



# **Report on Congregational Health and Vitality in the Anglican Archdiocese of Melbourne**

## ***Part II***

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In conjunction with NCLS Research  
30th September 1998

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## **Executive Summary**

Between July and September 1998, the Christian Research Association attended services at 13 Anglican churches in the archdiocese of Melbourne. They interviewed clergy at 17 churches, and spoke with focus groups of newcomers, young people, and other attenders at 14 churches. These churches were chosen by the Commission on Church Health and Vitality as churches which may provide models of ministry through which congregational health and vitality particularly in relation to the development of ministry among young people and newcomers (people without a previous church background) might be developed.

It found that worship which attracts newcomers and younger people is geared to particular life-stage groups, and for most people under 50, contemporary in style, with contemporary forms of music, accompanied by a band; relevant in terms of its language and themes to the issues facing that particular group in the community for whom the service was targeted; relaxed and 'child-friendly' for young families, involving the children in worship and tolerant of the noise of younger children; involving lay people in the services, not just in minor roles such as readings, but in the leadership of the services and simple in format and approach.

Churches which had high numbers of newcomers were focussed on reaching people outside the present congregation. They had programs and structures in place in which groups in the community were 'targeted', activities were arranged for making contact, structures for welcoming newcomers and simple services which newcomers could easily follow; and activities in which newcomers could explore faith and build relationships with others in the church.

A discipleship process is an important part of church health and vitality, preferably offering a series of structured courses rather than relying on sermons. Small groups may play an important role in the discipleship process, but the form of these will need to vary with the background of those for whom they are designed.

Ministry to newcomers and young people usually occurs when only when leaders have a clear, structured vision and step by step strategies for the development of such ministry which is communicated to leaders and to the congregation as a whole. Most churches are dependent on the visionary leadership of the clergy, although many clergy do not feel equipped for formulating and overseeing such visioning or developing new forms of ministry. In formulating the vision, the members of the congregation feel it is important that their own ideas are heard, and that the clergy are flexible tailoring their vision to the nature of the community and the capacities of the congregation.

The major routes for joining a church are through friends among young single people, and through rites of passage among young married or older people. Few people join a church for social reasons. They are attracted by the clear presentation of the Gospel in such a way as seen to have relevance for daily life.

No clear, successful models of ministry were found among people in their 20s. There has been a paradigm shift in the nature of spirituality, and while there has been a general rise in interest in spirituality, fewer people, particularly of this age group, are seeking to find resources in the church. There is a need for much more experimentation in possible forms of ministry.

## **The Parameters of the Study**

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people."... All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read."

The task undertaken by the Christian Research Association (CRA) was to identify models of ministry that appear to be effective in developing health and vitality in the churches, particularly in relation to bringing people without church background into the life of the church and involving young people. The method for this part of the research involved case studies of congregations, involving attendance at services and interviews with clergy, newcomers and young people in churches of the diocese.

Between July and September 1998, members of the CRA research team attended services at 13 Anglican churches in the archdiocese of Melbourne. They interviewed clergy at 17 churches, and spoke with focus groups of newcomers, young people, and other attenders at 14 churches.

The CRA researchers attended a total of 15 groups. Eleven groups were specially formed of people who had responded to an invitation from the vicar, the majority taking place after a Sunday morning service of worship. In four cases, the researchers attended pre-existing groups replacing or adding to the usual programme of the group.

In the context of these focus groups, the researchers interviewed approximately 48 newcomers, 40 other younger people (under the age of 35), plus 20 other lay people. Of the 48 newcomers, 11 were over the age of 40. Thus, in the group interviews, the researchers spoke to nearly eighty young single people or young married people with young children. In addition, informal discussions about church-life were held with another dozen or more people in coffee times following church services.

Most of the churches contacted were identified by the Diocesan Task Group as churches which had recently shown some signs of health and vitality according to results from the National Church Life Survey, the Diocesan parish census, Diocesan financial records, and the recommendations from the bishops. The Christian Research Association was allowed to choose up to three extra churches that it considered worthy of contact from its own examination of the statistical data.

In identifying these churches, a range of criteria of health and vitality were taken into account. While growth in numbers, numbers of newcomers and numbers of young people under the age of 35 attending worship were key characteristics of interest, the NCLS research also looked at levels of belonging, willingness to share faith and invite people to church, community involvement, and reports of growth in faith. It made its recommendations partly on the basis of churches showing high levels of attainment in several of those areas. Churches with less than 75 attenders were not generally included in the list as, in these churches, small numbers could make large percentage changes and it was difficult to evaluate the capacity for

long-term health and vitality. Both NCLS and the committee sought to identify churches in several areas around the diocese recognising that what may work well in one part of the diocese may not work so well in another part.

In the case-study work, the primary emphases were placed on identifying patterns of church life which contributed to people without a church background entering into church life and ministry among people under the age 35 years, particularly older teenagers, people in their 20s and young families. These had been identified as areas of particular interest for the Task Force to consider. Activities in the areas of community welfare and social justice were discussed with clergy in interviews, but this was not the prime focus of the case-study work. While recognising that community welfare and social justice are important for the health and vitality of ministry as a whole, this report did not aim to investigate thoroughly models of ministry in these areas.

As the CRA visited churches, they heard a great many stories, and saw many signs of 'health' and 'vitality'.

- 50 teenagers worshipping, growing in faith, having found there is a real alternative to 'parties and getting drunk'; (the sermon we would rate one of the best of 14 sermons we heard was preached by an 18 year old girl on the topic of 'grace' at this service).
- A group of people thinking about what their faith means to the life of the community organised a 'clean-up' day for their local area as an expression of their care of God's creation.
- A regular worship service on a Monday night for healing attracts many broken people who receive the support of prayer and hear the Good News of God's love.
- A free and professional counselling service operated by a church has assisted thousands of people to find heal and ways of dealing with their problems.
- A group of university students and other young people meet weekly to study the Bible, think about faith and support each other in living the Christian life.
- People who had been disillusioned with the church try an Alpha course and find a new church home and new meaning to being Christians.

Health and vitality may be expressed in small groups and larger ones, as people begin the journey of faith, or as mature Christians find new insights and begin to live in new ways. Health and vitality are hard to measure, and are not always easy to discern when one is in the midst of a particular situation. Often it is seen when churches are growing, but sometimes that may mean little more than the 'entertainment value' of its services is high. Sometimes it is found in apparent decline, as 'dead wood' is cut, as people hear the challenge of discipleship and realise that the church is not just there to be a comfortable Christian club. Jesus spoke a lot about pruning in order that his followers might bear fruit.

We find it helpful to think of faith - both of individuals and of groups - as a journey. People may be at different points along the journey. What is important is not how they have come, but the direction in which they are travelling, and perhaps the speed at which they are

travelling. The Spirit may sometimes be more evident in the few faltering steps of the person beginning to think about the Christian faith, than in the long term member whose commitment is really on the decline if they were honest about it.

The forms of health and vitality are as many and varied as people's personalities. Some groups find it in the quiet, reverent worship of traditional Prayer-book worship. Others find it in the boisterous, hand-clapping feet-stamping singing of modern choruses. The forms are not the point. John directed us to evaluate by looking for the fruit of love. Do people and communities emerge that are more loving, in which care is expressed, where people have greater concern for others than they do for themselves following the example of Christ? Are people finding liberty and hope in Jesus Christ?

It is important that the 'soil' be examined, that ministry is grown in ways which are appropriate for the soil. Any program or plan of ministry may work well in one place, but fall flat in another. A particular program will move one group of people forward in their faith, but be quite inappropriate for another group.

In the case-study work that has been done, nothing final can be said about 'what will grow healthily where'. However, some suggestions which might be tested by people seeking to minister in different places can be made. There are some general principles which appear to apply widely. The Task Group of Church Health and Vitality has suggested seven keys to church health. Some of those keys have to do with the definition, and others have to do with means to achieving health and vitality. These formed basic hypotheses for the case-study work. These factors are:

- Leadership including appropriate structures, vision, biblical emphasis, positive 'climate', appropriate style.
  - Worship vibrant, targeted to a particular group (i.e. culturally relevant).
  - Ministry team ministries, community linkages, social justice, compassion, dependence on God through prayer.
  - Discipleship training for volunteers and staff, discipleship process.
  - Small groups an intention to place all members in small groups, including new arrivals.
  - Evangelism an intention to reach the major targeted groups in the locale.
  - Community love, mutual care and a sense of belonging.
- The following report considers each of these factors.

Another set of hypotheses revolve around the factors which NCLS has identified as indicators of congregational vitality. These are:

- High level of newcomers
- Retention of young adults
- Numerical growth
- High level of belonging

High level of community involvement  
High level of willingness to sharing faith and invite others to church  
High level of reports of growth in faith.

Clergy interviewed were asked about what they considered makes for a healthy church. One might summarise the responses by saying that different people emphasised different parts of three dimensions (which are similar, but not identical with the three dimensions identified by the NCLS team - attractional, incarnational and faith exploration, see Kaldor et al, 1997, p.5):

1. Attenders' relationships with God, or their inner life of worship and growing, learning faith, receiving God's generosity and responding in praise;
2. Attenders' relationships with each other, demonstrating care and support for each other, being gracious towards each other in such a way that there is no place for on-going conflict;
3. Congregation involved in ministry beyond itself, being God's people in the world. At this point, some would emphasise an evangelistic thrust seeking to bring others into a relationship with God, while others would emphasise service of care and being the 'salt' of society.

Many clergy spoke of some of the things that they felt contributed to a healthy church. Four people mentioned the need for healthy leadership. Others spoke of the need for appropriate forms of worship, small groups, functional structures, unity in the parish, finances and resolution of conflict. Others spoke from a theological perspective: a church which was open to the Holy Spirit.

## Worship

In worship that is authentic. God is truly acknowledged. Signs of such worship are that it is true to the Biblical faith as interpreted by the Church, and that love for God and for others results.

It has been evident many times in discussions with people that the forms and language of worship which help some along the path of faith in acknowledging God leave others cold. Some, mainly older people, spoke of their preference for an 8 am traditional worship service. Others wanted contemporary worship. The teenagers wanted energetic and exciting worship. Worship needs to be in the language of the heart before it becomes real for the worshipper. While it is recognised that people of different ethnic backgrounds speak different languages, it is also true that people of different generations and different educational groups speak different languages. Worship does need to be expressed in forms that are culturally relevant to the participants, and this means that, to cater for the variety of groups in the community, there will need to be a variety of worship services taking a variety of forms.

One worship service cannot cater for all groups in its locality. In many parishes there are several worship services catering for different groups - often a traditional worship service for older people, family worship usually including a segment for primary school children who are then catered for also within a 'Children's Church', and in some places, a teenage service. Mid-week services, healing services, and other forms of service may cater for other groups within the population. In these services, the music, the style of language, the issues of life which are addressed, the forms of service, and even the dress of those leading and participating are different. In times of rapid social and cultural change, the need to address the needs, styles and culture of different generations has become acute. The problem is not simply one of music but of the whole language and nature of worship and the forms of church life (as has been addressed in the paper Philip Hughes, 1994, 'A Maze or a System? Changes in the Worldview of Australian People').

The only churches in the sample of churches attended in the Diocese of Melbourne which had more than five or six teenagers attending, for example, had services which catered specifically for them. The same applied to people in their 20s. In one church in the sample, there were several young people in their 20s who had grown up in the youth group and had continued their involvement. Several churches had two or three young people in their 20s attending. One church had a Taize style service attended by a range of younger people including a few in their 20s. Another church had a contemporary worship service on a Sunday morning which was largely run by and for young people in their 20s. This was the only group in which many of the young people were out at work - past the stage of tertiary education. In other words, in the seventeen churches with which we had contact, very few had more than two or three young people attending on a typical Sunday. All of those which did had contemporary styles of worship geared to older teenagers and young adults, or to young adults.

There were many more people in their 30s attending worship services in the churches in the sample and attending a wide range of styles of worship. However, the more formal and, in general, the more 'high church' the style of worship as measured by the use of the

processions, robes, incense, Prayerbook, and lectionary, the fewer the proportion of people in their 30s.

Most people in their 30s attended at least partly because of their children. They wanted them to grow in a Christian atmosphere, attend Sunday School and be involved in a church. These people were anxious that the church cater adequately for their children rather than cater for themselves. Of prime concern was that if their children were noisy in church, they would still be accepted. This was mentioned as a major concern affecting their attendance patterns by most parents of pre-school or primary aged children interviewed in all seven focus groups which contained parents.

Some parishes have one or two services each week which purport to be for all people. In some places with several services, the differences in style between the services are slight and those services cater for the same segment of the population. Usually such services are found to be appropriate by one group of people (usually people over 50 years of age) with a few younger families attending. While we met a number of people in their 20s in small groups, there was only one church which had worship specifically catering for this group, and from the information gathered, it appeared that this was the only church with more than ten people of this age group regularly worshipping at any church in the sample.

The differences which are important for worship are not just generational but also social. One service attended during the research in a predominantly working-class and lower middle-class area was quite distinctive containing personal testimonies and use of story and illustration, and had a charismatic flavour. The well-attended service in an upper-middle to upper class was a highly polished high-church style service with professional style and delivery of classical music and a very articulate sermon. Most Anglican services appeal to articulate and well-educated people of the middle class or above and, in general, few parishes were catering to other sections of the society. Few services targeted people other than non-teenagers for whom reading is a major chore. No sermons in any of the churches attended used visual aids except with children. A few had printed notes or outlines in which people could 'fill in the gaps', but few used anything other than verbal images.

The sermon in a service geared for teenagers used some action in the sermon. A volunteer was asked to come forward and asked to take a \$5 note without opening his hand. The volunteer could not do it. The point was that people need to be active in the reception of God's grace. This illustration in simple action form captured the attention of the congregation and remained something that would be easily remembered.

People of different personality relate to worship in different ways. On one day, the researchers visited two very different churches. In one church, people expressed their delight in the band and the vivacious style of the service. In the other, they expressed their delight in having a quiet time in which they could draw aside from the everyday activities of life. In the first church, they spoke warmly of their heavy involvement in the life of the church, in a range of groups and activities, and of the fact that they saw other members of the church frequently during the week. In the second church, none were involved in small groups or any activity apart from the Sunday service. They spoke warmly of the fact that no demands had been put on them. Different personalities warm to different styles of worship and church life.

In fourteen services attended, five made no use of the Prayerbook at all. Another five followed a form of service in it fairly closely. Most churches had 'simplified' their services in one way or another. In some this had involved taking out a few parts from the Prayer Book and printing them on a separate sheet or card or putting the relevant sections on an overhead. Of the fourteen services we attended, seven used only choruses for music. Three had both choruses and hymns, three used the Australian Hymnbook, and one had its own printed hymnbook containing a range of hymns and songs written by the vicar. One of the growing churches used the Australian Hymnbook, but was seeking to appeal to highly educated, professional people. Some declining churches used mainly choruses. Changing the style of music itself will not assure growth. Nevertheless, the style of music must be appropriate to the congregation as different groups in the population have very different tastes in music.

In the five churches we interviewed which had large numbers of newcomers, four of them had contemporary worship styles for their main Sunday morning service. Four of them had moved away from using the lectionary, the Prayer Book (except for brief extracts, usually printed on separate pieces of paper or card), and robes of any kind for the clergy. In these churches, planning for the themes of services and sermons was done well in advance - usually at least a year. Themes of relevance to people - such as anger, the issue of homosexuality, a Christian response to human suffering - were the subject matter of sermons. In several of the churches, people interviewed commented on the relevance of the sermons to their every-day lives. In some of these churches, exegetical Bible study was also done sometimes with something of a balance between Bible passages and themes of life being taken up.

However, the church interviewed with the highest numbers of newcomers was quite different. The lectionary and Prayer Book were used and a robed choir led the singing. Several newcomers at that church mentioned that it was the professional quality of the singing, sermons and of the services in general that had attracted them to the church.

There is a place for different styles of worship, although younger people (under 45 years of age) overwhelmingly prefer contemporary styles of service and music. Whatever the nature of the service, it is important that it be 'professional' in the quality of its delivery and its content. In interviews with attenders, the importance that sermons are relevant was mentioned frequently: not just the development of concepts of faith, but giving people tools and resources to use in everyday life. People were seeking for answers (though not superficial answers) for everyday questions and compassionate advice for 'ways of living'.

All but one of the churches with high numbers of newcomers had high levels of involvement of lay people. In three instances, the clergy only preached and the rest of the service was led by lay people. In two instances, a lay person also preached. However, those who participated in these churches had been through training programs within the parish. They had established programs through which 'spiritual gifts' were recognised and people were trained and involved on the basis of their gifts.

In three of these churches with high proportions of newcomers, the Eucharist was not included in the service that we happened to attend. Out of thirteen Sunday morning services which were attended, four of them did not include the Eucharist. All of these churches have the Eucharist sometimes on a Sunday morning, but not every week. Non-liturgical and

non-Eucharistic services are probably more attractive to newcomers without a background in church life. Indeed, most of these services stood out in their simplicity, both of language, form and music. Little reading was required of attenders.

In summary, worship which attracts newcomers, is generally:

1. geared to a particular group of people in the community, which, for almost all people under 30 years of age (and for many other people under 50 also) meant it was contemporary in style, with contemporary forms of music, accompanied by a band;
2. relevant in terms of its language and themes to the issues facing that particular group in the community for whom the service was targeted;
3. relaxed and 'child-friendly' for young families, involving the children in worship and tolerant of the noise of younger children;
4. involving lay people in the services, not just in minor roles such as readings, but in the leadership of the services.
5. Simplicity in format and approach which appeals to newcomers who are not familiar services.

## Evangelism and Welcoming of Newcomers

Of the twenty-five churches with the highest numbers of newcomers in the diocese, the CRA visited seven. These seven were each in different types of suburbs. While it is easier to find and involve new people in growing suburbs and places where there are new housing developments, churches may grow in most areas. The most difficult places for growth would be small rural centres with declining populations. It was evident that these seven churches had successfully brought newcomers into the life of the church because they had adequately handled all of the following steps.

1. *Occasions where contact is made with people outside the present congregation.* In each of the churches which were successfully bringing in new people in the life of the church, training programs to assist lay people to share their faith with their neighbours, friends and relatives. Most people start coming to the church through personal invitations. This was certainly the dominant pattern among the newcomers we met - school friends, members of the family, and so on.

Each of the churches with high numbers of newcomers were not only encouraging people to share their faith with their friends but were specifically working with groups of people in the community and seeking to bring them into the life of the church. For example, a play group can be used to build a group of people who will begin to explore the issues of faith together. All of these churches had play groups, kids' clubs and youth groups which were specifically aimed at bringing in children, young people, and their families to the life of the church. These groups had an evangelistic edge. They also had programs for men - men's breakfasts. Several of them had other activities such as youth cafes. Several of them had made important contacts with people through ministry in local state schools - both primary and secondary. While such activities would appear to be important, few of the people interviewed in focus groups had come into the life of the churches through such activities except through activities in a local high school. However, clergy spoke of people who had come in through play groups and other such activities.

Some churches had done some door-knocking, mainly in new housing areas. It had been 'soft sell', delivering pamphlets about resources in the community and about the church. Response to such door-knocks had been much lower than through activities in which friends were invited. No one interviewed had come into a church because of a door-knock, although some clergy could identify people who had. Several had first come to the church after moving home. The act of moving provides an opportunity for people to change their patterns of living. Of course, it may also be a time when people who previously attended regularly drift away from churches.

Many people came through rites of passage - particularly baptism, but several through funerals. No one interviewed had come through marriage. They often came primarily for the sake of their children but had been attracted by the warmth of the church. Many churches had a few people who had come into the church recently through rites of passage. While this is an important opportunity for bringing people into the life of a congregation, churches cannot rely on this means.

2. *Occasions when faith can be discussed with or presented to people not currently involved in a church in an appropriate way.* The important thing was to have non-threatening events organised by the church to which families and friends could be invited. Some had Seeker Services and others dinners off-site with an evangelistic speaker. However, only one person interviewed had had his first contact with a church in this way. Most people had come first to a regular worship service, and thus, what was important was that the service was meaningful to them. In one church, several had first come to a healing service.
3. *Structures to welcome newcomers in a warm but not over-bearing way.* In all churches the members of the research team attended without prior warning, they were warmly welcomed. In several churches, the minister was involved in welcoming people. Several parishes had committees of people who 'took care' of newcomers who came, even sitting next to them during the service, and encouraging the newcomer to leave some contact details. One church had a lay person who would phone newcomers that day. Then there would be a letter saying that it was great to have the person in church, and inviting any feedback. Another church sent a letter after the first visit, and then phoned if people came a second time.

One person we met had come to the particular church because she had been 'over-welcomed' at another church. The welcome can be claustrophobic. On the other hand, almost everyone responds with a warm welcome which does not pry but gives them plenty of opportunities to leave their name and address for follow-up should they wish to do so. If people are happy to give their phone number, then they may well expect that someone will phone them; or if they leave their address, a warm letter simply saying that it was good to see them is appropriate. Two churches which have had many newcomers invited feedback in that initial letter, which is a good way of indicating that any relationship in the future may be 'two-way' and invites people to have an input from the time of that first contact.

4. *Appropriate groups or activities through which relationships can be formed and faith can be explored in greater depth.* Beyond attending a service, newcomers were welcome in several churches through meals. In one church, the vicar organised a newcomers dinner just for newcomers on a regular basis. In another church, newcomers were invited to a barbecue organised by a home group. In three of the churches (if not more), people were invited to become part of a small group. This might be a fellowship or home group, or it may be a group to systematically explore faith. Several of these churches used Alpha courses - or modified forms of them. Three of the churches also had other courses to which people could graduate to learn more about the faith and preparing these people for living the Christian life and involvement in the ministry of the church according to their gifts.

Reaching out to people beyond the parish is one of the most challenging dimensions of health, and one which most churches did little more than think about, or relied on the (reluctant) sharing of faith by members of the parish. All the churches which were successful in doing this had this as a clearly stated part of their mission, had strategies for doing it, and were organised to do it.

On the other hand, none of the churches which were not growing had a set of procedures and processes in place to encourage growth. It is not always easy to get the process started. Among families with children, play-groups, Holiday Clubs and Kids' Clubs appeared to be the best way, ensuring that there was an evangelistic dimension to these activities. Among teenagers, youth groups, youth cafes, and other such activities were appropriate. It is not easy to identify appropriate ways of contacting people in their 20s, partly because they are a very mobile group. Increasing numbers make up the 'café sect' in our inner suburban areas, and the development of appropriate cafes, gyms, or even theatre, art and cinema groups may be possibilities which could be explored. The provision of suitable accommodation is another avenue through which contact could be made and Christian communities of faith built. Among people in their 20s, almost all those who were newcomers to the churches and interviewed by the researchers of the CRA had been invited by friends to church activities and had been through an Alpha course or some other course introducing them to the Christian faith.

In order for the activities of evangelism to be appropriate, it is necessary to target particular groups and to plan the whole process well. Again, what will work with one age group, education group or socio-economic group will not work with another.

In summary, those churches which had high numbers of newcomers were focussed on reaching people outside the present congregation. They had programs and structures in place in which:

- groups in the community were 'targeted';
- activities were arranged for making contact;
- structures for welcoming newcomers and simple services which newcomers could easily follow;
- activities in which newcomers could explore faith and build relationships with others in the church.

## Discipleship Process

Discipleship process is another part of the definition of health and vitality. There must be ways through which people are growing in faith, thinking about issues of faith, struggling with new behaviour patterns, growing in love for God and for others. It is easy to confuse 'growth in faith' and 'growth in enthusiasm for faith' particularly when it is self-reported and it is not easy, then, to measure 'growth in faith'. Faith, like love, is recognised when it comes under testing, and endures; not necessarily only when enthusiasm for it overflows.

Many churches relied for the weekly worship service to 'carry' the discipleship process. Certainly worship services often make a substantial contribution. It is important that the preaching is relevant, challenging people where they are at, looking at the implications of faith for the lives they are living, rather than developing 'concepts' of faith or even the facts about the Bible. In many places people spoke warmly of the preaching and its importance to them. Many also spoke of small groups in which they wrestled more personally with the issues of faith.

Some groups are 'action oriented'. They wrestle with the issues of faith by focussing on action for social justice, pastoral work in the community, prayer, parenting, ministry to the elderly, business ethics or whatever.

There was little evidence of people coming into the churches through small groups. However, small groups had often been very important in people finding a place and feeling a sense of belonging. Among younger people and among many others, structured courses, such as the Alpha Course, have been used very successfully. One church was using the Catechumenate process effectively and others were preparing to try it. People who had been through such courses felt that they have gained enormously, because specific content has been given and absorbed.

Some churches have further courses for those maturing in faith, and for the development of spiritual gifts for ministry to others. Those churches which had the highest percentages of attenders reporting 'growth in faith' in the National Church Life Survey, the CRA visited four out of the top fifteen. In each of those four churches, there were series of structured courses, not only to introduce faith but for maturing Christians and in recognising and gifts for ministry and undergoing training for developing skills in ministry. Successful completion of these courses was generally recognised through the public awarding of certificates. The fact of 'graduating' in a course encourages people to feel that they have grown in faith.

Beyond the courses, it was important that people be given opportunities to be involved in forms of ministry appropriate to their gifts and interests. All of these churches scoring high in 'growth in faith' that were visited had high levels of involvement among lay people in a variety of forms of ministry.

Among people who have known each other a very long time, living together in a local area, small groups can sometimes be threatening rather than helpful when expected to 'share' at some depth, or even in prayer for one another. These people meet each other regularly and usually have good 'vines' of communication. In some small churches, the Sunday morning

service may act in a way very similar to a small group if it provides opportunities for people to share their concerns and interests formally or informally.

Several people in one church responded very differently to the structured discipleship courses and the home groups. They warmly affirmed the structured courses, but were not keen to be involved in the home groups that the church offered. They felt that the home groups did not 'guarantee' growth in faith as did the structured courses. These people were mostly from working-class backgrounds, and we suspect that they would be easily intimidated by small group discussion without strong leadership or clear direction.

However, to involve new people or people new to a community into the life of a church and to build a sense of belonging, small groups, structured or unstructured, play a very important role. More structured or more action oriented groups tend to work better among people who find it difficult to reflect on or verbalise their thoughts about their own lives.

Sermons are important, but generally do not encourage people to systematically work on the material that is presented in such a way that people actually feel they have 'grown in faith', even, if in fact, they do help people to grow. In most churches attended the preaching was enjoyable, succinct, and relevant. Unfortunately, excellent preaching does not often build a congregation.

In summary,

- a discipleship process is an important part of church health and vitality, preferably offering a series of structured courses rather than relying on sermons;
- small groups may play an important role in the discipleship process, but the form of these will need to vary with the background of those for whom they are designed.

## Supportive Community

Supportive community, where the members of a congregation or a group, care for one another is part of what we would consider the definition of 'health'. In a small congregation among people who have known each other for a long time, this may take place informally. In order to care for newcomers, or more mobile people, some form of group life is usually important. This may be supplemented by prayer chains, a pastoral care team which visits or telephones to keep in touch, by food banks or groups which organise transport for the sick, child-care for parents, or whatever the needs are.

One factor is group involvement. Many people found a sense of belonging through small group involvement. In the six churches we visited that were in the top twenty-five of those reporting 'growth in belonging', five had a strong small group program. However, it is interesting that one of those churches did not.

In two churches with a strong sense of belonging but without a strong small group program, the clergy were warm, personable, and 'easy-going', and we expect from discussions with members that the personality of the clergy was a key factor. They were encouraging growth in belonging through inclusiveness in their approach to church life. This accords with the finding of the National Church Life Survey that leadership which helps attenders discover their gifts and skills builds a sense of belonging. Belonging, feeling part of a supportive community, for many, means being able to participate and to be affirmed in that participation.

In most of the churches with a high sense of belonging according to the NCLS, the vicar in charge had been in that church for a considerable length of time prior to 1996 when the measurements were taken and were still there in 1998. In some cases there was evidence that long-term ministries by people who are well liked had helped to build a growing sense of belonging.

The sense that the church is going somewhere, that there is a vision, and, step by step, something of that vision is being attained, also contributes to a growing sense of belonging. People are caught up in that vision and the activities to achieve it. The NCLS reported that, in general, there has been a significant correlation between a sense of vision and direction for the congregation and a growing sense of belonging.

In the five out of six churches visited with a strong and growing sense of belonging, there was a clear vision and means in place to achieve this. In three of those churches, this vision was primarily evangelistic and had also led to numbers of newcomers. In the two other churches, the vision was directed to service to the community in other forms. As noted in the National Church Life Survey report, those churches in which a strong sense of belonging was reported were not always those churches which are growing numerically or in terms of newcomers.

It should also be noted that while many people valued greatly the support of a congregation, there were others for whom this could be claustrophobic. They were not anxious to have more demands laid upon them, or for church activities to 'take over' their lives. Indeed, a few people interviewed indicated that they had deliberately chosen to attend a particular church

because they felt they could attend without too much being expected of them.

In a recent book looking at models of ministry in Canada, Reginald Bibby says

Given such factors as time constraints and diverse family structures, what is also needed is a church that both offers little and asks for little. Many people would simply like a superb worship service, complete with good music and a centrepiece sermon, offered by a person who has deep faith in God and attempts to relate that faith to everyday life. No, they don't want the frills - the coffee after the service, the Wednesday night potluck, the Saturday social, even the Sunday school. They have neither the time nor the inclination. They do, however, want to worship, reflect, hear what God has to say about life (1993, p.297).

Some of the focus groups suggested that some churches in the Diocese are fulfilling such a need in a small way. There is a need for congregations in which the service is of consistently high quality, but in which people do not feel pressure or the expectation to give more in time or energy. At the present time, many people with work are expected to work longer hours than ever before. Many families build their life-styles, including their children's education, around two incomes. Time is at a premium.

The congregation which demands little and does not seek to build a strong sense of belonging or involve people in Christian ministry through the life of the church may be seen as a 'stage in the journey' rather than the ideal form of church life. Nevertheless, there may be a place for it within the Diocese. On the other hand, this model should be an excuse for *not* having a vision for building a community of faith, or for *not* engaging in a variety of forms of ministry.

In summary,

- love, mutual care and belonging are generally signs of a healthy church;
- they may be built through small group life and a variety of other structures to ensure people experience care and are able to offer care for each other;
- can be enhanced by a sense of vision which is being worked out in the life of the congregation;
- and through the warmth offered by the clergy themselves to the members of the congregation and where people feel their gifts are recognised and used.
- However, there may be also be a place within the Diocese for congregations where it becomes widely known that the services will be of high standard, but where people will feel free to 'drop in'.

## **Mission to the Community**

It would appear from both the NCLS data and from our case-study work that few churches are effective both in reaching out into the lives of their communities, working for justice and well-being in the community, and in putting before individuals the invitation to faith and the journey of discipleship. Most of the churches which were well organised in terms of bringing people into the life of the congregation, with strong small group structures and courses through which people studied the issues of faith, felt that they were not strong in their involvement in the life of the community.

There were some exceptions, however, and some other churches which were not particularly good at bringing in newcomers to the church which were doing some very creative things in their communities. Some churches had lots of special services in which they served the community, such as services for the schools, principals and staff of the local (state) schools, emergency services, or other community groups. Other clergy were involved in taking services at nursing homes and in other welfare institutions in the community.

One church had organised a series of groups which were focussed on local environmental issues, historical issues, and other community-based issues. There were a range of programs through which churches served the community: offering the rites of passage, play groups, counselling, social activities, sporting clubs, and so on. Several churches had opportunity shops, several of which provided welfare assistance. Three churches had effective, free counselling programs which had a substantial input into the lives of many people in the community. In one several professional counsellors gave short periods of time on a regular basis to the service. In others, a counsellor was employed by the church.

Some churches had thought about the issues of gambling or had supported a particular ministry to people in prison.

## Leadership and Organisation

Particular styles of leadership and organisation are not part of the definition of health and vitality of ministry *per se*, but are most important in achieving it. Leadership which has both the vision and the ability to work out the details for it to happen is important in the development of a healthy and vital congregation. In times of great social change, visionary leadership is important, but is not sufficient in itself. That leadership must be Biblically and theologically sophisticated, but be able to form the vision, work out achievable goals preferably to be achieved in specific periods of time, and work out the means to accomplish those goals. The vision, goals and strategies then need to be communicated clearly and persuasively to the congregation as a whole, but in detail with the leadership - whether that be a leadership team or vestry.

Those churches which scored high on vision all had clearly structured visions, with achievable goals, and had actually accomplished goals. There is nothing which succeeds like success. For that reason, setting goals that can be achieved, and then achieving some, and being able to celebrate those achievements is an important part of the processes of leadership.

The vision usually related to the various aspects of the life of the community, and was often formulated in words such as 'gathering - healing - equipping - sending' or in being a community for others. It would express the basic dimensions of being the church.

Out of the seven churches with the highest numbers of newcomers, six had well-developed, structured visions for doing so. Thus, in most instances, it may be concluded that structured visions shared with and owned by the congregation are important to bringing newcomers into the church. In each of these six churches, the vicar had been the primary person in formulating the vision, in communicating it with others involved in leading ministry, with the vestry, and with the congregation as a whole.

In four of the other churches in the sample, visions for reaching newcomers had been recently formulated. The testing time for those visions would be in the next few years, as those visions were communicated and as strategies for implementing them were adopted. In two churches, the visions revolved primarily around the way the church functioned in the community rather than reaching newcomers. Both those churches were doing significant things in the community in terms of welfare and social justice, but did not have many newcomers.

Five churches did not have a clearly articulated vision or strategies for attaining that vision which were shared by the congregation. Only in one case had the church grown substantially and people without a church background had become involved in the church. In this case, the growth appeared to be partly due to the vision and initiative of some lay people in the church who had been supported by the vicar and the vestry.

Leadership also needs to be 'person-centred' in that it pays a great deal of attention to the needs and concerns of the people in the parish and those in the wider community. In several places, lay people mentioned how important it was for them that the leadership listened to them. In several instances, successful programs (such as a disco for young people, a play group, and so on) had been started by individuals in the parish independently of clergy

leadership. However, the encouragement and support of the clergy is vital for these initiatives to work.

Many clergy had taken some time before that vision had been formulated. They had listened first to the needs of both the church community and wider community, and had discussed ideas widely with at least the leaders of the church if not the whole congregation. Thus the vision was seen as being formed in response to the local situation. It was important that the clergy take the steps to develop the vision and to work with the whole church in its implementation.

The flexibility of the clergy was also important. We noted that several of the clergy which had churches with lots of newcomers were very flexible in their approaches. They were able to cope with services which were quite different for different groups of people in the community and were able to adjust their styles of dress, language and even style of leadership within the service to suit the occasion.

Goals were usually established for particular time periods in those churches where there was a strong sense of vision. In some places, there was a rolling vision, always five years ahead, and renewed each year. The goals may be in terms of establishing groups, establishing and running a particular service, such as a counselling service, or creating some new activities or structures through which the Gospel would be expressed. Sometimes they were expressed in terms of numbers attending. Most of the churches which had large numbers of newcomers had a vision which was oriented to sharing faith with people outside the present congregation. They had specific goals in relation to developing contact activities for specific groups of people, and activities through which the faith of newcomers could be developed.

The churches with strong vision had leaders who were willing and able to delegate, to empower and enable. They set up training programs for leaders and nurtured and cultivated the skills of the team of leaders. Some clergy are very good at getting people involved in the life of the church, but lack achievable goals for the future. Some clergy, however, lacked ideas, lacked the focus, or lacked the ability to enable their congregations go far beyond running the various services or visiting those sick or in crisis. Others had the ideas but saw themselves hamstrung by the lack of resources in their congregations.

Leadership must be able to listen and respond appropriately to where people are at: to set goals that can be attained, so that a positive climate is developed and people feel they can minister. They must model and must educate, but also recognise their own limits. Some clergy spent a lot of their first year or two in a parish formulating a clear vision, goals and strategies for their churches. In one church many small groups had been formed among the congregation with the specific purpose of discussing the vision and working on the ways of achieving it. In that church, there was high levels of ownership of the vision and goals.

If clergy are to spend substantial time in developing vision and strategies, it means that they have less time to spend in other things. Few clergy said they were able to do more than visit the sick or those in crisis and new people. Few clergy said they did much counselling. While many clergy have been appointed to undertake pastoral work, the demands of parishes mean that few can spend much time in that area. Rather, clergy must focus on leadership and education.

Most clergy preach most weeks. Most of those in churches which have newcomers and young people have spent time developing or modifying structured courses for use in groups of newcomers, among young people and other people in the church. Part of their time also goes in preparing people in the congregation to lead those courses although some do themselves. Thus, teaching, both directly and indirectly, through sermons and in developing course structures is an important function for many clergy. Teaching is an important part of developing ministry with young people and newcomers.

In smaller churches, many clergy work closely with their vestries. In larger churches, most clergy develop a hierarchy of leaders for the various dimensions of the life of the church. Thus, the vicar in charge will work with a team of people, paid or unpaid, who take charge of ministry with children, teenagers, young families, older people and so on. These people will have their own teams of people with whom they work and who will be leaders of specific activities or task groups.

The clergy varied considerably in their sense of accountability. Those in churches with large numbers of newcomers generally saw themselves as accountable to their congregations, as well as their bishops. This was part of their commitment to listen to the people in their congregations and part of their 'people-centred' approach to ministry. Some saw themselves as primarily responsible to the Diocese and the Bishops, while others emphasised their responsibility to God. Several mentioned that parish reviews were important and should be well done.

In summary,

- in contemporary society, health and vitality do not happen because of faithfulness to what has traditionally occurred in the life of the church;
- but usually occurs when people have a clear, structured vision and step by step strategies for the development of the life and ministry of the congregation, which is communicated to leaders and to the congregation as a whole.
- Parishes are mostly likely to achieve according to the breadth and nature of their vision; and thus a vision for providing welfare will lead to the provision of welfare but not necessarily to growth in numbers. A vision for engaging people outside church life in the journey of faith is most likely to lead to success in so doing.
- Most churches are dependent on the visionary leadership of the clergy. In formulating the vision, the members of the congregation feel it is important that their own ideas are heard, and that the clergy are flexible tailoring their vision to the nature of the community and the capacities of the congregation.

## **Clergy Selection, Training, In-Service and Health**

Most people appreciated their training for ministry. Those who attended Ridley College appreciated the Biblical foundation with which it had provided them. Those who attended Trinity appreciated the theological foundation.

However, many clergy felt that practical training had been slight and that the academic emphases had taken over. One mentioned that training was primarily for working with 'middle class' people and that there was no preparation for working with other groups in the community. Few clergy are currently trained, and many do not feel competent, to develop visions and strategies for the development of ministry. There is really very little training in leadership, which is one of the primary tasks of the clergy.

Part of the problem is the selection of candidates. Clergy are being required to be entrepreneurs and yet are often selected on the basis of their ability to continue the traditions of the church. This is something which should be considered carefully by those responsible for the selection and training of clergy. Several suggested that, in selection, the Diocese should seek people with a proven track record in lack leadership and with the skills for growing churches. One person asked 'Why do we priest people who do not have the gift of leadership?' The appropriate question is 'who can preside at communion?'

Another person suggested that more should be done in the formation of clergy, in assisting them to adapt to different situations, to 'travel light', and being ready to love.

It was generally felt that in-service training was weak in the Diocese and that more money and effort should go into it, although some mentioned that if one looked for it there were a lot of opportunities available. However, it would also need a change in mind-set among the clergy themselves.

One person suggested that, post-ordination, people should be involved in in-service training for one week a year for the first five years. Two or three others suggested that there should be more supervision for those in their first appointments by people who been successful in ministry.

Methods of appointment were also criticised. Several clergy felt that little care was taken to match the needs of the parish with the spiritual gifts and skills of the clergy. It was noted that little 'hard' strategic thinking is being done on a regional or Diocesan level about such matters as planting new churches or congregations, the placement of resources, and perhaps the merging of some churches.

Several clergy mentioned that clergy health and stress was a major problem in the Diocese. Sometimes this is hidden because the same people called to have pastoral care for the clergy also have administrative responsibilities. There was a general feeling among most of the clergy that the structures of the Diocese were not working well. Several felt that there were too many Diocesan committees. Several clergy suggested their role was a very lonely one. The clergy are flooded with administrative demands from the Diocese while they and their families are given little support.

## **General Reflections on Health and Vitality of Congregational Life**

The identification of congregational health and vitality is a theological task, and one in which clergy vary from one another, particularly in their emphases. How do we identify, in our culture and our time, when congregations are 'bringing good news to the poor'? Or when they are proclaiming 'liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind'? When are congregations setting 'free the oppressed' and announcing God's salvation?

An indication of health and vitality is lives being changed, when people are freed from old habits and addictions which cause pain and suffering, when people are finding a new sense of direction and purpose through a relationship with God, when the past is really put behind people as they find forgiveness. Health and vitality is seen as people engage in authentic worship and as they find God's values which give structure and direction for life, when people have compassion for each other and give practical and prayerful support to each other. It is seen when whole communities change, as trust develops, as people create a more just society, caring for one another and for the whole environment in the name of the Creator.

In many churches, people told the researchers of the changes that have occurred in their lives. There was evidence in many places of vibrant worship, of people finding God's values, of compassion and support for others. However, the ways in which these took place were a little different from one place to another.

In general, it should be said that more occurred where there was leadership which had vision and an eye for the detail through which vision could be accomplished. People were brought into the life of the church and lives were changed most where churches intentionally sought to do that, through developing contacts with people, inviting them to appropriate times of thinking about faith, and by providing structures through which people could explore faith and build relationships with other Christians.

It occurred most when worship was targeted to particular groups and when the forms of worship were relevant to a targeted group, in terms not only of music but of the issues considered in the sermon, the style of dress of those leading, and the worldview which underlies the expressions of faith.

This, in itself, means that there must be variety in the forms of church life and worship throughout the Diocese. What suits one person, or one section of society, will not suit another. Parishes need to be aware of the various groups strongly represented within their locality and develop appropriate forms of ministry for them. This may also mean that different churches in adjoining geographical areas might deliberately target different groups of people, developing different styles of worship and church-life. There are a few parishes in the Diocese with the resources to cater for a variety of people through a variety of activities and worship services. However, in most areas, this could be best achieved by complementary strategic planning by groups of parishes. To undertake ministry in such a way, acknowledging the necessity to people groups rather than to localities, would involve a major shift in the concept of parish boundaries.

## **Change**

In most of the churches in the case-study, change did not appear to have been a very major issue. In all the churches with contemporary services designed with the needs of newcomers in mind, there were also traditional services for those who preferred them. What these churches had done was not to change what had been significant to people, but rather to add on new and different services, new dimensions to the life of the church, rather than change the old. In some cases, this had meant little more than changing the time of the traditional service.

It did mean the development of new visions, new emphases, new groups and structures, and new activities. People were encouraged and challenged to change. No doubt, some people decided that they could not cope with such challenges and moved elsewhere, although we heard very few stories of that happening. While vestries may be suspicious of the free-wheeling contemporary service aimed at teenagers, most feel that they have little to lose if they themselves do not have to attend. Adding dimensions to church life is much less threatening to people, than changing it, and usually, it would appear, more effective.

## Newcomers

The CRA spoke to over forty people who had come into the life of the congregation within the last five years in eleven churches. Of these, approximately

35% were teenagers

15% were in their 20s

35% were in their thirties and had young children, and

15% were older people.

### *First Contacts*

These interviews suggested that there are two major times of life when people enter church life. The first is as teenagers and the second is as young married people with young children.

The paths of the two groups were quite different. Almost all the teenagers and people in their 20s had been influenced by friends. Friends had persuaded them to attend Christian groups or meetings, either at a state high school or at a church. In one case, initial involvement with the church had been through a sporting group. In almost all cases, the young people had begun their faith journeys through a course such as an Alpha course.

In other words, for young people coming into a church without previous background, peer invitations had been critical. However, something at the church such as an Alpha course, through which these people could become part of a group and through which they could begin exploring faith, were also essential.

In several cases, in several churches, experiences at Anglican schools were cited as being obstacles to the development of faith. Several had been 'put off by the worship at school. One or two said that part of the journey into the church was learning that the impressions they had received at school were wrong. 'Religion' had been identified with undertaking formal acts of worship or as accepting certain values, rather than as a relationship with a personal God which affected everyday life. In no cases in this study were experiences at Anglican schools a positive part of the journey of faith. While no generalisations can be made from these cases, this issue should be explored further.

For young families, in most cases, initial contact with the church was in seeking baptism for their children. In most of those cases, the parents made the initial contact without any friends being involved or suggesting a church. They had contacted the local church because it was the local church. Several said they had tried several churches before the present one, receiving several 'poor responses'. In most cases, they mentioned that the warm, undemanding response from the vicar had been very important to them in proceeding to further discussions about baptism.

In several cases, people of this age group had moved to a new area, and as part of the process of adopting new life-styles, had decided to look around at local churches. Usually there was something in their own background or that of their families which led them to try an Anglican church. Another person had been invited to a Baptist church by a friend, but after finding that not to her personal taste had decided to try the local Anglican church. Several others we met in the focus groups had moved church because they did not feel comfortable in

Anglican or other charismatic churches.

One person came into the church through an outreach dinner to which he had been invited by a friend. While the churches which had larger number of newcomers often had various outreach activities, this was the only older person through which an explicit outreach activity had been an important part of the journey.

A couple of older people who had recently joined a church had come because they saw the changes in their son after attending an Alpha course. Several others had their first contact with a church through a funeral. They had been impressed by the minister and had come into the life of the church. One other middle-aged person had been invited to an ordinary worship service by a friend. Another walked past the door of the church at Christmas and decided to come in.

### *Staying Involved*

While no one had entered the church through a small group, small groups of one kind or another had been important for many people staying involved. Teenagers and people in their 20s valued small group life. In nine out of the fourteen churches in which focus group discussions took place, people spoke highly of Alpha courses, or similar structured introduction to basic Christianity courses. These courses provided an opportunity for people to think through the basics of Christian faith, to meet other people and form warm relationships, and to find out more about the life of the church.

Newcomers are usually very conscious of the fact that they do not know as much about faith or about the church as do others. They are nervous about doing the wrong thing in church services, or not knowing what others know in small group situations. They are fearful of standing like 'shags on a rock'. Parents are worried that their children will make a noise or cause a disturbance. They are very sensitive to the wrong sorts of looks from other parishioners. Indeed, it is likely that for many people, such fears keep them from entering a church at all.

Structured groups which go through a course of study are not as threatening as unstructured small groups can be. Thus, for many newcomers they are more attractive. However, many people, particularly younger people, proceed to unstructured small groups and find the sharing and the learning, as well as the relationships that are formed, very beneficial.

Most younger people, both teenagers and people in their 20s, valued greatly opportunities to be involved in worship on Sundays, rather than just 'observers'. This was true in every church where young people were interviewed. Most of the younger people met in focus groups had one recognised role or another in worship. Many were involved in the music. Some were involved in readings, drama, or even in advertising. Most young people will not come just for the sake of being there. They want to participate, and it is important that their participation is valued.

Younger people value worship which relates to them. They want music to which they can relate. They want sermons which relate to topics that concern them. For example, as one teenager said, they are not interested in sermons about raising children, but are very interested in sermons about relationships.

Older newcomers, however, do not expect to be involved. Many became involved through an inquiry about baptism. The preparation for baptism was an important time. In one church, parents were invited to attend a basic Christianity course first, and valued the opportunity to do that. Others attended Alpha courses and built relationships with others through the course.

Almost all newcomers spoke about the importance of the friendliness of the church that was offered without any strings attached. They spoke of the warmth of the welcome by other lay people. For many, the relationship with the vicar was important to them particularly as the vicar was the first person they got to know. The case study confirmed what was found in the Combined Churches Survey that what people wanted above everything in the vicar was a friend.

Above all, many parents spoke of the great importance that it did not matter if their children made a noise. They wanted their children also to be accepted. For many, this was a vital sign of the friendliness of the congregation. Another vital sign was that people would initiate conversation after the service and remember the other person's name.

In several churches, but not in all, people spoke about the importance of the relationships built which offered support. They appreciated that when they were not in church, someone phoned to see if they were ill. If they were, help with food and friendly visits were offered.

In both high and low churches, older newcomers spoke of valuing the relaxed atmosphere and the informality of the service. In several churches, people spoke of feeling relieved that people wore ordinary clothes on Sunday and that they did not have to dress up. This emphasis on informality was a little surprising, as some of these churches had services which were more formal than others. In these more formal services, the people explained that they did not feel it mattered if they did the wrong thing, if they did not kneel when others knelt, for example.

They also valued the preaching. In one church, people expressed their gratitude that sermons were not 'wishy washy', that they made you think about your life and challenged the ways in which they lived. They spoke of the differences it had made to their attitudes to money. One woman had left the work-force to spend more time at home because of a change in her values that had resulted from a sermon, in several other churches, people spoke of the importance of the sermons. Most important was the fact that sermons related to their own lives. In one church, the professional style of music was another attraction to people.

In general, older newcomers were not so anxious to be involved in a formal way in Sunday worship. Many stated that they valued the fact that no pressure was put on them to be involved in groups or in particular ways in the church, even though contact was maintained. However, for some, finding a place in a choir, in a meditation group or another small group was important in the longer term. In three churches, newcomers regretted that there were no small groups in which they could meet people informally.

#### *Comparison with general NCLS results*

These results accord in a general way with those noted by the NCLS (1997, p.23). Most newcomers want to find and relate to other people of similar age and background to themselves. They look for contemporary styles of music and worship. They are attracted to

churches where things are happening, in that people are being challenged to make changes in their lives as a result of faith, where there is an outward focus, and where leaders take attenders' ideas into account and help attenders to discover and use their gifts and skills. There was little evidence in the case-studies among these Anglican churches, that many newcomers had themselves experienced decisive moments of faith commitment, or were attracted to churches where many had had such experiences. The case-studies tended to contradict the finding that most newcomers were young adults in their 20s. In the case-studies, most were either in their teenage years or in their 30s with young children.

The NCLS found that 64% attended through some form of personal contact (1997, p.22). This was higher than that found in the case-studies in which many came through rites of passage without any previous form of personal contact. However, nearly all young single newcomers had come through personal contact.

The NCLS found that 67% of newcomers first came through a church service, with 11% first coming to a baptism, wedding or funeral (1997, p.25). Only 4% first attended a small group, 2% a special outreach activity, and 2% a social activity. The case-studies bear out the fact that most first attend a church service, although for many this is a rite of passage, particularly a baptism or funeral. This appears to be a characteristic of Anglican churches according with the finding mentioned in Castle, Hughes and Kaldor (1998, p. 14) that many newcomers to Anglican churches come without first being invited.

## Young People

The comments made about the maintenance of newcomers apply generally to young people, whether they have a long history of involvement in church-life or not. Most young people want to be involved. They value it when their ideas and their input is taken seriously. It is very important to them that they can relate to the music, the style of the service and the sermon. Very few young people will 'put up' regularly with a service which is not contemporary in style, or which has only a few contemporary elements in it. Invariably, they appreciate a relaxed, informal atmosphere.

The peer group within the church is also very important. Most young people get involved in a youth group and/or some other sorts of small groups with Bible study and sharing of ups and downs of life. Some older teenagers and many in their 20s enjoy groups which are structured (but informal in style) through which they are challenged and in which they feel they are growing.

It is important that they feel they can relate to the leaders. However, if the vicar is not a youth leader, the role of the vicar is not generally as important as for older people.

Young families who come appreciate their children being accepted and involved in the service. They want them to feel part of what is going on. While most want their children to have time in Sunday School or a similar children's programme of worship, some chose to have their children remain with them in church.

In the longer term, most young families want to get to know other people of similar age and background. While groups may be difficult to form with young families, given the pressures of work as well as family life, there are great possibilities for 'Parent Support Networks' or arrangements for exchanging child-minding and occasional group activities.

Young people who have moved out of home but have not yet had children are the age-group least involved in church-life. These people are often highly mobile. One person who had moved from a rural area had been followed up by a city church, informed by the rural minister. However, often contacts are lost.

In the churches visited, the only model for developing the involvement of people of this age group was informal small groups and Alpha-type courses. In order to make contact with people of this age group, there needs to be much more experimentation. There are many possibilities. The Café Church, being tried in several places in Sydney, is a possibility. Many young people have little conscious affiliation with a local community. They operate in a variety of networks. Involvement with this age group will need to seek to engage people through such networks.

### *Comparison with general NCLS results*

The NCLS found that churches with a younger profile attracted more young people (1997, p.27). The case-studies suggest that this is not just a matter of having a critical mass of young people among whom they can build relationships. It is also a matter of having targeted services of worship with contemporary music and styles of worship and appropriate

programmes for youth. For this reason, it is harder for a small church to develop such facilities and larger churches have generally been more successful in retaining young adults. However, rather than try to cater for a small group of young people in a 'family service', it may be better to develop an appropriate worship time even if it be among a small group in a home.

NCLS (1997, p.28) notes that congregations having a regional focus are more likely to retain young adults. A number of the 20 year olds interviewed in the focus groups lived several suburbs away from the group or the church. However, this did not apply to teenagers, most of whom lived in the same suburb as the church.

The case-studies bore out the NCLS finding that congregations that are effective in retaining young adults are likely to be those in which young adults are encouraged to be involved (1997, p.30). A sense of involvement certainly leads to a great commitment. Where opportunities are not given involvement and where young people feel their ideas are not heard, they will move on.

## **Factors Contributing to Ministry among People without Previous Church Background and to Young People Identified in the Case-Study Work**

Case-study work has limitations in that it deals with samples which are limited in number and not necessarily representative of the total population. However, recognising these limitations, the following factors appeared were perceived as important for ministry among newcomers and young people through the focus groups, discussions with clergy and observations of services.

1. Initial contacts for newcomers have been primarily through friends and members of families (especially younger people) and through rites of passage (especially baptism for families with young children).
2. Both in initial contact and in on-going contact, people valued being accepted above all else. Many were fearful of feeling out of place or having demands placed upon them. They wanted to be warmly accepted, without judgement and without pressure. For parents, it was very important that their children were accepted in this way, even if they were noisy or cause some disturbance in church. This warm acceptance by the clergy was often critical - even at the point of initial phone contact in the case of people seeking baptism for their children.
3. Worship services were the major entry point into the life of the church. It was important that these be accessible and appropriate for the life-stage and educational level of the people who came. Almost all young people and people with young families wanted services that were contemporary, relaxed, informal in style and relevant to their lives in their content. Many suggested that both music and the sermon must be of high quality in their presentation, recognising that high quality rock music was what teenagers had in mind, while a few older people looked for high quality classical music. Almost inevitably, this means having worship services targeted to people of specific life-stage groups and perhaps educational and socio-economic backgrounds. There were almost no teenagers and no people in their 20s in services which were not specifically targeted to their needs.
4. Structured courses were very helpful for many newcomers and young people to find a way into the life of the church, to develop their journeys of faith and to develop relationships with other people. While many young articulate people find it relatively easy to move into unstructured home groups, that is not always so with older newcomers. It is important for most newcomers to build relationships with other people in the church in order to feel a sense of belonging and to maintain involvement. This may take a variety of forms, however.
5. For the maintenance of involvement, it was important to most younger people (but not so much those with young families) to have recognised positions through which they contributed to the life of the church, such as through music, publicity, and responsibility in small groups. There were few young people in the focus groups who did not have such roles. It was also important to them that their opinions were heard by the clergy and lay leaders and that their ideas were seriously considered.

6. The implications for leadership of the above is that
  1. it be people-centred, warm, accepting, open and willing to listen. The maintenance of contact without putting pressure on people was frequently mentioned as very important for people's continuing involvement in the life of the church.
  2. it be sufficiently flexible (and entrepreneurial) to develop or allow to develop different styles of worship and structured learning groups specifically geared for different life-stage and educational/socio-economic groups in the population.
  3. it provide and communicate vision and strategies through which the vision can be achieved that are appropriate to the area in which the church is located, but also appropriate to the congregation(s).
  4. it have the skills and the levels of self-confidence to provide training for leadership especially among young people and delegate leadership responsibilities to others in the church.
  
7. Ministry must be authentic to the Gospel and provide meaning - and challenge - to life. In the past it is likely that many people went to church for social reasons. Today, few people, especially younger people, join the church because it is a pleasant social club. They will come because they find something in the life of the church, in the worship services and in the other activities of the church, which gives meaning and direction to life, that provides values for themselves and their families, and which is rooted in the reality of the divine.

While the form of services and activities must be culturally relevant in language, structure, and style, the content must be different from that found elsewhere. Ultimately, the critical factor for ministry is that the church puts people in touch with God - and the peace, the sustenance, and the values and direction which God alone can give.

Unfortunately, too often, churches have language, structure and style which are peculiar to the church and are quite different from that of the world, but a content which is only vaguely different from the moral values of being nice people, caring and considerate of others, which is widely supported in the world outside the church. In general, it has been found that most people think about the Christian faith in terms of holding general values about being caring and considerate for others, and few of these people feel that church attendance is important to their faith. Among those who feel that worship of God is important, most feel that church attendance is important.

In the 1993 National Social Science Survey, undertaken nationally by the Australian National University, a sample of adult Australians was asked in what ways was religion important to them, asking them to chose from one of the following five options.

- 2.3% said 'talking about the faith to other people'
- 8.1% said 'spending time with God in worship'
- 12.3% said 'keeping the Ten Commandments'
- 60.7% said 'being caring and considerate to others', and
- 16.6% said 'religion is not important to me at all'.

Of those who said

- religion is not important, 84% had reduced the frequency of church attendance, 2% had increased, since growing up;
- religion is about being caring and considerate, 80% had reduced, 7% had increased attendance;
- religion is about keeping the 10 Commandments, 70% had reduced and 8% increased attendance;
- religion is about spending time with God, 27% had reduced and 35% increased attendance;
- religion is about talking about the faith with others, 16% had reduced and 39% increased attendance.

In other words, almost all who see religion primarily in terms of values such as being caring and considerate or keeping the Ten Commandments feel that church attendance is unnecessary and have decreased their levels of attendance. Most of those who see faith in terms of spending time with God or sharing faith with others feel that church attendance is important and have increased or maintained their levels of attendance since growing up (Bentley and Hughes, 1998. p. 118).

## **Concluding Comments: The Paradigm Shift in the Nature of Spirituality**

While many good things are happening in many of the Anglican parishes visited, few churches are fulfilling anything like their potential. Many are doing good things. A few are having a very real impact on the individuals and communities in which they minister. Those churches which are most effective are churches with strong, people-focussed leadership which both listens and formulates the vision, and pays sufficient attention to the details to make sure things happen. Those churches in which the leaders have developed visions and strategies of contact people beyond the church, engaging them and inviting them into the life of the churches, are those which have been most successful in that area. Churches which have sought to show care for the community, or to work for social justice in the community, have been most successful in so doing.

It was evident that different people warmed to different kinds of churches. Some people needed the services of healing and reconciliation. Some older people valued traditional Prayerbook services. Young people wanted lively, exciting services. All wanted services that were relevant to their lives - and what was relevant for one age group or social group would be irrelevant to another.

The larger and growing churches generally had a variety of services geared to and catering for a variety of people. One cannot cater for all types of people in the one context. These same churches would have appropriate activities in terms of structured and unstructured small groups and activities for different people.

There is still much opportunity to explore even greater varieties of groups and activities for different parts of the community. Perhaps we need to be even more daring in diversity with new models of being church, acknowledging the very different life-styles that people lead. Most ways of being church revolve around the weekly worship services. The greater the variety in these services, the greater the variety of people in the community for whom the church will serve.

But one might well ask if other forms of worship might be explored, in homes and cafes, in meditation groups, and community action groups, in camping programs and pilgrimages. One of the churches interviewed was planning home churches to meet weekly as the basis for church life, with monthly meetings in a larger community. It will be interesting to see how this plan works, and whether this leads to an overall growth in Christian vitality, or whether the home churches will be found intimidating to many people.

In the past, the development of religious faith has centred on the development of communities of faith who take on or extend a particular identity of people. People have seen themselves as 'Anglicans' rather than 'Baptists' or 'Catholics'. For many, part of this identity has been rooted in their ethnic and historical heritage. However, that sense of denominational identity has become weak in contemporary society.

At the same time, general surveys have shown that there has been a small, but significant rise in interest in spirituality, especially among younger people. In the Australian Values Study

Survey of 1983, 56% of the population described themselves as 'religious people'. In 1995, the World Values Survey, asking the same question of adult Australians found that 58% so described themselves. Among people under the age of 20, the rise was from 34% to 47%. But few are looking to the churches as the places where their spirituality may be explored or expressed.

Young people are putting together their own spirituality using a wide range of resources. The difference in the very nature of spirituality, from being part of people's identity and involving identity with a religion or religious denomination, to seeking for individual resources without commitment to a particular religious group, is so great as could be described as a paradigm shift in the nature of religiosity in contemporary society. Few young people are looking for 'whole spiritual packages' and few are interested in exploring regular commitment to a congregation. Rather, they are looking for a range of spiritual resources from a variety of sources that they can put together in their own way.

It seems that in order to meet those 'consumer attitudes' to spirituality, churches need to get into the market-place of spirituality, where people are. They need to explore making films where the issues of faith are presented, developing art-shows, to offer Christian holidays, developing holiday programs not only for children but for adults in which there are spiritual directors or in which spiritual pilgrimage is a recognised part, to produce books on spirituality for the wider public and for people who have not had a Christian heritage, and books in which the issues of business and economics, politics and forms of society are discussed from a Christian point of view; parenting networks and Christian computer clubs, Christian cafes and Christian gym clubs; Christian environmental groups and media watch groups. The possibilities are endless. With different activities, the churches will link into different community networks. On the other hand, there are few models of ministry among people in their 20s and 30s which are proving successful at the moment. There needs to be a lot more experimentation. At the moment, the mainstream churches are failing almost totally to engage most younger people (under the age of 40 or even 45) in the quest of faith, despite widespread affirmation of the importance of spirituality to many in this age group.

The suggestions above do not mean an end to the local church or the continuing committed community of worshipping Christians. Rather, such groups form a major part of the ideal and these other activities seen as stages on the journey towards the ideal.

Part of the issue is the fact that most churches are still working on a model of serving the local community defined by parish boundaries. But in most places, the local community is not an entity. In urban areas, it rarely recognises itself. Only in rural places does it have recognised means of communication or even personal networks. Rather, people work through a wide range of networks which cross geographical boundaries. Networks with a Christian emphasis need to be created and used for ministry, developed in such ways that worship is offered, discipleship is processed, supportive community is developed and mission to the world is engaged.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Schedule Anglican Clergy**

### **Some Background**

1. May I start by asking how long you have been at this church?
2. Where were you prior to this?
3. Where do you train for ministry?
4. What was most valuable in that training?
5. Different people approach ministry differently. For some its education, others focus on counselling... What would you say are your emphases in ministry?

### **Leadership and Vision**

6. How do you seek to give leadership to the parish - in terms of the leadership of people and in terms of the management of resources?
7. How do you structure the leadership of the parish?
8. Do you feel that you have a vision for where this parish might go?
9. What, in essence, is your vision?
10. How do you communicate it and how often?
11. How well do you feel the parish is focussed on it?

### **Worship**

12. How do you prepare for worship?
13. What is important for you in your preparation?
14. What do you feel you are seeking to do in worship?
15. Do you feel it is important to seek to cater for the needs of different age groups in worship? If so, how do you do that?
16. Do you seek to involve lay people in worship? How and who do you involve?
17. How would you describe your use of the Bible in worship?
18. What portion of your time is spent in preparation for worship?
19. Do you have Sunday School or worship for children? If so, how effective is it? What about children's clubs?

20. What about worship, fellowship and educational activities for teenagers? How effective do you feel they are?
21. And for twenty year olds and singles?
22. And what about young families?

**Community Involvement, Mission and Evangelism**

23. Are you involved in the local community? In what ways?
24. Do you feel it important to encourage the congregation to be involved?
25. What do you feel the church has to offer the community?
26. How do you feel the church should relate to the local community?
27. How do you see the church standing for social justice? Is that an important part of the life of this parish?
28. Is the parish involved in community welfare activities?
29. Does your parish have any involvement with Anglican welfare work or schools? Do you have any chaplaincy roles? Does this feed into parish life in any way?
30. How do you see the church reaching people beyond the present congregational members? What are the best ways of doing this?
31. What have you found to work?
32. Are there ideas you would like to try?
33. Does the church have particular 'target groups' in the community with whom it is trying to be 'in mission'?
34. What portion of your own time is involved in mission beyond the life of the congregation?

**Evangelism and Making Disciples**

35. How do you welcome visitors to the church?
36. In what ways do you seek to bring new people into the life of the church?
37. How do you 'build the faith' of newcomers?
38. Do you have any special programs for people seeking to know more about the Christian faith? Or for new Christians? What is your evaluation of them?
39. How do you seek to recognise or develop spiritual gifts or train people for leadership?

How do you evaluate your programs?

### **Small Groups**

40. Does your church have many small groups?
41. What are the aims of those groups?
42. How are the small groups organised - both in terms of who attends, and what activities they do?
43. How do small groups contribute to the life of the church?

### **Other Administrative Issues**

44. What portion of your time is spent in administration?
45. How do you seek to build a caring congregation?
46. How do you seek to include people on the fringe of parish life?
47. What part does counselling and visiting have in your ministry? How important do you see these activities in building up the life of the parish?

### **Special Projects or Activities**

48. Are there any special projects or activities which your church has undertaken? What were the aims? How effective were they?
49. Are there any projects you would like to try?

### **Recommendations**

50. What do you think makes for a 'healthy' church?
51. Do you have any recommendations for models of ministry that you feel should be more widely adopted?
52. Do you have any recommendations for training for ministry? For in-service training? And how clergy should be appointed to parishes?
53. Do you feel that clergy are accountable to their parishes? Should they be?

### **Personal Descriptions**

54. How would you describe your theological orientation and your churchmanship?
55. Would you consider yourself strongly self-motivated? And personally well-organised?
56. What vision do you have for your own future? Where do you see yourself in another ten years?

## **Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Newcomers**

*(Used in focus groups.)*

### **Introduction**

1. Please tell me a little about yourselves. Do you live in this area? Have you lived in this area long? What brought you to live in this area?
2. What are the major things which occupy your time these days? - Work, family, special interests, etc..

### **First Involvement**

3. Tell me about your first contacts with the church here. How did that come about? How did you first hear about the church - or know of its existence?
4. What were the first activities you attended?
5. What were your thoughts prior to attending?
6. And what were your first impressions?

### **Beyond the First Time**

7. What happened after your first time?
8. What were the things which encouraged you to come?
9. What were the things which discouraged you?
10. Tell me about the process since those first visits. What have you become involved in? How has that process worked?

### **Evaluation of the Church Now**

11. How do you feel about involvement now?
12. How easy or difficult has it been to relate to other people in the church?
13. ... And how about finding out what was going on?
14. What differences has the church made for you? Do you feel you have changed? In what ways?
15. Do other members of your family come and how do they find it?
16. What do you think now are the good things about the church?
17. Are there things you would like to see change or develop in the church?
18. What would you say you most wanted out of life?... And how does the church contribute?

## **Appendix 3: Questions for Use with Focus Groups of Young People** *(Used in focus groups.)*

### **Introduction**

1. Please tell me a little about yourselves. Have you always lived in this area?
2. What are the major things which occupy your time? - Study, work, family, special interests, etc..
3. What are the things you most enjoy doing in your spare time?

### **First Involvement**

4. Tell me about your first contacts with the church here. How did that come about? How did you first hear about the church - or know of its existence?
5. What was your first involvement with the church?

### **Encouragements and Discouragements**

6. In what ways are you currently involved in the life of the church?
7. What were the things which encouraged you to be involved?
8. What were the things which discouraged you?
9. How important is it to be involved in the decision-making? Is it easy to be involved that way?

### **Evaluation of the Church Now**

10. How do you feel about this parish now?
11. How easy or difficult has it been to relate to other people in the church?
12. ... And how about finding out what was going on?
13. How important is it to have activities specifically for your age group? If it is important, in what ways should they be 'different' to cater for your age group?
14. Do you feel you have changed in your faith or spirituality? In what ways? Has church contributed to the changes and, if so, how?
15. Do other members of your family come and how do they find it?
16. What are the good things about the church?
17. Are there things you would like to see change or develop in the church?
18. We are trying to find what makes a church 'healthy' and 'vital'. Out of your

experience, what do you think makes a church 'healthy' and 'vital' for young people?

19. What would you say you most wanted out of life?... And how does the church contribute?