphasizes the educator, the agent of change who presents stimuli and reinforcement for learning and designs activities to induce change.¹⁶⁰

The term learning, by contrast, emphasizes the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur. Learning is the act or process by which behavioural change, knowledge, skills and attitudes are acquired.¹⁶¹

In summary, education emphasises the educators who design educational processes for learners; on the other hand, learning emphasises the person in whom the change occurs through the knowledge gained and expertise achieved. For the purposes of this chapter, this shift of emphasis from the educator to the learner is formally recognised.

In the philosophy of Christian religious education, the key terms in regular usage, namely, “education”, “teaching” and “learning” are examined. The following definitions are offered for these terms.

Education, as indicated above, emphasises the educators. Education is a wide-ranging term and originates from the Latin words, *educere* (to lead out, to draw out) and *educare* (to bring up, rear, educate). A more general definition of education would include children and young people as well as adults undergoing a broad process of learning something.¹⁶² Jeff Astley provided Melchert’s more detailed definition of education: this definition described wide-ranging intentional educational processes involving teaching and learning, gaining deep knowledge and understanding in systematic ways over time. Melchert suggested six criteria that an activity must meet in order to qualify as education. It must be (1) an intentional activity (2) of value that (3) involves knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth. It must also be a (4) long-lasting process, involving (5)

¹⁵⁹ Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton & Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶² Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 38.

interpersonal interaction and (6) engaging the whole of a person and his/her relationships.¹⁶³

Teaching in broad terms is “normally speaking the intentional facilitation of learning”.¹⁶⁴ Astley argued that philosophers and psychologists of education would agree with the view that learning does not imply teaching because people learn all the time through a variety of learning experiences. One is taught when the learning is brought about or facilitated in some way by a teacher or a teaching situation.¹⁶⁵ Teaching is “the arrangement of those situations and conditions which will most effectively facilitate desired learning outcomes in an individual”.¹⁶⁶

The narrative in this chapter has now moved from the defining of education and the educator, and from the defining of teaching and the teacher towards the focus on learning and the learner.

Learning involves a permanent change of attitude and behaviour in a person or a group.¹⁶⁷ Astley suggested that psychologists of education have a broad and generally useful definition of learning which includes the understandings of many philosophers of education. He reported that Gagne, a psychologist, wrote:

Learning is a change in human disposition or capability, which persists over a period of time, and which is not simply ascribable to processes of growth ... The change may be, and often is, an increased capability for some type of performance. It may also be an altered disposition of the sort called ‘attitude’ or ‘interest’ or ‘value.’¹⁶⁸

Such a definition is broad enough to include the understanding that people learn knowledge, attitudes and skills.¹⁶⁹

After defining learning in terms of a change in observable behaviour and in internal thinking and feeling processes, Burns, another adult educator, added an insight about the significance of later reflection. As he wrote: “[t]here are many situations in which what is learnt may not manifest itself in observable behaviour until later”.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁶⁴ Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶⁷ Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷⁰ Burns, *The Adult Learner at Work*, 114.

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Such a definition is broad enough to include the understanding that people learn knowledge, attitudes and skills.¹⁷³

After defining learning in terms of a change in observable behaviour and in internal thinking and feeling processes, Burns, another adult educator, added an insight about the significance of later reflection. As he wrote: “[t]here are many situations in which what is learnt may not manifest itself in observable behaviour until later”.¹⁷⁴

Clarity of definition makes for a reasoned discussion. Being clear about the distinctions between education, teaching and learning has prepared the ground for a focus on learning the Christian faith. The discussion above helped to clearly define learning as a distinct area to be studied in its own right.

Learning as process

Although this chapter is about learning in parishes, that is only an emphasis. The educator or teacher is still needed. The educator and the teacher are both learners. The discussion moves towards faith learning with a focus on the learner, the learning processes, and the learning achieved, while still recognising the importance of teaching and education.

Several approaches exist within the field of Christian education, ranging across the spectrum of a learning and teaching continuum. There are context-centred and learning process-centred definitions on the one hand. On the other hand, teacher and content-centred approaches exist. In the centre of these two extremes of

¹⁷¹ Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 34.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷⁴ Burns, *The Adult Learner at Work*, 114.

the continuum, faith and life-centred definitions are located. In addition to the work of Groome, Roger Shinn and Robert Pazmino also provide examples of centralist definitions.¹⁷⁵ Each definition has its own focus depending on its purpose and context.

The definition of faith learning presented in this thesis focuses on the process of learning the Christian faith and is applicable for a learning process and learner-centred emphasis in parish educational ministry.

Embedded within the lives of individuals and parishes is the common theme of the centrality of learning. There is implicit and explicit reference to learning, for example: learning from the example of Jesus; and learning from reflection on ministry practice, from worship, from independent study, from Bible study, from a congregational project, through the sharing of ministry, through joining in an outreach project and by theological reflection.

In the light of these examples of learning and the purpose of the research project, a definition of faith learning used in the research process and pertinent to parish life is offered:

Faith learning is a process of growing in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith in and through Jesus Christ.

By growth in faith learning, I mean the degree to which people report that their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith have grown or been enhanced; that individuals and groups report a change in their acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills in terms of the Christian faith.

This definition focuses on two key aspects of Christian learning developed in this thesis. First, the definition raises the issue of the essential relationship between process and growth in the Christian faith. Second, the definition draws attention to the possibility of assessing growth in faith for research purposes and recognising growth in faith within parish life. These two aspects are discussed later in this chapter.

As previously stated the definition focuses on the process of learning for the learner. The learner includes the teacher and the student, the minister, the

¹⁷⁵ Examples of centralist definitions include Roger Lincoln Shinn, *The Educational Mission of Our Church* (Boston: United Church Press, 1962), 20; Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, 25; Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 91.

ministry leader and the parishioner of any age. These people are co-learners using the processes of working together and learning from each other,¹⁷⁶ in the participatory ways outlined in Chapter Two in the section on learning theory and learning communities.

Tye made this necessary distinction between ‘process’ and ‘method’:

Process refers to the broad approach we use for educating. A process is a series of actions that we take in order to accomplish a purpose. We may use a variety of methods within a process we choose, but the process provides us with the broad outline of how we proceed.¹⁷⁷

“Method refers to those specific activities and techniques that we use to carry out the process.” Tye wrote that we need an “understanding of the process in order to have some criteria by which to select appropriate methods that will help us accomplish our educational tasks”.¹⁷⁸

This broad definition of process fits well with the understanding of the processes used in this research project. The holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective processes used for the research are described in Chapter Three and operationalised or made measurable for research purposes in Chapter Six. As has already been stated (in Chapter Two), the processes are as important as the content. The processes help enact the content and enable learning.

Astley’s work on Christian learning is mentioned here to provide support for the contention in this chapter that process has an essential and justified place in a definition of faith education in parishes. Astley argued that learning is understood not only as a topic or subject or learning to be learnt as a result of teaching, but as a process and an achievement or change on the part of the learner.¹⁷⁹ Astley used the word “learning” to specify a process. He claimed that religious faith “is partly, but significantly, determined by the way in which it came and comes (and, indeed goes)”.¹⁸⁰ His claim is that “the product of learning is specific to the processes of

¹⁷⁶ Seymour et al., 136-137.

¹⁷⁷ Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*, 90.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁷⁹ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning Theology* (England: Ashgate, 2002): 19-20, 37.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

learning, at least sometimes and to some extent”.¹⁸¹ In other words, “Christian learning is ‘learning the Christian Way’ along the (my) Christian way”.¹⁸²

By reference to Marshall McLuhan and his famous statement about the interaction between the medium and the message, Astley drew attention to the close relationship between “the medium (process) of communication and the material (product or message) being communicated”.¹⁸³ This understanding of the congruence between the process and the content of learning is applicable in the context of faith learning in parishes.

The learner at the centre

Christian education has been defined quite generally “as designating those processes by which people learn to become Christian and be more Christian”.¹⁸⁴ Those who emphasise learning, focus on the person or persons in whom, or the parishes in which, change occurs, in which learning happens, and in which knowledge, attitudes and skills are enhanced. The focus is on “keeping the learner at the centre” to use Astley’s words. The learner comes first “at least in the sense that learning is something that only the learner can ‘do’; it is something that can only ‘happen to’ the learner”.¹⁸⁵

For Astley, the term “ordinary theology” describes “the articulation of ordinary people’s religious understanding”.¹⁸⁶ His research focused on the theology and theologising of Christians who had received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind.¹⁸⁷ His interest is in the God-talk of people who have not formally studied theology but who speak and think about God. These people are engaged in their own theology, their attempt to talk about God.¹⁸⁸

Like Astley, those who research faith learning focus on what the learner has in fact learnt and articulated, rather than what they have been taught.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 6. Aron also focused on the importance of the processes of learning. Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation*, 2.

¹⁸² Ibid., 20.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁸⁴ Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Christian Education: a reader on the aims, principles and philosophy of Christian education* (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1994), 3.

¹⁸⁵ Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning Theology*, 18-19.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

In his research on the stages of faith development, James Fowler wanted to discover the faith that people had. He was “wanting respondents to let me overhear” the ways that their faith had been enhanced. Fowler wanted to tap into the “self-aware reflection” from his research participants. In the research project outlined in this thesis, there is the expectation that research participants will also provide self-aware reflection about their faith learning.¹⁸⁹

Fowler researched what faith meant to people. Astley researched what ordinary people thought theologically. The focus in this research is on what the learner learns; not prescribed learning, but recognition of their learning as they reported it. For example, self-reports describe the ordinary faith learning achieved by Christian people, lay and ordained, in the context of a congregation and the whole of their lives.¹⁹⁰

In the faith learning definition presented earlier in this chapter, the learner is seen to be learning through a Christological perspective. In faith learning, people learn of God in and through Jesus Christ. Learners are taught, learn and grow into the teachings and ways of Jesus the Christ as portrayed in the Gospels and, through the Spirit of Christ, come to know and relate to God. They learn their way of being Christian and living in a Christian way.

Astley used a pilgrimage metaphor to describe the relationship between the learner and those facilitating the learning. He presented the pilgrimage metaphor after providing two other metaphors. In a production line metaphor, he commented that the teacher does something *to* the learner. In the gardening metaphor, he commented that the teacher did something *for* the learner. In a pilgrimage metaphor, the teacher does something *with* the learner.

The ‘pilgrimage’ image sums up the position taken in this chapter about the interaction between the learner and those teaching. In the world of this pilgrimage metaphor, the minister, leader or teacher is a facilitator of learning. As Astley wrote, “[t]he teacher does something with the learner, as they both tread the same road on the same journey of exploration, discovery and discipleship”.¹⁹¹ All are

¹⁸⁹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Blackburn, Victoria: Dove Communications, 1981), 309-310.

¹⁹⁰ Helen Savage also researched “ordinary learning” in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds. (England: Ashgate, 2013), 199-208.

¹⁹¹ Jeff Astley, ed., *Learning in the Way: Research and Reflection on Adult Christian Education* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2000), 46.

intentionally involved together on this journey and need knowledge for the journey or pilgrimage. A learner can be a teacher, and the teacher, leader or minister can be open to new learning. Astley wrote:

Certainly, at the end, there is only one goal for Christian learning. It is a learning 'in Christ', a learning that is orientated 'to Christ' in its intention and gradient. Christian education as a journey is indeed a metaphor of 'openness'; but this may be construed as becoming more open to God and to the contours of the landscape of God, and of learning Christ in the Way – 'on the open road'. And that learning is a learning of Christ who is the Way, a learning of the road that is Christ.¹⁹²

Leaders or ministers or teachers with a learning community perspective, as in the pilgrimage metaphor, work alongside people and learn with other learners.

Assessment and recognition of learning outcomes

The issue now is to discern the learning that happens as a result of the teaching, the learning that happens from participation in a Christian education programme or from membership of a parish or congregation or from the living of daily life in the light of the Christian faith. The use of self-report measures in research is an attempt to be very aware of the learning experienced and described or reported by the learners as they are formed and grow in their Christian faith and life as a result of the teaching and their experience.

A key topic in this section of the chapter is the learning of the learners: the recognition of the growth and enhancement achieved. In the definition of faith learning presented earlier in this chapter, a priority is placed on the learning experienced and described or reported by learners. Faith learning is the degree to which people report that their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith have grown or improved or been enhanced.

With this approach, there is also a willingness to explore the development of research instruments and appropriate assessment tools to describe the enhancement of Christian learning in parishes. This aspect will now be fully outlined under two headings: learning assessment tools used in the research project and methods used to recognise learning outcomes in parishes.

¹⁹² Ibid., 50.

Self-report measures on learning outcomes used in the research project

In seeking an answer to the second research question about learning outcomes, through Survey Two, several quantitative and qualitative methods were used to assess growth and enhancement of faith learning. A full account of these methods is provided in Chapter Six. Individuals and groups were invited to report their learning outcomes. To assess the degree of enhancement, Likert-type rating scales were used along with rank ordering of the cumulative scores, statement prioritisation and written reports on faith learning examples. The methods used to assess faith learning enhancement are illustrated in Survey Two which is available in the Appendices.

Assessment for this research project, in relation to the second research question, meant that reliable ways needed to be found to enable participants to let the researcher know that their existing faith learning had grown and been enhanced. Focus groups were also conducted so that the voices of some of the research participants could be heard as they gave accounts of learning enhancement. Some of these voices can be heard in the case study presented in Chapter Seven.

Self-report measures on learning outcomes used in the parish context

This section explores ways in which the growth and enhancement of faith learning in the parish context can be recognised and made visible. John Hattie outlined the idea of visible learning.¹⁹³ In the school context, visible learning involved finding ways to make student learning visible to teachers, and finding ways to make the teaching visible to students, so that both student and teacher developed a love of learning. The centrality of learning was a common theme in the writing of Hattie. He wrote about “the need to retain learning at the forefront and to consider teaching primarily in terms of its impact on student learning.”¹⁹⁴

Although Hattie wrote for the school context, there is value in adapting his research findings for the parish context to keep the focus on learning so that clergy and leaders in parishes want to talk as much about learning as about teaching. The way we think about educational ministry has practical consequences. As Hattie

¹⁹³ John Hattie, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2012), Kindle Edition, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

argued, our “mind frames” or our ways of thinking matter.¹⁹⁵ To be mindful of the effect that teaching has on the learning achieved applies as much to the sermon as to the Bible study group in a parish. Too strong a focus on teaching content may reduce the importance placed on how people learn and the ways in which to recognise the growth and enhancement of faith learning.

The focus on learners and learning has consequences not only for the research project but also for the parish context. The challenge is to make the learning of learners visible in the parish through methods of recognition.

In the search for methods by which to recognise parish learning, I used various sources: methods used in academic research assessment; educational standards-based assessment; competency-based assessment;¹⁹⁶ adult Christian education assessment practices; and various learning theories briefly presented in Chapter Two.

In this chapter, the word *assessment* applies to the research in tertiary and schooling contexts, as the assessment process in these contexts is well developed with clear guidelines and criteria. The word *recognition* is an appropriate word for the parish process of describing faith learning. Recognition is a more general process of acknowledging and identifying the learning that has happened. The priority given to recognition processes in the parish context is in the early stages of development. The progress in methods of learning recognition in parishes will be discussed.

At the present time in parishes, unless a formal course of study is undertaken, there may be no system for the formal recognition of learning. For example, although a parish Bible study programme in Anglican parishes may have taken a long time to prepare and may have been conducted over a few weeks, the time and effort taken to recognise the Christian learning achieved in such a parish educational event is non-existent or minimal.¹⁹⁷ There is no need to award grades

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., Part Three, Chapter 9 on the eight “mind frames”, especially “Mind Frame 3: Teachers and leaders want to talk more about the learning than the teaching”.

¹⁹⁶ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (London and New York: Routledge, Sixth Edition 2010); Macquarie University Learning and Teaching Centre, *Assessment Toolkit Resources*, retrieved on 3/4/12 from <http://www.mq.edu.au>; Graeme Dobson, *A Guide to Writing Competency Based Training Materials* (Melbourne, Australia, National Volunteer Skills Centre: 2003).
<http://www.training.gov.au/aguidetowritingcompetencybasedtrainingmaterials>

¹⁹⁷ This statement is based on my experiences and observations over 40 years in Anglican parish ministry, and as a Consultant in Christian Education in Parishes in four Australian Anglican Dioceses.

or marks in parish education, but other ways can be used to recognise the learning experienced and described or reported by learners.¹⁹⁸

Recognition for individual Christian learning in parishes involves finding reliable ways of enabling participants to let themselves and others know that learning has taken place or has been achieved. A learning community-based approach to the recognition of faith learning in parishes uses methods that identify faith learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice.¹⁹⁹ Reporting on faith learning episodes is one such method.²⁰⁰ Feedback and self-assessment forms combined with the learning enhancement indicators used in parish research surveys provide other examples of learning recognition methods.²⁰¹ Other methods used include: an excursion report; an assignment; peer assessment; faith sharing in groups; practical tasks to be undertaken; and the provision of a personal learning outcome worksheet.

In many educational events, a certificate or statement of attendance is provided at the end of the activity to confirm participation. For example,²⁰² as a result of participating in a skills course with a competency-based assessment approach, I received a certificate of attendance and, during the course, wrote a unit of competency for a Lay Ministry Assistant in the Anglican Church in Adelaide. The matrix of learning recognition approaches for that unit included the following methods: observation with questioning, discussion and demonstration; written questions; interview; third party verification; and production of a portfolio.

Any methods used for the recognition of faith learning need to respect the value of individual persons.²⁰³ Any recognition instrument used for faith learning in parishes needs to be gentle and to affirm the importance of the Christian value of respect for individuals and their potential for learning and growth in faith.²⁰⁴ Roger

¹⁹⁸ These ways were originally outlined in my 2014 paper on “Defining Christian Learning in Parishes”.

¹⁹⁹ See definition of faith learning earlier in this chapter.

²⁰⁰ Dr Giasemi Vavoula, in the article “Towards a Theory of Mobile Learning,” with others researched everyday adult learning through “reported learning episodes”. (2005, Retrieved 3/4/12 via Google from G. Vavoula’s website <http://www2.le.ac.uk/Members/gv18/gv-publications>). I used the term “faith learning episodes” after discovering Vavoula’s term.

²⁰¹ Indicators are available in the two Surveys on Parish Learning, May and September 2013.

²⁰² The author completed a Workers’ Educational Association course on “Assessment Skills”, March 2012 in Adelaide, South Australia.

²⁰³ Roger L. Walton, “Assessment in Adult Christian Education,” in *Learning in the Way: Research and Reflection on Adult Christian Education*, Jeff Astley, ed. (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2000), 90-112.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

Walton wrote that “Christians should be foremost in respecting and strengthening the self-esteem of (learners), through affirmation of their worth as persons”.²⁰⁵

The power of learning recognition and feedback should not be underestimated. Once again, the research by Hattie proves to be insightful and helpful for parish faith education as well as in the school context. John Hattie and Helen Timperley define feedback “as information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of performance or understanding”. They noted that feedback was a consequence of performance.²⁰⁶ Research evidence reviewed by Hattie showed that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement in the school context. However, various types of feedback have different degrees of effectiveness. Hattie and Timperley presented three types of effective feedback in three questions.

1. Feed up. Where am I going? (What are my goals?)
2. Feedback. How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?)
3. Feed forward. Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)²⁰⁷

Such questions also apply to growth and enhancement in faith learning in the parish context. Indeed, questions in Survey Two asked participants to respond, individually and collectively, in providing feedback on their growth in faith, by reporting whether they had experienced much growth or little growth or the other options from which to choose.

Learners, however, are not only individual persons. Congregations and parishes also learn and value affirmation through recognition of faith learning. In the learning-community literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the term “learning congregation” was introduced. Through leadership, a congregation or parish can develop the “capacity to learn about itself, engender new insights, develop new

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 94. Brian Hill argued that Christian schoolteachers must seek to enhance the self-esteem of students through the assessment strategies used. Hill’s point about enhancing self-esteem also applies to parish learning recognition. Brian V. Hill, “Is Assessment Compatible with Agape?” *Journal of Christian Education*, Papers 96 (December, 1989): 5-20.

²⁰⁶ John Hattie and Helen Timperley “The Power of Feedback,” *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 1 (March 2007): 81.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 87-104.

behaviours and create new futures”.²⁰⁸ Using a theological reflection process during a congregational decision-making event enables reflective learning.²⁰⁹ Indicators used in research surveys help to describe the enhancement of congregational learning. A verbal or written or filmed report on a congregational faith learning event would be one example of a learning recognition method. An in-built time of formal and brief reflection at the conclusion of a group study prompts effective learning.²¹⁰ Mutual and gentle recognition of that learning helps to create a community of learners.

Valuable results arising from this chapter

This chapter highlights the value of making learning visible in parishes through the use of a variety of attitudes and methods.

There is value in developing a “mind frame”,²¹¹ which focuses on learners and the learning that happens in a parish; thinking about and assessing learning outcomes as much as thinking about and assessing teaching methods; and giving consideration to definitions, the theories of learning, and the way that processes enhance learning.

Published research on faith learning suggests ways and means for conducting an investigation on faith learning in the parish. The survey questions used in this research project and other research survey material provide examples to consider, including in the National Church Life Surveys (NCLS) in Australia.²¹²

Learning recognition methods mentioned provide examples for use in a parish situation. Further growth and enhancement of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith are promoted by the recognition of and reflection on learning outcomes. In the later chapters, Chapter Seven on the research findings and Chapter Eight on the interpretation and discussion of those findings, ample evidence is provided of the ways in which faith learning is enhanced.

²⁰⁸ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 25.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 43-49.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-28.

²¹¹ Hattie, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*, Part Three, Chapter 9 on eight “mind frames” or ways of thinking.

²¹² Ruth Powell, John Bellamy, Sam Sterland, Kathy Jacka, Miriam Pepper and Michael Brady (NCLS Research Team), *Enriching Church Life: A guide to results from National Church Life Surveys for local churches* (Strathfield, Sydney: NCLS Research, 2012, Second and Revised Edition).

Summary

In this chapter, a focus on learning, learners and learning outcomes helped to answer the second research question. That question required definite evidence of faith learning in parishes. This chapter includes a definition of faith learning. The chapter summarises the investigation that was conducted into learning outcome assessment and recognition methods. The description of practical methods to assess learning outcomes for research purposes and to recognise learning outcomes for parish ministry provides a range of possibilities for use by researchers, leaders and parishioners.

In the next chapter on the research methodology, the practical methods used in this research project to assess learning outcomes are fully outlined and explained. The self-reporting measures used in the research to discern learning outcomes for parishes and individuals will be revealed.

Chapter Six: Research Methodology

Introduction

The chapter gives an account of the research methodology used in this project. It outlines the research problem; specifies the research population; identifies the research questions and hypotheses; reports on the research design; and presents the strategy for analysing the data gathered. It concludes with mention of some issues that required attention during the use of this research methodology and some retrospective observations on the limitations and strengths of the research project. The chapter describes the gathering and analysis of data from parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide using a mixed-methods approach.

Research problem

The idea of envisioning the congregation or parish as a learning community emerged when I was parish priest in a team ministry within the Anglican parish of Glen Osmond, Adelaide, from 1992-2006. Reflecting on the parish educational ministry practice, I became aware of some learning community literature, found the learning-community approach effective and wrote about it.²¹³ A number of other authors recommended the approach for the parish context.²¹⁴

As indicated in Chapter Two, a considerable body of research literature existed on learning-community approaches in other educational contexts, in schools and tertiary institutions including universities. In these contexts, the approaches had become widely used owing to evidence-based research findings about their significant impact on learning outcomes.

Research on learning outcomes through the use of learning-community approaches in the parish context was scarce. To date, research on the relationship between learning outcomes and learning community processes in the Australian Anglican parish context has not been undertaken.

The challenge was to find evidence, if any, of significant impact on learning outcomes from the use of a learning-community approach in Adelaide Anglican

²¹³ John Littleton, "A Learning Community Focus for Christian Education" in *Religious Education* 103, 5 (October-December 2008), 553-578; Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*.

²¹⁴ For example: Hawkins 1997; Campbell 2000; and Everist 2002, as referenced in Chapter One.

parishes. The remainder of this chapter outlines the steps taken to accept the challenge and investigate this issue.

Research population

The research population consisted of 61 parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia. The sampling frame was taken from the updated 2010-2011 Diocesan Year Book published by the Diocesan Office, listing clergy and parishes.²¹⁵ All 61 parishes were given the opportunity to be involved in the research with 47 parishes choosing to participate, thus achieving a 77% response rate.

The parish was the sampling unit. In Survey One, the unit of analysis was the parish with information provided by a small working group, one member of clergy and the wardens. In Survey Two, the unit of analysis was also the parish with information about the parish provided by five persons responding separately, one member of clergy, one warden, one ministry leader and two parishioners, one of whom was to be under 40 years of age. A second analysis was carried out on the responses of these five persons as individuals.

Research questions

The first problem was to identify the existence, extent and location of parishes as learning communities. The second research question was then about effectiveness and the relationship between the parish as a learning community and learning performance as measured by the variables defined later in this chapter.

Research question 1: Is there evidence that a learning community methodology (that is, holistic, collaborative and theological reflective processes) is practised within Anglican parishes in the Diocese of Adelaide?

Research question 2: Is there evidence that the use of a learning community methodology enhances faith learning outcomes in these parishes?

²¹⁵ Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.adelaide.anglican.com.au>

Hypotheses

Objective One:

To assess the extent and degree to which a learning community methodology is practised among the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, 2013-2014

Objective Two:

To assess the extent and degree to which a learning community methodology, when practised within parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, enhances learning outcomes.

a) Null Hypothesis H_0 :

That a learning community methodology does not enhance learning for individuals and parishes in the Anglican parishes within the Diocese of Adelaide, 2013-2014

b) Alternative Hypothesis H_1 :

That a learning community methodology does enhance learning for individuals and parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, 2013-2014

Research design

The premise underpinning this research was that the intentional use of a learning community methodology, with its associated processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection, enhanced learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

In the light of this premise, the research sought to discover the strength and direction of any association between three independent variable factors of influence and three dependent variable factors of outcome. The sets of influence and outcome factors could then be coded, scored and ranked to provide an overall result.

The three independent influencing variable factors of the learning processes were:

- holistic
- collaborative
- theological reflection.

The three dependent variable factors of the learning outcomes were:

- knowledge
- understanding
- practice of the Christian faith.

The word *enhance* linked the independent and the dependent variables. The important question was: to what degree did particular learning processes enhance or improve or upgrade the learning outcomes of knowledge, understanding or practice?

Correlation

A correlational approach²¹⁶ examines the degree of association between “two broad classifications of relational statements”, “where there is some kind of influence of one upon the other”.²¹⁷ Nicholas Walliman states that the correlation between the two concepts or relational statements can be:

either none (no correlation); positive (where an increase in one results in the increase in the other, or decrease results in a decrease); or negative (where the increase in one results in the decrease in the other and vice versa). The degree of association is often measureable.²¹⁸

John O’Toole and David Beckett clarify the distinction between a probability and an “expectation of causality”, when dealing with correlation, which is “a comparison between two sets of measures”.²¹⁹ They state that in quantitative research we are not seeking to prove a case; rather, we are providing indicators that go “some way towards confirming or disproving something”.²²⁰

Spearman’s rank order correlation coefficient (rho) statistic provided a measure to indicate the degree to which the two ordinal variables of learning processes and learning enhancement were associated, and whether that association

²¹⁶ Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 10.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹⁹ John O’Toole and David Beckett. *Educational Research: Creative Thinking & Doing* (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

was found to be positive or negative.²²¹ The research methodology employed and the test of association used were not sufficient to assert a causal relationship.

A narrative mapping approach, suggested by William Trochim and Douglas Land, clarified the design logic and illustrated that the data collection and analysis were done from a number of different angles.²²²

Table 6.1: The logic of the research design

<p>Phase One Survey One. Provided information about the presence and extent of holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes in the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide.</p> <p>Outcomes: Rank scores from Survey One.</p>	
<p>Survey Two. Provided information about the degree to which respondents judged and reported that Christian knowledge, understanding and practice had been enhanced.</p> <p>Outcomes: Rank scores from Survey Two.</p>	
<p>Phase Two</p>	<p>Combined outcomes: Measure of association between rank scores from Surveys One and Two.</p> <p>Focus group selection: Outcomes from the focus groups: qualitative insights of both a substantive and confirmatory nature.</p>

A mixed-methods approach

The “explanatory sequential mixed-methods” design for this research involved “a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyses the results, and then uses the results to plan the second, qualitative phase”.²²³ The qualitative data built directly on the quantitative results and helped explain, confirm or deny, expand and provide more depth and more insight into the quantitative results.

²²¹ William Trochim and Douglas Land “Designing Designs for Research” in *The Researcher* 1, 1 (1982): 1-6.

²²² *Ibid.*, 1.

²²³ John W. Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (London, UK: Sage, 2014, Fourth Edition), 224.

Research strategy

Operationalisation: Survey preparation

For the research project to proceed, the notion of the learning community needed to be translated from the general to the specific, the measurable and the achievable in terms of identifying observable and reportable indicators of the learning community processes. Operationalisation moves the research from the concept or idea of the processes in the parish context to the practical aspects of developing a survey instrument in which particular behaviours can be measured, in a way that is sufficient to indicate that the processes were practised.²²⁴

Learning processes: Survey One

The degree to which the learning processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were present in parishes was surveyed in Survey One on parish learning, under the following three headings:

1. Patterns of learning in the parish – 12 specific questions.
2. Ways that people interact when learning – 11 questions.
3. Reflective learning and Christian ministry – nine questions.

In these three ways, the three learning processes were made measurable.

Research participants were asked to consider the statements and to state to what extent, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’, the statement applied to their parish. Full survey details are available in the Appendices. Survey One’s purpose established whether and to what extent parishes in the Diocese of Adelaide engaged in learning practices that bore the characteristics of learning communities, that is: holism, collaboration and theological reflection. Three examples are mentioned below:

1. Patterns of learning in the parish

There are groups which help people (children, youth, adults, families) learn the Christian faith.

Leaders take time to intentionally teach and help individuals learn and discuss the Christian faith, including support of private study.

²²⁴ Gary D. Bouma and Rod Long, *The Research Process* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004, Fifth Edition), 41, 47.

There are parish meetings which help many members reflect on parish life and plan for the future.

Leaders take time to intentionally assist individuals and groups to apply the Christian faith to daily life. (e.g., at work, school, college, family or ...)

Leaders organise occasions when members meet to learn about different viewpoints which exist in the parish and discuss them through respectful conversation.

2. Ways that people interact when learning

The members work well together as a team, enjoying and respecting the abilities and contributions of others in achieving common tasks.

The clergy and people consult and collaborate to a high degree.

In this parish leaders encourage members to find and use their gifts and skills.

3. Reflective learning and Christian ministry

Members think that it is important to relate the Biblical story to daily life.

Sermons show evidence of some form of theological reflection.

In this parish community, we learn Christian faith during worship services.

Learning outcomes: Survey Two

The research premise stated that the intentional use of the learning community processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were associated with enhanced learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. Survey Two investigated, by means of self-reports from research participants, the degree to which an enhancement of the learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith was evident in parishes.

This second survey was about the parish, about individual growth in faith and about some of the factors which influenced that growth or enhancement of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith for the participants.

The survey booklet with 23 questions contained the following details.

Knowledge is to do with the content of the Christian faith; information on the Christian faith through beliefs, persons, teachings, the Bible, Jesus, the church, customs, principles, themes and trends; knowledge about God, knowledge of God.

Understanding is to do with comprehension and attitude; meaning of words, language and the teaching of Jesus; appreciation of the attitudes of others.

Practice is practical action, application, ability and skill to apply the knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith in real circumstances; ministry in the church and outreach; living the faith in daily life.

The three parts of Benjamin Bloom's *Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* were used as the basis for describing learning as knowledge, understanding and practice, or knowledge, comprehension and skills. The three overlapping parts or domains in the Bloom classification are: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Bloom's revised taxonomy or classification in the cognitive domain has to do with knowledge (remembering), comprehension (understanding), application (applying), analysis (analysing), evaluation (evaluating) and synthesis (creating).²²⁵ This research project involved participants in the knowledge, comprehension and application domains with some analysis (examining, valuing) and evaluation (reviewing, deciding and reporting on).

Growth and enhancement of faith learning in parishes

In this research project, participants' self-reports helped to describe and assess the degree to which the faith learning of adults had been enhanced or had grown, or been heightened or improved in quality by the use of learning community processes. The methods of rating scales,²²⁶ rank ordering, statement prioritisation and reports on faith learning examples helped to assess enhancement. Participants indicated their score on a rating scale, ranging from 'no growth' to 'very much growth'. This method was one way to help participants indicate any improvement, and to describe and report on their learning experience in ways which were measurable. Assessment in this research project meant finding reliable ways of enabling participants to let the researcher know that their existing faith learning had been enhanced.

Generic faith learning, in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice,

²²⁵ Benjamin S. Bloom, ed., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1956); David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom and Bertram B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 2: Affective Domain* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1964); Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessment: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001).

²²⁶ Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*, 325-328.

already existed in all parishes. This research project was about the growth and enhancement of that faith learning in the parish context. Chapter Seven discusses the relationship between general faith learning and the enhancement of learning in parishes.

Some examples to measure enhancement are included below.

In considering the growth or enhancement of the parish knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, survey respondents selected up to three aspects of parish life through which that growth had mainly happened.

The growth was mainly through:

- participating in group Bible study discussions on a theme
- encouraging private study or independent learning
- sessions for the congregation(s) to plan future directions
- the sharing of ministry abilities and skills
- sermons
- theological reflection methods used in the parish
- working as a team on an outreach or mission project
- the worship services
- assisting the needy in the community
- other (please state)

In considering their own individual growth and enhancement in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, individual research participants selected up to three aspects of parish life through which that growth had mainly happened.

The growth was mainly through:

- parish groups
- private study and individual learning projects
- conversation with others
- talking and sharing a ministry activity with others
- networking on the internet
- the guidance of parish leaders (clergy and lay)
- sermons
- reflecting on the example of others
- hearing and reading about Jesus' example in the Bible
- other (please state)

Full survey details are available in the Appendices.

Coding

A codebook was prepared to assist with the analysis. The details of the codes are as follows:

Survey One: Codes

Respondent self-reports for Survey One were coded:

‘strongly agree’, 5; ‘agree’, 4; ‘neutral’, 3; ‘disagree’, 2; ‘strongly disagree’, 1; ‘not applicable’, 9; ‘missing’, 10; ‘written material’, 11.

Survey Two: Codes

Respondent self-reports for Survey Two were coded:

‘no growth’, 1; ‘little growth’, 2; ‘some growth’, 3; ‘much growth’, 4; ‘very much growth’, 5; ‘not applicable’, 9; ‘missing’, 10; ‘written material’, 11; ‘do not know’, 12.

For questions 3, 5, 7, 16, 18, and 20 on growth in knowledge, understanding or practice being evident mainly through particular parish activities, one point was allocated for each response made by each person. Individual response scores were added together to obtain a total score on a topic for each parish with 15 being the maximum.

For questions 13, 14 and 21 on growth in knowledge, understanding and practice, the five individual scores were added and averaged to obtain a score for each individual. All individual average scores were added together and averaged to obtain one single learning outcome score for the parish.

For the demographic sections in each survey, each participant response was given a numerical code for each topic; gender, age, position in the parish, length of parish membership and educational qualifications.

Data gathering: Phase One

Data were gathered by means of two surveys.²²⁷

Survey One

In May 2013, 61 parishes in the Diocese received Survey One on parish learning processes with a stamped addressed envelope in which to return the completed material. This parish learning survey sought to discover the degree to which the selected learning processes were present in parishes, and included 28 questions about those processes and four qualitative questions asking for examples. In addition, a demographic section was included. The clergy and wardens

²²⁷ Appendices: Surveys One and Two.

collectively completed the survey. Pastoral telephone calls were made to encourage some leaders to complete and return surveys, with responses received from 47 parishes. The data were subsequently coded. This survey was used to calculate a general score for each parish on the extent to which holistic, collaborative and theological reflective learning processes were evident in parish life. The parish scores, derived in this way, were then ranked.

Survey Two

In September 2013, 47 parishes in the Diocese received Survey Two with a stamped addressed return envelope included in the package. This parish learning survey was about growth and enhancement in faith learning. Five individuals completed the survey separately: a minister, a warden, a ministry leader and two parishioners. Pastoral telephone calls were again made to encourage some leaders to complete and return surveys. The survey included 21 questions about growth in faith and two questions asking for examples, as well as a demographic section. Responses were received from 45 parishes. The data were subsequently coded. The survey resulted in a general score for each parish about the extent to which respondents reported growth and enhancement in their faith learning. Those parish scores were then ranked.

Survey participants

In Survey One with its focus on learning processes, the clergy and wardens were the people most likely to have an all-round understanding of the parish, people very much involved in parish planning and parish life.

The clergy and wardens, having already participated in Survey One, were asked to select and invite five people to participate in Survey Two with its focus on learning outcomes. The letter (see Appendices) sent to the clergy and wardens during September 2013 asked them to invite one ordained minister, one warden, one ministry leader and two parishioners, that is, five individuals who would know enough about the parish and the grassroots thinking, and their own thoughts and feelings, to be able to provide dependable responses. The inclusion of two parishioners provided a parishioner perspective.

Each congregation in an Anglican parish has two wardens, each of whom is a layperson: the parish priest appoints one warden, and the people at the annual Vestry meeting elect the other warden. A parish with two congregations would have four wardens. The role of the warden, in addition to ensuring that regular worship services occur, is to co-operate with the parish priest in conducting the work of the parish and with others on the Parish Council to manage the property and governance of the parish.²²⁸ “Parish Council together with the parish priest is responsible for the worship, ministry and mission of the parish under the leadership of the Parish Priest.”²²⁹

The Vestry in an Anglican parish, in accordance with Anglican Church ordinances, consists of the clergy, churchwardens and all the members of the parish. A Vestry:

shall under the leadership of and with the Parish priest be responsible for the pastoral, educational, evangelistic and missionary work of the parish and shall have and may exercise such powers and duties as are prescribed by this Ordinance.²³⁰

The strategy of asking groups of people to complete the surveys and to participate in focus groups was chosen in order to gather data in a collaborative and manageable way, and to give every parish in the Diocese an opportunity to participate in the research project through a numerically limited yet wide-ranging knowledgeable group of people. For Survey One, 61 survey forms were distributed. For Survey Two, 235 survey forms were provided to the 47 responding parishes.

The clergy and wardens completed both surveys. In the Anglican Church, clergy and wardens generally meet regularly. This meant that there would be less likelihood of the need to arrange a special meeting to complete the surveys, thus making it easier to participate in the research. These people are very much involved in parish planning and parish life with other members of Parish Council and ministry leaders and parishioners. The Chair of Parish Council signed a research project consent form on behalf of the Parish Council. In all, 47 parishes provided a signed consent form.

²²⁸ Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, *Diocesan Red Book of Constitution and Ordinances*, Part III, Parish Councils, C4, retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.adelaide.anglican.com.au> under Governance, then Ordinances, Parochial Administration Ordinance 1985, by sections Ordinance C4, 2007.

²²⁹ Ibid. 9.

²³⁰ Ibid. 3.

The draft survey instruments for the two surveys were pilot tested. During November 2012, five colleagues completed the draft surveys. As a result of their feedback, changes were made to the survey questions and other clarifications were made to the wording at several points. In Survey Two, the sections dealing with knowledge, understanding and practice were combined into question 21 to avoid a possible blurring of meaning, to reduce duplication and to make the survey a little shorter. The pilot test showed that each survey would take about 20-30 minutes to complete. Feedback suggested that Survey Two was easier to complete once Survey One had been completed. This prompted me to conduct both surveys within one year, rather than go forward to a new year. Survey One was conducted during April, May, June and July 2013, and Survey Two during September, October, November and December 2013.

Clergy in multiple centre parishes requested that their parish receive only one set of research material. In the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, at the time of the surveys, 46 parishes had a one-centre congregation, eight parishes had two centres, four parishes had three centres, one parish had four, one parish five and one parish had six centres.

The research project did not include the three Sudanese experimental congregations in the Diocese. The reasons for this decision were multi-faceted. To include these congregations would have involved cross-cultural and language issues. English is spoken by some members of the congregation but not always by the leaders. Considerable adjustment to the research would have been needed to do justice to the Sudanese culture of these reasonably new congregations. However, these congregations show that the diversity of the congregations in the Diocese is increasing and will continue to do so in the years ahead. To contain the research project to the 61 already well-established parish units recognised the limits of the present research, but flagged the possibility that later research might need to reflect the increasing diversity in the Diocese.

Data gathering: Phase Two

Focus groups

Focus groups selected for the qualitative second phase in the research design came from a subset of the 45 parishes that had responded to the two surveys.

In April 2014, six focus group parishes selected from these survey findings represented 10% of the 61 parishes originally surveyed and located geographically in the north, south, east, west, central and south-west areas within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, so as not to privilege any particular region within the Diocese. The six parishes, selected from the range of ranked scores, included parishes from across the spectrum of parishes, some with multiple learning community characteristics and some parishes with a few of those characteristics.

From May to August 2014, focus group sessions occurred in the six parishes: the recorded data were transcribed, coded and analysed. An iPad and a Live Scribe pen were used for the recording. Each focus group generally consisted of the people who had completed Survey Two, a potential membership of five people, plus the researcher as moderator.²³¹

Each focus group session lasted about one hour. The moderator introduced the focus topic: “Learners’ learning – What and how faith learning happens in this parish?” He outlined the nature of the group conversation, which progressed through these stages: the main question, follow-up questions, probing questions, prompting questions and suggestions, then the conclusion.

In total, 227 people participated in the surveys and focus groups, with 25 people participating in the focus groups.

Analysis

From the Survey One data, the 47 responding parishes ranked according to their cumulative learning process score. The resulting scores for the three sections of the survey were extracted and detailed on spreadsheets under the headings: holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective.

For Survey Two, the 47 responding parishes received the 235 questionnaires sent. From the Survey Two data, the 45 responding parishes ranked

²³¹ Appendices: Focus Group Moderator Guide.

according to their cumulative scores for growth and enhanced faith learning. Despite pastoral telephone calls of encouragement, two parishes that had responded to Survey One did not complete Survey Two; thus, from that point on, the scores from the 45 parishes were used.²³²

Responses from the two sections of the survey on parish learning and individual learning enhancement were detailed onto spreadsheets under the three headings of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. Two case studies were then prepared.

The data from each focus group were transcribed, and the material analysed under the headings of learning community characteristics and categories; the number of spoken exchanges per individual; and the number of lines spoken by each participant. An independent researcher, with professional qualifications in communications, then analysed the anonymised transcripts and independently ranked the focus group parishes according to his understanding of the differences revealed in the data. Data from the surveys and focus groups were summarised on a matrix. Focus group quotations illustrated various content categories, with reports on each phase of the research project written. A variety of data analysis tools enacted the principle of triangulation.²³³

Issues attended to during the application of the methodology

Participants reported on their learning processes and learning outcomes as individuals and with others in order to demonstrate their practice of the collaborative principle. The strategy of asking a small group to complete Survey One was intentional. It required a joint effort involving participation in a collaborative decision-making discussion group when completing the survey. Such a collaborative response would also indicate whether or not a parish enacted a key learning process, namely, collaboration. This shared collaborative response principle illustrated a key aspect of this research project and also applied to Survey Two. In Survey Two, five participants completed the survey separately, to provide an overall communal and collective response.

²³² Forty-five (45) parishes, not 47, so Survey One would match the 45 Survey Two responses.

²³³ Nancy L. Leech and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, "An Array of Qualitative Data Analysis Tools: A Call for Data Analysis Triangulation," *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22, 4 (2007), 579.

Researchers in congregational studies depend on the way that participants report on their learning processes and their learning enhancement experience and outcomes. The data gathering process during this research project used a self-reporting approach. Respondents' self-reports have been widely used, effectively and dependably, in research on communities of learning in various contexts, as well as in the study of congregations over many years.²³⁴

The word "assessment", as used in this research project, needs to be clarified. Various assessment methods are available in the area of research. Quantitative and qualitative methods include surveys, interviews, case studies, focus groups, participant observation, action research, questionnaires and many others.²³⁵ Educational assessment has to do with "the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs" of individuals or communities to estimate and determine learning progress.²³⁶

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this research project to assess or estimate, measure and describe the degree to which the faith learning of adults was enhanced or had grown and improved by certain learning processes as recorded by each participant's self-report. These methods helped participants to recognise and indicate any learning improvement by reporting on their learning experience in credible ways, which let the researcher know that the faith learning had taken place.

Ethical considerations received attention. The Adelaide College of Divinity Human Research Ethics Committee approved the application for my Adelaide College of Divinity Doctor of Ministry research project proposal on 15 April 2013. A copy of the letter of approval is included in the Appendices.

Free and informed consent of the participants was sought and given. The researcher maintained participants' confidentiality and anonymity. An ID was assigned to each parish, as well as to each person involved in Survey Two and the

²³⁴ Christian Research Association (CRA); the National Church Life Surveys (NCLS); and Susanne Mary Owen (University of South Australia), "Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: 'ah hah moments', 'passion' and 'making a difference' for student learning," 57-74; Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1998). This handbook was a revision and update of a similar *Handbook of Congregational Studies* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 1986); Mathew Guest, Karen Tusting and Linda Woodhead, *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (England and USA: Ashgate, 2004).

²³⁵ Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*.

²³⁶ Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_assessment: 1.

focus group. Each member of a focus group signed a focus group participation consent form.

In the surveys, some research instruments, including data gathering tools previously used by others were adapted. The use of existing research gathering and analysis tools added to the dependability and validity of the data gathering process. These instruments had been used before and were shown to be effective. The use of these instruments obviated the need to spend more time than was necessary on developing and comparing other research tools.

Many statements in my survey instruments are in the style of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) data gathering tools as I encountered them in NCLS publications, and in the work of Steve Taylor. The NCLS questions were adapted and used by Taylor in his doctoral thesis.²³⁷

The material published about “Growth in Faith” by the NCLS Research Team in the book *Enriching Church Life* has been very helpful in guiding my research survey statements.²³⁸ Material in the book *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* was very helpful as I developed my survey instruments.²³⁹

Some statements in Survey Two are in the style of the Christian Research Association (CRA)/Uniting Education Research (UCA) National Survey on Christian Education 2000.²⁴⁰

The faith learning episode material was developed in the style of Dr Giasemi Vavoula’s research definition of a “learning episode” in the article by M. Sharples, J. Taylor and G. Vavoula, “Towards a Theory of Mobile Learning” and in G. Vavoula’s “Participant Brief”.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Steve Taylor, “A New Way of being Church: A Case Study Approach to Cityside Baptist Church as Christian faith ‘making do’ in a Postmodern World”, (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2004). For his research tool, Taylor adapted a NCLS question on faith formation, thesis p. 39, No. 6: explanation on pp. 112-113 and p. 391. Some of my survey statements are in the style of Taylor’s data gathering tools on thesis p. 394, No. 6; p. 395, No. 10; and p. 396, No. 14; my Survey One, for example, Nos. 3 and 5, and Survey Two, Nos. 3, 5, 7, 13, 14, 16, 18 and 20.

²³⁸ Powell et al., *Enriching Church Life*, 40-43 on “Use of Attenders’ Gifts and Skills”; my Survey One, No. 19, my Survey Two, No. 1 adapted.

²³⁹ Nancy T. Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 242-243.

²⁴⁰ Survey of church attenders, Edition A, No. 3, and Edition B, No. 9: my Survey Two, Nos. 13 and 14. Survey copies kindly provided by the Reverend, Dr Philip Hughes, Director, Christian Research Association, PO Box 206, Nunawading LPO, Victoria, 3131; <http://www.cra.org.au>

²⁴¹ Giasemi Vavoula, “Participant Brief” 2005, retrieved 3/4/12 via Google from G. Vavoula’s website <http://www2.le.ac.uk/Members/gv18/gv-publications>); my Survey Two, Nos. 8 and 22.

Survey One Part D and Survey Two Part C used demographic questions from the Australian Census 2011 as a guide.

Limitations and strengths

In retrospect, I mention a number of limitations and strengths for this research project. The majority of participants in this 2013-2014-research project were elderly with 83% over 50 years; 52% female, 48% male; and 61% had a university/higher education background. These research demographics can be compared with the 2011 NCLS Diocesan demographics, where a majority were elderly with an average age of 59 years; 61% female, 39% male; and 41% had a tertiary background. Even with an elderly cohort, the findings revealed significant aspects of parish learning. Another research project with a focus on those aged less than 40 would need to be conducted to discover whether any consistency existed between the findings for the different age groups.

For Survey One, 61 survey forms were distributed. For Survey Two, 235 survey forms went to the 45 parishes that had responded to Survey One. In total, 227 people participated, with these statistics thus representing strong participation in this research project

In Phase One of this research project the two surveys were distributed, one on learning processes and the other on learning outcomes. Forty-seven (47) parishes responded to Survey One and 45 parishes to Survey Two. However, in Survey Two, 29 of the 45 parishes responded by returning four to five completed surveys, which was sufficient to qualify as a collective parish response in accord with the collaborative principle outlined earlier in this chapter. These 29 parishes provided an adequate database for this research project. However, in any future research project conducted on this topic, researchers would need to find ways to increase the limited collective response requested for Survey Two, thus achieving a greater level of participation.

Participation in Survey Two depended on the judgement of the clergy and wardens in each parish selecting the most suitable available people, and to do so in the light of their existing knowledge of the research project guidelines and the parishioners. This process of selection could be seen as a limitation of the research as the clergy and wardens may have had a bias or preference to select certain

people. On the other hand, the task of the researcher was to accept and receive the responses of those who had, in the wisdom of the clergy and wardens, been selected and invited to participate in the research for the parish.

The use of self-reports in the data gathering process proved to be a strength as it had been when used in research on communities of learning in other contexts. The effectiveness of self-reporting improved with the use of collaborative reporting in Survey One and collective reporting by five individuals in Survey Two. These collaborative and collective methods of data gathering provided reflective and communal self-reporting.

The mixed-methods approach (triangulation) provided a double-check process to confirm the findings. In addition, the two surveys included 11 requests for written qualitative examples to illustrate and confirm other responses. A parish with multiple learning community characteristics on the quantitative score provided 11/11 reflective written examples. A parish with few learning community characteristics on the quantitative score provided 4/11 reflective written examples. These qualitative self-reporting responses confirmed the quantitative findings.

This interweaving of quantitative and qualitative research methods within the surveys is one of the strengths of this research project. That strength is revealed when the assumptions of the mixed methods approach are examined.²⁴²

The mixed methods approach takes into account two knowledge worlds that operate within a parish environment. The nomothetic and ideographic knowledge worlds are distinguished for research purposes in order to understand the total social reality of parish life. The researcher gathers data information from those two worlds to provide a broad and in-depth understanding and appreciation of faith learning situations in parishes. The more perspectives used to explore the many aspects of parish life and learning, the more holistic will be the understanding of that environment. The research findings might then “ring true” for that situation.

Nomothetic knowledge assumes that reality in the parishes is objective, tangible and accessible; that the behaviour of human beings in community is observable, measurable, and interpretable by general principles and patterns. That

²⁴² Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich, “The Case for Qualitative Research” in *The Academy of Management Review* 5, 4 (October, 1980): 491-500.

reality is obtainable and can be investigated and described through the quantitative methods of social science.²⁴³

Ideographic knowledge on the other hand assumes that reality is personal, relational and complex, that human beings understand the world differently. That ideographic knowledge is obtainable by studying individual, unique and subjective human experiences in parishes through the use of qualitative methods.²⁴⁴

In their research on congregations, Fleischer and Aron et al used qualitative methods. Chapter Two details their qualitative studies.

The strength of the research project presented in this thesis lies in the use of quantitative and qualitative methods to draw on the data from the two knowledge worlds with the intention that the research results might adequately represent the polyvalent nature of parish learning situations.²⁴⁵

Caution may need to be exercised about the transferability and generalisability of the study findings. Nevertheless, the research findings are helpful for the parish context in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Adelaide. The findings are also consistent with other learning community research studies on learning enhancement in school, tertiary and church contexts. Chapter Eight mentions examples of the studies with which these findings are consistent.

Summary

The design of the research methodology outlined in this chapter delivered robust, trustworthy²⁴⁶ and dependable findings, and will assist others to replicate the methodology. The use of triangulation provided rigour in this research project. Data corroborated from a number of different angles strengthen the case for the reality of the findings and their application. The findings are presented in the next chapter.

²⁴³ Cohen et al, *Research Methods in Education*, 6-21; John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 37-51.

²⁴⁴ Cohen et al, *Research Methods in Education*, 6-21; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 37-51.

²⁴⁵ Swinton and Mowat, 51. For research purposes they refer to a situation as “interpretatively polyvalent.”

²⁴⁶ Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*, 133, 158. The word “trustworthy” summarises the conclusion that the research was credible, confirmable, transferable, replicable, repeatable and objective. It was objective in that the researcher showed “disinterestedness” during the research process; that the researcher was “dispassionate.”

Chapter Seven: Findings

Introduction

This chapter reports, firstly, the extent to which the characteristics of learning communities existed within the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. It outlines the results of a ranking of parishes according to the degree to which the learning community characteristics were evident in their parish life and reviews the overall scores derived. The findings showed a spread of parish responses, ranging from a number of parishes with multiple learning community characteristics to a number of parishes with few of these characteristics.

Secondly, the research findings detail the extent of and degree to which the processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection enhanced the faith learning outcomes reported by parishioners in the participating parishes. Through a measure of association between rankings of the learning process scores and learning outcome scores for each parish, an overall pattern emerged. Quantitative and qualitative methods helped to reveal and corroborate this pattern.

Examples of factors that influence the growth and enhancement of faith learning for individuals and parishes are presented. The findings on parish leaders and growth in faith also reveal a spectrum of learning outcomes. A descriptive case study concludes the chapter.

Defining terms

The characteristic features of learning communities identified in the course of the research project are referred to in this chapter. Two sets of characteristics describe learning processes and learning outcomes.

The three learning process characteristics are holism, collaboration and theological reflection.

The learning outcome characteristics indicate the growth and enhancement reported in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Demographics

A demographic description of those involved in the research begins this outline of

the findings.

The participants in the two surveys were, on average, well balanced in terms of gender with 52% female and 48% male.

The majority of participants were elderly: Survey One: under 50, 17%; 51-70 years, 57%; and over 70, 26%; and in Survey Two: over 40 years of age, 93%.

The majority (64%) had a length of parish membership of, on average, more than 10 years.

Most participants were university/higher education educated (61%), with 22% who had technical or further education, and 17% with secondary or primary school as their highest qualification.

Parish leaders constituted 65% of the responses in Survey Two while 35% were members.

The parishes included in this demographic description are broadly representative of the whole Diocese. This demographic profile in general corresponded to the 2011 NCLS Snapshot of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide as reported in the introduction to this thesis.

The majority (91%) of those who participated in Survey One did so with involvement in a group discussion with 2-5 people. In 50% of parishes, the group discussion consisted of three persons. This means that the majority of participants had a collaborative response experience during Survey One.

Data gathering: Phase One

The data gathering research strategy for Phase One comprised Survey One on learning processes and Survey Two on learning outcomes.

Survey One

The 47²⁴⁷ parishes that responded to Survey One ranked according to their cumulative scores on the learning process measures. The pattern is illustrated in Figure 7.1. The results for the three sections of the survey were extracted under the headings: holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective. The scores derived from the response choices (comprising ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neutral’, ‘disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’) to statements in the surveys.

²⁴⁷ Forty-seven parishes (47) responded out of the original 61 parishes in the Diocese.

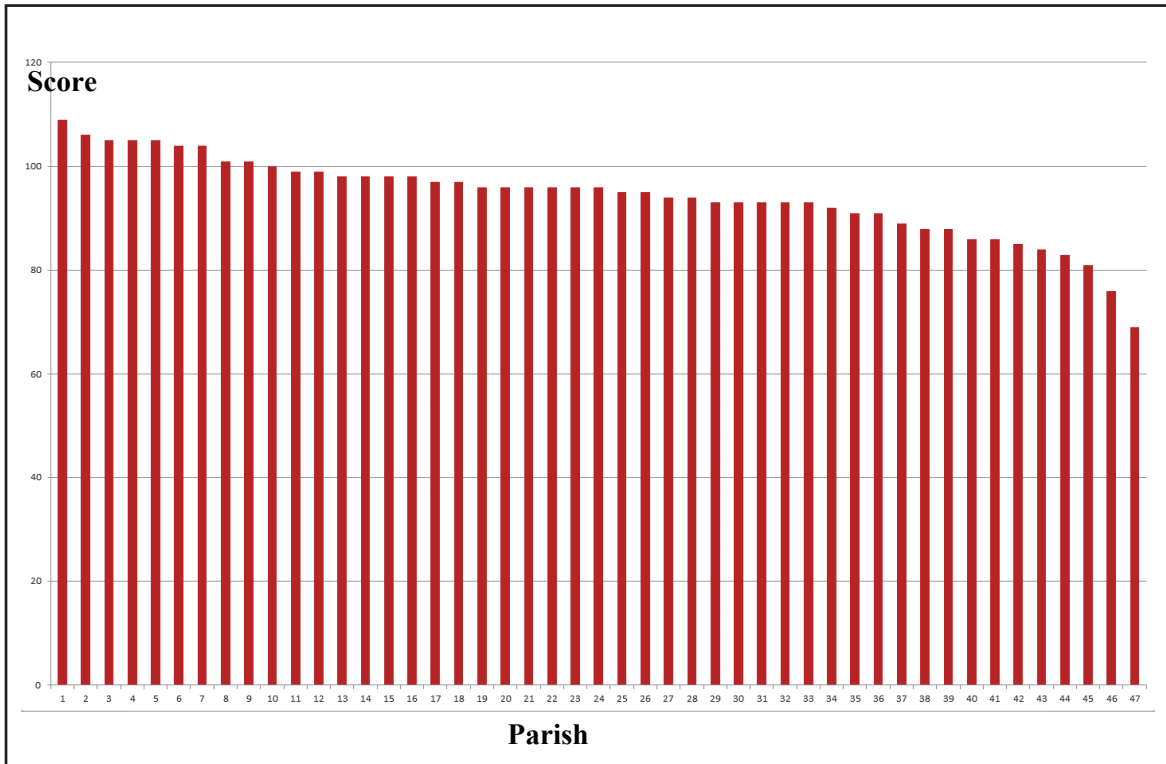


Figure 7.1: Parishes ranked by learning process scores N=47

**Table 7.1: Survey One parishes ranked by learning process scores N=47
(Potential score: 125)**

Score	Rank
109	1
106	2
105	4
105	4
105	4
104	6.5
104	6.5
101	8.5
101	8.5
100	10
99	11.5
99	11.5
98	14.5
98	14.5
98	14.5
98	14.5
97	17.5
97	17.5
96	21.5
96	21.5
96	21.5
96	21.5
96	21.5
96	21.5
95	25.5
95	25.5
94	27.5
94	27.5
93	31
93	31
93	31
93	31
93	31
92	34
91	35.5
91	35.5
89	37
88	38.5
88	38.5
86	40.5
86	40.5
85	42
84	43
83	44
81	45
76	46
69	47

As indicated in Figure 7.1, some parishes ranked highly and other parishes ranked lower in terms of the learning process characteristics, namely, the processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection. The rank ordering of the cumulative learning process scores revealed a spectrum of scores across the 47 participating parishes. On the spectrum, as indicated on Figure 7.1, many parishes ranked in the middle, located in between the high-ranked parishes and the low-ranked parishes. No parish showed a complete absence of learning process characteristics. Forty-five (45) of these 47 parishes agreed to complete Survey Two.

Survey Two

From Survey Two on learning outcomes, 45 parishes ranked according to their cumulative scores for growth and enhanced faith learning, as shown on Figure 7.2. The scores derived from the response choice to a statement: ‘no growth’, ‘little growth’, ‘some growth’, ‘much growth’ and ‘very much growth’. Responses from the two sections of the survey, namely, parish learning and individual learning, were extracted for the three headings of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

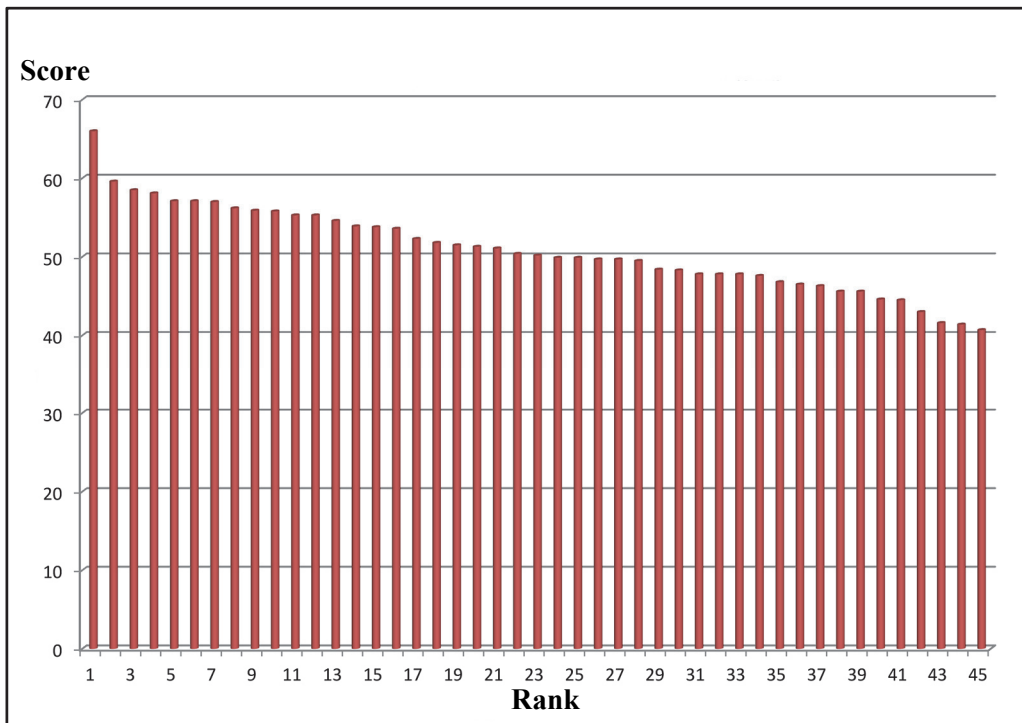


Figure 7.2: Parishes ranked by learning outcome scores N=45

**Table 7.2: Survey Two parishes ranked by learning outcome scores N=45
(Potential score 72)**

Score	Rank
66	1
59.6	2
58.5	3
58.1	4
57.1	5.5
57.1	5.5
57	7
56.2	8
55.9	9
55.8	10
55.3	11.5
55.3	11.5
54.6	13
53.9	14
53.8	15
53.6	16
52.3	17
51.8	18
51.5	19
51.3	20
51.1	21
50.4	22
50.2	23
49.9	24.5
49.9	24.5
49.7	26.5
49.7	26.5
49.5	28
48.4	29
48.3	30
47.8	32
47.8	32
47.8	32
47.6	34
46.8	35
46.5	36
46.3	37
45.6	38.5
45.6	38.5
44.6	40
44.5	41
43	42
41.6	43
41.4	44
40.7	45

As indicated in Figure 7.2, the rank ordering of the scores for cumulative growth and enhancement of faith learning revealed that a spread of scores occurred across the 45 participating parishes. Some parishes ranked high in terms of self-reporting on growth and enhancement in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith while other parishes were ranked well down on the dimension.

All the participating parishes reported some degree of faith learning, as indicated in Figure 7.2. That all parishes showed a degree of growth and enhancement in faith learning was unsurprising in that some degree of growth in faith would be expected from established parishes. However, Survey Two's focus on learning outcomes was about growth and enhancement in faith. From that point of view, Figure 7.2 revealed that not all parishes surveyed reported very much or much growth in faith learning. It is a significant finding that all parishes showed a degree of growth in faith, but that not all parishes reported very much or much growth and enhancement in faith. A spectrum of responses resulted.

Survey One and Survey Two ranked scores compared

The ranked scores for Surveys One and Two were brought together and compared in order to establish an overall pattern. For the purpose of the comparison, the Survey One results reduced to 45 parishes, decreasing the number of parishes by two, that is, the two parishes that did not respond to Survey Two. The 45 parishes from Survey One now matched the responses from the 45 parishes in Survey Two.

The findings from Survey One on learning processes and from Survey Two on learning outcomes, when graphed against each other for each parish, showed that not only was there a spectrum across the participating parishes, but that the same parish ranked as number 1 on both sets of findings, being ranked as number 1 on the learning process score (scoring 109) and ranked as number 1 on the enhancement score (scoring 66). This parish displayed the multiple characteristics that serve to define learning communities and reported strong patterns of growth in Christian learning.

As Figure 7.3 shows, the 45 parishes spread across the chart. The spectrum of parishes ranged from parishes with multiple characteristics to parishes with some or few of the characteristics that serve to define learning communities.

Similarly, parishes spread across the graph according to their reports of growth in their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. As shown on Figure 7.3, one parish ranked further down on the listing had 76 as a learning process score and 40.7 as a learning outcome score.

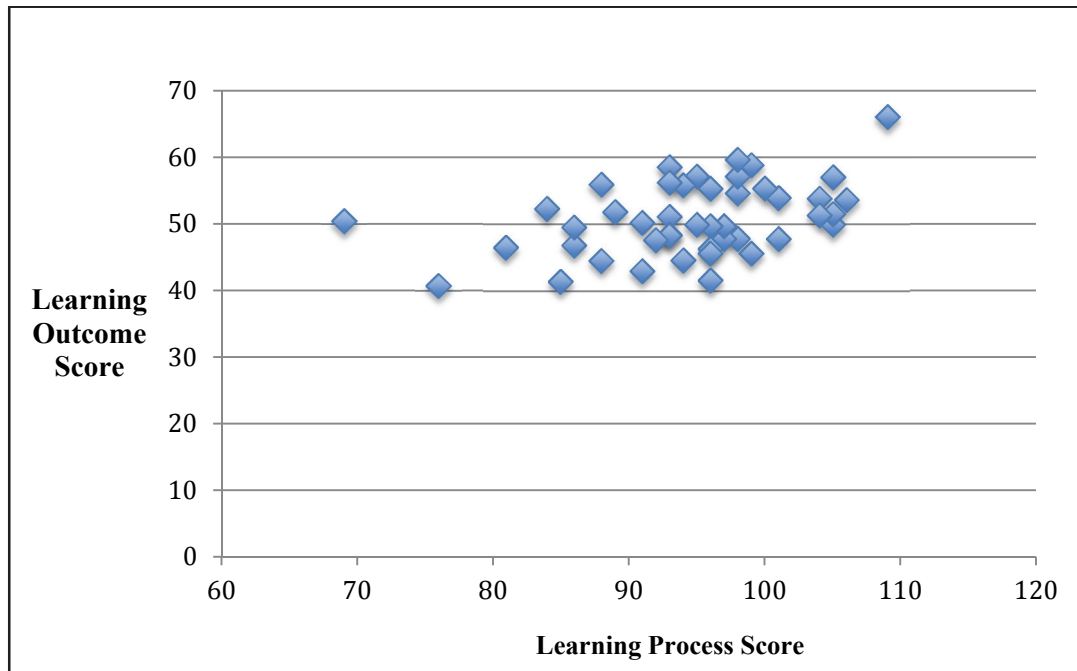


Figure 7.3: Parish scores on learning processes and outcomes N=45

These 45 parishes represented parishes from across the Diocese: north, south, east, west, central and southwest. When the shared collaborative response principle (as described in Chapter Four) was applied to Survey Two responses, scores from 16 of the 45 parishes became an issue.

As shown on Figure 7.3, 16 parishes provided one, two or three individual responses. As less than four responses did not do justice to the communal and collaborative principle, this opened up the possibility of response scores that did not accurately reflect parish realities. One to three responses allowed too much weight to fall onto one or two voices and had the potential to tip the result away from a more communal finding. Eight parishes had three respondents, four parishes had two respondents and four parishes had only one respondent. For example, for the parish with a learning process score of 96 and a learning outcome score of 41.6, the latter score was based on the response of only one person from that parish.

On the other hand, 29 parishes returned four to five completed surveys, 15 parishes provided the requested five respondents while 14 parishes provided

four respondents. For example, for the parish with a learning process score of 109 and a learning outcome score of 66, the latter score was based on the responses of five people from the parish. This discrepancy between the numbers of respondents from across the 45 parishes prompted the decision to focus on these 29 parishes as indicated in Figure 7.4 and Table 7.3.

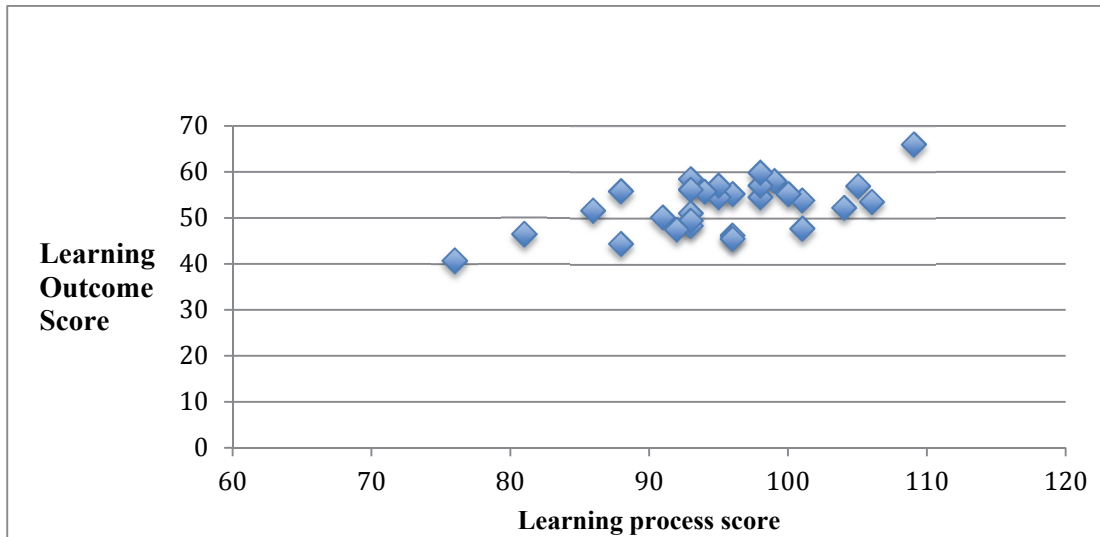


Figure 7.4: Parish joint rankings on learning process and outcomes scores N=29

Table 7.3: Parish joint rankings on learning process and outcome scores N=29	
Survey One (S1) Score	Survey Two (S2) Score
109	66
106	53.6
105	57
104	52.3
101	47.8
101	53.9
100	55.3
99	58.1
98	54.6
98	57.1
98	59.9
96	55.3
96	46.3
96	45.6
95	54.6
95	57.1
94	55.8
93	51.1
93	48.4
93	49.5
93	58.5
93	56.2
92	47.6
91	50.2
88	55.9
88	44.5
86	51.7
81	46.5
76	40.7

Figure 7.4 showed a range of scores for the 29 parishes. As already mentioned, these 29 parishes responded with four to five responses to Survey Two, thus providing a more communal response.²⁴⁸ When the shared collaborative response principle (see Chapter Four) was applied to Survey Two responses, the scores and ranking of the 29 parishes provided a more dependable result compared to the result from the 45 parishes. In terms of the findings from the 29 parishes, 15 parishes provided the requested five respondents and 14 parishes provided four respondents.

The graphs in Figures 7.3 and 7.4, respectively depicting the 45 parishes and the 29 parishes ranked for the two surveys, present a spectrum of parishes, with

²⁴⁸ Sixteen (16) of the 45 parishes provided one, two or three individual responses. Further analysis of the data from the 16 parishes at another time may reveal new insights.

variation from low-ranked to high-ranked parishes in terms of characteristics of the learning community. This general trend across the spectrum of parishes indicated that the greater the presence of these characteristics in a parish, the greater the likelihood that there would be much growth and enhancement in faith learning, with a lesser presence of these characteristics tending to correlate with less growth and enhancement in faith learning. A parish where multiple learning process characteristics were evident is a parish in which parishioners reported very much or much growth and enhancement in their learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient (ρ)²⁴⁹ revealed the degree to which the two ordinal variables of process and enhancement correlated. For the 45 parishes, the correlation coefficient was +0.39 [significant at the 0.01 level N=45 (2-tailed)] and for the 29 parishes, it was +0.45 [significant at the 0.05 level N=29 (2-tailed)]. The Spearman test results for the 45 parishes and the 29 parishes were both positive, thus supporting the assertion that the null hypothesis of no relationship can be confidently rejected.

Spearman's test for the 29 parishes showed both that there was an association that was positive and that this was sufficiently strong between rankings on learning processes and learning outcomes to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship. The strength of the correlation suggests that this is not a random result. In regard to probability, we can say in general terms that high learning process rankings were likely to be associated with high learning enhancement rankings, and that low learning process rankings were likely to be associated with low learning enhancement rankings.

²⁴⁹ Philip H. Ramsey, "Critical Values for Spearman Rank Order Correlation," *Journal of Educational and Behavioural Statistics*, 14, 3 (1989):245-253.

Table 7.4: Spearman's rank order test for 29 parishes			
S1 Rank	S2 Rank	Difference	Difference²
1	1	0	0
2	15	13	169
3	7	4	16
4	16	12	144
5.5	23	17.5	306.25
5.5	14	8.5	72.25
7	11.5	4.5	20.25
8	4	4	16
10	13	3	9
10	5.5	4.5	20.25
10	2	8	64
13	11.5	1.5	2.25
13	26	13	169
13	27	14	196
15.5	22	6.5	42.5
15.5	5.5	10	100
17	10	7	49
20	18	2	4
20	21	1	1
20	20	0	0
20	3	17	289
20	8	12	144
23	24	1	1
24	19	5	25
25.5	9	16.5	272.25
25.5	28	2.5	6.25
27	17	10	100
28	25	3	9
29	29	0	0
			2247.25

Notes: $p = 1 - 6(2247.5) / (29^3 - 29) = 1 - 13485 / 24360 = 1 - 0.55 = +0.45$

Data gathering: Phase Two

Phase Two of the research strategy involved a qualitative study of learning processes and outcomes by means of focus groups. In reaction to the pattern of findings from Phase One, six parishes from across the spectrum were selected as parishes in which to conduct focus groups. The focus groups formed part of the mixed-methods research design “to go deeper into the motivations for respondents and their reasons for responding as they do”.²⁵⁰ The findings from the six focus group parishes are shown in Figure 7.5 and Tables 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7 and in Table A8 located in the Appendices.

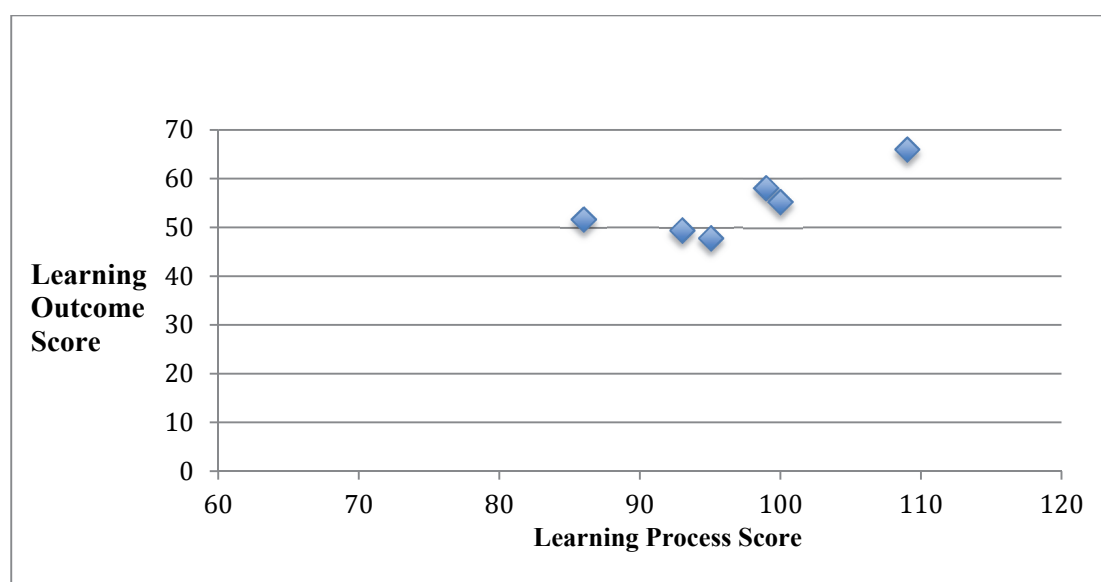


Figure 7.5: Learning process and learning outcome scores for six focus groups

These focus group parishes, the learning process and outcome scores are shown in Figure 7.5, were selected from across the spectrum in order to collect qualitative data from a spread of parishes, from parishes with many characteristics of a learning community to others with only a few of these characteristics. The tables below provide detailed findings from the specific focus group material and from the findings from Surveys One and Two as they applied to the six focus group parishes.

²⁵⁰ Owen, “Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: ‘ah hah moments,’ ‘passion’ and ‘making a difference’ for student learning,” 4.

Table 7.5: Parish focus group scores and ranking				
	Process Score	Rank	Outcome Score	Rank
Parish	109	1	66	1
Parish	99	8	58	4
Parish	100	7	55	11.5
Parish	95	15.5	47.9	22
Parish	93	20	49.5	20
Parish	86	27	51.7	17
(Ranking is based on Tables A3 and A4 (in Appendices) for the 29 parishes, as shown on Figure 7.4)				

Table 7.5 shows the learning process scores from Survey One, as they were ranked, and the learning outcome scores from Survey Two, also as they ranked, for the six focus group parishes. The first parish on the list had the highest scores and ranking which indicated that the parish had multiple learning community characteristics and much growth and enhancement of faith learning as reported by the research participants. The scores and rankings are listed for the other five parishes to indicate the spread of the findings, ranging from parishes which had many characteristics to parishes with fewer characteristics. The fourth, fifth and sixth parishes had lower scores and rankings. The lower ranking indicated lower learning process scores and lower reported growth and enhancement in faith learning outcomes.

The findings on a second focus group Table 7.6 provide a more complex description by adding more detail to that shown on Table 7.5.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ The legend is explained in the text.

Table 7.6: Focus group statistics expanded summary									
Parish	Response	Score Survey One	Rank	Holistic Survey One	Collaborative Survey One	Theological Reflection Survey One	Response	Score Survey Two	Rank
P	5	109	1	40	43	26	5	66	1
P	5	99	8	35	39	26	4	58.1	4
P	2	100	7	35	38	27	5	55.3	11.5
P	4	95	15.5	34	36	25	5	47.9	22
P	2	93	20	30	38	25	5	49.5	20
P	2	86	27	22	36	28	5	51.7	17
Ranking is based on Tables A3 and A4 for 29 parishes									

The more detailed Table 7.6 presents, in addition to the focus group scores and ranking shown on Table 7.5, the three component scores which made up the cumulative learning process score for Survey One and the cumulative learning outcome score for Survey Two. The Response column indicates the number of participants from the parish who were involved in the survey responses. For example, in the first parish listed, five people completed each survey.

Reading from left to right on Table 7.6, the Survey One holistic score for the first listed parish shows a holistic learning process score of 40, out of a possible 45. The Survey One collaborative score shows a collaborative learning process score of 43, out of a possible 50. The Survey One theological reflection score shows a theological reflection learning process score of 26, out of a possible 30.

The significance of Table 7.6 is that it reveals a decreasing holistic score from the first parish, with a score of 40, to the sixth parish, with a score of 22. The learning process holistic score significantly decreases as a component of the cumulative learning process score. The sixth parish has a learning process holistic score of 22 out of a possible 45. The holism score result is shown to be the score that contributed least to the cumulative learning process score.

Note too that the sixth parish has a high score for the theological reflection learning process in Survey One, a score of 28 out of a possible 30. Even so, that parish had a lower Survey One cumulative learning process score of 86, and a lower learning outcome score of 51.7 for Survey Two.

One conclusion from this evidence is that all three learning processes effectively contribute to the total result, but also that the holistic learning processes contribute most to the variance. This research indicates that parishes need to be aware that it is the pattern of the three processes, namely, holistic, collaborative and theological reflective processes, which delivers positive faith learning outcomes as reported by parishioners. Table A8 (in the Appendices) confirms the findings with a listing of all the learning process scores for the 29 parishes shown in Figure 7.4.

On an examination of the focus group responses to the topics considered under the heading of holism in Survey One, the six parishes divide into two clear groupings.

The parishes listed first, second and third had *many* parish groups and *strongly agreed* that: leaders take the time to help individuals learn and discuss the Christian faith; parishioners help one another in conversation to learn and think about the Christian faith; there are parish meetings which help many members reflect on parish life and plan for the future; leaders take time to assist individuals and groups to apply the Christian faith to daily life; leaders organise occasions when members discuss different viewpoints through respectful conversation (one parish *agreed*, two *strongly agreed*); and teaching and learning are important aspects of any parish activity.

The parishes listed fourth, fifth and sixth had *some or few* parish groups and two of the parishes *agreed* that: leaders take the time to help individuals learn and discuss the Christian faith; parishioners help one another in conversation to learn and think about the Christian faith; there are parish meetings which help many members reflect on parish life and plan for the future (one *strongly agreed*); leaders take time to assist individuals and groups to apply the Christian faith to daily life (one *strongly agreed*); leaders organise occasions when members discuss different viewpoints through respectful conversation (one *disagreed*); and teaching and learning are important aspects of any parish activity (one *strongly agreed*).

The parish listed sixth on Table 7.6 *disagreed* that: leaders take the time to help individuals learn and discuss the Christian faith; and leaders take the time to assist individuals and groups to apply the Christian faith to daily life, and was *neutral* in response to the statements that parishioners help one another in conversation to learn and think about the Christian faith and that there are parish

meetings which help many members reflect on parish life and plan for the future.

This examination of the focus group responses to the holism topics in Survey One indicated two groupings of three parishes among the focus group parishes. In the first grouping were parishes with many parish groups and strong agreement with many aspects of holism in parish life. In the second grouping were parishes with some or few parish groups and agreement with some aspects of holism in parish life.

Table 7.7: Focus group extended statistics									
	Rank Survey One	Rank Survey Two	Much Growth	Much Growth	Qualitative response	Qualitative response	Size	Leader growth	Independent Researcher
P	1	1	87%	41/47	100%	11/11	3	Very much	2
P	8	4	60%	23/38	73%	8/11	5	Very much	1
P	7	11.5	30%	14/47	82%	9/11	4	Very much	3/4
P	15.5	22	23%	11/47	63%	7/11	4	Some	4/3
P	20	20	19%	8/47	54%	6/11	5	Some	5
P	27	17	15%	7/47	36%	4/11	4	Some	6
(Ranking is based on Tables A3 and A4 (in Appendices) for the 29 parishes as shown on Figure 7.4)									

Table 7.7 includes some replication of Table 7.5 in terms of parish rankings for Surveys One and Two on the left-hand side. New material is added to the right-hand side which draws attention to faith learning outcomes as evidenced in Surveys One and Two and in the focus group transcripts.

Two parish growth scores are listed. The possible responses to questions about parish and individual growth and enhancement in faith were: ‘no growth’, ‘little growth’, ‘some growth’, ‘much growth’ and ‘very much growth’. The responses were mapped and the ‘much growth’ and ‘very much growth’ responses were added together to make a combined response of ‘much growth’. The focus group listed last on Table 7.7 provided a 15% ‘much growth’ response rate, with

seven responses mapped out of a potential 47 responses. The parish listed as first on Table 7.7 provided an 87% ‘much growth’ response rate, mapping 41 out of a potential 47 responses.

In relation to much growth in faith, it is of interest to note the 2011 NCLS findings for the Diocese of Adelaide. In reporting on the Diocese in relation to “alive and growing faith”, NCLS results indicated that 28% said that “in the last year they had experienced much growth in their faith through this church” (their church); 6% said that they had experienced “much growth” through other churches; 8% reported “much growth” through private activity; 45% reported “some growth” through their church and 13% reported “no growth”.

Although not directly comparable, the NCLS Diocesan finding of 28% reporting ‘much growth’ through the local church provided a general percentage by which to consider the 87% ‘much growth’ response and the 15% ‘much growth’ response as revealed in this research project. The reported ‘much growth’ response rate varied enormously across the parishes in the Diocese, as evidenced by the 2011 NCLS results and the findings of this 2013-2014-research project. Once again, parish responses ranged across a spectrum.

Qualitative responses were also obtained from Surveys One and Two. In these two surveys, 11 opportunities were provided for research participants to write qualitative responses which provided sample reflections on parish life about various topics. The first focus group parish listed on Table 7.7 provided 11 out of 11 responses, a 100% response rate. All five participants responded by having something to write in each case. This could indicate that these respondents belonged to an active and reflective parish community. The sixth parish listed in Table 7.7 provided four out of 11 responses, a 36% response rate. Once again, the responses confirmed a spectrum across the parishes.

The number of people from the parish in each focus group is indicated in the column headed ‘Size’. The focus group moderator was an extra person in the group.

Leader growth in faith is indicated towards the right-hand side of Table 7.7. This shows the responses that a group of leaders in these focus group parishes gave to Survey One question 32: “Does your involvement as leaders in the parish help you learn more as a Christian disciple?” The suggested responses could have been; ‘very much’, ‘much’, ‘somewhat’, ‘not really’ and ‘not at all’. Leaders in the

parishes listed in the first three responded ‘very much’. Leaders in the parishes listed fourth, fifth and sixth responded ‘somewhat’. These responses confirmed a spectrum of responses across the parishes. Leaders in three parishes responded that involvement as a leader was a great help, with three responding that involvement as a leader was somewhat of a help in learning more as a Christian disciple.

On the right-hand side, the conclusions reached by an independent researcher with professional qualifications in communications are presented. This researcher read anonymised focus group transcripts, ranked them independently and confirmed a spectrum across the six focus group parishes, but with some position variations. The first and second parishes listed by the independent researcher were listed first and second but with a variation. The fifth and sixth parishes were confirmed in their positions. The middle parishes could have variable positions. The independent researcher provided a double-check on the findings.

Taken together, the evidence from the focus groups presented in Tables 7.5, 7.6, 7.7 and A8 provided a richness of data which showed a definite spectrum of learning community characteristics across these six parish contexts.

A summary of the focus group material confirmed the spectrum and modified the rankings as there were some variations. However, overall, the rankings distinguished between the three parishes with multiple learning community characteristics and the three that had some or few of these characteristics (see Tables 7.5, 7.6, 7.7 and A8). This more general patterning of the parishes indicated that there needed to be a grouping of parishes in the rankings. The focus group data provided a complex or “thick” description²⁵² of each parish’s learning culture. This description helped to ensure that the complexities of the parish community, that is, the holistic, collaborative, theologically reflective and learning enhancement aspects were well researched.

However, the data for the three focus group parishes that reported fewer learning community characteristics, indicated that the score and ranking for the variable factor of holism were greatly reduced, compared to the two other variable factors of collaboration and theological reflection. The holism factor in these parishes (Table 7.6) showed a low score, even though they had scored and ranked

²⁵² Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*, 21, 169. Cohen et al. wrote that thick descriptions are “representing the complexity of situations” and are “preferable to simplistic ones”.

reasonably well in collaboration and reflection. One parish, with a high score and ranking in theological reflection, a medium score and ranking in collaboration, and a low score and ranking in holism did not report a finding of much learning enhancement (Table 7.5, parish listed sixth). In fact, when the data from the 29 participating parishes were considered, it was the holism variable factor which was low for 27.5% of the parishes. Those eight parishes which had the lowest ranked scores for the holism factor (Table A8) reported fewer learning community characteristics. Three of those eight parishes also had a low theological reflection score. One of those eight parishes also had a low collaborative score. The pattern of multiple characteristics was what made the positive impact on learning enhancement dependable.

Further analysis of the Survey One learning process indicators revealed that the learning processes of holism needed more development. When the ‘strongly agree’ parish responses in Survey One were ranked 1-19, theological reflection and collaboration indicators were highly ranked compared to the holism indicators. The theological reflection indicators were ranked: 1, 2, 3, 15 and 17. The collaboration indicators were ranked: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 19. The holism indicators were ranked: 4, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 18. These empirical research results confirmed that the holism learning processes needed more attention, particularly the holism indicator ranked as number 18 on dialogical learning, which involves respectful conversation about different viewpoints. Many more parishes might then make a ‘strongly agree’ response to some of the holism indicators.

An examination of the Survey Two learning outcomes for the six focus group parishes also confirmed the spectrum ranking of those focus groups and indicated that what mattered was the pattern of knowledge, understanding and practice viewed together. The combined scores for the parish and individual learning outcomes for the six focus group parishes ranked in order, 121, 104, 90, 93, 79 and 79, as shown in Table A9 in the Appendices. The results indicated that knowledge, understanding and practice scores from Survey Two reports were in tandem. Neither the learning outcome of knowledge nor understanding nor practice of the Christian faith could be isolated as standing out on its own. Instead, the findings showed that when a focus group parish had a high score for knowledge, understanding and practice, the individual scores for these three learning outcomes were also high. When a focus group parish had a lower score for these three

learning outcomes, the individual results were also lower. There was a tendency for scores for individual growth in faith learning to be high when the parish growth in faith was reported to be high.

This parish focus group learning outcome pattern was confirmed by conducting the same scoring exercise with the other parishes distributed across the spectrum of the 29 parishes in Figure 7.4. The learning outcome data for the 29 parishes are presented in Table A10 (also available in the Appendices). The focus group finding on the association between the three learning outcome components of knowledge, understanding and practice was representative of the 29 parishes.

Occasionally, in the parishes with a low learning outcome score, a few individuals reported ‘much’ or ‘very much’ growth and enhancement in knowledge or understanding or the ability to apply the Christian faith in practical ways. As indicated from Table A10, all parishes and individuals could do more to reach their potential in relation to the growth and enhancement of their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and their ability to apply the Christian faith in practical ways.

Convergence of findings

When the findings from the quantitative Phase One and the qualitative Phase Two are drawn together, an overall result can be presented, showing that the findings converged.

As shown on Figures 7.3 and 7.4, responses received from across the range of parishes confirmed this spectrum of responses (Table 7.5). The research demonstrated that much growth and enhancement of learning for the participating parishes and individuals, in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, was associated with the use of holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective processes. A positive correlation existed between the use of these learning processes and the faith learning outcomes in a number of parishes with multiple learning community characteristics. When the holism component score and ranking were low, the reported faith learning outcome was less.

Factors which influence growth in faith

The next set of findings highlights the factors that influenced growth and enhancement of faith learning for the parish and individuals. Survey Two comprised two sections, Part A and Part B, with Part A about the parish as a whole. The following words introduced the section:

In this Part A of the survey you are being asked about your Parish, your Parish's growth in knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, and some of the factors that may have influenced that Parish growth in the Christian faith.

The top three responses for each of the three categories of knowledge, understanding and practice in Part A on parish learning are listed as follows: 'growth in knowledge was evident mainly through sermons, worship services and group Bible study discussions'; 'growth in understanding was evident mainly through sermons, worship services and group Bible study discussions'; and 'growth in practice of the faith was evident mainly through sharing of ministry abilities and skills, assisting the needy in the community and working as a team on outreach/mission projects'.

Part B was about the individual in the parish. The following words introduced the section:

In this Part B of the survey you are being asked about your own individual growth in the Christian faith, and about some of the factors which may have influenced that growth or enhancement of your knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

The top three responses for each of the three categories in Part B on individual learning are listed as follows: 'growth in knowledge was evident mainly through conversation with others, talking and sharing a ministry activity with others and private study with individual learning projects'; 'growth in understanding was evident mainly through conversation with others, talking and sharing a ministry activity with others and sermons'; 'growth in practice of the faith was evident mainly through talking and sharing a ministry activity with others, conversation with others and parish groups'.

Parish and individual learning processes are naturally different, but complementary. Parish learning occurs when members do something together, with individual learning undergirding this activity.

Many examples of the following topics received a mention in each focus group: preaching, Bible study, prayer, conversation, interactive learning and learning from doing ministry together. The focus group findings confirmed the survey findings and placed an emphasis upon collaborative and interactive faith learning. A number of focus group members commented that faith learning is not just about knowledge and understanding but it is the interaction of knowledge, understanding and practice, in the ‘doing’ of the faith. One member said:

I certainly find, both in myself and the fruits of learning in others, that learning works better for me when it is with others. So while there is the private study I do, it is actually in discussion with others, in the application and the working through issues with others that the learning comes, so that there will be lasting results rather than a quick fix.

Statements like this one, made during focus group conversations, provided evidence of a sense of excitement and hope, a note of enthusiasm, an atmosphere of trust and energy for the task.

Leaders and growth in faith

The research findings highlighted the growth and enhancement in faith learning for parish leaders. In the quantitative surveys, two questions asked about the degree to which involvement and participation as leaders in the parish helped them to learn more as Christian disciples. The group responses (from clergy and wardens) to Survey One indicated that 76% thought that being a leader was a great help (‘very much/much’) to them in learning more as a Christian disciple. In the responses to Survey Two, 108 individual parish leaders (70%) reported that their participation as leaders greatly helped them (‘very much’ 33%; ‘much’ 37%) to learn more as Christian disciples. The focus group additional data (in Table 7.7) indicates that leaders in parishes with many learning community characteristics reported much learning enhancement. Leaders in parishes with some or few characteristics reported some growth in faith.

The Hub

The image of the Hub in Figure 7.6 depicts an ideal situation. The Hub illustrates a major finding from this research project. When the multiple learning community processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were intentionally

practised together in a parish, much growth and enhancement in faith learning was reported. It is the pattern of the three learning processes that delivered positive faith learning outcomes as reported by parishioners. There is a strong association between the three well-developed learning processes and much growth and enhancement in faith learning.

As explained during the discussion of Table 7.6, evidence showed that, for example, when holism processes were not well developed, ‘little’ or ‘some’ growth and enhancement in faith learning was reported; rather than ‘much’ growth and enhancement in faith learning. As visualised in the Hub, the whole package of the three learning processes is required for maximum impact on learning outcomes.

PATTERN OF LEARNING COMMUNITY PROCESSES
WITH MUCH GROWTH AND ENHANCEMENT

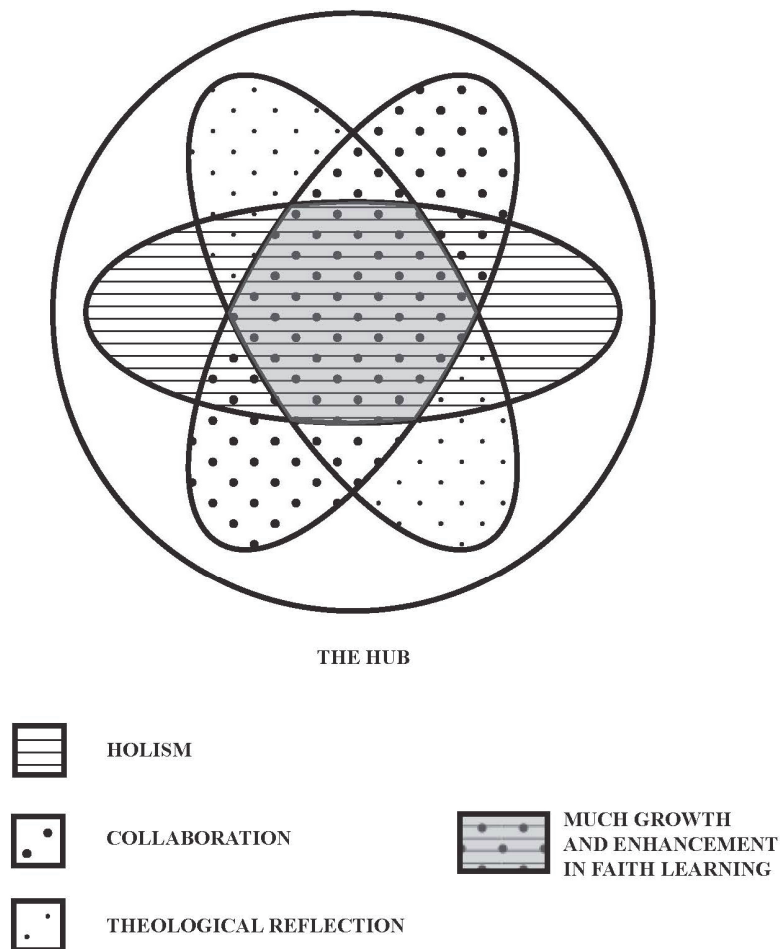


Figure 7.6: The Hub

A case study

This case study is written in the light of the focus group activities and draws on comments and statements made by focus group participants. The quotations provide an opportunity for research participants to voice their experiences and articulate their views about the learning processes and learning outcomes. In these quotations, research participants express their thoughts and feelings in their own words.

Dewerse emphasises the importance of *culture speak* in qualitative research through which participants say what they want to say in their own words. Their different experiences and circumstances are then genuinely respected and heard in their own voice. The quotations provide the research findings with authenticity.²⁵³

This descriptive case study²⁵⁴ aims to portray what it might be like to be a leader and a member in a parish where many or most of the learning community processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection are present.

The parish leaders in this case study are concerned to develop intentionally, over a number of years, a positive learning environment; and to create a faith learning culture where many (if not all) members come to understand themselves as intentional learners. One participant said that in their parish: “there is an attitude that all are learners”. Individuals take responsibility for their own learning. Another participant commented on their learning:

Learning to be the person that God wants me to be so I learn as much as I can in all kinds of different ways. There is a lot to learn from the wonderful Christian teaching in the sermons, working in a team with people, reading the Bible and home groups in our church.

The excitement of faith learning is evident in examples of personal and group learning. One participant reported:

The process of teaching the concept of grace has been fantastic. The church teaches the grace of God and how much God loves us. That graciousness of God is shown to us in others and flows through to others; gracious people.

Working as a member of a group or team is regarded as a time of faith learning. Another participant in a focus group remarked that “I like the idea of

²⁵³ Rosemary Dewerse, *Breaking Calabashes: Becoming an intercultural community* (Unley, Adelaide, Australia: MediaCom Education Inc, 2013), 47-50. The quotations are used with permission.

²⁵⁴ Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*, 253-258.

learning as we relate to each other through teamwork”. Through teamwork, faith learning becomes collaborative, interactive and purposeful.

These individual parishioners form a community of learners. They become a learning community when worship, pastoral, educational and outreach activities are tackled by the parish as a whole using holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes. Significant approaches to intentional adult faith development are promoted and programmes conducted. The parish life provides many enriching opportunities for people to practise their way into learning the Christian faith. The practical environment of the parish community enables people to practise their faith in Christ, learning Christian behaviour in the activity of participating. One parishioner made this remark about their parish: “It is a learning by doing parish”.

People participate through involvement in internal and outward activities, for example, working with refugees, participating in ministry with Australia’s First Peoples and faith sharing during community outreach events. Parishioners who participate with excitement in parish mission activities report much growth in faith, learning by the doing of, and reflecting upon, those activities. A parish leader reflected on an outward activity this way:

We do missions, outreach locally. Fun day in a local park, except it rained the first time, so we were in the hall. Second time we had some students present from the Bible College. We say why we are there and it is fascinating to see how willing any participant is to talk about faith and issues. We talk about this. It is doable and so much easier when done in community than on our own. I saw that way of combining opportunities for the whole church community is one of the keys, to practise what they believe. You just cannot say ‘go and do it’ but need to provide opportunities and programmes and it is amazing that many find their voice. It is not for everyone but amazing the number of people involved.

Clergy and laity share leadership which is visionary and collaborative. Leaders are co-learners and co-leaders. The leadership is biblically literate and reflective. As a leader proposed:

It is a culture of invitation, of trust, in the priesthood of all believers, that everybody has a ministry to offer. It is a matter of discovering that and nurturing it and supporting it and getting it out there.

In such an hospitable learning parish environment, people are free to be themselves. A participant made this statement about their parish: “It is an environment where it is safe enough to question”.

Theological reflection is practised in the parish. It is taught and encouraged in individuals, groups and for the congregation as a whole, in the processes of parish decision making, in times of change and in the undertaking of community engagement programmes. An example of theological reflection was articulated in a focus group:

Fascinating to hear you talking about Parish activities, the nature of God and here we are today on Trinity Sunday. It is rare to learn about God in the head, in an intellectual way. We get hints but to be in a serving team of a great variety of cultures and ages and intellectual capacities that we have here, one tells us that God delights in diversity; and two, tells us something about who God is, that loving caring communal presence. We learn about God's love for us not so much by reading about it as by experiencing it. Learning about who God is, which is presumably what Church is about, happens not so much in our heads as in our experience of knowing and being loved by loving one another. The community life is presenting to us through experience, head, heart and everything ... the learning of God's love. It is a total community learning.

In this case study parish, people feel God's presence and are inspired by the example and teachings of Jesus. Recognition is given to the ways that people grow in their Christian faith. Growth and enhancement in faith learning is shared and discussed in a caring and loving learning environment. In this kind of context, one is invited to think, learn and act as part of a community in response to lively worship, regular prayer, wise teaching, sound preaching, shared leadership, shared ministry practice and the 'doing' of the Christian faith in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice, with the enhancement and growth of much faith learning. This is what it is like to be in a parish where a strong association exists between learning processes and faith learning outcomes.

Summary

This chapter outlines the extent and degree of process-enhanced faith learning reported in the participating parishes in the Diocese. A number of parishes with multiple learning community characteristics reported much growth in faith learning. Some parishes with a few of these characteristics reported little growth in faith learning. This range of responses emerged during the research (Figure 7.4). A mixed-methods approach revealed and corroborated the pattern of a spectrum of parish responses. The findings revealed key factors within parish activities which influenced growth in faith and that parish leaders reported much growth in faith.

The findings presented in this chapter now become a body of evidence upon which to reflect in the next chapter where the findings are interpreted and discussed.

Chapter Eight: Interpretation and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides an interpretation and discussion of the research findings in order to articulate the lessons learned.²⁵⁵ The research demonstrated that the learning-community approach processes were positively associated with learning outcomes within parishes in terms of the degree of growth and enhancement in faith learning. The research findings show consistency with other research on similar topics.

Drawing on material in Chapter Seven, this chapter expands the discussion and moves the narrative towards an articulation of the eight main lessons learnt from this research project.

Convergence of findings

The analysis of the convergence of the findings identifies trends and patterns.

The responses received from the participating parishes range across a spectrum from those with multiple learning community characteristics and a high degree of growth and enhancement in faith learning to parishes with few learning community characteristics and a low degree of growth and enhancement in faith learning outcomes.

A general trend across the spectrum of parishes indicated that the greater the presence of learning community characteristics in a parish, the greater the likelihood that there would be growth and enhancement in faith learning, with a lesser presence of these characteristics tending to correlate with less growth and enhancement in faith learning.

The focus group analysis confirmed the spectrum and indicated the need to recognise some variations in that spectrum. Rather than the six focus group parishes being ranked 1-6, as originally thought, the ranking now distinguished between three parishes with multiple learning community characteristics and three parishes with some or few of those characteristics (Chapter Seven, Tables 7.5, 7.6, 7.7 and Table A8 located in Appendices). The Phase Two qualitative results

²⁵⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 200.

provided a double-check on, and an adjustment to, the Phase One results.

The qualitative results also deepened and expanded the quantitative results through the voices heard from the focus groups in the Chapter Seven case study.

The qualitative data from the focus groups, when combined with the quantitative data for these groups, placed an emphasis on the complex nature of the parish learning environment as shown in the case study material. This complex nature of the learning community characteristics correlated with learning enhancement. The three focus group parishes with multiple learning community characteristics confirmed that the three independent variable factors of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were together associated with much growth and enhancement in faith learning.

However, the data for the three focus group parishes which reported fewer learning community characteristics indicated a much lower score and ranking for the variable factor of holism compared to the two other variable factors of collaboration and theological reflection. The holism factor for these parishes showed a low score even though the parishes scored and ranked reasonably well in collaboration and theological reflection. The pattern of multiple learning characteristics made the positive association with learning enhancement dependable.

The findings demonstrated that the absence of learning enhancement processes indicated the need for these processes to be developed and practised in a parish so that much growth and enhancement in faith learning would be likely to occur.

Factors which influence growth in faith

The findings revealed a surprise, a match and a mismatch. The parish and individual learning findings revealed a mismatch between the parish and individual learning enhancement processes as reported in Chapter Seven.

When the parish members gathered together for larger parish activities, they reported that their growth in knowledge and understanding was mainly evident through sermons, worship services and group Bible study. Parish growth in the practice of the Christian faith was mainly reported as evident through sharing in ministry tasks, in assisting the needy and in teamwork. In summary, parish learning

happened mainly through sermons, worship services, Bible studies, sharing ministry in tasks, assisting the needy and teamwork.

On the other hand, individual members of the parish reported that their growth in knowledge was evident mainly through conversation, sharing ministry, private study and individual learning projects. Their growth in understanding the Christian faith happened mainly through conversation, sharing ministry activity with others and through sermons. They grew in learning to practise the faith mainly through sharing ministry, conversation and parish groups. In summary, individuals learnt mainly through conversation and sharing ministry with others.

In contrast, the learning processes used for the larger parish occasions included worship services with sermons, Bible studies and sharing ministry tasks with others. These processes are in contrast to the preferred reported individual interactive and participatory ways of learning through conversation and sharing in ministry. The research found a mismatch between individual and parish ways of faith learning. Individual ways of learning were not in general matched or congruent with the parish ways of learning. This could indicate that larger parish activities might involve more interaction through conversation and sharing of ministry with others.

Parishes with much learning enhancement did in fact use such interaction. The findings revealed that in the parish ranked highest in terms of both learning processes and learning enhancement, parishioners reported much growth in the Christian faith which occurred mainly through working in a team, participating in group Bible discussions and in the sharing of ministry abilities and skills. In that same parish, parishioners reported that their individual learning enhancement happened mainly through conversation with others, sharing ministry and in parish groups. In that parish, a match existed between the parish and individual faith learning enhancement processes. The focus group material for that parish confirmed the match between parish and individual process-enhanced faith learning patterns.

The importance of learning through conversation was also emphasised by an analysis of the Survey One questions 3, 4 and 9. In question 3, research participants considered a statement about whether members of the parish helped one another in conversation to learn and think about the Christian faith. In the result, 18% responded 'strongly agree'; 73% responded 'agree'; 7% were 'neutral';

and 2% ‘disagreed’. The responses indicated that these conversations happened mainly during tea/coffee after church, hospitality in the homes of parishioners and mentoring. That is, 91% of the parish respondents agreed that learning through conversation was significant for faith learning.

Moreover, in question 9, when asked about whether leaders organised occasions for members to learn about different viewpoints in the parish and to discuss them through respectful conversation, 7% strongly agreed; 55% agreed; 20% were neutral; and 15% disagreed, while 2% did not respond. That is, in 62% of the parishes surveyed, respectful conversations about different viewpoints happened. Considering the importance that respondents placed upon learning through conversation, more leaders in parishes might need to nurture respectful conversation about different viewpoints.

The finding that faith learning happened through conversation with others is consistent with another Australian congregation-based research study finding on Christian education. Through the 2000 Survey of Christian Education in Uniting Church of Australia congregations, researchers found that services of worship; relationships with people (“People feel that they learn through their interactions with their peers, through sharing personal stories, through experiencing friendship”); music; and being in nature contributed most to faith development.²⁵⁶ These findings are consistent with a recent UK study on “Ordinary Learning” where researchers “found that, in the context of church learning groups, ordinary learning is founded on conversation and the quality of the relationships”.²⁵⁷

Leaders and growth in faith

This study confirmed the connection between parish leaders and their enhancement of faith learning. The positive findings in Chapter Seven, that being a leader in ministry enhanced faith learning, are consistent with other parish studies on the

²⁵⁶ Philip Hughes and John Emmett, *Making Disciples* (Collingwood, Melbourne: Uniting Education, 2000), 11.

²⁵⁷ Helen Savage, “Ordinary Learning” in *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds., 199-208. On p. 2, Astley defines ordinary theology as “the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the reflective God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education”. Charles R. Foster, “Communicating: Informal Conversation in the Congregation’s Education,” in *Congregation: Their Power to Form and Transform*, C. Ellis Nelson, ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 218-237. Foster’s writing on the role of “informal conversation as an educational activity” in congregations adds anecdotal evidence to such research.

link between leaders and learning. Involvement as a leader in a parish greatly assists faith learning. This is the case for those who are the ordained leaders as well as local leaders in congregations.

A 2008 CRA study on rural churches in South Australia stated that “[m]any members of lay leadership teams report that they are growing in faith through their leadership”.²⁵⁸

A case study of pastoral leaders in St Gabriel’s Catholic Parish, New Orleans, USA concluded that, “[f]or both the Pastoral Team members and the Ministry Team leaders, involvement in ministry was a major pathway for their own learning, both for personal faith development and for moving towards a shared ministerial vision”.²⁵⁹

In the Australian 2006 NCLS, researchers found that an “alive and growing faith is most strongly associated with faith-sharing, followed by vision”.²⁶⁰ A strong connection existed between this NCLS research finding and the very positive leader ‘much growth’ finding of this research project. Leaders with a growing faith would be very likely to practise faith sharing and to have a high commitment to a shared vision.²⁶¹

Parish leaders in this research project reported much growth in their faith learning. Such leaders fulfil an essential role in encouraging enhancement of faith learning in parishes. As discovered in my research, theological reflection is one of the key learning processes to influence growth in faith. Price also noted the importance of reflective leaders. Through her research, she emphasised the need for learning community leaders to be reflective and flexible thinkers, equipped to lead the way and to enable others in a parish to develop the ability to reflect analytically. She argued that there would need to be a critical mass of reflective thinkers to assist in the formation of a culture of learning in a parish. As evidenced from the focus groups, people in a parish who are biblically literate and theologically

²⁵⁸ Philip Hughes and Audra Kuncionas, *Rural Churches in the Uniting Church in South Australia: Models of Ministry* (Nunawading, Victoria, Australia, Christian Research Association (CRA), 2008), 23. The CRA conducted research during 2009 on rural Anglican parishes in Victoria. <http://www.cra.org.au>

²⁵⁹ Fleischer, “The Ministering Community as Context for Religious Education,” 104-122.

²⁶⁰ Powell et al., *Enriching Church Life*, 97.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 95-100. Many findings from the NCLS about ‘growth in faith’ in Anglican parishes are useful for comparisons with the findings of the current research project. It is however important to note that the NCLS data were collected in a different way, as data were obtained from individuals within whole congregations at parish Sunday worship services.

reflective in ministry practice provide that critical mass of reflective thinkers. A definite strength of this research study was that its evidence-based findings confirmed and endorsed the conclusions reached by Price. The findings of this research project are consistent with her research conclusions.²⁶²

Learning and teaching: a distinction

The distinction made between learning and teaching challenged some parish leaders. Whilst 85% of parish respondents in Survey One agreed that teaching and learning were important aspects of any parish activity, 15% did not agree. In those few parishes, learning and teaching were not considered to be an important part of a parish activity.

Some participants in the focus groups on learning found it easier to discuss teaching than learning. Learning has to do with behavioural change in a person or community when new knowledge, skills and attitudes are gained. Teaching has to do with the intentional facilitation of learning for learners. Four of the focus groups had to be reminded about this distinction between learning and teaching. There was no need to mention that distinction in two parishes, other than during the introduction on the purpose of the focus group.

The current research found that a challenge for parish leaders is to focus on learners and learning.

Parish goals

Growth in faith learning is related to parish goals. If one of the key purposes of a parish is to help both individuals and the parish community to grow in faith and to enhance learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, then evidenced-based research findings about enhanced growth in faith can be offered to the wider church for consideration.

Re-envisioning and re-inventing parishes as learning communities provide ways of enabling people to grow in their faith and practice. A focus on learners and learning assists in the development of parish goals of pastoral care, worship, education and engagement with the wider community.²⁶³

²⁶² Price, "Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation", 358-370.

²⁶³ Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 23-25; Retrieved 29/1/2016 from <http://www.stsavioursgo.net> (Example of a parish vision and goals).

This research project focused on the parish within a Diocesan structure. The local church, in all its many forms, is part of the church's structure in society and plays an active role in achieving church goals.

The importance of the local parish church is highlighted in the work of Lesslie Newbigin. In his writing, Newbigin emphasised the importance of the local Christian community in a chapter on the "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel".²⁶⁴ He wrote that "[t]he only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it".²⁶⁵ The formation of parishes in which faith learning is enhanced helps to fulfil the parish's role in our pluralist society and world by nurturing much growth in faith learning.

Much growth is an indicator used by the NCLS with NCLS researchers writing that: "[w]hen more attenders are growing in faith, churches tend to grow in attendance and the welcoming of newcomers". "Vital churches are churches where people feel that their faith is growing."²⁶⁶ Parishes where faith learning is enhanced become vital churches.

Impact on learning

"Impact on learning" is a term used in the literature on the school and tertiary contexts to communicate that learning communities work, that there is evidence of positive impact "on the achievement, retention and involvement of students; the ways teachers teach; and the manner in which organisations respond to change".²⁶⁷ Learning-community approaches have become widely used in the educational field owing to their significant impact on learning outcomes.

This thesis presents research which indicated that a learning-community approach was effective in the parish context. Evidence showed a positive association between learning community processes and the growth and enhancement of faith learning for clergy, leaders, members and parishes.

²⁶⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing and Geneva, WCC Publications, 1989), 222-233; Darren Cronshaw and Steve Taylor, "The congregation in a pluralist society: Rereading Newbigin for missional churches today," *Pacifica*, 27, 2 (2014): 206-228.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁶⁶ Powell et al., *Enriching Church Life*, 18-21.

²⁶⁷ Shapiro and Levine, *Creating Learning Communities*, 166-187; also, Caldwell and Spinks, *The Self-Transforming School*, 19-20.

Summary

In summary, through this research project, the patterns of parish learning within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide emerged. Eight main findings stand out as particularly significant.

First, across the spectrum of parish responses, the research revealed a moderate, positive and clear association between learning processes and learning outcomes. The research findings demonstrated that the learning processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were associated with the growth and enhancement of faith learning in parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide in 2013-2014. The package of the three learning processes delivered positive faith learning outcomes as reported by parishioners. As indicated in Figure 7.2, all parishes reported faith learning. However, not all parishes surveyed reported that they had experienced ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in faith learning. Hence, the spectrum of responses shown in Figure 7.4.

Second, a clear link existed between parish leaders and their enhancement of faith learning outcomes as stated in Chapter Seven. Self-reporting by parish leaders indicated that being a leader helped them to grow in their faith. These “growing in the faith” leaders fulfilled a necessary role in the development of parish learning.

Involvement as a leader in a parish greatly assists growth in faith. A strategy of involving many parishioners as leaders for various aspects of parish life would be a means to enhance faith learning. Leaders in ministry learn a great deal through their preparation and study, practice and discussion, reflection and prayer; and they grow in the faith learning outcomes, especially in a learning community context.

Third, in parishes with enhanced faith learning the parish learning methods corresponded with the preferred ways of learning for individuals. The individual learning methods and the learning methods used across the parish as a whole matched one another. Parish and individual faith learning happened mainly through the processes of conversation, parish groups and in teams with the sharing of ministry abilities and skills. Individuals reported that they preferred interactive and participatory ways of learning through conversation and sharing in ministry. In other parishes the parish learning methods did not directly correspond with the

ways that individuals preferred to learn.

Fourth, the findings challenged parish leaders to focus on learners and learning, rather than on teachers and teaching; and to appreciate that all parish members were learners as individuals and as they reflected on parish life together.²⁶⁸

Fifth, the holism characteristic emerged as a learning edge for parishes that reported little faith learning. Tackling the learning processes of holism would be a practical and specific place to start initiating an innovative activity and would put the research findings into practice.

Sixth, the data showed that when a focus group parish reported ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth in faith learning outcomes, the individuals in that parish also reported ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in faith learning outcomes and vice versa. That is, when a parish reported to have ‘some’ or ‘little’ growth in faith learning outcomes, the individuals in that parish also reported ‘some’ or ‘little’ faith learning outcomes. Analysis of the focus group learning outcomes revealed this trend. A connection existed between individual reports of much growth in faith learning outcomes and reports that their parish had much growth in faith learning outcomes. This focus group finding turned out to be representative of the 29 parishes presented in Figure 7.4 and detailed in Table A10. To enhance individual learning outcomes, leaders also need to develop the processes that foster parish learning.

This finding on the important link between parish learning and individual learning outcomes helps to confirm the claim made in the literature review chapter (Chapter Two) about the educational influence and formative power of the congregation or parish community in faith formation.

Seventh, the self-reporting methods adopted for data gathering during this research project, when examined more closely via the focus group sessions, proved to be robust indicators for use in the recognition of learning processes and outcomes in the parish context. The practicality of questionnaire and focus group methods in research could translate across to assist individuals and groups to self-report in parishes. The principle of collaborative reports and collective responses

²⁶⁸ In his writing, David Clark described the church as a “reflective learner” when its members were reflecting on parish life together. David Clark, “Engaging in Mission – the church as a learning organization,” in *Changing World, Unchanging Church: An Agenda for Christian Public Life*, 103.

used in the surveys with regard to articulating parish learning processes and outcomes could be replicated in the parish context.

Eighth, enhanced faith learning in parishes is not just an ideal; it is happening in reality within parishes of the Diocese of Adelaide. An understanding of how parishes achieve enhanced learning identifies a strategic learning agenda for other parishes.

However, an approach that emphasises holism, collaboration and theological reflection might not be the only way in which learning is enhanced. I do not suggest that the approach covers all enhancement of faith learning outcomes in parishes. In this thesis a learning-community approach is shown to enhance faith learning outcomes in parishes.

In the next chapter, the lessons learnt from these interpreted research findings will be framed for educational ministry practice in parishes, that is, for ministry practice, which involves the task of transforming parishes into learning communities where much growth in faith is reported.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

“We know what we are, but know not what we may become.”
Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Act 4, Sc. 5 (43-44)

Introduction

The research focused on the degree of association between learning processes and learning outcomes, and aimed to find any evidence of the impact that learning processes made upon learning outcomes. The premise of the research stated that the intentional use of holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective processes by leaders and members in parishes enhanced learning outcomes for individuals and the parish, in terms of their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

The two research questions effectively elicited the findings about learning processes and learning outcomes. The research findings demonstrated that the learning processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection were significantly associated with the growth and enhancement of faith learning in parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide in 2013-2014. The positive evidence-based findings showed that the use of these learning processes in parishes enhanced learning outcomes for individuals and the parish community. The evidence indicated an association between learning processes and learning outcomes.

This thesis describes the extent and degree of the positive association of learning processes with learning outcomes, as reported by the research participants, and discusses the implications. The research reveals patterns in parish learning within the Diocese as shown in the range of responses. All parishes reported faith learning outcomes. However, not all parishes surveyed reported that they had experienced ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in faith. (Figure 7.4) A spread of responses is revealed in the research findings. Chapter Eight presented the eight main findings.

In summary, a perusal of the information from the research data reveals a definite trend or tendency across the spectrum of the participating parishes. Parishes with a high ranking in terms of the learning community processes tended to report ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in faith learning.

Parishes with a low ranking in terms of learning community processes reported ‘some’ or ‘little’ growth and enhancement in faith learning.

Future directions

The summary of the research results leaves us with the question: where does that take us? The response to that question involves the task of transforming learning patterns in parishes to enhance faith learning.

The research results show that it is possible to enhance faith learning in parishes. Through this evidence-based research, parishes “know what they may become”. The existence of a spectrum of parishes with a variety of learning community characteristics across the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide provides a template from which to gauge future directions for parish learning in parishes. In Chapter Seven, as shown in Figure 7.4 and Table 7.3, 29 parishes ranked across a spectrum, with variation from high-ranked to low-ranked parishes in terms of characteristics of the learning community. This general trend across the spectrum of parishes indicated that the greater the presence of these characteristics in a parish, the greater the likelihood that there would be much growth and enhancement in faith learning, with a lesser presence of these characteristics tending to correlate with less growth and enhancement in faith learning. The parish ranked highest for the learning processes and learning outcomes demonstrated enhanced faith learning.

Encouraging more parishes to enhance faith learning is the next step.

Informing parishes about the learning-community approach, and *forming* leaders to become practitioners in that approach, may lead the way towards the *transforming* of parishioners and parishes into learning communities where much growth and enhancement in faith learning is reported.²⁶⁹

Throughout this thesis, reference is made to parish leaders and their growth in faith. In the two quantitative surveys, 70% of leaders reported that involvement as parish leaders helped them (‘very much’ 33%; ‘much’ 37%) to learn more as Christian disciples. Focus group findings confirmed a strong link between parish leaders and enhancement of faith learning outcomes in parishes with multiple learning community characteristics. The formation of these leaders towards becoming learning community practitioners is a way forward.

²⁶⁹ Groome, *Will There Be Faith?* 12. Groome uses these three words “inform, form and transform” in relation to the Christian faith.

The chapters of this thesis outline key competencies for learning community leaders. These competencies include the ability to: envision the parish as a learning-community with holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning processes (Chapter Three); appreciate that the biblical image of the “body of Christ” informs the theory and practice of a learning-community approach (Chapter Four); understand the significance of the focus on learners, learning and the recognition of faith learning outcomes (Chapter Five); take into account the research results (Chapter Seven) and the eight main findings (Chapter Eight); and practise the learning community characteristics mentioned in previous chapters and expanded in this chapter.

The formation of a parish into a learning community is a work-in-progress. Surprises and fresh opportunities to nurture new developments arise from time to time. To grasp such opportunities a learning community leader needs to be a reflective learner.

Donald Schon’s writing is helpful here.²⁷⁰ Schon argued in favour of an understanding of reflection-in-action that was about forward thinking the action while it was happening. The leader, educated in reflective practice would “integrate reflection-in-action into the smooth performance of an ongoing task”.²⁷¹ That is, when undertaking a project, the leader would, upon reflection, make changes to the project as it progressed and according to the circumstances. Schon recommended that the competency of reflective practice be learnt through participation in a “reflective practicum”.²⁷² A person would learn about a particular competency practice by doing that practice in a specifically designed scenario under the “guidance of a senior practitioner”. In other words, when becoming a learning community leader, a person would gradually be inducted into that community of learners and pick up the necessary competencies, capabilities and skills of being a leader, under guidance of an experienced and qualified mentor in an appropriate setting.

²⁷⁰ Donald Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (Oxford, UK, San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987).

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 36-39. Other authors also refer to the work of Schon on reflection in action. For example: O’Toole and Beckett, *Educational Research*, 72-73; Alan Redropp, *Family Business Engagement* (PhD Thesis, University of South Australia, 2012): Section 2.10.4; Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 192.

In addition to the previously mentioned competencies and drawing on learning community literature, such a mentor may also focus attention on the spirituality of the learning community leader with reference to two further matters, namely, Jesus as the Teacher, and the spirituality of the teaching and learning processes.

Firstly, a study of the Gospel portrayals of Jesus as the Teacher, through the lens of the learning-community approach, revealed Jesus as a Teacher for all, a collaborative and theologically reflective Teacher.²⁷³ This study is mentioned in Chapter Two. As portrayed by the Gospel writers, Jesus the Teacher learnt from God and others. Jesus prayed and taught others to pray the Lord's Prayer. In communing with God through prayer, Jesus recognised that he was a learner, learning from God (Jn 7:16, 8:28).

Secondly, this recognition of Jesus as the role model for teaching and learning in parishes is a reminder to those in educational ministry of the role of prayer and the role of the divine in the educational process.²⁷⁴ Groome reminds teachers that: "God's grace works through nature – here, the good efforts of religious educators". He wrote: "[b]alance our own best efforts with the memory of God's grace; God gives the growth" (1Cor 3; 6).²⁷⁵ The "body of Christ" theology, articulated in Chapter Four, emphasised the importance of a biblical foundation for learning communities in the church.

The spirituality of the learning-community approach recognises that the Holy Spirit does the work of Jesus Christ in and through human beings. In the Gospel according to John, we learn that the Helper, the Holy Spirit, is a teacher whom God will send in Jesus' name to "teach you all things, and bring to mind all that I said to you" (Jn14: 26). This Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is present in and through the learning and teaching processes in parishes through the life, skill and sensitivity of the teacher in the selection of teaching content and methods in the way of Jesus the Teacher. The Spirit of Christ becomes a presence in the receptive and inspired learner as they grow towards Christlikeness.

In his writing, Gary Newton guides teachers to recognise five ways in which the Holy Spirit is active within teaching and learning processes: through the

²⁷³ Littleton, "Jesus as the Teacher: Facilitator of Learning."

²⁷⁴ Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities,'* 390.

²⁷⁵ Groome, *Will There Be Faith?* 338.

teacher; through the learner; through attention to the Scriptures; through interpersonal interaction in a learning community; and through the hospitable learning environment enacting the fruits of the Spirit.²⁷⁶ In these ways, Newton wrote, the Holy Spirit “works as a catalyst for learning”.²⁷⁷ The Spirit of Christ is at work through the processes of the learning-community approach.

Strategic attitudes

By way of conclusion to this thesis six strategic dispositions or attitudes of mind suggest themselves. These strategic attitudes have implications for the future directions of ministry practice in the parish context.²⁷⁸

The strategic attitudes originated in a learning community perspective and grew out of the research findings presented in this thesis. This research project shows that a learning-community approach in parishes is an effective means to enhance faith learning and to foster much growth in the Christian faith. These six strategic attitudes help to keep the focus on shaping the future of parish life in terms of the growth and enhancement of faith learning.

First, the research found that in parishes with enhanced faith learning, there is a focus on learners and their learning as well as on ministers and leaders teaching. In these parishes, leaders want to discuss their own learning as much as the learning of the parishioners. In such parishes, leaders and members regard themselves as co-learners. Leaders respect the various ways that people learn the Christian faith. Leaders understand the trends in learning theories and the variety of indigenous learning approaches offered in a parish context, namely, through community and prayer, study and service.²⁷⁹ Learners know their own best way of learning and leaders know about the need to create a culture of learning which has a focus on the processes of learning as much as on the programme content.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Gary Newton, “The Holy Spirit in the Educational Process” in Michael J. Anthony, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 125-129.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 129.

²⁷⁸ For more on the mindset of leaders and the shaping the future: Littleton, *A Handbook for A Learning Community Perspective in Congregations*, 4; Littleton, *A Handbook on Leading Learning in Congregations*, 5-9, 41-53. Hattie used the term “mind frames” for ways of thinking: Hattie, *Visual Learning for Teachers*, Kindle Edition, Chapter 9.

²⁷⁹ Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching The Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 65-139.

²⁸⁰ Refer to Chapter Five of this thesis, especially on p. 71 where comments made by Astley about the importance of the process of learning are mentioned. (Footnote 177 should also be noted.)

Second, the research project used a learning-community approach as its framework. That approach is fully outlined in Chapter Three. The definition of faith learning used in this thesis draws attention to the relationship between process and growth in faith.

It is helpful to focus on the characteristics of the approach in parishes.²⁸¹ Two sets of characteristics describe learning processes and learning outcomes. The three learning process characteristics are holism, collaboration and theological reflection. The three learning outcome characteristics are where ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in learning the Christian faith are reported in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice. A parish where multiple learning process characteristics are evident is a parish in which parishioners are likely to report ‘very much’ or ‘much’ growth and enhancement in their learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Third, this research suggests that it is helpful to focus on learning processes that are holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective. Where holistic processes are present, there is a shared vision of the whole parish. This shared vision brings together the five parts of parish learning: individual learning, group learning, congregational learning, community engagement learning and dialogical learning.

Collaborative processes in parishes involve people in the sharing of leadership within the ministry and outreach responsibilities of the parish, and occur when members work and learn together interactively, enjoying and respecting the abilities and contributions of others in achieving a common task.

Theological reflection processes in parishes involve people in reflecting upon or thinking about present life actions in the light of the biblical story and traditions, and then moving forward, renewed for future action. Examples of holistic, collaborative and theological reflection methods are mentioned in Chapter Three.

Fourth, the research suggests that it is helpful to focus on learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are a consequence of the learning processes and become evident when leaders and members report on their learning outcomes in terms of

²⁸¹ These are some action steps for a parish to consider and develop in association with the learning-community approach previously outlined in Chapter Three. To develop enhanced faith learning in parishes, leaders might work towards having these characteristics intentionally in use.

knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith. These learning outcomes are fully detailed in Chapter Six.

Knowledge of the Christian faith is evidenced through content and information on beliefs and teachings, the Bible and the church, to mention some examples. An understanding of the Christian faith is recognised through comprehension of the teachings of Jesus and an appreciation of others with empathy and respect for their feelings, to mention some examples. Practice of the Christian faith is assessed by actions, application and skills, as well as the ability to practise the faith in ministry and daily life. Regan emphasised that growing or maturing in faith combines the practice of a personal faith perspective with knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs.²⁸² More practical examples of these learning process and learning outcome characteristics are written in the research surveys, which are available in the Appendices.

The focus on learning outcomes also involves paying attention to faith learning outcomes reported by individuals and the parish community. Self-reporting has been used in this research, with participants reporting the degree of their growth and enhancement in faith learning. Reflective assessment methods are available for parish use.²⁸³

Chapter Five mentions ways to recognise and affirm growth or enhancement of Christian faith learning in parishes. The definition of faith learning used in this thesis draws attention issue of assessing growth in learning. Reporting on ordinary faith learning episodes is one effective method. Feedback and self-assessment forms assist in the recognition of individual learning enhancement. Congregations also learn, need affirmation and value recognition of the learning achieved. These examples, along with other approaches to the assessment of faith learning in congregations, have been designed to be gentle, respectful and affirming.

²⁸² Jane E. Regan, "Growing Faith for a Vibrant Church," in *C21 Resources*, A Service of Boston College (Fall, 2009): 1-2, retrieved 25/8/2015 from <http://www.bc.edu/church21/publications/c21resources.htm/Fall2009>

²⁸³ Refer to Chapter Five of this thesis in which assessment methods based on the learning-community approach are mentioned. Other references on this topic include: Margaret Cooling, *Creating a learning church* (Oxford, UK: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2005), 30-35; Roger L. Walton, "Assessment in Adult Christian Education," in *Learning in the Way: Research and Reflection on Adult Christian Education*, Jeff Astley, ed., 90-112; Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz, *The Dirt on Learning: Groundbreaking Tools to Grow Faith in Your Church* (Colorado: Group Publishing, 1999), 192-198.

Fifth, it is helpful to focus on the eight research findings outlined in Chapter Eight. These research findings demonstrated that a moderate, positive yet clear association existed between learning processes and outcomes across a spectrum of parishes in the Diocese, as illustrated in Chapter Seven, Figure 7.4.

A focus on the findings, which are of immediate interest and relevance, may be one way to proceed. For example, the holistic processes identified by the research as needing attention in some parishes in order to enhance faith learning could be considered. Another example could be to improve parish learning in order to enhance individual learning. Some other findings may help in a particular parish situation. The findings might be used to further parish goals and to identify parish directions. As Neil Thorpe recommended: “[i]dentify and confront (your) learning edges”, those places in personal and parish life where the “need to learn is sharp”, and where you find you have to know more.²⁸⁴

Sixth, this research project shows the value of developing a parish learning profile by working collaboratively with a group in a parish, the Parish Council, the clergy and wardens, a ministry leadership team or a grouping of four to five parishioners. The advantage of having a communal and collaborative response in gathering data featured as one of the research findings presented in Chapter Eight. It would be possible to gather data to develop a parish learning profile by asking four questions which summarise the questions used in the research surveys, namely:

1. To what extent **is** the educational ministry of the parish holistic?
2. To what extent **do** the leaders and members work together collaboratively?
3. To what extent **do** the leaders and members reflect theologically, as individuals and as a parish community?
4. To what degree **do** parishioners report growth and enhancement in faith learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith?

These four questions may be read in association with the research questionnaires which are available in the Appendices. The use of the following evaluation tool may also assist. Each question would be rated on a scale from 1-5. Questions 1 to 3 would be rated as follows: ‘no extent’ (1); ‘to a small extent’ (2);

²⁸⁴ Neil Thorpe, *Pilgrim Learning Community*, 2012 “The Education Edge: What is Christian Education exactly?” retrieved 19/5/15 from <http://www.journeyonline.com.au> September 2012 *Journey*, Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod.

‘to some extent’ (3); ‘to a large extent’ (4); and ‘to a very large extent’ (5). Question 4 would be rated as follows: ‘not at all’ (1); ‘a little growth’ (2); ‘some growth’ (3); ‘much growth’ (4); and ‘very much growth’ (5) (this would result in a maximum score of 20 for each individual for the four questions, that is, four questions multiplied by five points).

The individual scores of the group members may be added together to make a total group score which would then be averaged to get an overall result. For example, if the total group score for question 1 was 10 for four participants, once averaged (10 divided by four) with a score of 2.5, the response to the question would be: ‘to some extent’.

The six strategic attitudes mentioned above help to keep the focus on learners, learning processes and learning outcomes in parishes.

The value of this research

The value of this research is that it has charted ways in which parishes, by becoming learning communities, can help both individuals and a parish community to grow their faith and enhance their learning. From this research, every parish can learn enough to move forward on the journey towards the vision of the parish having multiple learning community characteristics. Aron and other researchers emphasised the value of research in providing direction and framework for congregations to work towards as they seek to become learning communities of faith.²⁸⁵ The possibility of enhanced faith learning outcomes in parishes can be achieved by fully developing the three learning processes of holism, collaboration and theological reflection.

Becoming a learning community is a process-centred journey towards significant faith learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are essential for leaders and parishioners who seek to move onward in the cause of Jesus Christ. The process of implementing the three learning processes is foundational for the faith learning enhancement outcomes to be achieved, and a vital means by which

²⁸⁵ Aron et al., *Sacred Strategies*, Kindle Edition, Chapter Eight; The Search Institute, USA, uses the words “Practical Solutions to Put Research into Practice” on its regular 2015 e-newsletter, and makes the same comment about the value of research for ministry practice. Retrieved on 29/1/2016 from <http://www.search-institute.org>; the NCLS Research Team also provides resources for parishes to use when the NCLS research results are applied in the parish context.

the Anglican Church, through its parishes in the Diocese of Adelaide, can be seen to be a learning church as much as it is a teaching church.²⁸⁶

Those involved in the research journey, the participants and the researcher, also value this current research study. The research process is as valuable as the research outcomes expressed in the findings. The exploration is as exciting as arriving at the destination. During this research project, as a researcher, I travelled on a fascinating journey, exploring the contextual landscape of Anglican parishes; discovering the emergent process-enhanced faith learning patterns in these environments as they were revealed; articulating the dependable findings; and documenting them for future reference and use. This research study enriched the researcher. The evidence-based research findings suggest ways forward for individuals and parish communities.

Summary

This research concluded that a positive association exists between the presence of learning community processes and faith learning outcomes in the Adelaide Anglican parish context. This dependable and affirmative research result indicates that the use of a learning-community approach, customised for the parish context is likely to produce a significant and positive impact on faith learning outcomes.

The evidence-based findings of this research project demonstrate that a learning-community approach for educational ministry practice in parishes is a positive way to enhance faith learning and to foster much growth in the Christian faith. The six strategic attitudes proposed will help those in parish ministry to shape the future life of the parish by fostering much growth in the Christian faith. Enhanced faith learning in parishes becomes an achievable goal.

²⁸⁶ “We are a ‘learning Church’ as well as a teaching Church” is a statement made by the Anglican Consultative Council about the Anglican Church. This is written in a paragraph on dispersed authority in *Being Anglican in the third millennium*, the Official Report of the 10th Meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, Panama 1996, compiled by James M. Rosenthal and Nicola Currie (Harrisburg, PA: Published for the Anglican Communion by Morehouse Publishing, 1997), 108.

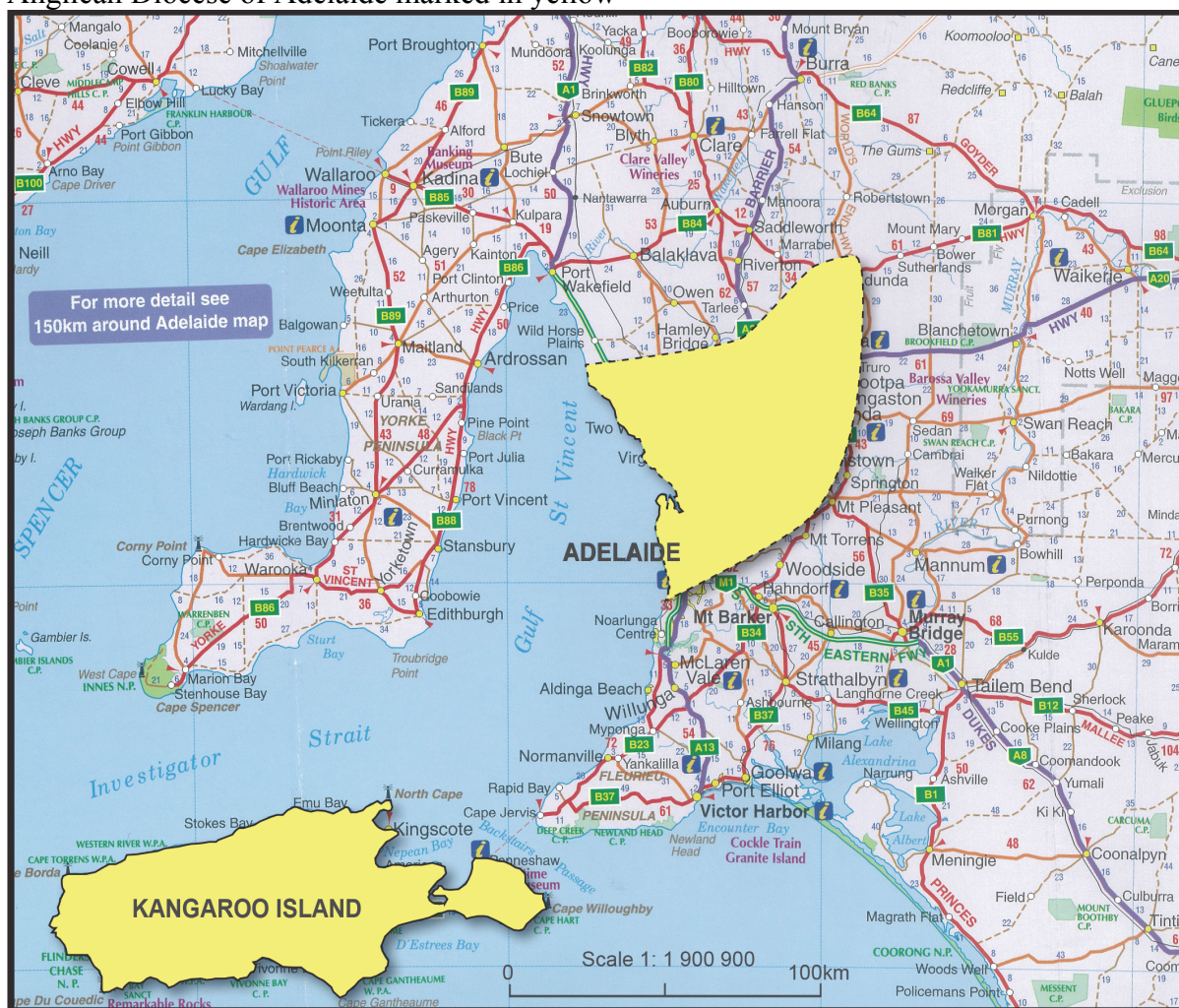
Appendices

Contents:

- Appendix One: Map
- Appendix Two: Surveys One and Two
- Appendix Three: Correspondence and Letters of Introduction
- Appendix Four: Moderator's Guide for Focus Groups
- Appendix Five: Tables A3, A4, A8, A9 and A10

Appendix One: Map

Anglican Diocese of Adelaide marked in yellow



UBD South Australia Map 570 Gregory's.
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Appendix Two: Surveys One and Two

Adelaide College of Divinity

Survey on Parish Learning

Researcher:

John Littleton

**A Survey of Parishes in the Anglican Diocese of
Adelaide**

Inside this cover please find:

Two letters

The survey

An envelope in which to return the Survey and
Research Consent Form

Parish Christian Learning Survey 2013 Survey 1

Parish ID..... (ID is for researcher use only)

HOW TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY. The survey should take about 20-30 minutes and is easy to follow. All you need to do is tick the box for any item or circle the words or write a few words of description. This survey, about your parish, is for **one clergyperson and all the wardens to complete as a group** please. You will find it helpful to look over the whole survey before you start.

In this survey you are being asked, **as a group**, about the life of **your Parish**, about the educational and learning processes in your Parish or congregation, about things that do or do not happen in your parish. When responding think about the parish or congregation as a whole.

Now for your responses:

Survey – Part A

This section of the survey relates to patterns of learning in your parish.

In this Parish Community:

1. There are groups which help people (children, youth, adults, families) learn the Christian faith.

- Many
- Some
- Few
- None
- Unsure/Don't know

2. Leaders take time to intentionally teach and help individuals learn and discuss the Christian faith, including support of private study.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3. Members of the parish help one another in conversation to learn and think about the Christian faith.

- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
- } Go to question 4
- Go to question 5

4. If you agree please indicate when these conversations happen:

- Mentoring
- During tea/coffee after church
- Hospitality in the homes of parishioners
- Other

5. There are parish meetings which help many members reflect on parish life and plan for the future.

- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
- } Go to question 6
- Go to question 7

6. If you agree please indicate what these occasions were:
Select as many as applied in the past year.

- Annual Parish Vestry meeting
- A consultation on parish future directions
- Transition consultations to plan for new minister
- As a result of a series of Parish Bible Studies
- A Parish project
- Other.....

7. Leaders take time to intentionally assist individuals and groups to apply the Christian faith to daily life. (e.g., at work, school, college, family or...)

- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-] Go to question 8
- Go to question 9

8. If you agree please indicate when these occasions happen. Select as many as applied in the past year.

- Reflective group discussion
- Sermons
- Guest speakers
- Individual conversation followed up with
a resource idea to consider
- Other.....

9. Leaders organise occasions when members meet to learn about different viewpoints which exist in the parish and discuss them through respectful conversation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. Teaching and learning are important aspects of any parish activity.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. We can give an example of a Parish or Congregational activity when specific teaching and learning were part of the process:

Yes / No

12. **If Yes**, please name and briefly describe the project and the learning required.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Survey – Part B

This section relates to ways that people interact when learning.

In this Parish Community:

13. Leadership is shared among the members according to their abilities, skills and insights.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. The members work well together as a team, enjoying and respecting the abilities and contributions of others in achieving common tasks.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. Leaders and members learn about, teach and seek to practise ‘the body of Christ’ understanding of the nature of the Church.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16. The clergy and people consult and collaborate to a **high** degree.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. The Internet is used for networking (E.g. Emails to and from parishioners and/or Christian Education resource contacts).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

18. Members learn about the Christian faith through using modern technology.
(e.g., Internet, Mobile phone, Skype, Facebook, YouTube, iPad...)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. In this parish leaders encourage members to find and use their gifts and skills.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

20. Members participate in liturgy or worship planning in preparing for Worship Services.

- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-] Go to question 21
- Go to question 22

21. If you agree please indicate when this worship planning happens:
(Select as many as applied within the last year.)

- Weekly
- Monthly
- On special occasions
- For Christmas Services
- For Holy Week and Easter Services
- For Pentecost Services
- Other.....

22. Members are invited to fill in a Time and Talent form (listing parish activities which need to be done)

Yes / No / Don't know

23. Please list one or more examples of occasions when there is sharing of ministry.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Survey – Part C

This section relates to reflective learning and Christian ministry.

In this Parish Community:

24. Sermons help make the Bible passages relevant for ordinary life.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

25. Members think that it is important to relate the Biblical Story to daily life.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

26. Sermons show evidence of some form of theological reflection.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

27. Members think theologically.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

28. In this parish community, we learn Christian faith during Worship Services.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

29. Please give an example of a parish activity in the last year which shows leaders and members thinking about a topic in the light of their Christian faith.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

30. Over the last year, do you believe that your Parish community has grown in its Christian faith?

- No growth
- A little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

31. If you think there has been growth in your parish please name an occasion when your parish grew in its Christian faith, then briefly outline the occasion and the growth or new learning that you noticed.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

32. Does your involvement as leaders in the parish help you learn more as a Christian disciple?

- Very much
- Much
- Somewhat
- Not really
- Not at all

Adelaide College of Divinity

Survey on Parish Learning: Survey 2

Researcher:
John Littleton

September 2013



Inside this cover please find:

One letter

The survey

An envelope in which to return the completed Survey form

This survey is being sent to Parishes in the
Anglican Diocese of Adelaide

For Office Use Only				
				/ / 2013

Survey 2

HOW TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY

The survey should take about 20 -30 minutes and is easy to follow. All you need to do is tick the box for any item, circle the word or write a few words. You will find it helpful to look over the whole survey before you start.

To be completed individually.

SURVEY 2 PART A: ABOUT THE PARISH AS A WHOLE

In Part A of the survey you are being asked about **your Parish**, your Parish's growth in knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith, and some of the factors that may have influenced the Parish's growth in Christian faith. The following statements may be helpful as you make your responses.

Knowledge is to do with the content of the Christian faith; information on the Christian faith through beliefs, persons, teachings, the Bible, Jesus, the church, customs, principles, themes and trends; knowledge about God, knowledge of God.

Understanding is to do with comprehension and attitude; meaning of words, language and the teaching of Jesus; appreciation of the attitudes of others.

Practice is practical action, application, ability and skill to apply the knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith in real circumstances; ministry in the church and outreach; living the faith in daily life.

Parish or congregational learning involves thinking about the parish or congregation as a whole; the education or learning that happens when all (most) of the members (the whole parish or congregation) do something together.

Now for your responses:

1. Over the last year do you believe that your parish as a whole has grown in the Christian faith overall?

- No growth
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

2. Over the last year, more specifically, do you believe your parish's **knowledge** of the Christian faith has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded "No growth" go to Question 4)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

3. This growth in knowledge is evident or shown or is apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply.)

This growth is:

- mainly through parishioners participating in group Bible study discussions on a theme
- mainly through encouraging private study or independent learning
- mainly through sessions for the congregation(s) to plan future directions
- mainly through the sharing of ministry abilities and skills
- mainly through sermons
- mainly through theological reflection methods used in parish
- mainly through working as a team on an outreach or mission project
- mainly through the worship services
- mainly through assisting the needy in the community
- Other (Please state).....

4. Over the last year, more specifically, do you believe that your parish's **understanding and comprehension** of the Christian faith has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded "No growth" go to Question 6)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

5. This growth in understanding is evident or shown or is apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply).

This growth is:

- mainly through parishioners participating in group Bible study discussions on a theme
- mainly through encouraging private study or independent learning
- mainly through sessions for the congregation(s) to plan future directions
- mainly through the sharing of ministry abilities and skills
- mainly through sermons
- mainly through theological reflection methods used in parish
- mainly through working as a team on an outreach or mission project
- mainly through the worship services
- mainly through assisting the needy in the community
- Other (Please state)

.....

6. Over the last year, more specifically, do you believe that the **ability of your parish to apply the Christian faith in practical ways** has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded “No growth” go to Question 8)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

7. This growth in application is evident or shown or is apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply).

This growth is:

- mainly through parishioners participating in group Bible study discussions on a theme
- mainly through encouraging private study or independent learning
- mainly through sessions for the congregation(s) to plan future directions
- mainly through the sharing of ministry abilities and skills
- mainly through sermons
- mainly through theological reflection methods used in parish
- mainly through working as a team on an outreach or mission project
- mainly through the worship services
- mainly through assisting the needy in the community
- Other (Please state)

.....

8. Can you recall and remember an occasion when you feel **that your parish** has learnt something new in the Christian faith? This may be that the parish as a whole acquired some new knowledge or understanding or further developed the ability to put the Christian faith into practice.

Yes / No

(If you responded “No” go to Question 10)

9. **If Yes**, please name the occasion when you felt that your parish learnt something new about the Christian faith and briefly outline the occasion and the new learning.

The occasion

was:.....

.....

.....

What the Parish learnt was:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

SURVEY 2 PART B: ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL IN A PARISH

HOW TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY.

All you need to do is tick the box for any item, circle the word or write a few words. ***To be completed individually.***

In PART B of the survey you are being asked about **your own individual growth** in the Christian faith, and about some of the factors which may have influenced that growth or enhancement of your knowledge, understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Now for your responses:

10. Over the last year do you believe that **you personally** have grown in your Christian faith?

- No growth
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

11. Does your participation as a **leader** in the parish help you learn more as a Christian disciple? (Circle one response)

Very much Much Somewhat Not really Not at all

OR

12. Does being a **member** of this parish help you learn more as a Christian disciple? (Circle one response)

Very much Much Somewhat Not really Not at all

13. **In each** of the following ways has your own **knowledge and understanding** of the Christian faith developed or grown stronger in the last year?

For each topic below please circle the number which applies to your response:

- 1 - Definitely developed or strengthened a lot
- 2 - Developed or strengthened to some extent
- 3 - Little or no change
- 4 - No change
- 5 - Not applicable

God	1	2	3	4	5
Jesus Christ	1	2	3	4	5
The Holy Spirit	1	2	3	4	5
The Bible	1	2	3	4	5
The Church	1	2	3	4	5
Holy Communion/The Eucharist	1	2	3	4	5
Human behaviour: Love of God and neighbour as oneself	1	2	3	4	5

14. **In each** of the following ways have you personally, in the last year, **developed or grown in your ability to...?**

For each topic below please circle the number which applies to your response:

- 1 - Definitely developed or strengthened a lot
- 2 - Developed or strengthened to some extent
- 3 - Little or no change
- 4 - No change
- 5 - Not applicable

Share Christian faith with others	1	2	3	4	5
Apply faith to daily life in the family	1	2	3	4	5
Relate the faith to work and social issues	1	2	3	4	5
Serve God in the life of the Church	1	2	3	4	5
Show respect for God and your neighbour	1	2	3	4	5
Pray	1	2	3	4	5
Help the needy	1	2	3	4	5
Be a leader in the Church community.	1	2	3	4	5

15. Over the last year do you believe that your own **knowledge of and information about** the Christian faith has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded “No growth” go to Question 17)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

16. This growth in knowledge is evident or shown or apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply.)

This growth is:

- mainly through parish groups
- mainly through private study and individual learning projects
- mainly through conversation with others
- mainly through talking and sharing a ministry activity with others
- mainly through networking on the internet
- mainly through the guidance of parish leaders (clergy and lay)
- mainly through sermons
- mainly through reflecting on the example of others
- mainly through hearing and reading about Jesus’ example in the Bible
- Other (Please state).....

17. Over the last year do you believe your own **understanding** of the Christian faith has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded “No growth” go to Question 19)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

18. This growth in understanding is evident or shown or is apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply.)

This growth is:

- mainly through parish groups
- mainly through private study and individual learning projects
- mainly through conversation with others
- mainly through talking and sharing a ministry activity with others
- mainly through networking on the internet
- mainly through the guidance of parish leaders (clergy and lay)
- mainly through sermons
- mainly through reflecting on the example of others
- mainly through hearing and reading about Jesus’ example in the Bible
- Other (Please state).....

19. Over the past year do you believe that your own **ability to apply the Christian faith in practical ways** has been enhanced or grown?

- No growth (If you responded “No growth” go to Question 21)
- Little growth
- Some growth
- Much growth
- Very much growth

20. This growth in application is evident or shown or is apparent mainly through-
(Please tick the one, two or three responses that most apply.)

This growth is:

- mainly through parish groups
- mainly through private study and personal learning projects
- mainly through conversation with others
- mainly through talking and sharing a ministry activity with others
- mainly through networking on the internet
- mainly through the guidance of parish leaders (clergy and lay)
- mainly through reflecting on the example of others
- mainly through hearing and reading about Jesus’ example in the Bible
- mainly through sermons
- Other (Please state).....

21. Rate **ALL** the following aspects in the life of your parish now in terms of their contribution to the growth of your **knowledge, understanding and your ability or skill in applying and practising** the Christian faith.

For each topic below, please circle the number which applies to your response:

- 1 – Very unhelpful or useless
- 2 – Unhelpful
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Helpful
- 5 – Very helpful

Private study preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Conversation with others	1	2	3	4	5
Shared ministry activity	1	2	3	4	5
Parish groups	1	2	3	4	5
Sermons	1	2	3	4	5
Theological reflection	1	2	3	4	5
Bible reading	1	2	3	4	5
Worship	1	2	3	4	5
Helping those in need	1	2	3	4	5
A Parish project	1	2	3	4	5

22. Can you recall and remember an activity when you feel that you have learnt something new in your faith experience? This may be that you have acquired some new knowledge or understanding or practice of the Christian faith through your participation in an activity of the life of your parish.

Yes / No

(If you responded “No” go to **Part C**)

23. If Yes, please would you name the activity when you felt that you learnt something new about the Christian faith, then briefly outline the activity and new learning.

The activity

was:.....
.....
.....

What I personally learnt was:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix Three: Correspondence and Letters of Introduction



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15 April 2013

Rev John Littleton
20 Douglas Street
Magill SA 5072

Dear John

Your application for approval of your ACD Doctor of Ministry research project proposal has been considered by the ACD Human Research Ethics Committee.

I am pleased to advise that the Committee has agreed to approve the application. Some of the Committee members provided comments and suggestions for improvement of the research project. The Committee asks that you and your supervisor consider these and take them into account as far as possible in your research.

Best wishes for your research project.

Yours sincerely

Rev Dr Steve Taylor
Chair, ACD Human Research Ethics Committee

Copy: Rev Dr M Trainor

From: Margaret Messner <bishopsoffice@adelaide.anglican.com.au>
Subject: **Letter from Archbishop Driver to Parish Clergy**
Date: 28 March 2013 2:40:54 PM ACDT
▶ 1 Attachment, 199 KB

Please find attached a letter from Archbishop Driver advising you of a research project to be conducted by the Rev'd John Littleton in association with the Adelaide College of Divinity.

With kind regards

Margie Messner
Executive Assistant to Archbishop of Adelaide
The Most Rev'd Dr Jeffrey Driver
P: 08 8305 9353 | F 08 8305 9166 | E bishopsoffice@adelaide.anglican.com.au

Anglican Diocesan Office
18 King William Road, North Adelaide SA 5006
www.adelaide.anglican.com.au

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Anglican Diocese
of Adelaide

Anglican Church of Australia
Archbishop of Adelaide

27 March 2013

Dear Colleagues in Ministry

I am writing to advise you of a research project being conducted by the Reverend John Littleton in association with the Adelaide College of Divinity.

The research project is on "the parish as a learning community" and will seek to identify ways in which parishes within the Diocese seek to engage in Christian learning.

The primary instrument will be a survey to be filled in by parish clergy and wardens. Information will remain anonymous.

I understand that John will be in touch with you about this project sometime over the coming weeks.

With every blessing

Archbishop Jeffrey
Anglican Diocese of Adelaide



14 December 2012

REF: KS/jp/070/Littleton

Rev'd John Littleton
20 Douglas Street
MAGILL SA 5072

Dear John,

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 December 2012 and for our conversation the other day.

I note your research project and your current studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity, in particular the use of the 2010-2011 Diocesan Year Book as part of your work. I also acknowledge that you have met with the Archbishop regarding your work and I can confirm that the use of the data contained within the Year Book is acceptable to us and that you have permission to use the information contained therein.

With good wishes as you undertake your research,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Stephens'.

Keith Stephens
REGISTRAR



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10 May, 2013

Dear Parish Clergy and Members of Parish Council

I am senior lecturer in the Biblical Studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity and in the Department of Theology at Flinders University.

This letter is to introduce The Reverend John Littleton who is a Doctor of Ministry student in the Adelaide College of Divinity. He will verify his identity with his student card, which bears his photograph.

He is undertaking research which will contribute to his doctoral thesis and, eventually, other publications. His research focus is the Parish as a Learning-community and its importance for Christian learning. The research will identify ways in which members of the parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide engage in Christian learning. John will do this through a survey for stages one and two of the research, and then focus groups.

He would be most grateful if you would volunteer to spare the time to assist in this project, by completing a survey, which will assist in the gathering of reliable data on the practice of Christian learning across the Diocese. No more than 30 minutes should be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identified in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Of course, please feel free not to participate or to decline to answer particular questions in the survey.

Arrangements for the storage of data obtained from this research will be kept in a secure place until the research project is completed and destruction of the data will be by the year 2019. If you would like information about the research in which you participated contact John to request access to the research. Please note that data will not be used for any other purpose without further consent. This research project has been approved by the ACD Human Research Ethics Committee.

I would be grateful if you could sign and return the research consent form at the bottom of John's letter that accompanies this letter.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries concerning John's project either at the address given or by phone on 08 84168460 or e-mail (michael.trainor@flinders.edu.au).

Thank you for your support of this important research project.

Yours sincerely,

(Rev Dr) Michael Trainor



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To Parish Clergy and Wardens

Dear Clergy and Wardens,

I am researching the parish as a learning-community and its importance for Christian learning. The research will identify ways in which members of the parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide engage in Christian learning. Archbishop Driver has sent a letter advising you of this research project.

As many may know I have been a priest in this Diocese since 1983, ministering in the area of Christian formation and Christian education in parishes 1983-1992 and as Rector of St Saviour's, Glen Osmond 1992 -2006. I am now retired and a Doctor of Ministry student at the Adelaide College of Divinity.

This research will be used for the purposes of my degree in ministry studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity. The research project supervisor is The Reverend Dr. Michael Trainor, senior lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity and in the Department of Theology at Flinders University.

The research will involve gathering reliable data on the practice of Christian learning across the Diocese. The data will be assembled into a report which will be available to the parishes. The report will not mention any person's name, or the name of any parish, nor will statements be made attributable to any identifiable persons. Anonymity is assured for all participants.

It is important to obtain data from across our parishes in the Diocese. Therefore, your participation in completing this survey about Parish Christian Learning is appreciated. The survey is about Christian learning in your Parish and should take about 20-30 minutes to complete.

Please return the research consent form below, within two months, with the completed survey. Parish Council approval for participation in this research project is needed.

The Reverend John Littleton
20 Douglas Street,
Magill, SA 5072.
jjlittleton@bigpond.com
08 84315457

.....
CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITY

The Parish Council gives consent for the Parish's participation in the survey on Christian learning being conducted by The Reverend John Littleton a researcher/research student in the Adelaide College of Divinity Inc., subject to the conditions outlined in the above introductory letter.

SIGNATURE:

Chair of Parish Council.....Date.....2013



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September 2013.

Dear Clergy and Wardens,

Thank you for completing the first survey concerning Parish Christian Learning, and for returning the research consent form from the Parish Council.

The time has come to conduct the research project stage two survey on **growth and enhancement in Christian learning**. The Rev'd. Dr Michael Trainor mentioned this second survey in his earlier introductory letter about the research. He wrote about "a survey for stages one and two of the research, and then focus groups."

Archbishop Driver has advised you about the research project. This research will be used for the purposes of my degree in ministry studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity. The research project supervisor is The Reverend Dr. Michael Trainor, Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity and in the Department of Theology at Flinders University.

The research involves gathering reliable data on the practice of Christian learning across the Diocese. The data will be assembled into a report, which will be available to parishes. The report will not mention any person's name, or the name of any parish, nor will statements be made attributable to any identifiable persons. Anonymity is assured for all participants.

It is important to obtain data from across our parishes in the Diocese. Therefore, your participation in completing this second survey about Christian Learning in your Parish would be appreciated. The survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete.

This second survey is to be completed by five people from the parish. Please would you, within the next month, select and invite these five people to complete the survey: one clergy person, one warden, one ministry leader, and two parishioners. If possible, ensure that one of the five is under 40 years of age.

When you have the names of the five people who will complete the second survey, please give each person a copy of the survey. **Five copies of "Survey on Parish Learning: Survey Two" are enclosed.** This survey is to be completed separately by each of the five individuals, then returned to me by each participant in the stamped addressed envelope provided; to be returned as soon as possible, but by October 25, 2013, please.

Thank you for helping in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

The Reverend John Littleton
20 Douglas Street,
Magill, SA 5072.
jjlittleton@bigpond.com 08 84315457



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September 2013

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for participating in this research project survey on growth and enhancement in Christian Learning. This letter is enclosed within a copy of the "Survey on Parish Learning: Survey Two."

Archbishop Driver has advised the Parish about the research project. The Clergy, Wardens and Parish Council know that the Parish is participating in the project.

The research will be used for the purposes of my degree in ministry studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity. The research project supervisor is The Reverend Dr. Michael Trainor, Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Adelaide College of Divinity and in the Department of Theology at Flinders University.

The research involves gathering reliable data on the practice of Christian learning across the Diocese. The data will be assembled into a report, which will be available to parishes. The report will not mention any person's name, nor the name of any parish, nor will statements be made attributable to any identifiable persons. Anonymity is assured for all participants.

Your participation in completing this second survey would be appreciated. The survey should take about 20-30 minutes, and is to be completed by you as an individual.

Complete the survey, then return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided; to be returned as soon as possible please, but by October 25, 2013.

Thank you for helping in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

The Reverend John Littleton
20 Douglas Street,
Magill, SA 5072.
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Dear Parish Clergy and Members of Parish Council,

I am senior lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Australian Catholic University and adjunct lecturer at the Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University.

This letter is to introduce The Reverend John Littleton who is a Doctor of Ministry student in the Adelaide College of Divinity. He will verify his identity with his student card, which also bears his photograph.

He is undertaking research which will contribute to his doctoral thesis and, eventually, other publications. His research focus is on the Parish as Learning-community and its importance for Parish Learning. The research identifies ways in which members of the parishes within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide engage in Christian learning. John is conducting this research through two surveys and then focus groups.

He would be most grateful if you would volunteer to spare the time to assist in the project by participating in a focus group, which will help in the gathering of reliable data on Parish Learning. No more than one hour should be required for the focus group to meet.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since he intends to make a recording of the focus group, John will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the group, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and to make the recording available to other researchers on the same conditions. It may be necessary to make a recording available to secretarial assistants for transcription, in which case you may be assured that such persons will be advised of the requirement that your name and identity not be revealed and that confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

Arrangements for the storage of data from the research will be kept in locked storage in a secure place until the research project is completed and destruction of the data will be by the year 2019. If you would like information about the research in which you participated contact John to request access to the research. Please note that data will not be used for any other purpose without further consent. This research project has been approved by the ACD Human Research Ethics Committee.

I would be grateful if you could sign and return the research focus group consent form at the bottom of John's letter that accompanies this letter.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries concerning John's project either at the address given or by email (michael.trainor@acu.edu.au).

Thank you for your support of this important research project.



Michael Trainor

Yours sincerely,
(Rev Dr) Michael Trainor



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CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP

I

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the letter of introduction from The Reverend Dr. Michael Trainor about the research project on the Parish as a Learning- Community being undertaken by The Reverend John Littleton.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to my information and participation being recorded.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
6. I agree to the recording being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, on condition that my identity is not revealed.
7. I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's signature.....**Date**.....

NB. *Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8, as appropriate.*

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....



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Dear Clergy and Wardens,

Thank you for participating in the second research survey on Parish Learning. Please thank those who completed the survey.

As previously stated, I have been researching the parish as a Learning-community and its importance for Christian learning. The research has involved gathering dependable data on parish learning from across the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. The data will be assembled into a report which will be available to your parish at the conclusion of the research project towards the end of 2015.

This letter is an acknowledgement of the involvement of your Parish in this research; an involvement very much appreciated.

Thank you for helping in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

The Reverend John Littleton
20 Douglas Street,
Magill, SA 5072.
jjlittleton@bigpond.com
08 84315457

Appendix Four: Moderator's Guide for Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE for one hour 2014 John Littleton

FOCUS TOPIC: Learners Learning – What and how Christian Learning happens in this parish? (Six parishes selected across the spectrum: ID509, 125, 204, 319, 666, 566).

Research objectives: “The Learning-community Parish and Learning Enhancement”.
Logistics – letters, consent forms for each person, turn recording iPad and LiveScribe on.
Questions and activities for the 5 member + moderator focus group for one hour.

1. **INTRODUCTION:** Welcome, Introductions, write it out (Names for me)... ... and now focus on you as Learners Learning Christian faith in this Parish. What? How? Group conversation ... Define learning if need to ... Learning = change towards new knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviour. Teaching = intentional facilitation of learning by teacher.

2. **MAIN QUESTION** (stimulus)

When you think about your own learning in this parish, what is the first thing that comes into your mind? What is going really well for you?

(Listen ...)

When do you personally learn best and grow in your faith? What comes to mind? Please tell me about that time and place and process? Piece of evidence – a book or conversation or writing or sermon ... or ... an example to report ...

What is an example of new learning for the parish as a whole? First thing that comes to mind.

Please tell me about that example ... (What happens? What process ...? What new learning? Evidence of ...paperwork) What is going really well for you?

3. **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS** (enquire about their answers, the detail, expand answers)

Listen

Are there any problems/challenges the parish faces in helping members learn and grow in their Christian faith? What is not going so well?

What would be the biggest challenge for you personally as you learn and grow in your faith?

What did you learn and do to meet the challenge?

(How significant is that problem? What is the cause of that problem or challenge? How did it happen? What do you mean by ...?)

4. **PROBING QUESTIONS** (Salience: to clarify what they have offered, their salient points, prominent comments ... Short, simple, clear questions get long rich data answers! Dig below top of the mind answers ...) Listen, nod, be interested, active listening ...

Please tell me more ... give me an example ... help me understand ... or ...

Please describe a ‘faith learning episode’ you have mentioned, when you have learnt something new in your Christian faith, new knowledge or understanding or skill or ability to apply faith to life. What? How it happened?

5. **PROMPTING QUESTIONS/SUGGESTIONS** (if necessary, an aid to assist recall by triggering memory; something that I'm interested in but not yet mentioned voluntarily)

You, the group, mentioned ... what about ...?

What really gets you learning and growing in the practice of your faith?

What process(es)/activity(ies) in the parish get you growing in your faith?

What gets the parish growing in its Christian faith? What do you like best about faith growth?

(Other options: questions, picture set, images, similes, metaphors, role play, what are the benefits of growing in the faith? Visuals, select best one, then next best one re parish learning.)

6. **CONCLUDE:** Next steps. Take people back, surveys ... consent forms, transcribe, analysis, outcomes and report end 2015. Thank you. (Turn iPad and LiveScribe recordings off) **23/4/14**

Appendix Five: Tables A3, A4, A8, A9 and A10

Table A3: Parish rankings from Survey One N=29	
Score	Rank
109	1
106	2
105	3
104	4
101	5.5
101	5.5
100	7
99	8
98	10
98	10
98	10
96	13
96	13
96	13
95	15.5
95	15.5
94	17
93	20
93	20
93	20
93	20
93	20
92	23
91	24
88	25.5
88	25.5
86	27
81	28
76	29

Table A4: Parish rankings for Survey Two N=29	
Score	Rank
66	1
59.6	2
58.5	3
58.1	4
57.1	5.5
57.1	5.5
57	7
56.2	8
55.9	9
55.8	10
55.3	11.5
55.3	11.5
54.6	13
53.9	14
53.6	15
52.3	16
51.7	17
51.1	18
50.2	19
49.5	20
48.4	21
47.9	22
47.8	23
47.6	24
46.5	25
46.3	26
45.6	27
44.5	28
40.7	29

Table A8: Parish Survey One results – Learning process scores N=29				
Parish	Holism	Collaborative	Theological Reflection	TOTAL
P	40	43	26	109
P	37	38	26	101
P	36	42	27	105
P	35	39	25	99
P	35	38	27	100
P	34	41	29	104
P	34	36	25	95
P	34	37	24	95
P	33	42	26	101
P	33	40	25	98
P	33	39	26	98
P	33	41	24	98
P	32	38	26	96
P	32	46	28	106
P	31	34	28	93
P	30	39	27	96
P	31	39	26	96
P	30	36	27	93
P	30	38	25	93
P	30	34	24	88
P	30	37	25	92
P	29	39	25	93
P	29	41	21	91
P	29	40	25	94
P	28	40	25	93
P	27	31	23	81
P	26	41	21	88
P	22	36	28	86
P	20	35	21	76

Table A9: Focus group parishes: Learning outcomes							
Growth and enhancement of faith learning. Questions from Survey Two.							
Responses scored: very much growth scored 5 points, much growth 4, some growth 3, little growth 2, no growth 1							
	Parish questions 2,4 & 6			Individuals' Questions 15, 17 & 19			
	Knowledge	Understanding	Practice	Knowledge	Understanding	Practice	Total
Parish	19	20	20	20	22	20	121
Parish	17	16	20	16	17	18	104
Parish	15	14	14	17	16	14	90
Parish	15	15	14	17	16	16	93
Parish	13	13	12	14	15	12	79
Parish	12	12	13	14	13	15	79

Table A10: Parish learning outcomes N=29							
	Parish Questions 2, 4 & 6			Individuals' Questions 15, 17 & 19			
	Knowledge	Understanding	Practice	Knowledge	Understanding	Practice	Total
Parish	19	20	20	20	22	20	121
Parish	18	20	20	18	20	18	114
Parish	17	16	20	16	17	18	104
Parish	16	16	16	18	18	18	102
Parish	17	17	18	16	16	16	100
Parish	16	15	15	19	18	15	98
Parish	16	16	16	17	17	15	97
Parish	15	15	17	17	17	15	96
Parish	16	16	15	16	16	17	96
Parish	14	15	17	16	17	17	96
Parish	15	13	16	18	18	16	96
Parish	13	15	16	17	16	16	93
Parish	17	15	16	15	15	15	93
Parish	15	15	14	17	16	16	93
Parish	13	13	13	18	18	17	92
Parish	15	14	14	17	16	14	90
Parish	12	11	14	17	18	17	89
Parish	15	16	14	16	16	11	88
Parish	13	12	13	15	15	15	83
Parish	13	13	11	16	16	13	82
Parish	14	15	14	13	13	12	81
Parish	12	12	13	14	13	15	79
Parish	13	13	12	14	15	12	79
Parish	11	11	13	16	16	12	79
Parish	10	11	11	16	16	15	79
Parish	15	15	8	15	13	10	76
Parish	12	12	12	10	14	14	74
Parish	11	11	8	12	12	13	67
Parish	10	10	10	11	10	8	59

Questions from Survey Two. Responses scored: very much growth scored 5 points, much growth 4, some growth 3, little growth 2, no growth 1.

The first parish listed scored 121 out of a possible 150 (six times 25 = 150) Parish at the bottom of the listing scored 59 out of a possible 150.

Parishes and individuals could do more to reach their potential in relation to growth in faith learning.

The questions about the parish and for the individual are in the copy of Survey Two, in the Appendices.

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