

## Narrative Change within Two Religious Organizations and Its Meaning to Members: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

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This study was conducted among members of religious organizations to explore the personal meanings derived from change in their organization's narrative. A subquestion was to inquire if narrative change results from the leaders replacing the organization's founding story(s) of lore. The central question and its subquestion were supported by two precepts: a) narrative enables members to find their place, contributes to their sense of self-knowing, and as a canonical form is formative of the organization's culture (Allan, Fairtlough & Heinzen, 2002; Boje, 1991, 2005; Brockmeier & Harre, 2001; Owen, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988) and b) leaders who seek to change an organization through narrative are in reality providing an alternate interpretative pattern (Fleming, 2001). They may do so in the belief that what is in place has rendered the organization's product no longer acceptable by the society it purports to serve (Doolin, 2003).

As it pertains to the religious organization, little empirical evidence or research exists on either the central question of member's meanings of narrative change or the subquestion of leaders ability to change a founding story of lore. While not referring specifically to the religious organization, Dunford and Jones (2000) indicated that a founding story can be replaced with another and in so doing change the identity of the organization. Likewise, leaders of non-religious organizations are warned of the consequence to members of such change: that the leader never conducts it alone but in the lives of members (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Calhoun, 1994; Ford, 1999; McAdams, 1996; Nelson, 2001).

Research in general seems susceptible to the researcher's inferences. Phenomenological research with its emphasis upon meaning and researcher as participant (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Shank, 2006), may, by its nature, be more conducive to it. For this reason I made diligent attempts to bracket my suppositions (Merriam, 2002) so that what emerged from the data is real and not contrived (Moustakas, 1994). In this effort I discovered the essences of: community, reality, relationship, acceptance, correctness, continuity, and care. For van Manen (1990), an essence "is a universal which... governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon" (p. 10) and is, after Plato, "the essential nature of a thing" (p. 177). These essences then are directional for the participant (Boeree, 2000), intuitively formative (Scott, 2003), and provide the structure upon which meaning is erected.

In addition to locating essences, van Manen (1990) calls for the phenomenological researcher in his or her quest for meaning to determine themes. Themes are the "structures of experience" (p. 79) that enable the "capturing" of an essence or "form" of a phenomenon (p. 87). In the discussions that follow seven themes were clearly and profoundly apparent. They are: Return to community, journey to reality, relationship, new identity, sense of duty, order, and disagreement concerning care. I found congruence between the essences and themes that I assigned to the participants in the following ways: community/return to community, reality/journey to discover reality, relationship/relationship, acceptance/new identity, correctness/sense of duty, continuity/order, and care/disagreement concerning care. These have been noted in the discussion of each participant.

### The Research Question and the Subquestion

Within research the expression "research question" may be shared by both qualitative and quantitative studies. Its use in this study is in the phenomenological tradition of qualitative research espoused by van Manen (1990), Moustakas (1994), and others (Glesne, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Shank, 2006) who held the question of what is being researched in qualitative studies is just that - a research question. Where qualitative research diverges from other forms is that its questions are directed to the discovery of meaning and the pursuit of deeper understanding (Glesne, 2006; Shank, 2006).

### *Research Question*

What meaning(s) do leaders and members derive from the experience of narrative change within their organizations?

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## *Subquestion*

Are leaders in the religious organization able to change the organizational narrative by leading people to change the organization's structuring stories of lore?

## *Expectations*

This hermeneutic phenomenology explored meaning in the lives of members and leaders while exploring the role leaders play in the production of such meaning. A central research question and its subquestion guided the study: the meanings to members of change in their organizational narrative and if leaders are able to change a founding story of lore.

Each research question was supported by a position I had expected to find. That supporting the research question, "What meaning(s) do leaders and members derive from the experience of narrative change within their organizations?" was that members and leaders hold their values transactionally and transcendentally. Although the terms are borrowed from Burns, (1978) and Wren, (1995), the concept is reinforced in the work of Hopewell (1987). Values held transactionally tend to be those needed to transact a person's living in a given situation or course of life. Values held transcendentally tend to be thought of as right or correct, non-negotiable, and resistant to change. The net effect could be change at the transactional level is thought of as change to routine while that at a transcendent level involves the instinctual essences of which culture is formed (Donald, 1991). At the transcendent level resistance to change is greater both individually and organizationally (Churchman, 2006; Currie & Brown, 2003). In effect, changing a practice (transactional) without first accounting for its purpose (transcendent) could be resisted. For change initiatives to be successful the meanings to an individual of their lived experience (van Manen, 1990) must be in accord with and provide support for their values (Bruhn, 2004). Leaders will also be careful to provide the tools for members to discuss the meanings of the proposed changes to what is held transcendentally (Quinn, 2004).

Hopewell (1987) notes the following in his study of Trinity Church. When attempting to establish a course on racial diversity in this Atlanta, Georgia congregation, congregants were eager to participate. However, as the day for class approached the dropouts increased until on the day of the class none of the members of Trinity Church who had signed on were present. In signing on for the class members only engaged transactionally, that is, the meaning of the event would agree with their value of supporting diversity and require only a change to routine: they would have to alter their schedule to be present. However, to actually participate meant to engage their transcendent value of inclusion: their acceptance by the church would be in doubt. The meaning of being publicly ostracized, not racial prejudice, kept them from class attendance. Participant's lived experience could be interpreted then at different levels of meaning. I found support for the expectation in the data.

The expectation supporting the subquestion, "Are leaders in the religious organization able to change the organizational narrative by leading people to change the organization's structuring stories of lore?" was that religious organizations have structuring stories of lore and their change is possible if not commonplace. Structuring stories of lore (Winslade & Monk, 2001; Young & Saver, 2001) are distinguished from the stories of everyday in that they repeat the values held by a culture generally (Fairhurst, 2007) and organizations specifically (Johnson, 2006). Organizationally, they are the "antenarrative" (Boje, 2001, p. 4), "folklore" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 24) and "sequentially occurring vocalities" (Currie & Brown, 2003, p. 564) that concretize as the reflection of a given people at a given time. In effect, a story of lore is one that precedes all other stories about the organization and to which they refer (Mishler, 2006; Schein, 2004). Stuber's (2000) research into a Roman Catholic religious community like that of Brown, Humphries, and Gurney (2005) in a non-religious organization attests to this.

Stuber (2000) discovered the sisters in a Catholic order lived by the themes and values of a founding narrative. Its presence was pervasive and the women changed their behavior to conform while committing to convey its values and norms to subsequent acolytes. Brown, Humphries, and Gurney (2005) discovered the presence of an underlying narrative in a non-religious organization. Like the Catholic order of Stuber's research, it too was defining of the employee's behavior and the permissions they allowed themselves.

Clearly, religious and non-religious organizations have structuring narratives. Dunford and Jones (2000) in their study

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of a non-religious organization demonstrated that structuring narrative(s) (structuring stories of lore) are changeable. In the face of the organization's extinction, management was replaced companywide and employees told that new themes would be the rule of the day. These were reinforced by an attitude of zero compassion for employees and emplacement of policies that assured the organization's survival. New stories of lore were introduced and employees encouraged to align work expressions along their axis. I found in this study support for the expectation of a structuring story of lore. Support for the notion that such a story is changeable was lacking.

## Interpretive Framework

This research used as interpretive framework that of mimesis (imitation) developed for literature by Ricoeur (1984) and applied to organizational communication by Boje (2001). Grounding his use of mimetic expression in Aristotle's Poetics, Ricoeur developed an interpretive schema wherein imitation figures prominently and bears upon the human conception of meaning, itself the heart of the hermeneutic phenomenological enterprise (Merriam, 2002). Aristotle viewed mimesis as the "referential relation to the real" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 32) and "mediation as fundamental expressions of our human experience within the world - as means of learning about nature that, through the perceptual experience, allow us to get closer to the real" (Puetz, 2002). As opposed to crude copy, mimesis represented for Ricoeur (1984) the acts of "creative imitation [and that] by means of the plot of lived temporal experience" (p. 31). This was referred to as a three-fold imitation known as mimesis1-3 (p. 53) and contains the narrative phases of pre-understanding, plotting, and application (Heikkinen, Huttunen, & Kakkori, 2000).

In mimesis1 are the practical experiences of cultural pre-understandings, symbols, and expected norms. In mimesis2 are the mediations or emplotment that configure our pre-understandings from mere succession of event or act to an acceptance of discordance within the overall concordance of our normalcy (Ricoeur, 1984). In this sense, emplotment is "not just a chronology of events or the schematic of a causal chain [but is] also the intertextual arrangement of events" (Boje, 2001, p. 121). That is, a poetic interpretation of what is known. Ricoeur (1984) said,

The very meaning of the configuring operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between the two operations... which constitute the two sides of mimesis. By saying this, I propose to show that mimesis2 draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is to conduct us from the one side of the text to the other, transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration. (p. 53)

Mimesis3 is the individual's joining of experience with the story that represents it (Scharlemann, 1985; Villela-Petit, 2007). Here, the plot constituted from what is known is integrated with the collected stories that describe it and produce a narrative in which the author figures (Heikkinen, Huttunen, & Kakkori, 2000). Heikkinen, et al, said,

The story is told and adopted, and so it becomes part of the identity. The author begins to apply this new understanding to his or her own life. There is, of course, no "simple" application of a story or self-understanding, because the story becomes altered over the course of the process of application.

Boje (2001) in his discussion of narrative within organizational communication expanded upon Ricoeur's (1984) work. He used Ricoeur's mimetic activity as the "pre-understanding" (mimesis1) that leads to a meditative role through plot formation (mimesis2) that then becomes an intelligible whole (mimesis3) and connects the parts in a "hermeneutic circle" (Boje, 2001, p. 112). Citing Schultz, Boje likens the first in Ricoeur's mimetic scheme to the "stock of knowledge at hand" (Boje, 2001, p. 119) saying that through it organization members interpret their experiences as well as anticipate their futures in an act of subject constructing story. Ricoeur's second, mimesis2, is where members aware of accepted norms, that is, what they have constructed, "draw parallels between various patterns of experience" (p. 120) and arrive at alternate interpretations from accepted norms. In mimesis3, the "emergent story constructs the subject as entangled in untold or pre-narrated stories" (p. 116) themselves the creation of a continually emerging mimesis along the arc of the hermeneutic circle eventually reifying as normative in the stock of stories (mimesis1).

Using this framework of continually evolving meaning from interpretation, participants' stories were examined for their stock of knowledge, that is, the prefiguring narratives that all in the group understood as normative. Then examined for interpretations differing from the stock of knowledge, then examined for the presence of an emergent or new story that

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had become normative or was in the process of becoming normative.

## Discussion

This section reports the significant findings of the study. The meanings to participants in relation to the research question and its subquestion are discussed and a comparison of the findings with the literature base is provided. My conclusions of the data are presented by research site.

Not all meanings to the participants of this study, whether expressed by the participants or explicated by me, are neatly explained by the expectations I have used in its structuring. Possibly, this is due to the derivation of meaning for humans as a complex that defies packaging. While it is possible to argue that all meaning goes to the perception of one's self or to one's values, doing so appears too narrow. Meaning, it seems, is a product of experience (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Shank, 2006; Van Manen, 1990), one weighed against the whole of a life (Gergen, 1994; Mishler, 2006; Ville & Khlal, 2006) and whose divination, even when pronounced by its subject, is liable to individual internal vagaries (Czarniawska, 1997; Kirby, 1991) and these possibly unknowable to either subject or researcher (Linde, 1993). This serves to make what is said stated for the moment as language gives reference to event (Kirby, 1991) and constructs meaning that are mediated (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001). In explicating participant meaning then, I have looked for linkage to my expectations but not required it for inclusion.

## Participants

In an effort to further anonymity and confidentiality, letters not corresponding to the individual's initials or are in other ways identifiable to the person refer to the participants. By necessity the exception to this form of anonymity is made in the case of the ministers.

## The Family Room Church

The Family Room church was originally founded in the 1980's as Evangel Christian Fellowship-Sacramento. A Christian minister, his family, and a small group of supporters relocated from San Jose, a city 120 miles distant, to Sacramento with the distinct mission of establishing a new church in the city. The method of its establishment was at the discretion of this minister, its manner was not: it was to replicate the values and priorities of the sending congregation. The relationship was defined in familial terms with the sending congregation referred to as the "mother" church and the new church plant as the "daughter" church.

The hierarchy and submission implied in these terms was enforced, albeit distantly, through the expectations of the sending leadership that the new church would showcase the unique features of the sending congregation. In this way the DNA of the one would be seen to have passed to the other. The minister and those with him had no issue with these restrictions, as the propriety of showing deference to those who exercised spiritual oversight over them was well understood. The minister said,

I really believed in submission to authority... in a very strong way. And so I knew that to identify with that church in that way would please him (the sending minister of Evangel Christian Fellowship-San Jose ECF-SJ) and so once I decided to do that, to actually become a part, [to] submit to that person... I named the church after the church in San Jose... That's how it got the name Evangel Christian Fellowship.

Saying, "In all honesty, I really didn't want to come to Sacramento [but] I felt like that's what he wanted us to do," the minister made it clear that the location for the new church was not one of his choosing. In fact, he and his wife were hoping to do mission work in Australia. However, he did make peace with the idea, even accepting it as a divine directive saying, "I had that real desire to say, 'Okay, God if this is what you've called me to then you've got a reason.'" Eventually he accepted that he was, "sent to the city as well." Acceptance of his location however, did not translate into acceptance of the sending authority's values to the exclusion of his own. Rather, he possessed a unique value regarding church life that gave the new church shape, even creating a distinction between it and the mother church. He referred to this as "the spirit of Evangel" and described it as,

It was almost like on a journey, a journey for reality. Ready to change at any time, [to] abandon the norm to pursue the goal of really knowing Christ, of practically loving one another and from that being able to impact a city and reach a

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world... Most of us... were tired of church as usual and so it was a journey to something beyond, a journey to see the real words of the Bible come alive.

“The spirit of Evangel” was a statement of passion, one that conveyed the minister’s value that members obtain the “spiritual life.” It meant being “wholly committed to God and to the work that He was calling us to do.” When asked what that would look like, the minister replied, “To me it was a person who would forsake anything else to gain a... love that would drive them beyond their own desires, their own ambitions.” The abstractness of the concept was bridged by the member’s faith that such a “quest” was indeed part of being in this church and while not demanded for association it was a hope for result.

In time the congregation expanded its membership into the multiple hundreds, eventually purchasing a large campus on a main thoroughfare for the growing ministry. Yet appreciation for conformity to the trappings of being a successful church were increasingly at odds with their growing approbation of the spiritual life. This point is seen in the minister’s statement that,

The big story was that what we had seen as a wine skin [the popularly accepted method of being a church] really wasn’t even as important as a wine skin other than in a negative sense. It was something that we began to see as a complete hindrance, that there really was no entity other than the people... So that was probably the bigger revelation that would cause us to deconstruct.

Although the minister made no mention of disaffected members, subsequent member interviews revealed not all felt the need to deconstruct the church. If Evangel Christian Fellowship-Sacramento was marked by passion among those questing for the spiritual life, its becoming the Family Room church produced bewilderment in others content with a less driven Christianity.

## The Minister: Community/Return to Community

### *Interview*

The minister came to his embrace of the Christian faith through parents who shunned the traditional concept of church as building, leaders and those led, and programs. Their preferred method of Christian expression was to relocate to an isolated area and in communal fashion attempt to influence change among the locals by the genuineness of their lives. As an adult he drifted from the practices of this early faith but reestablished them through a para-church organization that, like his parents, had little or no value of buildings and hierarchy. His passion and diligence distinguished him and upon the founder’s retirement he was asked to assume leadership of the organization. He spoke of his migration to the traditional pattern of church life found in Evangel Christian Fellowship-San Jose as,

This was a change... because I didn’t grow up in that organization; I’d come from another one... I was kind of adopted into that and so... so I decided “okay if I’m going to do this I’m going to do this all the way.”

However conforming he sought to be, his background in the communal form of Christian expression came forward upon his reading about a church “somewhere back east.” He said,

The little booklet... described a community of believers that actually operated as a family without programs, without the structure, routine, but their whole emphasis was family and the love around them. And so they were really a community... We realized that we... failed to be a community the way that [they] had understood.

Thus began for him a reexamination of what it could mean to live the spiritual life, one that took into account, “what we expected to come about in a practical sense through that kind of pursuit, just didn’t.” He admitted that those in his charge were “committed... moral, [and] mature Christians” but missing the “ideal of what a committed Christian should be.” In all likelihood his exposure to communal faith contributed in some form to his restatement of the spiritual life. The new understanding would be that life “wholly committed to God and to the work that He was calling us to do” was not possible in the present context of church.

It was understood that the minister’s appreciation of the “spiritual life” meant being “wholly committed to God and to the work that He was calling us to do” and that this would be actuated as a person forsook everything else to obtain a “love

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that would drive them beyond their own desires, their own ambitions.” The result would be a love for God and neighbor that “overcame everything else” and was seen in obedience to God. Its culmination would lead to a state of Christian awareness where both church and unchurched acknowledge God. In this way the awareness of God or “revival” would come to the people as well as the geographical region.

Most would consider that Evangel Christian Fellowship-Sacramento fared well, that its steady growth, multiple programs and support groups, full generational involvement and appeal, and a strong commitment to mission by belief and practice were indicative of the sought after revival. To the minister they were not. Instead these things underscored that the church was shifting from a life giving entity to a life draining institution. He said,

I think we realized for the first time the organization itself, the institution, is probably a better name... almost had a substance of its own that you tend to serve, even though you created it to serve you. But somehow you have to fit into that organization, that entity, the description of that thing.

It occurred to him that instead of furthering Christian community the “quest” had been interpreted to spawn its opposite. The fault was not in the desire to know God but in the hindrance the structure represented. That is, “the way we practiced church... wasn’t really scriptural.” In this view, “people had gotten into performance and duty rather than being free to be.” This line of thought concluded in the church being seen as a container “that was obstructive” to the flow of God’s “new wine” and “the first thing [that] needed to change.”

The minister’s appreciation of what needed to change and his leadership of that were not arbitrary. Although he had come to a place of clarity and his movement among the members, though not in haste, was with passion, when telling members about his new understanding he said, “I wanted to kind of let the people think together and so we would discuss those things.” The collegiality of his approach encouraged other members to express their own thoughts about the direction the quest had taken. This led to an acknowledgment that although, “we always considered ourselves family, we just weren’t happy with being as much family as we should have been.” The solution required understanding that “we had two things going. The identity, which was Evangel Christian Fellowship, it [sic] was a structure, at a place, in a city... and then you had the family of the people who related that way with one another.”

In the minister’s overall story he obtained clarity at two points in the life of the church: The first at its inception and the second at its deconstruction. The value that compelled his leadership in the beginning is the same that directed it in the end: that people obtain the spiritual life and in that find a commitment to God that transcends all. It took the form of leading members to “deconstruct” the very thing he and they had built. Operations that had become typical ceased and were replaced with times of extended prayer and the facility renamed as if to underscore the intent that people and not the “institution” were the priority.

We decided we shouldn’t name the people. That was just one of the things that came to our attention as far as “doing church. So we decided that we would just name the sanctuary... What we did is we threw out to the congregation... we said, you know, we need a name for this building that’s not descriptive of who we are, or it doesn’t, you know... doesn’t insinuate some exclusivity as a people, but only names the building.

Changing the name to The Family Room church seemed the continuation of a fissure begun long before; one whose natural end, considering the dynamics in play, led to an agreement among members not to restart their programs and eventually to sell the church’s real property. For the minister, seeing “people go beyond what I had normally perceived in the churches I had seen; to come to a place of really walking in intimacy with God [and] wanting revival at any cost” culminated in an impassable distance between mother church and daughter church, sending minister and sent, and even among members. As minister and some members forsook conformity to any standard but their own, others were offended by such resolution, its implicit rejection and implied condemnation. Ironically or intentionally he and those that he led, though the source of discomfort, found satisfaction.

The change from uh, being seen as an organization or institution to being seen as a family, a group of people, meant to me, first of all, that we’re being unsaddled. I felt personally unsaddled from a wrong identification that was weighing me down. Um, along with uncertainty and not knowing what would happen, I felt like, from

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what I heard from the people, they were feeling a new freedom. It meant freedom from something that was constrictive. Um, it just felt, it meant a hindrance to, a hindrance to the quest being removed. It meant that intangible “something is wrong” feeling that I had for years and years and years, finally being laid to rest... So there’s a sense of relief. Like “wow” something I was unable to see for some reason or saw shadows of, was just wrong or whatever, suddenly, it’s gone.

In a broad sense his actions meant, “It was the removal of all obligation to perform in any way and to simply learn to receive God’s love.” In a narrow but deeply personal sense he interiorized this understanding in ways that changed him and brought new meaning to well known beliefs.

I believe the same way as I did back then [but] God’s grace has expanded hugely to me. His finished work is so much more finished than I thought. That’s why I say it’s going to sound ridiculous, because I spoke all the ultimates before and thought I believed them and then the ultimates become more ultimate... We always hear about God’s part and our part and I don’t know what my part is anymore. I think I always used to know what my part is and now it’s just believing Him... Everything else happens... He’s done everything; he’s just asking us, “hold my hand and walk.” Striving, trying to build something, trying to get to heaven, trying to get people to change, it’s finished.

The effect of these changes and their meaning went beyond the practices of his sacerdotal functions to the core of his self-perception.

I think before the change my identity was with, uh... partly the position... and my sense of worth and identification came to what my place was, what my position was and what I was called to do. I think my identity now is not position or calling... but the identity is more changed to being a son of the Father... I see myself as a pilgrim and my calling to help, you know, other pilgrims on the path... I definitely don’t identify as, you know, the pastor or the leader of Evangel or the group of people that were, you know, called Evangel Christian Fellowship or the Family Room. I don’t really see myself as their leader... I don’t see myself as being leader of anything or anyone but just as a son that the Father can allow to help others along the path, along the trail.

## *Discussion*

The minister of The Family Room church, though credited with instigating and then leading change to the organization, was himself profoundly changed by the meanings of his lived experience in this period. In his case, self-perception and personal identity shifted leading to a new understanding of his role in life personally and professionally. Now, he sees himself not as a leader but only someone who helps “others along the path.”

He was certain on the point that his theology had not appreciably changed and equally as certain that it was not to theology that he appealed for change but to the practices of his faith. It did not matter that these same practices were accepted, even valued, in the main of Christianity nor was that fact sufficient enough to assuage his growing determination that they be restated. A disconnect arose between his faith practices and the relationship with God which they were to exemplify, a discovery that brought understanding that continuing one would end the other. Clearly, practices and relationship had to be aligned.

Guiding his decision were his familial and early ministry experiences (Fredrickson, 2006) in the practice of Christianity and a stated passion to obtain a love for God beyond personal desires and ambitions. These became the touchstone by which he and members made sense (Brown, 2000) of their dissatisfaction with the status quo and the success it represented. The coalescing, then, of memory, event, and language into meaning (Pals, 2006) allowed for a restatement of what had been understood and the return to another time; a time of the communal Christianity of his family and early faith practices. Here action produced meaning and faith was meaningful. It was not a flight of fancy or mere romanticism that motivated him but a pursuit of meaning and the meaningful that would take him into the not understood - at least, as it is reckoned by those who judge such things. Yet the same meaning that brought motivation, that appreciated the difficulty of his course-but without fatal apprehension, would enable perseverance that he be genuine once again.

Meaning for the minister appears to have derived from at least three sources: a) the sensemaking apparatus of his

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familial and early ministry narratives, b) the convergence of memory, event, and language and c) the adjustment in self-perception to restate both practice and role. This comports with the literature regarding narrative, its change, and the making of meaning (Barclay, 1994; Bruner, 1986,1990; Fivush, 1994; Holmes, 2006; Schechtman, 1996). When the minister matched his current practices against those of his earlier experience (Fredrickson, 2006) he attempted to locate sense in what he was involved. This required more than returning to the practices of memory, regardless how coddling, but the adjudication that the beliefs underlying the familial practices of his early community life were indeed worthy to direct his modern life. In doing so he found in them an agreement with and confirmation of his passion to know God “at any cost.” This introspective examination was called “sensemaking” by Brown (2000) and thought of as “interpretation and meaning production whereby individuals and groups reflect on and interpret phenomena and produce intersubjective accounts” (p. 45). The intersubjectivity was displayed in the minister’s approach to his people. He was not forceful or dogmatic but appealing, asking them to join a dialogue about something he wasn’t fully sure of in order to “discuss those things.” In his actions he allowed his congregation the space to make sense of theirs and his inner feelings about themselves and their progress as a church.

From these sessions came the clarity to delve further into possibility and the self- permission to explore what the future may look like if interpreted through the lens of his past. Miller (1994) called this the recalibration of life narrative “relative to the narrator’s vision of the present and the future” (p. 174). For Pals (2006) it could be considered an “act of constructing causal connections” and in the process “creating coherence within the life story” (p. 177). As a meaning producing experience it necessarily required engagement of memory, present event, and language, the simultaneity of which either demanded or allowed the recasting of his self-image. Martin (1986) held that, “Character and plot, life self [sic] and world, derive their present significance from their position on a path that gathers together all the past and projects it toward a future (p. 121).” The gathering in the case of the minister resulted in his inability to continue his present person or course. Fortified with new purpose and that derived from a newly stated but familiar meaning of Christian service and his role in it, his future efforts could not resemble those that had brought him here. He changed.

## Participant T: Reality/Journey to Discovery Reality

### *Interview*

Participant T is female and a person who appears to hold convictions deeply. She entered Evangel Christian Fellowship-Sacramento (ECF-S) in the early days of its formation and stayed to grow with the church through its development. Change was not new in her experience of ECF-S but something the church always dealt with “in one form or another.” In those days the congregation’s core membership was small but surrounded by a high transient membership as people would come then go on to something else. While acknowledging that the church had its beginnings as a “plant from a congregation in San Jose,” she likewise admitted to the consistent appeal of the leadership for members to “be more involved relationally-to know each other better.”

Her experience of ECF-S was that the “people who came hungered for something real, for truth.” This was seen as an experience that did not merely placate fervency but led to a changed life, something that was part and parcel of what it meant to “die to self.” Once achieved, the death of self would result in an inner transformation “so that life can occur in others.” Indicating that this goal of self-sacrificing service on behalf of the greater good was the ideal, she admitted, “There was such an emphasis on death to self that I was fearful of what God would require of me to die to self.” Fears notwithstanding, hers was a pursuit of the real: a deeply felt and experience originating faith, not a form of piety that in its end was deceptive and less real.

Eventually she considered her pursuit of the real to be hindered by the formal structure of the church saying it was, “A hindrance to realizing the desire for relations, truth, and dying to self.” This opinion was reinforced as she viewed the tendency to supplant relating to God with relating to the church structure and could be reflected in her statement that, “People could go to [church] and feel better about themselves but they [sic] weren’t real necessarily in their lives.” Later she would come to see that “although the desire was there... it took the deconstruction of everything before things started to happen.” Deconstruction, or the recasting of what it meant to be a church, became personalized upon her realization that, “church had become a habit and not because I loved God.” It was, in this view, a limit within itself.

Upon hearing of the proposed changes, the fear that she would be called upon to do what she could not or would not gave way to the fear that her faith practices had been wrongly conducted. When considering the changes she

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encountered yet another fear, one stated as, “How do I do this?” Even though she had long felt a change had to be made and its coming a sought after development, it would be change in a different key. Instead of finding the way forward among the principles of organization, this would be a “process of getting to know the Holy Spirit and letting him do what He wanted to do.” In keeping with the commitment to the dominance of the Spirit, she eventually concluded her life could only be fulfilled in service to God. In that understanding she found release for her fear and an embrace of wonder at the experience.

The participant’s first fear ceased to be a consideration in light of the understanding that her allegiance was to God. Whether she “could or would” no longer mattered for God’s greater claim of ownership overwrote temporal concern. Additionally it confirmed her own sense of being able to hear spiritual truth: before the senior leader announced any changes she had known a change had to be made. Ostensibly this knowledge was the beginning of her apprehending the real she had sought and became an invitation to journey “from a place of works to a place of walking in the Spirit.” In this context, “works” refers to the biblical dichotomy between the attributions of actions to a personal benefit verses receiving benefit without personal actions.

To continue her participation in the formal structure of the church would be “works” or the behaviors that attributed to one’s welfare. In a pursuit of personal diminishment to the greater glory of God, “works” that advances one’s self makes that self out of place. To refrain from such works then is to restore proper alignment between God and individual. It was an abandonment of self, at least toward the things (in this case, the organized structure of traditional church life) that were of comfort. She expressed it as, “I wanted to see displays of God’s power, for God to have free reign to show himself.” Saying, “God breaks our hearts so that he can heal them. He doesn’t heal the hard-hearted but the broken hearted,” she discovered that the embrace of “the real” was not comfortless but led to solace in God’s response toward her loss of the familiar.

The process was multi-faceted but always unidirectional. Though the senior leader implemented the new understanding of church he did so at the behest of God, for “he had been hearing from the Lord for a long time about this.” The direction was confirmed in her understanding of the divine as, “the Lord directed to lay down all ministries” and she was, “impressed by God to lay down ministry and pray.” In contrast to the works that formal church life now represented this new endeavor would advance because, “God would birth what ministry there would be.” In a practical sense it meant that she and others who were thought of as laity would now be given equal voice with clergy. In this new understanding she would be given assignments and told to teach them and titles for people were seen as unbiblical. Another departure from the clergy/laity understanding of traditional church culture was the new realization that she would receive instruction in spiritual matters directly from God. “It meant asking God to show the meaning of scripture; it meant the Holy Spirit teaching me himself” and an end to a lack of spiritual depth “because someone is hearing from God for you.” Gone were what she perceived as “the crutches” of organized worship and in its place people were encouraged to engage God directly through psalms.

The changes, in her words, “removed the hindrances” and produced in her a “conversion moment.” In Christian church life, the expression “conversion moment” can refer to one’s embrace of God and the sense of being loved by God. In evangelical parlance it is to be born again. Already versed in the perceptions of hearing from God, the experience of change was significant enough that she would cast all that was before in conversion terms. In Christian conversion one is penitent for misdeeds and confesses need of help. The preceding style of living is forsaken and a clean break made with the past while new understanding sought for old issues. If one should take up again what has been renounced they become anathema and are to be considered separated from the Savior.

The outcomes of these actions and their meanings not only redefined her perception of church life and what being a member of a church could mean but also redefined what it could mean to live Christianly. Although described as a diligent and sincere pursuit of what is real, the significance of classifying her prior church experience in terms of something to be forsaken is likely indicative that the meaning of these precepts shifted. Now she would experience, “more peace, greater joy, better understanding of trials.” She would have the certain knowledge that, “God has done a work in my heart” and greater “freedom to talk about God” and a “greater influence on people now than before.” But ultimately she would see herself differently. “The changes in our church were a change in the practices of my faith. Once I felt that I could change my practices then I was able to see myself in a different way.” Ironically, what church

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is to provide all in its interpretation of Christian faith was for her not discovered until the church no longer functioned. In a statement that underscores her use of the conversion metaphor and that likely redounds with the meaning of her experience she said, "I had an encounter with God's love."

## *Discussion*

Meaning to participant T dealt with the reinforcement of values rooted in what she termed as a pursuit of "the real." Church attendance and membership were efforts in this pursuit but of themselves not fulfilling. The change process heightened and gave name to this feeling while confirming that church life, as she knew and practiced it, could never be the real after which she sought. Instead, it hindered her reception of the real. She had been with the church since its early days and her loyalty vested her in its success. During our visit, her conversation was not about the multiple missions the church supported, the hundreds of people whose lives were enhanced, if not completely redirected as a result of its effort, nor the needed support its counseling services had given. Instead, the force of her experience was centered in the occurrences since the deconstruction of the church.

It is not to say that her experiences as a member in the organization had no meaning, only that it was ultimately dichotomous. As dichotomy she was presented with feelings of how faith should be lived and the demands of her organizational life about the way faith must be lived. So while meaning did not inhere solely in change, its essential nature did. As a result, the change processes and not her continued participation in the organization enabled her to experience "the real." She said,

There were so many hindrances to God's purposes: A service that people could go to and feel better about themselves but they weren't real necessarily in their lives. No depth to the walk because someone is hearing from God for you... [and] worship that is just singing words.

The removal of hindrances was the change in the organization from church with established practices to church without practices. The tenets of the Christian faith were still upheld and if anything embraced more closely while the popular practices of that faith as they regard being a church were rejected. Without the weight of organizational expectation, she was free to pursue "the desire for relations, truth, and dying to self" in ways before not possible. Now she would "walk in the Spirit" instead of merely supporting an organization. She had no disdain for the organization but the clear sense that, for her, the way she had "been doing church is itself a limit" to obtaining the full experience of Christianity.

The participant's call to "die to self" is of itself not curious within Christianity. It stems from the writings of the apostle Paul found in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In it he stated that a condition of knowing God was that his "flesh" be brought to death (NIV, 1985: Romans 7:5, 8:1-13, 14:7; 1 Corinthians 1:29; Galatians 3:3). Flesh, in this context, does not refer to the actual corpus but the pattern of living one had prior to their conversion (Anderson, 2000). The participant's accepting the call to "die to self" meant that she was prepared to relinquish the pattern of living she engaged before her conversion. Notwithstanding the fact that in Christian parlance one ever struggles with his or her flesh (Galatians 5:16), the fact of her conversion years previous and a faithful adherence to Christianity since, militates that the reference was to herself. This view seems assured when she speaks of her perception of the change in her organization as a "conversion moment."

What is curious is her transfer of a theological understanding onto an organizational reality. It was not her "flesh" that had to die but the pattern of organizational activity. As the Christian Bible posits the flesh being a pre-conversion way of life she, in a manner of appropriation (Prickett, 1996), applied that understanding to the practices of her spiritual organization and reached the only conclusion possible: it must die. Like the death of one's flesh, in the death of her organization she found "freedom," and that "God had done a great work in my heart" so although it was the organization that died, the effects were the attainment of spiritual yet personal goals.

It appears that essential to the participant's discovery of the real was the necessity of a theological imperative toward the actions that would bring it to existence. In this vein, it was not enough that her church close but that it close because it had contravened scripture. When she and others could justifiably see the church as "a hindrance" to the pursuit of God this burden had been met and cleared the way to accept a new reality. This use of appropriation as device likely says more about the strength of her faith and the seriousness she accords it than it does motive. The participant is

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constrained by her faith making all that occurs of import necessarily cast in its language.

Appropriation is the act of allowing one thing to stand in for another and universal to human narrating (Prickett, 1996). It is used as “hermeneutic principle to explain the present” (p. 39) and necessary in the search of meaning for past events. The greater truth and not facts are the stuff of appropriation. In what he termed as “historical legitimation,” Prickett affirmed this by noting the narratives of history are better as moral examples than historical fact. Such is appropriation that meaning can be attributed to events far removed in time and those events brought current to the recipient of the meaning. That the assigned interpretation is not historically relevant to the original occurrence is of little or no import, only that it relates to that event in meaning. Auerbach (1959) referred to this as a “figural interpretation” saying that history is ordered by it (p. 28).

The Family Room church sans ECF-S was an asset to its community and to those in which its influence was placed. Hundreds of people were helped in its counseling programs, poverty and illiteracy were challenged through its missions work, and ordinary people lived strengthened in their faith and comforted by the realization that a community in which they were accepted and valued was close by. There is no question of the participant’s motives yet in this explication of meaning the central role that biblical appropriation played cannot be ignored. It was, for the participant, legitimate, i.e., the Christian Bible is replete with appropriated meaning and it was natural, that is, the overarching tendency of humans is to narrate with appropriation (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001; Kermode, 1983; Prickett, 1996). Therefore, it was proper.

Participant N: Relationship/Relationship

## *Interview*

Participant N is male. To use his phrase, he and his family were “adopted” into ECF-S having neither been present in its formation or in the years immediately afterward. He described their entry by osmosis as, “We used to go down and visit and listen to the sermons and just participate in some of their functions.” This casual participation lasted a period of 2-3 years before leading to committed membership: it continued because of the value he received.

“In some senses it almost became somewhat of a habit, but it was like a good habit. You know. Sometimes you think, “I just don’t want to go down” but then the draw of seeing people that you know and just being able to share what’s going on in your life is quite a draw, you know, to make you want to go down and see people. So that was, uh, you know, something that kept us going down there. And I just came to love being with the people.”

His coming to ECF-S was from a background of religious involvement, some of which is considered outside of Christian orthodoxy. His experiences with various church doctrines had brought the conclusion that “some of it just didn’t make sense” and is likely the reason why at his joining ECF-S he was satisfied with, “becoming just [a] Christian, not really of any sect or anything like that.” His non-sectarian approach to religion and fatigue with doctrines that didn’t make sense were not sufficient however, to sustain objections to the peculiar behavior he encountered in ECF-S.

I was taken aback the first time I went there. I was, like, looking around. They had somebody dancing and everyone’s getting up and walking, you know they’re dancing around the inside of the church. I was just like, “Wow,” you know. And I became accustomed to it, but the first time I’ll tell you I was going, “Hey, this is kinda odd.”

He appears to have found a Christianity that resonated with him and that enabled his looking beyond what, for some, may be questionable behavior. “When you got there and you got to share with people, there was an uplifting. There was a reward in that that I think that kinda motivates you to continue to do that.” Because he didn’t object to the behavior but “began to embrace it and took a lot of freedom into it,” did not mean he had left his original conclusions. He categorized ECF-S as “typical of a lot of churches” saying it, “Has been a story that I played before except with a few different adventures.” What differed for him were the people, a fact he pointed out by saying, “I wouldn’t define Evangel other than the people that were there being different than somewhere else, but the church as per organization wasn’t much different than a lot of other ones.”

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Relationship among people was a hallmark of ECF-S and what drew him to stay. That and not the requirement of canon formed an ethos of inclusion and provided the sense that the faith journey ended in the warmth of family rather than just proper belief. He said, "I have a hard time with thinking this is the only way. Because every church you go to this is the only way." In this climate, church as entity, repository of doctrine, keeper of the creeds and other matters, receded into the background. Family was central.

I think it was concern for other people. I think it was interest in what was going on in their lives. I think it was compassion towards people's circumstances. I think there was charity and just overall concern for one another... So I think that was something that was kind of extraordinary about that church. I shouldn't even say that church. I'd say that group of people... We fell into a group of extraordinary people.

These extraordinary people came to represent for him "relational Christianity." It meant for him the form of Christian expression that privileges developing and sustaining relationship with God and other people over the maintenance of any program or structure. Relational Christianity is held in contrast to church as "a habit" or "ritual" observance and is in this view thought of as the better way for Christians to practice their faith. Its acquisition however, usually requires forsaking the "status quo" of accepted church life, a step that not all will take because "it's so easy to stay in what you're doing." Matters of acceptance aside, relating to God and people instead of traditional church structure was meaningful.

I have to do it for myself. You know, I have to talk to God. I can't wait for someone to tell me what God's telling me... I was depending on the pastor or somebody to tell me what's going on... I felt like if I got my so many minutes in on Sunday that I was good for the rest of the week... But when you get away from that, I mean, it's kind of a sink or swim. You don't have somebody else out there telling you "okay, you're supposed to be doing this... I mean you pretty much are your own soldier and you have to go to God and say, "What is it you want me to do?" It kind of makes or breaks [it] really. Do you have a relationship with God or not?

Finding a new way of interpreting his faith, even in view of his casual acceptance of churches and their doctrinal stance, did not lead to his complete dismissal of church as a way of life. Instead, he discovered that he was not "anti-church" because, "there's a lot of things that certain parts of that structure have to offer." In an almost nostalgic aside he admitted that, "It hasn't been that easy. I mean we miss being together more when we were going on Sundays and so forth." He was clear however, that he would not return. "So I don't think... you'd ever see us back to an organized church again. We might go visit one, or something, but we would never become where we are regulars or anything like that."

The changes within ECF-S that led to its becoming The Family Room Church engaged him differently than had prior religious experiences. Although he was busy with the normal affairs of involved church membership and in leading a recovery group, these things did not provide a sense of cause to the same degree as did his apprehending the tenants of relational Christianity. Speaking perhaps from his past religious experiences and the sense of cause they may have engendered as the truth of a proposition is thought revealed directly by God, he accepted the new way as God's revealed truth, itself a position not easily negated.

Here was a group of people known as Evangel that through not only being presented with a different way of looking at a walk with Christ but coming to an understanding within ourselves of what that was... you know, we all go to God to find out if that's the truth... we went on a different path.

The differences in the path led to the church becoming unlike any in his experience: it was no longer typical. Instead, with the Family Room "there was more of a 'part of' instead of participation. I mean you always felt like you were part of the family or the church." "We were family." The changes that led to this different path entailed hurt feelings, misunderstanding, and the rift or relations. That these were opposite outcomes of relational Christianity is not passed over lightly but passed over all the same. It was taken as a matter of fact that some could not walk this path. Those that didn't were cast as "They went back. They did not continue on with the story that we're on."

The meaning of his transition from casual, almost skeptical, attendee to committed adventurer is multi-faceted. In his view, ECF-S became The Family Room as the result of its fully embracing the meaning of relational Christianity.

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Relational Christianity was new only as practice not as concept; it had always been the stated intent of the church. He said, "The major theme even when it was Evangel is relational Christianity, the main thing being our relationship, our personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Achieving relational Christianity was for him the end of a life-long pursuit, one that had "always been my goal." It was what, "I've always desired in my life; a relationship with Jesus Christ."

In finding relationship with Christ he did so in a fashion similar to his own deconstruction of religion. It was his contention that all churches were "typical," and "offered the same type of programs." After having been to "many churches" and in them seeing "things," his response to this "status-quo" was to "become just Christian, not really of any sect or anything like that." But as ECF-S in moves that increasingly resembled his overall take on religion deconstructed into The Family Room then on to its ultimate dissolution, he found himself drawn irretractably to it. His doing so meant "freedom" to talk with God and less a feeling of being "programmed." It meant that the exercise of his faith could be "part of who I am" instead of "compelled by people." He described this saying,

I feel a lot better in my relationship with God. I feel that it's a lot more natural. It's not something that I have to contrive and uh, muster up, or whatever. I've been to meetings where they're just trying to muster up something, you know, trying to get something out of somebody... trying to get something happening. I never felt like it was natural. It was a form of manipulation. Now when God's doing His thing God's doing His thing in me.

The contrast between church and relationship had come full circle. He obtained what professional churchmen and church people had advertised but not delivered and that outside their approved path.

When you get relational Christianity, it's not about the doctrines of the different churches; it's all about relationship with Him. God isn't all about all the laws and doctrine they put out there. He's about having a love relationship with you. I think once that's established the other stuff just falls in place. It's not like this textbook that we have to know inside and out.

Indeed his journey to relationship with God and people was in ways not approved by the religious establishment, particularly the idea of closing a church, laying-off its staff, and selling its property. But for him it was a, "different perspective," a perspective that may stand justified by his skepticism of social norms and proven by the perception, "that I didn't lose family, I increased my family."

## *Discussion*

While not jaded toward faith generally nor organized religion specifically, participant N had arrived at an operational plane that took neither too seriously. It is not to say that he was not determined in his faith or lacking in commitment to its practice only that he understood both to be interpreted through fallible means. He had been reared in one faith system then, as an adult, migrated to another. Later, he returned to some semblance of his earlier faith and practices so that by the time he joined the Family Room church he was content that his approach to faith was "non-sectarian." Non-sectarian did not mean without faith or without conviction only without dogmatism. In other words, he believed but always with the awareness that what he believed may not be the entire story. Therefore what resulted was to be taken with a dose of skepticism if one were to find the underlying truth. And truth was important.

When the Family Room church began to change he was energized by it. He enjoys change realizing that the uncertainty it brings in one area of living is compensated by the freshness derived in another. He saw in the changes the emphasizing of relationship, itself the principle reason for his membership in the Family Room, and the potential for a church of even greater compassion, charity, and concern for one another. So that while familiar patterns of church life were changing, even disappearing, these things were compensated by the freshness of an increased sense of family and the relationship it engendered. Change represented the opportunity to continue doing what he had since young adulthood: to interpret his faith. In this iteration, however, organized religion would not play a part as his life, his narratives, and his faith, from segments that only informed his living, distilled to sustain it.

As the Family Room church left familiar practices and traditions it resembled his own out of cadence step with organized religion. Here, the adventurer in a renewed exploration of religion could turn curiosity into a cause unbounded by

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skepticism and touch faith pure and unadulterated. Now the relationship he had sought with God and people would be qualified not by structure or rule but only by sincerity guided in love. He had the gathering sense that this was what being a Christian was supposed to be even while allowing for others to “find out if that’s the truth” for themselves. Skepticism now aside he had no other critique to offer. For those who could not follow in the deconstruction of the church and in their view, their faith as well, he offered only the argument of an experience: It was what, “I’ve always desired in my life; a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Significantly, meaning for participant N was to confirm the rightness of his transcendent values and that through the matrix of his life. Meaning in this case did not arrive as a moment external to him but evolved through the processes of reflection and interiorization of his own experiences in light of present circumstance. Borrowing from Bruner’s thought, I’ve termed the distillation of thought to meaning as a matrix to connote that meaning is not a self-emergent entity but develops from “the relation of words or expressions to other words or expressions... along with reference” to constitute “the sphere of meaning” (1986, p. 64). This baseline of the meaning making process is instructive in that it locates meaning within the connective references of one’s life. Although not solely agentive in the production of meaning, communication when referential has the ability to release the collective streams of our unconsciousness (Ong, 1982) that in turn enable us to know ourselves (Kirby, 1991).

The conscious or unconscious elements that likely were meaningful to the participant are a) his desire for relationship marked by a non-objectified personhood. That is, people must not be reduced to propositions no more than his person should be diminished through pious but hollow intonations, b) he was able to retain his skepticism yet be received into a position of trust by the church, c) the variety of religious contexts that comprised his background, d) and that he received the commitment of the church without requirement of a commensurate effort. As in no other place the occurrence in this church of these elements affirmed he was loved without demand and trusted by the people and leadership. Truth, always important in his world, was evidenced not by correctly repeated propositions regardless their weight but by one’s commitment to another, itself the evidence of integrity and proof of relationship.

Although he had not wholly embraced the priorities of the church, saying that the church organizationally “wasn’t much different than a lot of other ones,” the emotional content of acceptance was strong enough to retain his membership. Once the church shifted its priorities away from organized forms of religion to personal relationship the alignment, for him, was complete. The words and acts of leadership became keys that unlocked permissions to express beliefs held but not spoken. He said,

I think as he [the minister] shared and kinda shared the freedom of it and introduced it to people, I think it awakened in them feelings that they had but didn’t understand and were trying to um, figure out why they were feeling certain ways. Or they might have been ways that they felt that they never expressed. But I think when he began to open that door of conversation that people were, you know, they jumped right on because that was something they were already feeling from some experiences or whatever may have brought them to that point.

This form of “conversational interaction,” said Ochs and Capps (2001), “realizes the essential function of personal narrative-to air, probe, and otherwise attempt to reconstruct and make sense of actual and possible life experiences” (p. 7). The minister by giving voice to these experiences allowed the creation of a new experience, one that would take his church and this participant in new but already considered directions.

## Participant Q: Acceptance/New Identity

### *Interview*

Participant Q is male. He and his family were among those who moved to Sacramento from San Jose to help start ECF-S. The method of his selection as church planter (one who attempts to begin a new church) was not random but based upon a close relationship with the founding minister; the two had served together in an organization the minister had previously overseen. Upon the organization’s merger with Evangel Christian Fellowship-San Jose (ECF-SJ) Participant Q took membership in the congregation as well. His decision to move to Sacramento and assist the minister grew from this ongoing relationship that had become for him, “a real attachment.”

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In his role as church planter he saw himself initially in two venues: as one who had “left everything and moved over there” and as among an elite cadre of “trained [and] highly functional leaders” who could “run a ministry if they needed to.” In the latter their “capabilities and dispositions” were such that this group “were not just going to sit in a pew.” The effect was that he did not think of himself as “your typical, regular congregant” but as one with “a pioneering spirit” and on an “adventure.”

It was his stated intent in coming to Sacramento to not “do church as usual.” Doing church as usual would mean that,

You would immediately get going into programs [and] strategies. What we found out is that we were more interested in people and their lives. We focused ourselves on relationships with each other and we really spent time developing our relationships with each other.

Emphasis on building relationships had a two-fold function. First, it demonstrated the priority of people over programs. Second, it was hoped that people seeing the value of relationship would expand it to include those not in the congregation. “Then the relationships we had with other people would begin to bring them in to the church.” The strategy was proven a success as people in need of counseling services came. True to the founding mantra of relationships-as-priority this group of “trained and highly functional leaders” responded. In doing so they demonstrated that “when your focus is the person then in the relationships things start to be revealed [sic].” The truth of the statement however, was applicable not only to those who came but also to those present.

You had a focus on relationships and you had a spiritual component in there and then you had the catalyst that caused the things hidden in their lives to now come to the surface. Which then needed to be dealt with, needed to be resolved, needed to be addressed and so that began to happen. Well that began to happen with everyone. And then you had people that once they got set free, turned around and decided to become counselors.

Instead of a cause for concern, the interiority of the process was seen as the normal outgrowth of “spiritual renewal” when relationship is emphasized. What resulted was not. As the church grew its services expanded and led to the offer and his acceptance of a prominent role in leadership. Eventually the task of management was accompanied by the awareness that his focus had shifted: instead of a relation-centered approach to people he saw them now as objects in a program. Realizing he had become the thing he loathed, he left leadership.

His resignation was an effort to re-center himself as well as a statement. As a statement he hoped to communicate that the organization had departed from its beginning ethos; as a re-centering effort he came to see his need to be “set free.”

I was in charge of thirteen ministries trying to manage them. Uh, my own, um ... in my own marriage and family began to suffer the effects of my time away... I mean I have to take responsibility for that. I can't point the finger... Something just began to snap inside of me and I just began to get more frustrated which would then create, you know ... started ... you know... started resenting the whole environment.

He accepted his culpability for the shift saying, “I was just as much to blame in that as anybody because of the zealotry of wanting to see things improve or grow.” However, the admission did nothing to assuage his “sense of disappointment” at what the church had become nor to lessen the feeling that its program driven approach “had become like a strangle hold on me.” The irony inherent in this statement is revealed by what follows and likely underscores what he came to see as his need for freedom.

I was disappointed to see that at that level, here I was having reached this level that I had looked towards reaching and had spent quite a bit of time and investment to get there only to realize that it was strangling me. Quite the opposite of what I had expected.

Although he had reached a point from which he could not continue, the regret isn't in attitudes that allowed his shift away from relation but the fact of his goals being thwarted. It was then with a “great sense of relief” that he welcomed the proposed changes in ECF-S seeing in them “a whole new perspective of our relationship with God and it was going back to the original intent of why we started.” The idealist scoffing at the pragmatist appears to have been that the

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idealist was a pragmatist. Ultimately the competing ends made visible by the shift in value brought transformation of the organization concurrent with transformation of the self.

The self-adjustments he encountered seem to have produced something of a shadow reality that tracked the deconstruction of the church. Of the latter he said,

Well we were deconstructing the programs. We were deconstructing the leadership paradigms as far as the titles of leadership. We were deconstructing the order of the services. Um, we were even deconstructing the way we positioned the chairs... it was going back to the original intent of why we started because we were about a people that were relational.

And in regard to himself,

I found clarity took place in relationships and with people I've been with. It became clear in my relationships at home with my family. Clarity took place in the sense of significance because my significance had been in my abilities and achievements or sacrifices or investments, what I had obtained through my effort and my disciplines. That being gone, my significance was found in Him.

Key to each transformation was the sense of going back to an original intent and finding there a prime truth. For the church it was a return to relationships over programs, for him it was the difference between religion and relationship. Both led to a form of dissolution; only one to a form of reconstruction. While the church disbanded as members and leaders came to see that organizational structure, regardless the intent or size, would always overshadow relationships, he rebuilt an inner self secure in the knowledge that, "God loves me unconditionally."

I'm more aware of who I am, I'm more aware of my inabilities and yet I'm not upset about it. I get frustrated, I get upset, I have things that irritate me and so forth, okay? And I'm still working through a lot of things from the past in my life that have been there but I'm not nearly as disappointed with myself.

On a personal level the deconstruction of church was meaningful due to his belief that church life fostered the expectations fueling his disappointments. He described it as, "a structure embedded in your psyche" and creating expectations that were "derived from religious understanding." In practical terms it was a form of morality that prescribed behavior and caused the repression but not the admission of actions thought immoral. It meant coming to grips with, "the things that are down in our soul, that are deep and they're dark and they're ugly but they're real and they're there." His manner of confronting this truth was to abandon all forms of religious restraint, to open the door that religion had "sealed off" and live outside of all expectations of his beliefs. He said,

I stopped reading the Bible. I stopped praying and I stopped caring about God. I went through a period of about three months, I call it of darkness, and I turned out the lights, pulled down the shades and I said, "That's it, I'm done." "God I don't want you talking to me I don't want anything happening here because I don't trust any of it now. As far as I know all of this has been a sham, so any thoughts or impressions I may have, I won't trust it."

He told of "reconnecting" with God in a dramatic but simple sense: "You come to Him and He touches you." The meaning of his journey was to find love and not shame in both his secrets and failures so that in place of expectations of performance he could live to another standard. "If I have a good day or a bad day, I'm loved. If I'm forty minutes late to an appointment, I'm loved. And if things aren't going right, I'm loved." As ECF-S had found new identity in its deconstruction so too did he.

## *Discussion*

In the case of Participant Q, the appreciation of new meaning also led to a remade personal identity and self-perception, one in which the acceptance of himself was key. Although precipitated by crisis in his organization, meaning was accorded personally and became the determinant of a new reality regardless the organization's course. This was a departure from familiar practice but one compelled by new thought: instead of seeing himself in the organization,

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he found an alternate and more satisfying reality in his faith. Ultimately, it led him to restate his identity in a new rapprochement toward both organization and faith.

His personal bonds with the minister were deep and strong as was his respect for him. However, when the minister initiated the conversation that would lead to the changing of the organization, the participant felt abandoned. The minister reports the ensuing conversation between them where Participant Q is to have said,

I don't feel like I have a relationship with you anymore... My relationship with you has always been based on your position as senior pastor and my role in serving you... Somehow I found my purpose and identity in relating to you on that basis... Now, with all the rules changed, I no longer know who I am. Who I am has always been wrapped up in what I do and in my service to you as the senior pastor. Now that I'm no longer under you, or serving your vision, I have none of my own. In fact, I don't think I have a relationship with the Lord. With no one to perform for, I'm totally lost. I don't know how to relate to God or you anymore. (Fredrickson, 2006)

This appears supported by the participant's statements that, "The most significant thing is freedom. Freedom from that mean, old, [here he named himself]; freedom from myself" and his claims to have "stopped performing all the prescriptions that I knew." From within a complex of emotion and alternate reality, prompted, then guided by the tragedy of his organizational self, he came to a catharsis. Its initiation was not the realization of the organization changing but that in its new form the reinforcement and approbation that had accompanied his efforts no longer satisfied. He said,

The impact it had on me was a significant sense of disappointment... The time that brought me from leaving a career path to starting this church - and also it had come to my sense of loyalty and friendship to [the minister] - was to help him build this and to see that... it had become like a strangle hold on me.

In the deconstruction of the organization he unwittingly committed himself to a similar fate. What it revealed was a different matter. His self-view shifted when from a known self with the qualities one would expect of an associate pastor emerged a truer self that was "mean" and from which he needed to be free. The path to freedom was the path to chaos. Absent organizational title, the camaraderie of peer and colleague, and the good wishes of those who follow, he was alone with his faith and from this vantage sought redemption. It began in his rejection of all that had rejected him. He would no longer commit to well-established faith practices but in an echo of his own search for genuineness test that of the God supposedly behind them. He said,

I remember a couple of times... I'd go, "God, if that's you God, shut-up. I don't want to hear you. I don't even want to think I'm hearing you. I don't want any opportunity or chance to think that I'm hearing you. I don't want that." And I then went "Okay, there's been certain things I've had thoughts about or desires about. I'm just going to go do it. I'm gonna go sin."

As experiences gave way to time their value diminished until the singular "sense of His love" became what he treasured. Here, in the sacred space between Divine and divining, the drivenness of "expectations" ceased in the greater unifier of loving acceptance. The result was a sense of significance, whole, but wholly unrelated to any activity. He said,

Clarity took place in the sense of significance because my significance had been in my abilities and achievements or sacrifices or investments - what I had obtained through my effort and my disciplines. That being gone, my significance was found in Him.

The result of the experience has been lasting. As proof, the participant related present life situations and contrasted his current state of mind and approach to what would have been in an earlier time.

I've had my life completely destroyed since then, financially and everywhere, I've had it everywhere. I've been just decimated financially... if this had happened to me back then, you would've had to put me in a loony farm. I would've snapped, you know, went mental. You know, I mean that whole thing would've been a devastating thing. Do I appear devastated to you?

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He, in fact, did not appear “devastated” but seemed restful, at peace, and thoughtful. His statement that it was primarily about his identity can best measure the power of the experience to the participant. Prior to the change experience he viewed the locus of his identity within the organization; afterward he did not. Due to the rediscovery of his faith, he no longer determines his worth by conformance to a “mental discipline,” that is, the expectations of organizational activity. Instead, he accepts that he is accepted and that without expectation.

The participant’s experiences seem to agree with the observation that in establishing the undergirding story of an organization’s practices (Dunford & Jones, 2000), identity for members can be formed (Addleson, 2000; Hopkins, Hopkins, & Mallette, 2005; Humphries & Brown, 2002). When this occurs the member’s self-esteem can be linked to the organization’s identity (Humphries & Brown, 2002) and may make changing that identity felt not as another day at work but as a personal affront (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Quinn (2004) held that resistance could result and Churchman (2006) saw that members so threatened in their self-esteem could be defensive of preserving the status quo.

Interestingly, rather than resist change to his organization, Participant “Q’s” resistance was to what it had become. While it seems he clearly took identity from the organization, he was likewise an advocate of the change threatening that identity. In the movement from its founding story, ECF-S became an entity different than that he had helped build and with which he identified. So rather than be affronted by suggestions of change he was eager to embrace them. This calls into question the strength of the organization’s imaging of identity onto the participant either sub-consciously or consciously. In not all events is organizational identity the sole identity of members but can serve a complimentary role to that of their own (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Although the participant did say that in the shifting of roles, “I no longer know who I am,” he likewise retained enough of his self-image to appreciate that, “I’ve got to get out of this because I’m going to go nuclear if I don’t.”

This may be answered in part by McAdams’ (1996) thoughts that we construct our life-story using elements meaningful only within the culture that jointly authors it. In terms of his religious culture, Participant Q had arrived at his sense of eminence within a culture that prided itself on its lack of structure and program. From this position he believed himself one of a group of “very highly functional, well-trained Christian leaders” who “could all handle ministries all on their own and each of them could run a ministry if they needed to.” The basis of his knowledge then were the understandings, explanations, and events of which he was most familiar (Linde, 1993; Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995) possibly giving rise to a self existing only in the context of their telling (Mishler, 2006). The introduction within his organization of a new story, of an alternate basis of knowledge, for which he had little understanding and few explanations likely removed him from a pattern of life that he had been socialized to understand (Eakin, 1999) thereby denuding him the sense of where he fit, who he was, and what were his duties (McAdams, 1996).

## Saint Aldates Church

As a building, Saint Aldates Church dates from the 12th century; the presence of its Christian community however, is thought to be several decades, if not centuries, before. The congregation is Anglican in denomination with evangelical, even charismatic leanings (evangelical is taken to mean the tradition within Protestant Christianity that emphasizes biblical authority, individual conversion, and the belief that conversion results from faith in the Atonement while charismatic refers to the belief in divine inspiration as a normal occurrence). While these can be theological the congregation’s agreement with Christian orthodoxy cause their being stated more in terms of emphasis, which is neither doctrinaire nor divisive.

During the 19th century A.M.W. Christopher influenced the rise of evangelicism at Saint Aldates. Hylson-Smith (1988) noted that, “his influence in Oxford, especially in the world of students... was an amalgam of the consistent and sustained preaching of the distinctive Evangelical message” (p. 168). A steady emphasis upon evangelicism and student evangelism has been maintained in the congregation and had significant place in its understanding of mission. This is reflected in written documents as well as statements on the church’s current web site (Saint Aldates, 2008) regarding student evangelism and evangelical charismata: “We are aware of the extraordinary opportunity and responsibility represented by the presence of so many students in our city and tirelessly we will seek to win them to Christ,” and “The Late Service: Spirit-filled worship, which leads people into the presence of God [and] lifestyle-related biblical teaching.”

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Saint Aldates centuries of faithful witness to the Christian message and service to the people of Oxford are recorded in a publicly posted chart of its rectors. That the continuity of message and service could be a matter of gratitude and some pride may be heard in the comment that a 17th century rector was “a great man of the Gospel” and that there “was something going on here over the centuries.” Rectors in Saint Aldates are free to follow “a calling, a direction, a leading which he felt came from God [and] the congregation would accept that.” Still, he or she must reckon with the historical understanding of the congregation’s message and service as well as the legal apparatus within the Church of England. As one participant indicated, they “had the legal right to disagree with him.”

Change at the behest of a rector was not unusual, even referred to on one occasion as “the rector’s latest theme.” It is likely then that a rector’s deviation from procedure would generally be accepted whereas that from message or service could be seen as a departure from the congregation’s historical and modern understanding of its mission. Yet under the service of its last rector deviation beyond procedure did occur in Saint Aldates. While he firmly embraced the evangelical/charismatic understanding (message) his deconstruction of Saint Aldates ministries and programs (service) was a radical change from all in modern memory.

## The Rector: Correctness/Sense of Duty

### *Interview*

Upon his arrival at Saint Aldates, the rector was aware that he followed an acclaimed author and speaker and had come to a congregation with a successful ministry. Comprised of student and non-student Oxford residents, this vibrant and growing church focused its ministry effort upon student evangelism and home groups. Taking over such a “largish concern” left the rector with the sense that he was “caught up in something and it’s going very fast.” Not that he was unqualified: His thirty years of Cathedral service, work as missionary, and demand as a public speaker saw to that. Rather his was the sense of having adequate skill but in new territory. The new territory was not the familiar ground of administration, leadership, or strategy but the priority his congregation accorded the Holy Spirit in their life experience.

In orthodox Christianity the Holy Spirit is thought to have multiple functions: “to lead into God’s truth,” to establish “a living relationship between Christ and believer,” and to make God real in “personal and corporate worship and devotion” (McGrath, 2001, pp. 314-315). Migliore (1991) echoed these themes saying the Spirit is to make “Christ present to believers,” form a “new life in communion with God and others,” and to give a “new freedom for the service of God (p. 172). Michael Green (1975), the former rector of Saint Aldates, referred to the believer’s engagement with the Holy Spirit as launching “out into the deep of experience of God” and a “full surrender to the Lord who is Spirit” (p. 177). Simon Ponsonby, the current Pastor of Theology at Saint Aldates and staff pastor during the time of the rector of this research said,

Baptism in the Spirit is the regeneration of the believer by the Spirit, the incorporation of that individual into the Body of Christ the Church where he or she grows and serves through the impartation of gifts by the residing Spirit... The Spirit filled-life is the sustaining, strengthening, and outworking of that initial Baptism in the Spirit. (2007, p. 254)

Previous rectors and pastors had taught the congregation regarding the Holy Spirit, a fact made clear by the “emphasis on being filled with the Spirit” present at Saint Aldates. The rector understood this. His concern was that the member’s engagement with the Spirit “had reached a kind of plateau” that ended in a general “lack of expectancy... [about] what God might do.” He viewed the Spirit life broadly; that under its auspices were people, buildings, programs, message, and service. In this way he could see a “real work of the Spirit” in the congregation’s outreach to families and its balancing of the student evangelism that had “dominated the life of the church.” Another was in the remodel of functional but less than modern facilities that had “hindered the development of [the] spiritual life.” It too would be “part of the whole process that the work of the Spirit was developing.” The Spirit then was thought of not only as a necessary accompaniment for individuals but also the congregation at large and all that pertained to it.

Many, if not all, at Saint Aldates, as it was understood in the teaching of prior rectors, experienced the Spirit. Rather than diminish these previous understandings, it was the rector’s hope that people would build upon them and so gain a greater expectation of “what God might do.” He said,

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The church had reached a very good stage in its development but it somehow got stuck at that stage... They thought the work of the spirit integrated into the life of the church was healing and gifts of the spirit and so on, prayer ministry. But it had reached a kind of plateau about the time we came. And I was puzzled that within our church services on Sunday and also in some of the meetings at the home groups there was limited manifestation of the spirit and I felt a lack of expectancy and effected by what God might do. And so we tried all sorts of ways of breaking through that.

His efforts at “breaking through” produced a near division of the church as two congregations formed: “One saying “we’ve moved on further, we’re now expressing the works of the spirit” and the others saying “this is all rather wild and unsuitable and we’re much more stable and secure.” After admitting mistakes he asked “the congregation that was representing the church to recognize that this [other] congregation had brought something that hadn’t been there before.” What “hadn’t been there before” was that among others was now something of the same desire for the Spirit as he had. While dealing sensitively with the aftermath he maintained a determined pursuit that his people experience the Holy Spirit.

That experience would necessarily contain an awareness of the Spirit’s outworking in all that makes up the church; that it be obtained would lead to his eventual deconstruction of Saint Aldates ministries and programs. It took the form of his having the sense of a divine directive that came clearly and forcibly. After discussing his impressions with the leadership team of the church and being encouraged to “proclaim this from the pulpit the following Sunday,” he did.

And so I forget what I was preaching on. But in the course of that said, “I think this is the Lord speaking to us” and concluded that He is calling on everyone in this church to lay down their ministries and to lay down the ministries at my feet. Which was a phrase I didn’t really like and was the one that caused the disturbance.

He interpreted this as the Spirit that he had wanted his congregation to pursue now in pursuit of His congregation. However, rather than being concerned with a “lack of expectancy about what God might do,” the Spirit would lead an assault on individualism and the “lack of depth of spirituality” that “success could hide.”

I spelt out a little more of what I felt it was and what God was trying to bring us to, that we learned to submit to His authority that means a form of submission to human authority too. That was something that the church hadn’t been good at. We were individualistic in our culture and that we were to change... I saw the challenge to the individualism of the West as being a very fundamental thing for the church as a whole.

After its near division, his reintegration of the congregation demonstrated the pursuit of the Spirit life would not be at the expense of community but a communal over individual allegiance. Oddly, the call “to lay down the ministries at my feet” appeared its reverse and to portray the Spirit life as destructive of community. The irony was not lost as ministries and programs were stopped including home groups. Thought by the congregation as the source of communal life, they were viewed by the rector as its source of individualism. His subsequent teaching on the matter “touched a raw nerve and people got quite angry about it.”

We had a church that was made up of lots of little bodies... who would then come together in celebration in the big church. Now in theory that is a good idea, but what we had found was that it had, in fact, contributed to the disintegration of the congregation and was one of the reasons why the congregation didn’t feel comfortable with each other in the main services; they belonged to little groups. And to some extent those little groups had become autonomous.

In faith settings referring to the outworking of a thing can indicate awareness that ends are sometimes achieved through not readily apparent means. For the rector, the outworking of the Spirit in Saint Aldates followed this path. In the disintegration of the home groups a weekly meeting was conducted to encourage integration. Though vividly oxymoronic the move was thought necessary.

We had a great many people who came and attached themselves to the church without actually committing

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themselves to belonging to the congregation... We were a lot of independents, through ministries and groups of people, who weren't prepared to submit to the overall direction, strategy and purpose and fellowship of the church, but who liked to draw on the strength of the larger body for their own purposes.

As viewed by the rector the Spirit's work produced eventualities within Saint Aldates and himself. In the church unity was achieved through a new sense of integration with others, the effort toward student evangelism was restated, and the building remodeled so as to open "the church to the world and the world to the church." For him the importance of submission was highlighted, he obtained a greater ability to show emotion, and gained a renewed appreciation of collegial leadership. Though coming to Saint Aldates in question of what his influence could be he saw himself, through the Spirit's processes of change, filling a role that "released things for other people and in other people."

The desire to lead his congregation into the deeper experiences of the Spirit became the Spirit leading both the rector and the congregation to address personal weaknesses and error. A case in point is the meaning that submission came to represent, particularly, as he told the congregation that all "ministries are to be laid at my feet." For this communication to be effective the degree of submission required of each was mutual. Each had reason to not trust the message: the congregation in what it would give up and the rector in his reputation. The rector submitted first to his colleagues that this was indeed something that had to be said. He then submitted to his congregation trusting their goodness in the guardianship of his reputation. The congregation in turn submitted to the leadership that its best interests would be preserved then to the rector that his motivation was pure. In all their submission was to the Spirit who gave the message. In so doing they found ground that, while not free of conflict, was nonetheless seeded with trust.

Another is in the meaning of what I term as collegial leadership. For Burns (2003) it is the ability of the leader to be inclusive of other leaders for a common objective and referred to by him as collective leadership. For Tarr (1995) it is collaborative leadership and based on Greenleaf's servant leader as listening, task-oriented with strategic sense, eager to understand, and empathize. The rector was aware that he could not either due to time or talent address every situation within Saint Aldates. He was already a collegial leader; meaning that he took the counsel of those who served with him as well as saw leadership as a group effort. In this manner he served his parish. The new meaning of collegiality built upon these understandings but added one important difference: instead of diminishing himself in pseudo-collegiality his role would be "pivotal." He said, "It helped me to recognize most of the things that were effective were probably done by other people, not by me. And yet I do realize that I had to have a pivotal role." Some of the confounding that occurred during this time may be due to the movement of a man who, normally reticent, stepped forward in answer to what he perceived as the Spirit's call. However, it was not in arrogance for coupled with any forward movement was a new appreciation of emotion.

His was a "British family." By implication, display of emotions would be constrained, possibly even frowned upon. Likewise developing a life of the Spirit meant being constrained by the things he developed, namely, faithfulness and submission. He made this point clear saying, "It's absolutely right that if I've done something wrong I should be brought up sharp and made to face it." When it became apparent that he must lead a divided congregation to healing he did so profoundly touched saying, "I cried in the pulpit for the first time." Had well meaning efforts ended with less than hoped for consequence or had the curious reversal that was the Spirit's pursuit of him and Saint Aldates also turned aright meanings of faithfulness and submission? In this event would his faithfulness or his submission not be the cause of success or failure but that of the Spirit in faithfulness to accomplish His work in him? Here, rather than his being constrained lest he "be brought up sharp" it would be the Spirit who must perform. In keeping with his new understanding of role and his being agentive of release for others, the new meaning of emotion became freeing and a "major factor... for many people."

## *Discussion*

Prior to his coming to Saint Aldates, the rector questioned what his influence could be upon the congregation. It was not doubt in his ability, call, nor sincerity, only that the established nature of the church under continually progressive rectors conveyed the message that every initiative had been mastered; there would not be much room for improvement. He was clear, however, regarding the role he accorded the Holy Spirit in the private practice of his faith and likewise clear that the Spirit was to have a prominent role in the life of the Church. Upon arriving at Saint Aldates he was challenged by what he experienced within the congregation as "a lack of expectancy" toward the Spirit. It signaled that he and the

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congregation might not be in agreement regarding the Spirit.

Oddly, it was not the rector's emphasis upon the Spirit that confirmed any lack of agreement but the actions he took under its aegis. The church was transformed in the space of days as long-standing programs and ministries came to a halt. Eventually people felt disenfranchised and some left. Tensions arose among some while others experienced joy and fulfillment in the freedom that a lack of programs brought. The church developed a congregation within a congregation and the two became mildly pitted against the other: one for greater Spirit, the other content in the "old" status quo.

This was hardly the result the rector had hoped for and difficult to see as being productive to the overall health of the church. In contrast with previous rectors who were much loved, their tenures marked by increase in ministry and people, and who led the congregation into broader understandings of evangelicalism, he was given to contend with the fact that not all in the church thought well of him, some wished him gone, and his efforts at leading to a greater appreciation of the Spirit were the cause of unrest. Balancing any negativity, however, were the affirmations of staff with whom he had extended periods of daily prayer, the fact that new people were joining the church, and the sense that his course was correct. The correct course was the completion of Saint Aldates congregational life, itself a development of a fuller understanding of the Spirit.

Even while leading Saint Aldates to accept an expanded role for the Spirit within individuals and corporately as a congregation, he was aware of the intensity of response to his effort, whether pro or con, would, like the Spirit that prompted it, dissipate to a settled state. What must remain in the transition was his congregation's awareness of their need for the Spirit. The Spirit's work at Saint Aldates is also a story of that work within the rector; he too would enter new territory of change and discovery. Guiding all would be his singular commitment to the God of the Christian faith and his resolute determination to obey what he perceived as that God's direction. This was not an undertaking to shuffle an organization nor a strategic repositioning to accomplish a corporate goal, rather it was a response grounded in the belief that he had received Divine direction and to that end he must commit.

Clearly, among the hundreds of people, the other ordained clergy, and the multiple staff of Saint Aldates were those who embraced the cause of Christ as fervently as the rector and for whom the Spirit was equally as valued. That it was he and not they who received direction or that he initiated change is not unique in Christian scripture and practice. He was the leader. Ample precedent in the Christian Bible (NIV: Exodus, 1 Samuel, 1 Corinthians) supports both. What may be unique is the certain meaning to the rector of the Spirit's direction. Others in the church, including this study's participants, also knew "a period of correction" was needed. At issue among those who disagreed with the rector - and many did not - was not that change be instituted but the severity with which he prosecuted the change.

One who disagreed with the rector's method found in his sincerity of belief reason for admiration saying, "That man was looking at God all the time." While there were likely differences in his and theirs approbation of the Spirit, at some level consensus was achieved. In the meaning of the Spirit's direction however, for some it was not. Rector and member both heard the Spirit and both understood change was in order. But meaning to the rector differed significantly. The work of Brazelton and others may address the cause.

Brazelton (1979) suggested that humans have innate ability to form connections between event and response and thereby form meaning. This seems to speak to an element of memory within meaning making. Memory, like the self it records, is social in nature and like the narratives we use to understand our world and ourselves, composed from stories colored by the mind that retains them (Cobley 2001; Gergen 1994; Spohn, 2006). Thus it appears that meaning and the memory supporting it is not what is told us but what we experience it to be or even what we need it to be (Heise, 1997). This derivation of sense from event and response, colored, then brought into consciousness, follows a predictable hermeneutic: past and present event will merge (Bennett, 1990). It serves to make what is heard not necessarily what will be told and what is spoken not always arranged according to the truth of its event (Berthoff, 1970). In our hermeneutical apparatus this is normative as interpretation and interpolation stand in for meaning as opposed to truth, i.e., history (Bevir 2000; Cebik, 1986; Martin, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984). It seems then that neither the hermeneutic principle nor the endeavor is suspect in the making of meaning only the result; for as universal is the principle equally as singular can be meaning.

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As meaning tends to singularity so the rector heard what others could not and although many agreed to a similarity of event only he, at least initially, stated a particular response. His is a life marked by duty and service to the Christian God and His Church and exemplified by an enduring commitment to each. He demonstrated humility in admitting that his passion for the Spirit needed informing, in submitting his ideas and plans to the bishop and church leadership team, and deferring any credit for good results to the work of the Spirit saying that his was merely a supporting role. Yet within this genial, humble leader resided an unbending determination to duty and service, one shaped by grandfather and father in service to the Bishopric of Jerusalem. Through it they passed into the family's stock of stories those of their own among which were undoubtedly themes of duty and call. It could also be seen in his returning to England as a 12 year old while his family remained in Jerusalem to fulfill their post. So although many heard, the meaning of what was heard could not be the same. As Bennett (1990) has suggested that past and present event merge in our hermeneutic of meaning, so too did past color present meaning for the rector: there was a clear and compelling duty in answer to the Spirit and in that path, not unmindful of those around him yet not deterred by them either, he led.

Participant C: Continuity/Order

## *Interview*

Participant C is a married couple that has been part of Saint Aldates for over thirty years. They are appreciative of the church's steadfast witness to Christianity, especially through its Sunday school and programs. The same stability that influenced their children also encouraged the gradual deepening of their faith leading them to conclude that they owe the church "a great debt." Though in complete support of Saint Aldates evangelical and charismatic emphasis, their spiritual growth in Saint Aldates was paced by an appreciation of the traditions of Anglicism and its inherent sense of order. This order is one that prescribes accepted belief as well as accepted action within the church. To be without either would be something other than completely Anglican.

If an inherent sense of order exists within Anglicism, embodied in it is the implied contract between rector and congregation that the order is maintained. It then is incumbent upon the contract's parties to be judicious in act and respectful of established practice. Each side will tolerate changes to procedure but not to message or service. By the time the rector of this study assumed his post, Participant C had experienced two other rectors at Saint Aldates. Each had informed the meanings of a well-understood message and expanded the understanding of Christian service. Rector deBerry was emphatic regarding the service of student ministry but a "fairly low-key conservative evangelical" as pertains to message. In the effort to establish families into the church Rector Green expanded the role of service into home groups. His teaching on the Spirit, while not changing the evangelical emphasis, expanded it to include a form of charismaticism. Additionally a modest remodel effort of the sanctuary was completed under his pastorate. The acts of each rector toward message and service were accepted within the contract. In doing so what was understood as the message and service of Saint Aldates was strengthened and the integrity of understanding between rector and congregation affirmed.

Rectors are expected to make changes, to make the church something of their own, and may do so as long as order is maintained. However, the changes of this particular rector appeared to violate the contract. His handling of message was true to the evangelical and charismatic emphasis for which Saint Aldates was known; his approach to the notion of its service was not. The participant referred to this deviation from service as the rector mandating "a laying down of ministries."

We were told we must. There was no "would you like to?" It's, "You must." There's a sense in which we're slightly limited in our knowledge here because we must have been away on holiday or something, because we came back to be told that this had been said. I imagine when [the rector] announced it, presumably in a sermon, no doubt he gave an explanation. But we never heard that explanation. We were just told that's how it was going to be. We sort of gathered the explanation subsequently.

At first the participant was eager toward the proposed change saying, "I was excited and I thought this is a time when we're going to learn a lot about God, about ourselves." That excitement soon gave way as "things fell apart, quite frankly." What had changed in the service of the congregation was multiple; yet central to the participant's sense of disillusionment was the sense that pastoral support had ceased. Pastoral support meant the circle of friends one

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establishes in a congregation or through small group meetings who make themselves present during physical or spiritual crisis. People still had their friends but in the change to Saint Aldates' service they were discouraged from supporting them through the accustomed fashion. That is, they could no longer pray with an individual, join in prayer meetings, or conduct small group meetings. Compounding their sense of disillusionment were shadows of clerical double-speak.

We weren't allowed to have prayer meeting together. But the clergy every day had a prayer meeting in the parish center. And the parish staff... never seemed to understand the total hypocrisy, as it seemed to everybody else, of the position they were in.

Disillusionment and suspected double-speak notwithstanding, the tenet underlying the change to service was initially agreed correct. So was the action. The rector's change to service was grounded in his point of view that what one does in church service cannot be the source of their identity. That is, Christians must locate their identity not in what they do but in whom they believe. Considered by the participant "a tremendous, important, foundation stone," its outworking took the form of stopping numerous forms of pastoral support and various leadership and service roles. Clearly this was an amendment of the rector/congregant contract and although tentatively accepted "it was too long before anything else was available." The ensuing sense of disorder then was not a consequence of the implementation of the change of service but its continuation.

I don't doubt that he did what he thought was right. Um, I don't think he dragged it up for himself and I accept that it came from God. I don't doubt that one. It was just the way I felt [the rector] presented it to the congregation, how he handled the fallout when people were unhappy, it was how he handled that. I suppose you could say, thinking back on it... that perhaps what ought to have been a fairly momentary discipline, putting the church straight, getting our priorities right, focusing on Jesus, we ought from then be able to grow and develop outwardly more firmly rooted but taking nourishment from those roots to work outside. And that second stage didn't happen, not that I remember anyway. It sounds awful. It sounds as if the church was a dreadful place to be.

Having yielded the contract, the participant concluded the change of service, though at the behest of God, became just another change by the rector. They determined to simply "sit it out" secure in the knowledge that "we're the people of St. Aldates [and] we're not going to be driven out by what a rector's doing." In the shift of their appraisal from God-directed to human-flawed they did not allow blame to accrue entirely to the rector saying he was a "gentle soul" for whom "it really wasn't in his character, what was going on." In doing so they attributed causation back to God and held that the role he embraced, when contrasted with his character, became "an indication that it was a calling." This allowed bruised feelings and misunderstandings to be relinquished, in part, so that by his departure he was held in high regard "and we loved him very much."

The fact of causation attributed to God did not relieve the rector of responsibility to honor the contract: to be judicious in act, respectful of established practice, and assure that order is maintained. Agreeing with God but disagreeing with the rector provided the grist for mixed feelings. The tenet underlying the change to service - identity in Christ - became "a more secure foundation for Christian life... for us personally" but one whose outworking left them "frustrated" and "quite unhappy." In another instance it was "a tremendous, important, foundation stone" yet remembered as "just a change in emphasis" that "was always there" and that "hasn't had any lasting meaning." In another it was change that had purpose but were experienced by "mature Christians" at Saint Aldates as a time of "great sadness" and even resentment.

I suppose we all like change, if we agree with the change and if we are uncomfortable with the change, then we're not at all, I think. It's simple. I mean, if you can see where it's leading and you can see that the end product is worthwhile, then you're prepared to go through the discomfort while it happens. I mean the very fact that we stayed at St. Aldates was that we were willing to go through this time because we could see there was a purpose. Just hadn't expected it to last quite as long as it did because eventually, really, we came back to what we were.

To come "back to what we were" likely implied that with a new rector the contract was once again in force. The desire for a return to order may be seen in the response to the planned remodeling of the building announced during the change

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to service.

Marvelous. And we're dyed in the wool Anglicans, dyed in the wool absolutely. We'd had some re-ordering under Michael Green. I mean the Church of England is such that you can't just decide you'll change your building. You have to have what's called a faculty and the diocese has to approve it all.

This was firmly prefaced with the participant's Anglican commitment, itself a precursor of expectations. Reference was also made to a previous rector who had expanded the message and lightly remodeled the facility but in these had also maintained the contract. Obliquely, the rector of this study is brought into view in the expression, "you can't just decide you'll change..." Here, unlike in the spiritual administration of his church, the rector must accede to the diocese. In so doing, order was restored, if temporarily, at Saint Aldates.

The keeping of service was not the greater priority of the contract but that order is maintained. Likewise the believed abandonment of mature believers and needless disarray of the church is not attributed to the change of service but that it "was handled very badly." For the participant, this lies squarely with the rector. The determination that it not happen again is perhaps seen in the statements "I have been in charge of the elderly at church. I've had the pastoral responsibility of the elderly at church." The mature believer of previous mention would not again be abandoned at the whim of a rector but provided for and the order thought so casually discarded would now, in that same provision, be protected.

## *Discussion*

Meaning for Participant C inhered in continuity and its resultant sense of order. Saying that the changes proposed and enacted by the rector were "just a change in emphasis" that "was always there" and that "hasn't had any lasting meaning" indicate, what became for the participant, a descent into disorder and its subsequent meaninglessness. Neither participant nor rector found pleasure in the process although both believed some form of correction was needed. Where the parties diverged was in their appreciation of the depth of the crisis that existed in Saint Aldates and the narrative that informed their respective point of view. Point of view is the acknowledgment that fact is not the object in narrative but the story one wishes to convey (Bal, 1997). In personal narrative, point of view may be explained through ideology, thereby producing truth that is so first and foremost for the individual uttering it (Ricoeur, 1984; White, 1973).

The rector believed his congregation needed further development in matters of the Spirit and Christian formation and that changes should be implemented to those ends. In reaching his assessment he brought both formal training and years of successful church leadership experience. The participant, with over 30 years of membership, a deep knowledge of the congregation, and appreciation of the order within Anglicism, saw need for a "momentarily discipline" that would put "the church straight" by helping them to get their "priorities right." While both rector and participant had similar conclusions regarding the problem neither agreed with the other to its extent. Meaning, at least temporarily, centered upon whether the issues at hand constituted an emergency or mere maintenance. Through his stoppage of the church's major service programs the rector signaled that, for him, the matter was of such magnitude that if not an emergency then certainly it was too important to be handled in the normal course of events. From the participant's point of view his actions were an over-reaction prompted by an overstatement of the problem. In either event the result was to bring a well-ordered congregation to disorder and disrupt the continuity it had come to represent.

From a "lively church" Saint Aldates became one that was "a dreadful place to be" as programs that had helped the congregation obtain a good name and that were meaningful to members were stopped. The disorder of members leaving, strained relationships, and broken bonds of camaraderie occurred against and were contrasted with the over 30 years of continued congregational growth, ministry expansion, and rise in prestige that the church had enjoyed. For the participant, the rector's actions were a needless detour into disorder that far from the meaningfulness of past initiatives was instead regarded as needless and if not meaningless, then nearly so. This lack of agreement between rector and participant was the reflection of a greater issue: each explained, understood, and derived meaning regarding the problem from differing narratives.

Hopewell (1987) noted the bonding features between a US congregation and tribal villages among which similarity in the way the world is viewed and acceptance of myth and ethos are required. This is not to denude the sacral nor

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to diminish faith but admit to the underlying human need for and use of narrative in all human enterprise including congregations (Currie, 1998; Herman & Vervaeck, 2001; Jaynes, 1976; McAdams, 1996). By it, agreement may be fashioned on points of worldview, myth is made palatable, and ethos becomes reasonable (Barclay, 1994; Mead, 1962; Rousseau & Herder, 1966). In short, religion and the faith of which it is a shadow appear to move between the rigidity of sanctimony and the malleability of community. If we can communicate our reasoning and beliefs in the understanding that we do so inherently as “variations on a few basic, universal plots” (Martin, 1986, p. 88) we are then better able to massage the disagreeable into the workable and in the process assure that the bonds of such community, now painstakingly established, remain. For in our instinct toward sociality, reconciliation and the community by which meaning is derived is preferable to solitude (Bennett, 1990; Dautenhahn, 2002; Dunbar, 1996).

The rector, in the eyes of the participant, was counter-culture in the execution of his initiatives: His actions were not those of one willing by appeal to the overarching narratives of unity, history, and faith within Saint Aldates to make the disagreeable into the workable. Simply put, it was his way or none at all. The participant said, “We were told we must. There was no “would you like to?” It’s, “You must.” In the rector’s personal narrative the matters at hand became the need for determination in initiating the changes and to seeing them through. However, the narrative responsible for his clarity was not that in use by the participant. The participant’s point of view was one of order. Decades of experience had confirmed that order must be maintained for in its keeping is the health of the church and the furtherance of the Christian message. It was unthinkable to wreak havoc upon the church, disturb the congregation, and upset the established order with abruptness.

While both rector and participant were informed by their basic narrative need, appreciative of worldview, aware that their stories were those in a stock of stories, and willing to make the disagreeable into the workable, neither could do so for the other due to the base narrative in which each stood. Their actions comport with Bennett (1990) who said, “There exists a universal tendency for all experience and textuality to be transcoded into the totalizing narratives of religious systems or philosophies of history” (p. 212). His statement is broader than the life of a local church yet applicable as a “totalizing” narrative seems to have motivated rector and participant. In the case of Saint Aldates, it appears that both rector and participant were the bearers of meta-narratives (Halbert, 2008; Mullin, 2008) created in the merger of personal narratives with those of their faith. In effect, they held and lived a totalizing big-picture story that gave meaning to all and through which all was cast. For each it was a meta-narrative concerning one’s stance toward the Christian Church: to the rector it took the form of correctness and duty; to the participant it was one of continuity and order. Although neither could be fulfilled in the other’s version of the present, both were required to complete the story that is Saint Aldates: He in the instituting of needed change and they in the organization’s stability. Contrarily, Barthes (1974) warns against this view saying, “The ‘I’ which approaches the text is itself already a plurality of other texts” (p. 10). In contrast to seeing all one’s stories “within a single structure” (p. 3), he notes its apparent impossibility due to our narrative intersubjectivity, the effect of which makes differentiation “irrecoverable” from the multiple narrative structures that contain it (p. 10).

## Participant I: Relationship/Relationship

### *Interview*

Participant I is female. Saint Aldates focus on students gave her the sense that “we were welcome and we were important” and aided her development in Christian faith. The relational aspect of Saint Aldates student ministry was also important in her decision to continue to membership.

Well I came first with my friends and then I became a Christian myself, not through St. Aldates specifically, but through my friends. But I’m sure that had an influence in not just knowing God personally, but in seeing that was lived out in the lives of the people there and that I wasn’t being a Christian on my own, but I could be part of that community in those people living for God or striving to live for God.

The experience of church in Saint Aldates was a marked difference from that of her childhood. Among the differences were Saint Aldates’ use of modern music, its casual approach to liturgy, and the genuineness of its clergy whom one could sense “had a deep relationship with God.” She thought them due to people who “seemed to have faith or a relationship with Jesus Christ.” The effect was that as relationship with people enabled a new understanding of Christianity, relationship with God would enable a new understanding of the Church. Here the awareness of the Spirit

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would be prominent and the interpreter of all that concerns Saint Aldates.

Spontaneity was neither the goal nor the harbinger of the Spirit; the antithesis of routine, it revealed the presence of relationship. In this case, it was relationship with the Spirit that produced a “renewing of the church.” In evangelical/charismatic understanding, renewal means the embrace of the Spirit with determined reference to scripture for guidance (Donovan, 2008). The stirrings of renewal within Saint Aldates, already by some Anglican standards a casual congregation, moved the church further in that direction eventually “becoming a new structure” of worship that would replace the old.

The service structure was all done in a particular way and you kind of didn’t interrupt it, maybe. This was what you were going to do and you’d do it. Whereas suddenly people seemed to be more, I guess they might have been praying to God for revelation and Him to speak to them, not to just do the sermon they planned. People would say “well I was going to do this and I feel that God’s telling me not to do this” or halfway through a sermon if they felt it was the right thing to get people coming forward or praying or saying “well I’ve got problem with that” things would be interrupted and they were prayer or outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

For the participant, the changes within Saint Aldates dealt with the congregation’s willing embrace of the Spirit and what resulted in the conduct of its public worship. It was a time when “the Holy Spirit was definitely there and real, but there was much more sense of Him being included in the whole of the service and people maybe wanting and expecting that.” When it was decided to close the house groups and thereby effect a change to service it too was viewed through the lens of the Spirit’s work albeit one that affected both leaders and led.

There was a laying down of ministries within the leaders and body. Because it was possible that people, even if they were doing good things... might just have done it because it would be considered a good thing to do, but it may not be that God still wanted you to do them or ever more do them and that people should let go of a lot of roles, including the leadership, until God did tell them what He wanted them to do... so that meant, like, the house groups stopped.

While the rector and others in leadership were in the forefront of the new structure, behind it all and directing its construction was the ever-present Spirit. Involvement in the home groups as in every other facet of worship would no longer be one’s desire for service or even the perception of its need but if the Spirit had directed the service. She embraced this new structure and supported the Spirit’s prominence in public worship. Still, her participation in the Spirit appeared restricted; while others would experience dramatic expressions of the Spirit her involvement seemed limited only to an interior hearing. She said,

He spoke to me about things in sermons and that was His voice and from the Spirit, but there were lots of people who were speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit all over the service - all over the floor - for many months at a time and I never had those kind of experiences. But I thought they were good and sometimes I thought I’d like the idea that they would happen to me, but they didn’t.

Instead of lessening her desire the experiences solidified the Spirit as an integral part of her faith and relationship with God. They were “strange but good” but not just “experiences so we could feel good and God would go away and life would carry on.” The vital thing was God purposefully moving the Church in an undefined direction, the momentum of which would influence them as a people, as a church, and hopefully as a country. “Now, I don’t know” was her statement as what had seemed clear in the change process became less so in its aftermath. Though she held that more churches and people believed in the Spirit as a result, the corporate benefit across the breadth of people, church, or country did not materialize to the extent she and others hoped for. In place of the Spirit’s purpose as a large-scale movement she found the result to be personal change. From within this individual motivation and meaning the Spirit then created the changes that marked His presence at Saint Aldates: opening the building to the city and the congregation opening themselves to people.

The Spirit is attributed with prompting the rector and congregation to remodel their centuries old building. Although the construction necessarily concerned itself with building plans, fundraising, and the physical structure, it was understood

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the work was to benefit the people of Oxford. The building was to be opened up and become a “hub in the community.” The same openness required of Saint Aldates’ members toward the Spirit in their lives and service was now required in the approach to their building, particularly as the new design departed from hundreds of years of practice. The limiting interior configuration would be changed to accommodate a variety of events and the entrance, once difficult to find, now built onto a prominent street. As the church would open their building in response to the Spirit they would likewise be challenged to open themselves to marginalized people.

We knew someone who was homeless who we invited to the student lunch after church. When we took that person in-they weren’t an elderly homeless person, they were a young kind of person-we were told that that person had to leave and so we left with them. There was lots of good things happening but the church wasn’t welcoming to the people outside the average margins of Oxford life.

The Spirit that had directed a change to facilities also caused a change in attitude toward people until “there was a change in terms of people being able to come in and join in.” In view of the Spirit’s forging a corporate response among the individuals of Saint Aldates, the participant concluded, “I think the church is different from how it was before as a result of that. It wasn’t like the Holy Spirit came, did amazing things and we went back to where we were before.” The building had changed and that was done dramatically. The presence of marginalized people represented change as well but the greater change was in individual beliefs and attitudes toward the Spirit. It was a change that left her and others “wanting the Holy Spirit and His work and His action and His voice and direction as a part of everyday life, as a part of church direction, as a part of church services in a way that it wasn’t so much before.”

The change in Saint Aldates was disruptive and did cause a number of people to seek worship elsewhere. However, an additional meaning to the participant was in neither disruption nor disgruntledness but in the Spirit becoming personal to her. She said,

That experience of the Holy Spirit... and understanding that God is the Holy Spirit and works through the Holy Spirit has affected who I am as a Christian; my beliefs, my foundations of how I would expect to live... I felt that moved me forward in my in my theological understanding of how God wanted me to be or understand and know Him... I participated as part of the body of the church, but maybe didn’t have particular personal experiences of deep spiritual happenings, but um, I think that it had an influence on the kind of church that I want to be part of in terms of the Holy Spirit being a big part of directing the church and speaking to the church and speaking to us and teaching about the Holy Spirit.

Individual relationship with God that was so appealing and one of the attractors to her joining Saint Aldates had been achieved. Now she too felt as His child.

## *Discussion*

Participant I discovered meaning in the experiences that some had found meaningless. Central to her experience was the narrative from her childhood of what church was and the sense of relational fullness she gained from her participation in the new narrative of the Spirit at Saint Aldates. She said, “That experience of the Holy Spirit... and understanding that God is the Holy Spirit and works through the Holy Spirit has affected who I am as a Christian; my beliefs, my foundations of how I would expect to live.” How she would expect to live is summed up in a statement that contrasted her previous church narrative with that of her new church narrative: “I could be part of that community in those people living for God.” When compared to what she had previously known the difference is significant.

I had gone to church as a child in what I would now realize to be a very high Church of England church where they chanted and that kind of thing. I don’t remember, but I was child, so I might not have taken it in then. So I don’t remember hearing people talking about a personal relationship with Jesus. So it was quite a revelation in lots of ways that church could be interesting, that sermon might be something you want to listen to. It was just very different from what I’d experienced before really. In a good way. Not that I disliked what I experienced as a child, it just didn’t make me interested to go back.

Within her former church narrative the people attended church because it was the “routine” but in the new, attendance

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was due to participation in relationship with each other and with the Spirit. She was impressed that under the Spirit's aegis "people seemed to have faith or a relationship with Jesus or God." It was in this experience of relationship, not the change in Saint Aldates highlighting it, that the participant found meaning. However, her two year attendance before the change initiatives were implemented - and that primarily among the college-age ministry - is hardly a contrast with others multi-decade history with Saint Aldates. Consequently, her knowledge of the congregation, previous rectors, and understanding of church polity and order were limited. Nonetheless, these things, as important as they are for some, were simply not meaningful to her.

Meaning for the participant, certainly while in the shadow of her history as all such are (Barthes, 1974), took greater reference from her present and the events that distinguished it from her history. Instead of a search for substantiation by tradition, hers was a search for realization through relationship. Having originated her return to church life in relationship it was normal, if not desirable, that it continue and deepen in the same way. Her understanding of the Spirit and all that it brought was a later but welcome addition – she attended two years before the rector instituted his change toward greater emphasis upon the Spirit – that she came to see as critical to fulfilling relationship. The Spirit then and not the sense of history, regardless how real or necessary, was her ultimate answer. She indicated as much in her explicit approval of and desire for the Spirit in similar fashion as was experienced in another congregation, an experience that was contravening of all church social norms.

I remember being probably [the rector] or perhaps whoever was leading the service, telling us about the Toronto Airport church and the renewing of the church and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was happening there. And that was a good thing. Something that we wanted in the church, you know, kind of a big sense praying for that to move here.

It is not clear whether the participant saw in the upheaval of established social norms an abolishment of tradition/history or if she merely desired the response to the Spirit as was in the Toronto church. What is clear, however, is her willingness to forego historical proprieties so that the quest for the Spirit be attained. So then, as the Spirit was the new narrative of Saint Aldates, relationship was the new narrative for the participant. In each, history and the order it imposes upon action were less relevant and ultimately subservient to relationship: that of the congregation to the Spirit and of the participant to the congregation and the Spirit.

Citing Iser, Bruner (1986) said, "Discourse must make it possible for the reader to write his own virtual text" (p. 25). The reference is to the larger writ of acceptable mores and taboo within realms of experience that allow the publication of personal story, not literally but virtually. That is, for the participant to come to meaning within her experience at Saint Aldates and to live it publicly it was necessary for its culture to make possible its expression. In other words, had the changes not been instituted she would have experienced relationship but not to the same depth.

Bruner's "virtual text" is a nod to the transparency of our living in relation to the texts of our writing. Bal (1997) said as much in his, "A narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story" (p. 16). As we read the literal world of text we produce a "psychological portrait" (p. 115) revealing of our own desires imposed into and upon the story. As we tell into our virtual world we do so with "rhetorically overworked" memories so that what is recalled is not identical to the experience but shaped to provide connection with our audience. In the participant's loosening the claims of history, like that of the congregation, a certain virtual world was entered. Here each reviewed past events in light of the present and found the wherewithal of narrative creation: a virtual story not ignorant of its past but recasting it to allow for participation in the present.

## Participant P: Care/Disagreement Concerning Care

### *Interview*

Participant P is a married couple and has been part of Saint Aldates for nearly three decades. They came from another religious perspective but were open to the idea of the Spirit having a prominent role in the church. Their introduction to Saint Aldates was a result of their children who, attending university in Oxford, had found the church a suitable substitute for their own and invited their visiting parents to worship. When asked to relate their first or most powerful experiences with the church, it was to this visit the participant referred.

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I'll go back to 1979 when our children were here and the church was not reordered [remodeled] and the previous incumbent to [the rector] was here. It was just a service that made me weep with delight to be in. There were students sitting on windowsills... they were pushing their way through to this place. It was an exciting place to be. It really was... and just an atmosphere of being in God's presence-you rarely find, particularly in Anglican church-and so that's my first experience of St. Aldates.

They held Saint Aldates to be an exception within Anglicanism due to its evangelical emphasis and the priority given to teaching scripture. This agreement with practices along with the participant having attended university with two of its rectors made joining the church seem natural. Within ten years the participant had moved to Oxford and the church they had experienced with their children became their home. It was a "lively church with good strong music and a very powerful sermon and an enormous amount of love." The rector of this study was their pastor and they enjoyed him, believing him a sound teacher of scripture and one who believed that "God moves in many ways that are not necessarily according to the prayer book." It was important for the participant to have the freedom of a less than strict adherence to Anglican form and described it as being "able to lift our hands if we wanted to without anybody feeling what will happen?" Although not wanting a church of "excess" having emphasis placed upon the Spirit was vital. Altogether Saint Aldates afforded multiple similarities with their previous church and experience, particularly in the understanding of the Spirit.

In addition to the role given the Spirit, Saint Aldates also emphasized its member's connection to a small group. In them people would discuss scripture, have prayer for local and extra-local needs, and generally be supportive of each other. Finding a church that provided small groups was for the participant "a little cherry on top... an emotional thing, really." This along with Saint Aldates being an established congregation and its preaching of scripture prompted the participant to choose the church over another congregation more in line with their experience. The friendliness of the clergy, the congregation's growing involvement in the Spirit, and the satisfaction of participating in then leading a small group confirmed their choice.

Engagement with the Spirit was important for the participant. Its emphasis at Saint Aldates was not their first exposure or the most significant but it was gratifying to find the church "had supernatural experiences." They said, "It was good to come to a church that was open to that, even if it wasn't bubbling over with it, because it wasn't really." However, a growing national charismatic movement identified as "Toronto" (the city of its founding) heightened awareness of the Spirit at Saint Aldates. The rector, already leading the congregation in greater openness to the Spirit, was nonetheless cautious in his embrace of Toronto; a response the participant valued.

We went to a loud, noisy, unusual, strange, conference day that [the rector] didn't take much part in, if any. And I recall going up to him and saying to him "Are you going to Toronto?" And [the rector] said very wise words he said, "God will give us what we need. I don't need to go to Toronto." And that was the first that I thought, "This man is going to be seeking the Lord to not fall in with all this going on, but to see what God was saying to us..." I was very concerned that he would get swept up with it but he was very re-assuring.

Though not avidly supporting Toronto, the rector did prepare his church for change by the permissions he gave and with the repeated statements of "change is here to stay." In his refusal to wholeheartedly embrace Toronto, arguably an experience of the Spirit of which he was in active pursuit and to which the participant wanted greater exposure, the rector was esteemed as one "who wasn't going to get stuck in a rut." His decision induced the participant's trust and helped make them "confident in him." The announced changes did arrive in the form of the congregation's increased engagement with the Spirit and altered worship service. In keeping with the rector's approach to the Spirit as something other than intellectual agreement, he led Saint Aldates into changes that altered the congregation's make-up.

The rector's actions were introduced as a vision prompted by the Spirit wherein he was to prepare the church as a bride for her wedding day. Initially, the participant perceived it as "very powerful" but once implemented it became the thing that was needed but whose execution was extreme. Still, not all members thought about the changes in the same way. Others thought of them more warmly.

I had to be careful not to talk to some people that were so thrilled with the movement of the Spirit in the church

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that I would've been dampening them if I'd have said, "Oh, but I feel so lost." I remember [people] who came in thrilled that they could leave our old church, which was not moving, coming into this place that was moving... They loved the Sunday. So they were being not only fed, they were being inspired.

The rector's refusal to embrace Toronto was not a refusal to embrace the Spirit. Clearly demonstrations unusual to Saint Aldates were occurring as people "saw a freedom that they had never experienced before." The participant said, "For many, this was the first touch of the Holy Spirit's supernatural evidence of praying and falling and praying and speaking in tongues and praying and prophesying." Neither the demonstration of the Spirit in public worship nor the fact of the rector's initial changes were particularly upsetting to the participant.

God was at work here. Maybe [the rector] was stretching things a bit, pushing things a bit too far a bit too fast, but we couldn't leave it. Here's a man of God leading his church through a painful period because it needs cleaning up... some refreshing, something new to make it more the sort of Church that God was looking for in his vision.

Rather, it was the administration of the Spirit-prompted changes, an administration that was intricately connected to the rector. The participant agreed change to service was warranted and did not hold the rector at fault for its initiation but likewise held he did so with a "sort of cloud of authority, trying to bring us all into line in some sort of way." They lived in the tension of their admiration for a man they had seen to be kind, gracious, a sound teacher of scripture, and spiritual leader and the role he took on ostensibly to conduct the Spirit's business. Here graciousness gave way to discipline and kindness to implacableness. Additionally their value that the church not be "seized and splintered" was violated as the rector closed its administrative board and stopped small group meetings. They interpreted his actions as his taking what he considered the "proper authority" and although not in complete agreement, believed the rector to have the best of intent.

[The] reason we didn't get up and go is that we knew that this man is an honest man who listened to God and wasn't trying to take us down a blind alley. It might have felt dreadful, but it wasn't.

If their personal tension were real so was the unsettledness around them. In the act of disbanding the small groups and "laying aside ministries," some expressed feelings of betrayal while others "felt they were just being shunted and no longer appreciated." People left the church, an action the participant contemplated as well saying, "I envied those who managed to go." Although they supported the rector, still they saw the change in service as a diminishing of their personal importance to the overall work of the church. It appeared then that the Spirit who was to give power to members had instead become the source of its loss.

These feelings were limited to those who having been at Saint Aldates for some time had greater stakes in outcomes. Newer members, having less a stake, were affected less by the changes. As a long-time stakeholder, the issues were felt deeply by the participant and remained unresolved even as they contrived reasons to justify what had been a sense of carnage in the church. They said, "I don't understand it. It's going to be a mystery all its life, I think. But I know that man was looking at God all the time." Likewise they are not certain of the changes end result among members, whether it is positive or negative, but do hold a strictly personal opinion that the entire experience was one of loss, albeit divinely sanctioned loss.

We see more health now than we did then and that's hard to say without feeling monstrously unfair to what we believe, for something God wanted. That picture of the bride, unready, has stayed with me all the time because it was honorable and it was the right intention. That's what God wanted this man to do with this disparate congregation. The fact that, in my opinion, he didn't seem to do it is very grueling to have to confess. I feel it as betrayal really. I don't like doing it. Because I can't see a significant way in which he achieved the bride being ready.

The tension the participant experienced in accommodating their rector, himself a figure of authority on behalf of God and church in apportioning power, had expanded to faith being exercised in the strain of the dichotomous Spirit. Here, Spirit, like rector, is representative of God and church and able to give power and render powerless.

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## *Discussion*

Participant P is a married couple who have been members of Saint Aldates for over three decades. They seem to be gentle people and those a leader would want in the vanguard of his or her enterprise. Their dedication and commitment was put to the test during the change processes at Saint Aldates not because they disagreed with either its introduction or direction but for its duration. They both saw and understood that Saint Aldates needed some “cleaning up” and had already experienced the Spirit in ways that were, as of yet, new to the church. What occurred then was neither unexpected nor new. The measure of discipline, however, was. Speaking of the rector they said, “I think he pushed them much too far and made it much more painful than it needed to have been.”

The participants do not see themselves as contrary to established order but people “who are of strong opinions” without being “rebels in any way.” Their preference is to “conform” in matters of church polity believing that in conformance they are better able to preserve the church. This is not due to a lack of self-esteem but a firm value that the church, even with flaws, is “the body of Christ and not something to be seized and splintered [and] fractured into bits and pieces.” The preservation then is not of the structure either organizationally or physically, a fact they confirmed in their willing embrace of change to each, but the spiritual essence of what constitutes a church. In Christian scripture this essence is the Spirit working within those who accept the Christian Faith as definitive and align themselves with its creeds and expectations (NIV: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians).

In short, the participant held people in high regard but that the Church belonged to God even higher. Though they accepted “the church was [sic] people not buildings or offices” they were not so naive as to believe that a period of correction could be implemented and people not be affected. Although they too were affected by the “laying down of ministries,” it was not organizational change that piqued them. Instead, when the period of “cleaning up” went beyond what was, in their opinion, its needed duration, they saw that the people and the greater Church that succeeded them were being damaged. This is not to say they lost confidence in the rector but that they disagreed with his management of the correction.

Ultimately this is problematic. The participant believed the rector had indeed heard from God and was following the dictates of the Spirit. They trusted him even though disagreeing with his actions. Yet, they too were Christians; mature believers who had been decades in Christian service and dedication to its Church but had not heard from the Spirit the same as the rector or those of the clerical staff. This seeming dichotomy in hearing did not diminish their faith or belief but did embolden the view that they and leadership had heard the Spirit say the same thing; all that differed was the judgment about what the Spirit meant, albeit one that became clear in the aftermath. With expressions such as, “betrayed,” “folk who were discarded,” “a lot of folk hurt at that time,” “just being shunted,” and “a growing awareness that I wouldn’t want to take my neighbors to church,” the participant voiced that what had occurred in the change process, though firmly believed by the Spirit’s inspiration, was at the behest of mortals.

Resistance can be an instinctive action when personal identity narratives become distressed (Ford, 1999). Saying that, “At the individual level, identity formation involves the development of both personal identity and group identity,” Phinney (2000, p. 2) indicated the primacy one places upon personal and group coherence. That is, the “interpretive process of self-making that operates to produce coherence through the formation of meaningful connections between past experiences and the self” (Pals, 2006, p. 177). That we relate well within our group then is desirable, accomplished through our use of narrative (Ville & Khlal, 2006), and in regard to the person we have become. In brief, we talk our way into approval, learn quickly among whom our words and dispositions are best accepted, and do so in the belief that the acknowledgment of our person validates the choices we made to arrive at this point in time.

During the time in question Saint Aldates did form distinct groups: those who agreed with the rector’s direction and those who did not. Though the organization never seriously approached the point of division it was clear among whom one’s leanings would best be tolerated. In opposition to their value of the Church, the participant found themselves having to choose one group over the other and though refusing to engage in triviality with either, it was neither to their liking nor satisfying to their sense of congruence. Unable to receive affirmation lest in doing so they tacitly acknowledge the superiority of one group over the other and denied a sense of congruence as their opinion expressing the totality of their experience was shunted aside, they summed up the experience as, “Sad; pained but hanging on” as God’s Church and the people that comprise it were, in their view, damaged.

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## The Study in Retrospect

During preliminary research for this study, three areas were identified where topics were either outside its scope or not sufficiently addressed in the reviewed literature. First is the notion that some perception of crisis by organizational leaders and members is in the main necessary or is at least conducive to restorying the organization. The examples of restorying the organization from New Zealand e.g. Infotech, Telco, and Central Health, were all in a deregulating economy, a political environment that admitted failure of a previously held view of government services, and a sense by leaders and in some cases members within the organizations that options other than radical change were not acceptable.

Second is the possibility that cultural attitudes toward resistance determine the value leadership places upon collegiality during the restorying process. Noll (1992) contrasted the disposition of Canadian and American attitudes toward change. He determined that the presence of monarchy in England had shaped the English and hence the Canadian attitude to resistance as one of accommodation instead of rebellion. Conversely an American cultural icon is the symbol of the Boston Tea Party where rebellion is celebrated. In that the attitude of the respective cultures toward resistance differs change is likewise reacted to differently. This could be seen in the work of Currie and Brown (2003) who reported that after one year of resistance by members in a UK organization, leadership reached an agreement that recognized their personal narratives. This is in contrast to wholesale firings or continued imposition of leader's change initiatives.

Third are the elements that comprise what leading narratively could entail. Though derived from the literature these are not tested via research. Their use, though confirmed in personal experience, could nonetheless be considered anecdotal. In light of the tentative nature of the critical definition given narrative leadership in this study, further research is required regarding the statements that: leaders help "the organization adapt to its environment" (Boje, 2005, p. 3); that leaders facilitate "the transformation of one way of narrating the corporation to another" (p. 12); that "leaders motivate followers by raising awareness of organizational mission and getting followers to transcend self interest" (p. 95); that the leader need be present in such way that the future is definable as well as "desirable" and the "development needs" of members addressed (p. 95); that narrative leaders help members form a "new reality" through the "active" use of words that depict current and new reality (Dunford & Jones, 2000, p. 1208); and that leaders are not merely suggestive but proactive, even forceful, in defining for members what is and what should be (Ford, 1999).

Both as discursive practice and literature, narrative is a deeply explored subject. Riceour (1984) grounded his epistemology in an appreciation of literary narrative while Bruner (2002), from a psychological perspective, found its structure in the narrative of discourse. Kirby (1991) observed the study of narrative crosses the disciplines of sociology, psychology, literary theory, philosophy, semiotics, and historiography. In the field research for this study two areas were found to lack support though founded in the literature.

First is the notion that organizations can be restoried. Though in the literature as a theoretical construct and practical enterprise (Boje, 2007; Driscoll & McKee, 2006; Dunford & Jones, 2000), this field research found the prevalence of the founding story of lore being restated as opposed to the organization being restoried. While this is much clearer in the case of the Family Room church it is not lacking in that of Saint Aldates, a fact that every participant made known by indicating, to the effect, that "nothing has changed" or what occurred was a "going back to the original intent of why we started." To restory an organization is to shift the allegiance of members from practices grounded in and supported by one story to a different story and its unique set of practices. Dunford and Jones (2000) highlight this in their analysis of Infotech, the New Zealand company forced to abandon its cradle to grace employment policy. To restate an organization is not a term or concept found in the literature. I have employed it to signify the leader's recognition that the organization's founding story of lore is no longer informing its practices and the effort he or she takes in its restatement. In the research of Driscoll and McKee and Dunbar and Jones, the restoried organizations were for-profit, non-religious concerns whereas this research dealt with the not-for-profit, religious organization. The extent that profit and secularity bears on the potential for restatement of an organization's founding story versus its restorying as well as the idea of restorying versus restatement within organizations are not known and areas for further research.

Second is the opinion of wholesale change in the personal identities of organizational members as a result of change in their organization (Brown & McMillan, 1991; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Humphreys & Brown & 2002). Though some participants in this study reported change to their identity and in some cases that quite pervasive, personal

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identity change was not as extensive across participants as I had expected. It may be telling that the society served by the organizations found their product acceptable, that is, their version of faith was a marketable commodity: In each, attendance was growing, programming was active, and ministry was accomplished. There then was no felt-need to alter practices such as in the cases of Telco or Infotech. What may have differed however, is of the two religious organizations studied in this research, though each organization and its product was accepted by its society, neither was accepted in its current state by its leader. Change to identity then may not have had the same impetus in this case as society, the legitimating source of our personhood (Schechtman, 1996), had not disapproved.

## Recommendations for Further Study

Phenomenological research examines the world of lived experience to gain insight (van Manen, 1990) into the meanings associated with that experience (Merriam, 2002, p. 93). While analysis is necessary, in the phenomenological undertaking it stands along side that of the researcher's apprehending meaning (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; van Manen, 1990). Doing so means the researcher attempts to interpret the interpretations of another (Shank, 2006) and that from within a certain embeddedness (Wolff, 2002). That is, the point where the lived experiences of researcher and participants are mingled (Moustakas, 1994) and produce new meaning. In this regard, Mishler (1995) said that as we retell our participant's accounts through our own redescriptions we make stories as opposed to finding them. My experience as researcher has confirmed this.

I began the field research aware of my experiences in leading the endeavors of people, the meanings to me of those experiences, my thoughts regarding narrative and change, and the meanings I had derived from the whole of my life experience - the same to which I credited attribution for bringing me to this point. Even so, I was not prepared for what I discovered: Specifically, a) the different meanings that clergy and parishioner derive from a given stimulus, b) the ability of parishioners to support the person and spiritual leadership of the senior clergyperson while adamantly opposing his/her change initiatives, c) the intensity of feeling by parishioners toward the stimulus whether for or against and d) the awareness of clergy toward their parishioner's attitude regarding change.

## *Clergy and Parishioner Meaning*

This research did not explore the difference in meaning between leaders and those led, clergy and parishioner, but admits to it as an observable fact. I noticed that in each research site the clergy were those to whom members looked for direction and decision. This was remarkable, especially in light of the fact that both congregations were administered through a congregational form of government. In the case of Saint Aldates this is ameliorated by the fact that as an Anglican assembly it is ultimately under the hierarchy of that catechism. However and as the participants did acknowledge, its local leadership had the power to select its rector or exert significant influence in that selection. To be congregational in government means, for churches, that the congregation has ultimate say in its affairs. As such, agency resides solely in the congregation and can be apportioned only as its members see fit. For the senior leaders (pastor/rector) then to be accorded the near power of fiat struck me as remarkable but not unusual.

I did not think it unusual due to my experiences within evangelicism where understanding of the Christian faith reckons scripture supreme to all councils. Thus the covenants of denominations, even those hierarchical in form, can be thought of by members to accede to the precepts of scripture. Saint Aldates, while an Anglican communion, is yet an evangelical congregation. Therefore it is likely its understanding of evangelicism and not that of Anglicism are what informs its operational practices. The Family Room church being evangelical from its founding likewise operated within this rubric. Leadership in each then is granted the good will of congregants in much the same submissive terms as that enjoyed by biblical leaders; submission to and respect of clergy being thought of as a scriptural precept. In this understanding, the legal arrangements of denomination and corporation are reserved for clerical fraud or malfeasance, not the operational restriction of clergy.

It appears that the trust given evangelical clergy extending to exception to some hierarchical practices, in combination with a perception of their vocation as "call" from God rather than a preferred career path, may be predispositional to certain attitudes. Among them may be that of giving greater attention to what is perceived as the voice of God than the voice of members. This is not to say that evangelical clergy are abusive of or neglectful of members, only that their orientation would be thought to face God before facing the people. When taken in conjunction with the positional reference of God's servant as a shepherd who watches over the flock, both clergy and parishioner could be predisposed

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to two elements: clergy to that of duty as faithful shepherd and parishioner to that of community as sheep seeking safety in the flock.

What each hears in the context of the body life of their congregating then may not be to the same end. This was observable in each research site as clergy and parishioner heard in the ethereality of the Spirit the same thing, yet not all interpreted the message the same nor garnered from it the same meaning. The phenomenon also worked within clergy who did not serve as senior leader as in each site non-senior clergy, like parishioner, moved into and out of agreement with their senior leader. What seemed clear was that with each senior clergyperson what was heard was held as a sense of duty, as something to be enacted, if necessary, at the cost of the congregation, whereas with parishioners and other non-senior leaders what was heard would be enacted with the goal of preserving the congregation. Clearly, the distinction is not this simple. No clergyperson desires the destruction of their congregation any more than every parishioner has at heart only the congregation's welfare. The notion that meaning distills upon clergy as duty and upon parishioners as community then could, within the religious organization, be an area for further research.

### *Support of the Senior Clergyperson*

Among the ten participants of this study four were against the senior clergyperson's change initiatives and their opposition to it increased with the passing of time. One felt more radical change was needed and that what had been instituted should have advanced more rapidly, and five were supportive of both the senior clergyperson and the change initiatives. Interestingly, among the six participants not supporting the changes, all generally supported the senior clergyperson. The reasons for this may be varied but among the possibilities two seem pronounced.

As I perceive this, the first could be the notion within evangelicism of clergy as one whom God has appointed. Old and New Testament canon variously depict God in support of his leaders while offering severe penalty (public rebuke to removal) for those violating their office. The understanding, if not belief, of one being divinely appointed and charges of fraud or malfeasance leading to strong reprimand or dismissal with the possibility of defrocking (to be barred from ministry practice) may give parishioners pause to ask with what are they in disagreement: policy or doctrine, aberrant behavior or decisions found aberrant to their norms?

The second possibility may be in the clergy/parishioner relationship. In my role as clergyperson I have observed parishioners place confidence in those clergy who serve them humanely while exhibiting devotion to God. This results in access to trust and the benefit-of-the-doubt trust engenders. In short, one could be allowed leeway to make changes so long as the initiatives they propose do not contravene scripture. The participants of this study who opposed to the senior clergyperson's change initiatives yet were supportive of him as person and spiritual leader seems a contradiction in terms. This phenomenon is an area of further research.

### *Intensity of Feeling*

The field interviews opened briefly for me a window into the soul of another human. Among those who were opposed to the changes initiated by the senior clergyperson, my approach was at all times tentative lest I damage what I could not repair. Yet it was necessary within the bounds of decency and kindness to probe memories some would prefer to forget. That is not to say all were sad or otherwise morose; they were not. Common to all, whether in agreement or disagreement, was an intensity of feeling about what had occurred. Those who were opposed were intently opposed while those in agreement were equally as intent in their agreement. It seemed as if the senior clergyperson's initiatives had left no middle ground of equivalence but instead served to polarize the congregation as those for and those against. While this observation was sobering even more striking was the intensity of emotion associated with the memories of the time.

The participants seemed to feel the changes as directed to their faith community first then to themselves second. Those opposed to the change initiatives held that the changes were a needless disruption in the fabric of congregational life and care while on a personal level it was taken as an affront to upend what had informed their sense of normalcy. Those in agreement with the change initiatives unwaveringly saw the congregation needing change in order break free of the customs and practices that prevented its attainment to the Christian ideal, that is, the body of Christ. On a personal level upending established patterns was freeing. Oddly, the damage to congregational life and care that was for one the destruction of the biblical ideal was for the other necessary to its attainment.

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The fact that parishioners would feel intently about change was not unexpected but the depth of those feelings, at least as I perceived them, was. Feeling toward the clergyperson's initiatives seemed to meet the level one would expect if long held and well-understood doctrinal positions were removed or otherwise challenged. It appears from these experiences that, for the participant, change to community could be equivalent to change in belief and expressed with similar fervency. In that these feelings are deeply held (while participants may not have total recall of each event, the feelings associated with it were never in doubt) they could have long-term consequences for the overall health of the individual as well as the congregation. Further research into this phenomenon is required.

## Clergy Awareness

A not unrelated phenomenon is the clergy's awareness of parishioners' attitudes toward change. In my appreciation of the lived experience of this study's senior clergypersons, meaning inhered in showing care for the people in their congregations, concern for their wellbeing, and a genuine sense of regret toward those who could not agree with them. In every instance the senior clergy of this study demonstrated awareness of their parishioners' struggle with what had been proposed. This, however, did not remove the clergy from what they perceived as the greater awareness of being answerable to a higher duty. As was noted elsewhere, the clergy perceived their change initiatives as being from God and with that a near mandate for its execution. What is unknown is the affect upon clergy of standing, as it were, between two worlds, charged with care of the one while at times required to ignore it. This is an area for further research.



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