

How can we Reshape Ministry in Evaporating Small Communities?

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ABSTRACT:

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By Wilson Gonese

I begin this thesis by giving the background of the study which is to understand ministry of the church in evaporating small communities. The United Church should consider reshaping ministry in small evaporating communities. The research's focus is Burgeo which lies on the south coast of Newfoundland. The thesis question is: How can we reshape ministry in small evaporating communities? I argue that meaningful missional reflection starts by knowing the church in small communities. This calls for a paradigm shift in the way the church does mission. This thesis also deals with understanding ecclesia and ministry in small communities. The traditional understanding of ministry in small communities should shift toward understanding the context of these communities. Understanding the identity of the small community church will enlighten the members of the United Church of Canada to accept the *Missio Dei* as their vocation and challenge regardless of where they are.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

This thesis on one hand, seeks to establish how best we can reshape ministry in evaporating small communities. On the other hand, it is engaging the ministry model¹ of the United Church of Canada critically in an attempt to develop a contextual and communal² missional³ approach in the United Church of Canada. This chapter lays out the plot of the research. It outlines the problem and states the hypothesis and goal. The chapter describes the methodology of the research and defines key terms. It describes the background and motivation of the research, demarcates the study and gives the outline of the chapters. The study presupposes that if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in light of the *Missio Dei*⁴ then the United Church of Canada is faced with the challenge of thinking and doing mission in an effective, appropriate and relevant way. The research is intended to help the United Church to inductively develop a mission framework that guides outreach to be both contextual and communal. The study challenges the United Church of Canada to work towards the contextualisation of its mission work in evaporating small communities. Context is defined in terms of a place, an event and a situation. Ukpong says that context refers to the situation of human beings. It is in this reality of people in

¹ The term model refers to a particular design. It suggests a procedure and principles that guide.

² The emphasis of this research is on communal theology, meaning a theology as holistically reflected and lived in the community of faith. It is expressed in relation to others. The communal perspective of life must be treasured and affirmed as the only basis on which constructive human relationships can be built in Christian faith.

³ Missional refers to being sent by God. It denotes the purpose of God's action in human history aiming at transforming reality (Bosch 1991:390).

⁴ D.L. Guder. *Missional church: a vision for the sending church in North America*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.)

which theological reflection on the Word of God is to be found. Context is a daily dynamic reality.⁵ In my opinion I think it is very crucial that people should understand the meaning of ecclesia/church in evaporating small communities and see to it that the ministry in small communities is preserved and conducted to suit the people. If churches in small communities are sustained there is a great need to understand the context of the small community, how people think, regard and do ministry. I think in modern day thinking the evaporating small community has been neglected, and as a result of this, the church in these communities is suffering as it fights to find its identity.

I am motivated to write this thesis because of my passion for churches in small communities. I was born in Zimbabwe in a small rural farming community where I grew up going to a small community church. It was such a closely connected community as far as the church was concerned, and I enjoyed attending church services even though the services were mostly led by the lay leaders. The minister came to lead services on special occasions like Easter and when he had a special communion service planned for our community church once or twice every year. I wondered why ministers were such a rare commodity, and that made me curious to want to learn more. When I was convinced that God was calling me to the ministry, I made a commitment to serve as a minister of churches in small communities. I served three churches in small communities in Zimbabwe and found the ministry to be challenging but fulfilling. When I applied for

⁵ J.S. Ukpong. *Towards a holistic approach to inculturation theology*. Mission Studies, Vol XIV: 2, 32, 1999, p. 103 -123.

admissions to the United Church of Canada, I made it very clear that I would like to serve a church in a small community because I feel this is where God has called me to serve.

1.2.The Research Problem:

The goal of research is to attempt to answer or solve a problem.⁶ This problem is very important because I am troubled about small communities which in my view are being taken off the map, disappearing because they are not considered as vital and significant as larger towns and urban areas. Small communities are often isolated and a higher percentage of people are seniors who have retired. As I look at the remaining communities on the South Coast of Newfoundland: Burgeo, Ramea, Francois and Grey River (see fig. 1), I see that these communities are evaporating fast because of aging and dying population. A number of communities in the area have since been resettled in the past thirty years due to their isolation and difficult geographical location. Burgeo has become the community where most of the people who were resettled ended up living. In June 2010 the community of Grand Bruit was resettled and nine out of the twelve people who were living in the community came to Burgeo because it was accessible by road. My research will focus on the community of Burgeo which is situated 150 km south west of the Trans-Canada Highway where I have been serving as a minister since 2007. I have come to understand that to serve as a minister in a small community has many challenges. Even though the church is alive in small evaporating communities, the importance of the church has shifted as people mainly focus attention on the bigger, urban situated churches. Clarence Seidenspinner in an article, “The Church for Tomorrow” wrote:

⁶ K.G. Smith. *Academic writing and theological research: a guide for students.* (Johannesburg: South Africa Theological Seminary Press, 2008.)

Small struggling, separatistic churches are no longer necessary or right. These groups can be combined to form larger churches. Even in the open country these groups can be combined and fine buildings erected compared to our consolidated schools. There will be no need for a one or two room country church when buses and cars can take the membership to the thrilling and busy and beautiful consolidated church in which generous and far-reaching fellowship may be enjoyed with a staff of competent leaders.⁷

This notion is what has made the United Church of Canada and others like the Anglican Church in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador to focus much of their attention in major centres and avoiding the church in evaporating small communities. Personally I do not agree with Clarence Seidenspinner because if we look at the churches in Newfoundland, we can see that more than 90% of the churches are in small communities which are mainly coastal isolated remote communities.⁸ The truth of the matter is that small churches will continue to exist and can remain healthy and thriving. I would suggest that the way programs are planned for small community churches should be different from the bigger churches. Here are some factors which might be considered when dealing with the church in small communities: (i) categories used in analyzing, understanding and planning must be appropriate to the small church, (ii) Images small churches hold of themselves and their situation are crucial to the way they function. (iii) There are considerable opportunities open to small churches to enable them to identify these opportunities and move towards meeting them, (iv) It should be very clear that what works in bigger churches cannot become the ingredients for small churches.⁹ Care should be taken that each small church should be dealt with in a very loving and caring manner and allow the people to speak out for their future. There is need to learn what small

⁷ Clarence Seidenspinner. 'Church for Tomorrow' *The Christian Century* 61. (1944): 1132.

⁸ Prof Shane. *O'Dea to the Newfoundland Historical Society* on September 23, 1982.

⁹ Lawrence W. Farris. *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*. (MD: Alban Institute: 2000), p. 4-5.

churches want rather than to impose decisions on them. By neglecting such communities we will be avoiding the reality on the ground. What I mean here is that, small communities should be consulted before programs are considered for them, and they should be able to decide on the way they want to do ministry. Many reasons are given why churches in small communities are neglected to the point of decline, including isolation and limited income because small churches are located in relatively poor areas economically. Also, poorly budgeted programs, lack of long range planning, resistance to change, low expectations, few leaders and short pastorates are among the reasons for diminishment.¹⁰

Burgeo has seen the survival of two churches: Faith United Church and the St John the Evangelist Anglican Church. Despite the location of the community, the churches have survived and continue to serve the community. I think that, it is important that as the church we look at new ways in which the evaporating communities can be reincorporated into the ministry of the church. No one outside the small community church should prescribe what they need to do. This problem is interesting in the sense that, evaporating communities are not given priority with regard to ministry. If it is settlement of ministers or calling, the small communities always receive ministers after the bigger churches get the first choice at the selection. The trend has always been that small communities are given ministers who are newly ordained and serve in the community as a stepping stone to larger centres which are considered to be where the vibrant ministry is. In some cases small communities receive student ministers who are on internship and only stay between

¹⁰ Carroll W. Jackson. *Small Churches are Beautiful*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers 1977), p. 109-111.

eight months to a year. I have also seen that the church focuses on the ministry personnel and not on the people who live in small communities. This problem is of significance because it will help me to explore how people who live in evaporating communities look at themselves and how they want to be served by the church in their own context.

This thesis seeks to establish the way ministry has been done and is being done in small communities and how we can reshape it to meet the challenges in today's world. In this paper I will demonstrate how small communities have been neglected and how best we can lead the church toward recognizing the important and unique ministry of small churches in their communities. I seek to discover how people in small communities feel about the way they are perceived and what they think should be done to improve ministry in their communities. In my opinion the establishment of churches in small communities was initially an effort to reach out to where the people were with an understanding that the church comes to the people in their own communities and in their context. The main question of the research is: How can we reshape ministry in evaporating small communities? In attempting to deal with this question, the research identifies key questions such as: What is ecclesiology, our theology of the church? What is ministry? How can the church do ministry in evaporating small communities? What should be done in trying to recognize and appreciate the ministry in small communities? The questions are linked together in this research and they will be discussed together in each of the following chapters. This chapter 1 of my thesis gives a background of the study, the statement of the problem and the relevance of the study guided by the research question and objectives. Chapter 2 analyzes of the work that has been done the United Church on ministry in small communities. Chapter 3 deals with ecclesiology/church and the theology

of ministry and how best this can be applied to evaporating small communities. It will give a brief history of Burgeo and how the church has progressed over the years, and will also look into the demographics of the small communities in Newfoundland. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of the research and how data was collected. Chapter 5 gives conclusions from the findings and recommendations. Chapter 5 will also address whether the research problem been solved and to what extent have the objectives been achieved and what has been learned from the results.

There is a need for the United Church of Canada to revisit and carry out an analysis concerning the thinking and strategies of ministry in small communities today. I will suggest that The United Church of Canada develop a relevant framework that will allow the church in small communities to participate in their own transformation giving them a platform to speak out and decide their future as the church without decisions being imposed on them from the top in a kind of “trickle down” ecclesiology. My hypothesis is that a contextual and communal approach in the ministry of the church in small communities will transform the United Church of Canada and the small churches in rural communities.

1.3.The Research Goal:

This theological research tries to discern the dream or vision God has, for the small community church. It reflects the future, the eschatological hope, the Kingdom of God that is already present. The study will also further determine how we can help in discerning the various local dynamics of churches in neglected small communities and how best to find applicable solutions. The goal is to test my hypothesis and to outline a theology for the United Church of Canada that will empower the believers in small

communities to actively participate in processes of addressing the needs and challenges of their own context. People are to be conscious instruments of their own transformation in their own setting and cultural context. The United Church of Canada's mission framework which will be discussed in chapter 2 must be able to recognize, acknowledge and empower the local people in small communities.

1.4. Research Methodology:

This research is a case study of a congregation in Newfoundland which includes my observations, data from interviews with members of the church and community, study of recent works on ministry in rural areas and what the United Church has documented on the topic. From my readings and personal experience, I am led to make an assumption that the United Church of Canada can shift its focus, to move from a traditional ministry model to a missional framework. I will apply a missional methodology, which means that mission is primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator Redeemer, and Sanctifier for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate. Mission has its origin in the heart of God, who is the fountain of sending love.¹¹ Missional is the act of being sent by God to go out into the world to fulfil God's salvific acts in the world.

The missional approach uses the illustration of the cross metaphorically.¹² Hendricks in *Studying Congregations in Africa* says that theology is about: (i) the missional praxis of the triune God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, (ii) about God's body, an apostolic faith community (the church); (iii) at a specific time and place within a globalised world (a

¹¹ David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*. (New York: Orbis, Mary Knoll 1991), p. 392.

¹² R.E. Hedland. *The mission of the church in the world: a biblical theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991.)

wider contextual situation); (iv) where members of this community are involved in vocationally based, critical and constructive interpretation of their present reality (local analysis), (v) drawing upon an interpretation of the normative sources of Scripture and tradition, (vi) struggling to discern God's will for their present situation (a critical correlational hermeneutic), (vii) to be a sign of God's Kingdom on earth while moving forward with an eschatological faith-based reality in view (that will lead to a vision and a mission statement), (viii) while obediently participating in transformative action at different levels: personal, ecclesial, societal, ecological and scientific, a

doing, liberating, transformative theology that leads to a strategy, implementation and an evaluation of progress.¹³ In his book, Lawrence W. Farris talked of some factors which should be taken into consideration when people are serving doing ministry in small communities: 1. Geography - It is very important to know the town than the congregation.¹⁴ This is because small town culture is like a map deeply embedded in the cognitive structure of those who have lived in it. Understanding the community, learning the internal map the members carry, will take a minister a long way towards understanding the congregation. It is very important that ministers knows the area where they are ministering as a way of having a keen interest with the people they minister to. 2. History - it is very important for the minister to listen to the stories of the small town they are ministering so as to be able to learn the history of the community. Listening validates the speaker and his/her experience, and shows the minster to be one who respects where people are and starts from there. 3. Culture - it is very important to understand the culture of a small community as this will help one to understand how people do things. It should

¹³ H.J. Hendriks. *Studying congregations in Africa*. (Wellington: NetACT, Lux Verbi, 2004.)

¹⁴ Lawrence W. Farris. *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 10-12.

be noted that as ministers we need to maintain our credibility in the communities we are serving. As a minister one should try to strike a balance at all times as a neutral representative of the community. 4. Values - the sense of community is certainly found in the small towns, even those that are grown up and still much shaped by the traditions, behaviours and patterns crafted when the town was smaller. Residents of small towns consider their values to be very important. There is a need for us to understand the world of small churches before ministering to them. It should be very clear that each church in a small community is unique in its own way and this should be respected and taken as a strength. There is a need to change the way small churches have been viewed in today's world as they are mostly labeled as dying. I further argue that, unless people understand the world of small churches and how they function, they will not be able to serve them well. It is necessary that we define what a small church is so that this may help us to understand what we are talking about. I agree with Lawrence Farris in the way he says that, small churches have a unique ministry in the twenty-first century. Much of what they have to offer is what they always have to offer: the incarnation of the living presence of God in real social relationships. But from here on, the way they offer this quality of salvation will need to reflect the challenging dynamics of society.¹⁵ This means that the way churches in small communities do ministry should be the one that suit their specific needs. Small churches offer family like connections. God did not create human beings to live alone. Every church in small community is important, and love is embodied in the personal dimension of congregational life. Small churches have the ability to enable spiritual growth in a natural and customized way. In a small church each and every gift of the Spirit is of value. The small church is a redemptive presence in the society. A healthy

¹⁵ Lawrence W. Farris. *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 5.

small church takes the prophetic stand that bigger is not always better.¹⁶ The small church demonstrates a social ecology of stewardship and harmony because of being small in number. People have a long term association because they know each other well, and have a strong sense of belonging. The primary quality of small churches is their relational dimension. Even though people who live in evaporating small communities are isolated, they have a highly known presence in their own way and they are where they know each other very well. In the life of small communities behaviour as much expressive as it is effective, and relationships are ends in themselves, not a means of achieving anything externally.¹⁷ Anthony G Pappas says churches in small communities see that recognition is a greater motivator of behaviour than material gain, and have qualities that contribute to long term stability, and tradition determines action.¹⁸

It is my assumption that small churches are the back bone of the Church, because that is where people have maintained the tradition of the church and to some extent bigger churches have their origin from smaller churches. In Newfoundland and Labrador province it is very important to note that most of the churches are in evaporating small communities, but they are doing well in the way they conduct their day to day ministry. There are some challenges which small churches are facing some of which are: *Tradition threatens the future of our churches*. This is the attitude that what has been must always be, is the argument for never trying anything new. It is usually the fear of the unknown as people say, ‘we have never done it that way before.’ Churches in small communities are being threatened by some people who are very negative and they want to just have one size fit all. This doesn’t work because each small church is very special and very unique.

¹⁶ Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of Small Churches*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 6-7.

¹⁷ Lawrence W. Farris. *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 14.

Niceness threatens our small churches; church leaders are entrusted by God to lead the church and care should be taken that the church grows and in one accord, and always watch for those people with hidden agendas in the house of God. *Conflict threatens small churches*; it is very good to always deal with any form of conflict before it destroys the church. Conflict should be used in a constructive way.¹⁹ We are called to be servants of God in the ministry of Christ in the world. Let me explain it in the words of Susan Willhauck in her book, *Ministry Unplugged: Uncommon Calls to Serve* where she writes:

We share God's faithfulness, forgiveness and love, though we are far from living up to it. God covenanted with God's people and called them to lead... God then equips that person to serve even when equipping involves the power to resist opposition and stigma of religious dance as a career. The scripture tells us that God has called God's people to be a community, the body of Christ that lives in and through God's grace. To build up that body God gives us gifts or charismata, these bring energies for new life.²⁰

We have each one received a calling that is empowered by the Holy Spirit so that we can go into the world with enablement from God. As the church of Christ we are called into community to serve Christ in the world. The church and ministry of Christ is important no matter where one is serving. There is no ministry that is better than the other only because of its location, each church/ministry should be allowed to function in the way which is essential to its specific setup, context and environment. There is no way in which we can just ignore ministry in evaporating small communities because the ministry is a reality and this cannot be swept under the carpet. It is crucial that we come to an understanding that small communities need to be ministered to and there is a need to change ways and make some improvements in which ministry in evaporating small communities may be

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 8-9.

²⁰ Susan Willhauck. *Ministry Unplugged: Uncommon Calls to Serve*. (Missouri: Chalice, 2010), p. 53.

well recognized. In most of the small communities there are very faithful members in our churches and they love their churches whole heartedly, and to them attending church is a way of life. What excites us as God's servants is that God has called us to this ministry and there is nothing more than being entrusted and sent out by God to go and be of service in the vineyard regardless of the location.

Contextualization is the key in trying to do ministry successfully in small communities. Context is defined in terms of a place, an event and a situation. The contextual aspect points to the need for and responsibility of Christians to make their response to the Gospel as concrete and lively as possible.²¹ Contextualisation is an attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of particular contextual-cultural realities. It is in these realities of people in which theological reflection on the Word of God is to be found. Context is a daily reality of people that is dynamic. A Gospel presentation that is contextualised enriches and is enriched by the specific human cultural context.²² I want to note that the expression of the Gospel is more effective when it takes into consideration the context of the recipients. This research believes an appropriate strategy of ministry in small communities emerges as the Gospel of Jesus Christ meets with specific contexts. The fact that Jesus was born in a specific culture and incarnating into it, reflects that mission of God should be contextualised. The Gospel is concretised in a particular historical cultural situation. God wants to interact intimately with human beings who always live in social contexts of their own making. Contextualisation is bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the context of people. It is the process whereby the Christian faith is made relevant and meaningful in a given cultural context. Guder says that to be

²¹ R. Schreiter. *Constructing local theologies*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1985.)

²² D.R. Shaw, & C.E. Van Engen. *Communicating God's word in a complex world: God's truth or hocus pocus?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.)

faithful to its calling the church must be contextual, that is, must be culturally relevant within a specific situational setting.²³ Likewise this research focuses on the Burgeo, Newfoundland cultural context. How is the Gospel message enabled to speak to people in Burgeo from within their contexts in order to transform them from within? The people's specific context is to be brought into creative interaction with the Gospel message.

It is vital for the disciples of Jesus Christ to study carefully and understand the context of the people in among which they live and minister. To contextualize means consciously and carefully thinking about life in relation to the circumstances in which it is happening or existing. Those involved in intercultural mission need to be aware of their own identity and have respect for the identity of the person of a different culture. Bevans and Schroeder argue that mission is and must always be radically contextualizing. They continue to explain that to be in Christian mission is to be responsive to the demands of the Gospel in particular contexts, with the church continually "reinventing herself as she struggles with and approaches new situations, new peoples, new cultures, and new questions".²⁴

It is important to provide the context since religious phenomena do not occur in a social vacuum. The faith community is to bring the contextual analysis into a hermeneutically sensitive dialogue with the Holy Scriptures.²⁵ The Gospel is to interact with context for the United Church of Canada in Burgeo, to be missional and relevant.

²³ D.L. Guder. *Missional church: a vision for the sending church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998.)

²⁴ S.B. Bevans, & R.P. Schroeder. *Constants in context: a theology of mission for today*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 2004.)

²⁵ H.J. Hendriks. *Studying congregations in Africa*. (Wellington: NetACT, Lux Verbi, 2004.)

Contextualized mission is an affirmation that God has turned towards the world through the birth of Jesus Christ. God identified with the world through Jesus becoming flesh. The research believes that contextualization occurs when there is identification with the cultural system of the local people. The Gospel must be contextual, that is, it is to relate to the real life circumstances of the people who hear it.²⁶ It is vital for the church as disciples of Jesus Christ to study carefully and understand the context of the people among whom they are living and ministering. Contextualize means consciously and carefully thinking about life in relation to the circumstances in which it is happening or existing. David Bosch's basic argument in his book, *Transforming Mission* is that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church became flesh in the life and world of those who embraced it.²⁷ It is, however, only fairly recently that the essentially contextual nature of a faith has been recognised. Context influences and even determines our doing of theology. A contextual framework starts reflecting on the social and cultural context. The intrinsic role of cultural, political, and economical factors in a faith must be recognized if we are to be faithful in our mission. It analyzes the wider and local context. The ministry in Burgeo and the Newfoundland context are influenced by the wider contexts of the country and the global world.

The Bible talks about the church as a community of believers and it all begins with the ministry in small communities. The Bible does not convey that God focuses on the numbers, but what God wants is the commitment. In Matthew 18:19-20 Jesus said, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered

²⁶ R. Bowen. *So I send you*. (London: SPCK, 1996.)

²⁷ D.J. Bosch. *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1991.)

together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.”²⁸ The Bible tells of the early house-hold churches, evidence that God blesses churches in small communities. 1 Corinthians 16:19 cites the church of Aquila and Priscilla as saying: "The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, together with the assembly that meets in their house, send you cordial greetings in the Lord."²⁹

The saying: "There's no place like home," is one of the basic principles of God's word and plan of salvation. In the Old Testament, the home and the Temple were the most important places of worship and celebration. The Passover, the greatest of all Israelite celebrations, was held in homes. Jesus made the home not only a center for worship but also His base for evangelization. He told His apostles: "Look for a worthy person in every town or village you come to and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his home bless it" (Matthew 10:11-12). After Pentecost, the early Church met in their homes daily for the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist) and shared meals (Acts 2:46). This resulted in the manifestation of signs and wonders, break-through in economic sharing, and wildfire evangelism. "Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). All the churches for the first 300 years of Church history were homes. Saul persecuted the Church by breaking up these home-meetings, dragging men and women out of house after house, and throwing them into jail (Acts 8:3). Peter was saved from execution through an all-night prayer-vigil at the home of Mary, John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). Lydia, the first convert of the Western world, made her home a church (Acts 16:15, 40). Priscilla and Aquila had the most famous home-based community in history. They strengthened Paul to return to full-time ministry (Acts 18:2-

²⁸ Jack W. Hayford. General Editor, *New King James Version Bible*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991.)

²⁹ *Ibid.*

5), converted Apollos, and empowered him to minister in the Spirit (Acts 18:26). All the churches of the Gentiles owed a debt of gratitude to Priscilla and Aquila and the congregation that met in their house (Romans 16:4-5). Other notable communities were those of Nymphas (Colossians 4:15), Titus Justus (Acts 18:7), Gaius (Romans 16:23), and Philemon (Philemon 2). The home-based community was seen as a training ground for leadership in the early Church (1 Timothy 3: 5, 12).

It should be very clear that God sees the church in small communities just the same way as in the cities and larger centres. The churches in small communities need to be recognized and given a chance to flourish in their specific context and set up. We need to know that small churches are stable, not dynamic organizations.³⁰ Leaders should know that change is difficult to achieve and it will take longer than it would in a differently structured organization. Churches in small communities who set their focus on survival are a little world in themselves, and this world can only be understood by those people who may take the interest to be a part of it. The typical small church sees the past not the future, registering what has been and not what can be.³¹ The past is always considered very important to the life and ministry of the church in small communities. Ministry in small churches is not so much concerned with getting the job done but rather building up good habits and changing ingrained behavioural patterns. The focus of the ministry in small communities is transformation and not production. The ministry in small communities lives on level of relationships and not on tasks. These relationships require work; they must be kept balanced and livable. In small communities people are all related in some sense and this is valued so much in their life. A Christian community is different

³⁰ Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of Small Churches*. (MD: Alban Institute: 2000), p. 93.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 94.

from families and groups in at least four ways. First, each committed member of the community must be under Jesus' lordship and open to the Spirit, although others can visit and participate in various aspects of the community. Second, a small Christian community has ecclesial, biblical standards for brotherhood and sisterhood as its ideal. It is not only a support group, prayer group, or study group. In a community, we are trying to be one as Jesus and the Father are one (John 17:21). We want to love each other to the point that we will lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). We hope to so identify with each other that if one suffers we all suffer and if one is honored we all rejoice (1 Cor 12:26). Third, a church in a small community is similar to an extended family. Twelve adults are usually the maximum number before the community branches off to form a second community. Like Jesus' twelve apostles, this community is small enough to be personal and large enough to have many varied gifts for the up-building of all the members. The community often centers around two or more Christian married couples and their families. Sometimes the community can form around a single person, as may have been the case with Lydia and John Mark's mother. The community includes single people, single parents and their children, godparents, relatives, neighbors, or anyone called to share in family life. Not all members must live under one roof, but all the members should be trying to share daily God's word, the Eucharist, prayer, time, possessions, and meals with at least some of the community's members. Fourth, a home-based community is an intentional community.³² Ministry in small communities is mainly centered on people who know each other and have a life long relationship and they know each other for a long time. This gives dynamics to the ministry in small communities because there is mutual respect for each other. Some small churches have maintained

³² James L. Killen. Jr. *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), p. 8.

their traditional conservative way of worship and they value the availability of a minister in their midst. It is from understanding small communities that when change is proposed, it is not an easy thing to sell because they want to maintain their old way of life and do the very basics. Each church regardless of the size, contributes to the life of the whole body of Christ. What we should note here is that most of the churches started small and then grew. Ministry in small communities has close and supportive fellowship in which people develop commitment to one another because they know each other in a deeper way. A good example of the church as a family I have seen is the church I am serving in Burgeo, where the motto is, 'We are a friendly family church.' This means that even though we are different, we are all one family in Christ in the church. The ministers serving small communities make the pastoral task the major vehicle for their ministry, and this is the image of the shepherd who knows the sheep (John 10). The small community ministry provides the full development of each person's potential.

The church is a community of believers regardless of their location or size. I strongly believe that it is a big mistake to associate small with failure, because the smaller the church is, the more the people are closely connected to each other. There is a need for small rural churches to be given a platform in the way they do ministry. In the New Testament the ecclesia/church refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in response to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ being empowered by the Holy Spirit. The word ecclesia/church can therefore refer to local assemblies of Christians or the universal Christian community.³³ Small and large churches are different, each has a particular role to play in the mission and ministry of

³³ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1991), p. 189.

Christ's body in the world. Since each is faced with differing challenges and social settings no church is to be judged on the basis of its resemblance to another. It is to be judged on the fulfillment of its calling in light of its resources and setting.³⁴ This theology of ministry is that, we are called to serve in God's vineyard and the church must reach out where the people are.³⁵ I agree with Susan Willhauck in her book, *Ministry Unplugged*, when she says ministry is not a prize and it is not a badge of honor. Ministry belongs to God. Ministry in its specific-ness exist within our Christian living full of prayer, faith and love. Our task is to see, hear and act on God's grace and word to us.³⁶ Ministry is a calling in which we have to respond yes to God's direction, guidance and leading. God is the one who calls people to service in all the variety of ministries in the church, and the commission is very simple and straight forward, which is to go out into the world wherever God sends us. According to Howard Clinebell, ministry is prophetic in the sense that it seeks to change a community and its institutions so that they will support not stifle wholeness in all persons.³⁷ The ministry we are called to is centred on Jesus Christ, and is characterized by service rather than domination. The purpose of every ministry is to build up the whole people of God in faith, hope and love for more effective service in the world.³⁸ Jesus Christ described his ministry in this way:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Luke 4:18-19 NKJV

³⁴ Jackson W. Carroll. *Small Churches are Beautiful*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 69.

³⁵ Frank R. Tillapaugh. *Unleashing Your Potential*. (California: Regal Books, 1988), p. 32.

³⁶ Susan Willhauck. *Ministry Unplugged, Uncommon Calls to Serve*. (Missouri: Chalice Press, 2010), p.12.

³⁷ Howard Clinebell. *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 40.

³⁸ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 229.

God's calling to ministry is a call to serve in areas which are not popular and offering services to the less privileged people. Evaporating communities need the ministry of dedicated people even though there are some challenges in such communities. These range from limited financial resources, passiveness, isolation, and long distances to go to bigger centres, just to mention a few. Evaporating small communities need to be recognized and be respected even if they are seen by those who consider themselves as being fast as being slow in the way they do ministry.

The organization of chapters is as follows: Chapter 1 of this study has given a background of the study, the statement of the problem and the relevance of the study guided by the research question and objectives. Chapter 2 analyzes of the work that has been done the United Church on ministry in small communities. Chapter 3 deals with ecclesiology/church and the theology of ministry and how best this can be applied to evaporating small communities. It will also give a brief history of Burgeo and how the church has progressed over the years, and will also look into the demographics of the small communities in Newfoundland. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of the research and how data was collected. Chapter 5 give conclusions from the findings and recommendations. Chapter 5 will also address whether the research problem been solved and to what extent the objectives have been achieved and what has been learned from the results.

1.5.Conclusion

This introductory chapter aims to provide a framework for the research. The question stated in this thesis is: How can we reshape ministry in small evaporating communities? The key questions the research identifies are: What is ecclesiology/ the church? What is

ministry? How can the church do ministry in evaporating small communities? What should be done in trying to recognize and appreciate the ministry in small communities? The research goal is to contribute in developing a mission framework for evaporating small communities that is holistic and contextual, which will encourage reflective involvement of the faith community in the mission of God with appropriateness, meaning and relevance to the context within which the United Church of Canada is serving in these communities. This study is based on the notion that, a contextual and communal approach in the ministry of the church in small communities will transform all parties involved towards becoming a church that is sensitive to the specific needs of evaporating small communities. Failure to come up with a new approach will lead to producing a superficial ministry in small communities.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding of Rural Ministries in the United Church of Canada.

2.1. Introduction:

In this chapter I am going to analyze the material and work that has been used to look at rural ministry in the United Church of Canada and in North America. Most of the congregations are historic small rural United Church congregations and are wide spread all across Canada. These date back to Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist congregations prior to the basis of the Union in 1925. Some of them have since disappeared, and some have vanished from local communal memory. By this I mean that, most of the small communities have since been relocated and the churches have been closed. In some places there has been amalgamation as a way of bringing a number of small communities together, and they share a church that is located in one central place. Many of the rural United Church pastoral charges are located in resource based rural communities that depend on fishing, mining, logging, agriculture and so forth. The United Church celebrates the incarnation of God in and through hundreds of ministries in small town United Church pastoral charges. These rural congregations offer ongoing leadership in their respective communities through their ministries to the community at large.

2.2. Analysis of literature of work done on Rural Ministry in the UCC:

In the resource entitled *Alive and Kicking*, Marvin L. Anderson a rural ministry specialist looks at ways in which the United Church of Canada can look at ministry in rural areas in a new way.³⁹ The study identifies seven lenses in which rural ministry can

³⁹ Marvin L. Anderson. *Alive and Kicking, Revitalizing Rural Ministries*, for Educational, Congregational

be revitalized. The first lens is: Purpose and Identity. It is very clear that the United Church is undergoing a decisive transition between its peak years of crowded sanctuaries and new church buildings, and the present trend of diminishing membership in rural as well as urban United Church congregations. My observation is that the difference in purpose and identity is that in urban areas the population remains but fewer people decide to go to church whereas, in rural areas the population continually declines = no population in the community means no people in the church. This historic transition posits the tension between the basis of the United Church union in 1925 and its history since then, with the growing apprehension about the uncertain future of our denomination, and Christianity in general. Marion Best, one of the former Moderators of our church acknowledged this concern in her book, *Will Our Church Disappear?* (1994).⁴⁰ Rural ministry is often assumed to be synonymous with small and smaller, rural is a completely different category than small. It is usually where people are considered to be backwards, remote and far away from civilization. Rural congregation reflect this attitude, time and time again. In his book, *The Indispensable Guide for Small Churches*, David R. Ray reiterates what we all know about a small church, that it “is rooted in its history and nervous about its future.”⁴¹ Meaning to say, rural areas are defined by their history and traditions. We might be tempted to read into Ray’s insight that rural congregations are nervous about their future because they are too rooted in their history. Carl S. Dudley, a well known author on the small church, notes that a church’s history is a solid foundation on which to build the church’s future. Dudley writes: “To appreciate

and Community Ministries Unit, General Council office, United Church of Canada, April 2008.

⁴⁰ Marion Best. *Will Our Church Disappear?* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1994.)

⁴¹ David R. Ray. *The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches*. (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), p. 92.

the past is not to be bound by it, but to build on it... The small church will die if it loses its history.... When the future is constructed from pride in the past, then the richest energy of the small church is released and activated.”⁴² This is very true of small churches as people value their history so much, as a result the small churches are very difficult to kill. They cannot die because of the way people cling to their history.

On June 10, 2010 we closed and decommissioned the Grand Bruit church which was a point of the Burgeo Pastoral Charge where I am serving. This was because of resettlement and the people had no option but to relocate because they were living on an island that was accessible only by boat after a three and half hour ride from Burgeo or from Rose Blanche. There were only twelve people living in the town of Grand Bruit. The people refused to sell their church giving the reason that they could not sell it because it’s a part of their rich history, and they would prefer to just see the building fall down on its own. The same can be said about the future promise of each congregation among the hundreds of rural and small town churches of our United Church of Canada. Despite the frequent lament of church closures and declining membership, the presence of the United Church across our country is evidence that the Spirit is still alive in the church. It is important to note that 53% of our total congregations in the United Church of Canada are designated “rural” (that is in communities with a population under 2000 people.⁴³ In addition to this, 23 % are located in towns with population between 2,000 and 30,000. In total, 76% of the total congregations in the United Church are rural or in small towns.⁴⁴ In other words congregations in rural areas and small towns make up three quarters of the membership of

⁴² Carl S. Dudley. *Effective Small Churches in the Twenty-first Century*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.)

⁴³ Marvin L. Anderson. *Alive and Kicking, Revitalizing Rural Ministries*, for Educational, Congregational and Community Ministries Unit, General Council office, United Church of Canada, April 2008, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

our denomination. At the turn of the 20th Century the total membership of the United Church was predominantly rural, dispersed in rural communities and small towns across Canada. ‘Rural’ usually referred to more remote villages as well as isolated farms and farming communities. In the cultural rural way of life, people depend on each other for survival.

In 1909 there was the “country life movement” and the Report of Country Life Commission was officially endorsed by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. Many of the criticisms voiced in the report lamented the contemporary ways in which the health and well-being of rural communities were being undermined. Long before Free Trade, there was free trade of ideas that circulated between the United States and Canada.⁴⁵ In May 2007, our church commissioned a study known as Emerging Spirit,⁴⁶ which had the aim of attracting un-churched people to the church. Regardless of its cost, it could be the convergence of our proud past and the creative energy. It can release as it was aimed to attract newcomers to rural and small membership United Church congregations. According to Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch:

The missional-incarnational church adopts a stance totally different from the attractional one. Rather than investing time in the creation and development of sacred religious spaces for people to meet God, this mode recognizes that church is a much more organic, dynamic, and non-institutional set of relationships than the old Christendom mode allowed for. If the attractional mode sees the world divided into two zones, the ‘in’ and the ‘out’, the incarnational model sees it more as a web, a series of intersecting lines symbolizing the networks of relationships, friendships, and acquaintances of which church members are a part.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Adapted from; *Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries: The Free Trade in Religious Ideas in the Theoretical Formation of Prairie Populism 1900-1920*. Written in Collaboration with colleagues, Dr. Gary Goreham, Dr. Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig, and Dr. John H. Young.

⁴⁶ www.emergingspirit.ca.

⁴⁷ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century*. (MA: Peabody, Hendrickson, 2003), p. 43-44.

Ministry in rural communities takes place through conversations and visiting in the local meeting places like cafes and coffee shops. Each congregation needs to discern its own purpose and focus which includes commitment to loving God. Our rural identity radiates from a renewed pride in our rural roots and cultural identity.

The second lens is: Context. Learning about our rural roots is imperative for discerning the future roots to which God is calling the rural church. The symbolic yearning for reclaiming our rural roots was highlighted in two separately planned educational events held in 2006. The first was a spring conference on rural ministry entitled “Your Roots Are Showing: Celebrating and Creating Rural Roots/Routes,” hosted by Kemble Pastoral Charge in Ontario. The second one was the R. Alex Sim Rural Ministry Symposium, held in the fall entitled “Digging around the Roots: Bringing New Life to Rural Congregations.” Shortly after the Rural Ministry Symposium, the emphasis on discerning future routes was the focus of the 2006 National Consultation on Rural Ministry. It was sponsored by the General Council Office and convened at Calling Lakes Center in Saskatchewan in November 2006. The title of the consultation was, “Discerning God’s Call for Rural Church Now.” In view of the widespread changes facing the rural pastoral charges within the United Church, this title was epitomized in the biblical text chosen for Rural Consultation.⁴⁸ Each of the 13 Conferences of the United Church selected and sent representatives to the Rural Consultation. It also included rural ministry personnel representing French Ministries and Ethnic Ministries as well as the Canadian Rural Church Network. The total number of people who attended the consultation was 60. The purpose of the consultation was twofold first, to bring together

⁴⁸ Marvin L. Anderson. “Executive Report,” *National Consultation on Rural Ministry*, The United Church of Canada, November 6-8, 2006, PCTC – Calling Lakes Centre, Fort Qu’ Appelle, Saskatchewan, March 30, 2007, p. 1-2.

this group representing rural church leaders in order to identify specific challenges currently facing rural pastoral charges and congregations in the respective geographical regions and Conferences across Canada. Second, it highlighted the diverse nature of Canadian small towns and rural communities in which those United Church congregations are located. The two questions which were addressed were: How do they see themselves carrying and living out that mission within their local rural community and small town? How do they explicitly understand their missional purpose in relation to their rural identity and context for ministry? In trying to answer the questions the consultation understood that the term ‘rural’ is diverse in Canada, sociologically, culturally, economically, and geographically.⁴⁹ Rural differ depending on the context in which the word is being used. We can no longer assume that ‘rural’ is solely equated with farming or with long established communities of predominantly white Anglophones. This rural diversity was recognized by the late farmer, R. Alex Sim, who was a United Church member. In his book, *Land and Community, Crisis in Canada’s Countryside*.⁵⁰ Alex challenged Canadians to critically re-examine their images and assumptions about what ‘rural’ really is. Sim came up with four types in describing different kinds of rural communities: Agraville, Fairview, Ribbonville, and Mighthavebeenville. Agraville is a community based on a rich, productive land resource, e.g., agriculture, mining, forestry, or fishing, which often functions as a service center for a local economy based on any one or more of the above extractive resources of a primary sector economy. Fairview: represents a community that boasts scenic landscapes and alternative life style values which attracts new residents. It is characterized by small towns serving as ideal

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

⁵⁰ R. Alex Sim. *Land and Community: Crisis in Canada’s Countryside*, (ON: University of Guelph 1988.)

locations for retirement communities, recreational centers, universities, and military base. Ribbonville: represents a community that is dominated by one or more large cities or towns. As the name suggests, it may be a town that may have been once independent from a metropolitan area that is becoming intertwined and encircled by a city's sphere of influence through urban and suburban sprawl. Mighthavebeenville: represents a community whose dominant self image of independence and self sufficiency belies a loss of control to other, more robust rural communities, like the Agravilles. Former hopes for growth and greatness have yielded to the stark reality of community decline and out migration. All of our rural communities are susceptible to the economic downturns of their particular industry; witness the current crisis for the logging and manufacturing sectors in rural communities in both northern and southern Ontario, British Columbia, and elsewhere throughout Canada. The loss of the cod industry and the decline of other key fisheries in the Maritimes and Newfoundland is a classic example of this phenomenon. There is a need for us to recognize the virtual interdependence between rural United Church congregations and their local rural communities. There is no viable future possible without explicitly drawing on the wealth of knowledge, range of skills and diversity of people that make up our rural communities. One of the delegates from the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference summed up context in this way - the challenge of doing rural ministry in those diverse plural and rural contexts is loud and clear: rural churches are not all the same. We are a mixed farm, a variety of colours and flavours worth celebrating. God is calling us to carry on as a vital part of rural life.⁵¹ I agree with Carl S. Dudley on the way he explains context when he says, your study of social context

⁵¹ Marvin L. Anderson. "Executive Report," *National Consultation on Rural Ministry*, The United Church of Canada, November 6-8, 2006, PCTC – Calling Lakes Centre, Fort Qu' Appelle, (Saskatchewan: March 30, 2007), p. 21.

develops the foundation of your community ministry.⁵² It is very important to know and relate to the context of a specific place so that one can be able to serve well in a place.

The third lens is Worship. Many of the rural churches are at crossroads and they are paralyzed by two fears: that the financial burden of staying open will inevitably overcome them and force them to close, and, that their young people will lose interest in matters of faith and leave their home congregation and town altogether. When such fears are on the minds of people, worship is dashed by the nervousness to look at the low numbers in churches and the fear of what the future will hold. The ways in which liturgy and worship are understood and carried out in rural ministries congregational and community based should reflect the ever-present presence of the Spirit in that particular place and context. As reiterated by Frost and Hirsch in their book, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, “the church should be missional rather than institutional. The church should define itself in terms of its mission, to take the gospel to and incarnate the gospel within a specific cultural context.”⁵³ Frost and Hirsch quote from David Bosch’s book, *Transforming Missions*, “The mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and reconceived.”⁵⁴ Though many rural communities and rural pastoral charges are no strangers to poverty and the lack of adequate financial resources, there is no scarcity of resourcefulness, imagination and creativity. People in rural congregations need to find ways in which they make worship suitable in their specific setting. People need to be creative in the way they worship. It is important to utilize what is there in order to make worship lively. Here in

⁵² Carl S. Dudley. *Basic Steps Towards Community Ministry*. (New York: Alban Institute, 1991), p. 43.

⁵³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), xi.

⁵⁴ David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology and Mission*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1991), p.519.

Newfoundland, an example, people play guitars and accordions, and these should be used in the worship services because this is what people are used to.

The fourth lens is Caring and Generosity. People living in rural areas in Canada are well known for their caring and generosity. This is true of the United Church congregations. A good example is about me, I came to Burgeo Newfoundland in September 2007 from Zimbabwe, Africa, and I was so worried about how we were going to fit into the community and the church. All my fears were answered with the hospitality and caring that we got as a family. I continue humbled by the caring of the people in Burgeo and how supportive they are to new people who come in their midst. Because of such care, generosity, hospitality and support, I have a wonderful ministry in this community. What I have seen is that typical rural congregations have organized their church life along family lines, with the descendants of original families taking lead positions. Many of them can trace their family history back to the 1830s. What is important is that people in rural areas want to be involved in the life and work of the church and they want the church to remain alive despite the challenges.

The fifth lens is Learning. In Romans 12:4-8, the apostle Paul talks about spiritual gifts which are given to all believers for the edification of the church which is the body of Christ. Martin Luther considered Paul's letter to the Romans, "the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel."⁵⁵ Teaching and ministry are very important in fulfilling the work of the church. Teaching includes teaching lay people and ordered ministers how to minister as much as it does to support those called to teaching ministry in the church. While both offer leadership in congregational and community settings, Paul

⁵⁵ From Martin Luther's "*Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*," 1522.

also makes a point of singling out the gift of leadership. Congregational leadership entails a relationship between a local's church culture and its ability to learn. Leadership in the words of George B. Thompson, Jr, is, "learning how to learn, how to pay attention to what is going on around them, how to adjust their focus on the future, and how to let their changed assumptions change as a result."⁵⁶ It is essential that prospective ministry personnel could learn more about those specific contexts for rural ministry while staying in a rural pastoral charge and small town, and by meeting with lay and ordered people who work and minister in that same community. A good example is the Diploma Program in Rural Ministry at Queens College in Kingston, Ontario.⁵⁷ This program was designed to give students the basis in doing ministry in rural communities. Students who were doing their Master of Divinity also did a program which featured a week long courses through onsite learning opportunities held in different kinds of rural communities within the province of Ontario. Even though the program had the Bay of Quinte Conference in mind, it was helpful because some students after graduation served in other rural communities all over Canada. In the year 2000 Muskoka Presbytery in the Toronto Conference commissioned a report on alternative models of mission strategy for small and rural congregations in decline.⁵⁸ The recommendation of the people who worked on the report was to form a trained group of lay leaders, well versed in the polity of the United Church of Canada, familiar with the history of the church, having solid studies in scripture and theology and able to preach and conduct worship.⁵⁹ Being a largely rural

⁵⁶ George B. Thompson, Jr., *How to Get Along With Your Church: Creating Cultural Capital for Doing Ministry*, (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), p. 77-78.

⁵⁷ Marvin L. Anderson. *Alive and Kicking, Revitalizing Rural Ministries, for Educational, Congregational and Community Ministries Unit*, General Council office, United Church of Canada, April 2008, p. 32.

⁵⁸ Marvin L. Anderson. "Alternative Models of Mission Strategy for Small and Rural Congregations," Final Report for Muskoka Presbytery, The United Church of Canada, May 2000.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 29-30.

presbytery, Muskoka had already been engaged for some time in providing exemplary models of lay education that encourages and trains laity to develop their own skills at ministry. Two frequent challenges rural congregations face are their low self-esteem and worry about their future, and the fact that often when settled to a new rural pastoral charge, ministry personnel do not stay very long. There is great need for lay people to assist in conducting worship and preaching, to do some of the pastoral visiting, to provide Christian education opportunities in the congregation, and to learn how to witness to their faith in the community. In Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery in Quebec in the Montreal and Ottawa Conference, there is training of the laity to lead worship, visitation and other ways of ministry. This program has been going on for more than 25 years.⁶⁰

The sixth lens is Healing and Transformation. Revelation 21:5 says, “Behold, I am making all things new.” The church filled with the Holy Spirit, in the words of Canadian theologian, Clark Pinnock, “is agent of God’s coming kingdom and sacrament for the world. God touches the world when the church speaks the truth, proclaims good news, performs Jesus-actions, identifies with pain, builds community, shares and forgives. The mission is holistic and has broad parameters. Spiritual ecstasy is not meant to be an end in itself, the goal is transformation.”⁶¹ This lens enable us to see how the work God calls us to do in the world is about both healing and transformation. We are God’s hands and fingers, and we leave our human fingerprints on the work we do in the name and Spirit of Jesus. The purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 is to bring the kingdom of God near and change real life situations. As we noted in the first lens on purpose and identity, the historic mandate and legacy of the United Church is one that commands

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

⁶¹ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flames of Love*, (IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), p. 143.

respect because of its historical incarnation of the social gospel. The explicit emphasis on “Christianizing the Social Order” was endorsed by commissioners to the General Council of the United Church in 1932.⁶² The chapter on Indian Residential Schools was a shame for our church. The personal and communal longing for healing among Aboriginal survivors of the Indian residential schools reminds us of the gospel truth proclaimed by Paul: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26). This powerful ritual of Aboriginal healing for those who have suffered is a sign of the profound way in which God touches the world when the church speaks the truth, proclaims good news, performs Jesus actions, identifies with pain, builds community, shares and forgives. It points to the prophetic yearning among all of us for God’s healing and transformation of the broken world in which we live. In response to our church’s commitment to repentance, the United Church of Canada made an official apology to the injustices done to the survivors of the Indian residential schools on Tuesday, October 27, 1998:

As Moderator of The United Church of Canada, I wish to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time. On behalf of The United Church of Canada, I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church’s involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused. We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada’s First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry. To those individuals who were physically, sexually, and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology. You did nothing wrong. You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused.

We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens. Our burdens include dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations peoples and the richness of your gifts. We

⁶² www.unitedchurch.ca, 5th General Council 1932, Hamilton Ontario.

seek God's forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations peoples. We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority. "We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future."⁶³

(The Right Rev. Bill Phipps)
(Moderator of the United Church of Canada)

Healing and transformation become genuine if the offender realizes when she/he has done wrong and the offended accepts the apology. This leads to forgiveness, reconciliation and trust as people accept one another in a genuine way without suspicion or ill-feelings. Transformation comes when people agree and see the need for change. Effective change has to start from within, it cannot happen as a push from outside, people must have the desire to change, that is when they can initiate change.

The seventh lens is Sustainability. The United Church has done the reputable advocacy work on behalf of social justice here at home and around the world. This has acquainted Canadians with international groups involved in rural ministry as well. Prominent among them is the International Rural Church Association (ICRA) which is, a network of rural Christians from around the world who seek to support one another in their mission for connecting the gospel and rural life in their own context. In July 2007, with funding from the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church, Brandon Manitoba hosted the fourth international gathering of the International Rural Church Association on the campus of Brandon University. The conference focused on the topic of sustainability in the rural context, and was titled: "*How can we find hope in the rural landscape?*" It was organized

⁶³ www.unitedchurch.ca. *Apology to Former Students of the United Church Indian Residential Schools and to their Families and Communities*, October 27, 1998. The Right Rev Bill Phipps, Moderator.

by Catherine Christie, a United Church minister from Saskatchewan Conference chair of the Canadian Rural Church Network (CRCN), and Joyce Sasse, a retired United Church minister from Alberta Northwest Conference, a long time advocate for rural ministry. Sustainability was the focus of the conference and the keynote address was presented by retired Professor, John Ikerd, from the University of Missouri at Columbia. His address way entitled, *“The role of the rural church in sustaining rural communities.”* In his address, John Ikerd noted that rural churches must find the courage to reject the arrogance, intolerance, selfishness, and pride that permeate much of the global society today, including many of our rural churches today. We need to speak up for the interest of rural people, and not be apologists for corporate colonizers. Many rural ministers seem to be concerned about losing members and financial support, they cannot find the moral courage to preach and teach the principles that must sustain the people of their communities for generations to come.⁶⁴ It must be noted that, most of our traditional rural communities and small towns are struggling to maintain their historic community and traditional economic resource base. They want to remain faithful to the generations of people and family who established that particular place as home. Leadership is the key to ensure the sustainability of ministry in rural pastoral charges and rural communities. The birth of the Canadian Rural Church Network (CRNC) is one the most promising signs of mobilizing rural ministry across the country.⁶⁵ One of the reasons for the basis of the union of the United Church was the realization that sufficient clergy and financial resources were necessary to service the growing population in the Canadian prairies as

⁶⁴ Presentation by Dr. John Ikerd to the International Rural Church Association Conference 2007, Brandon, Manitoba, July 4, 2007, in Proceedings from, “How Can We Find Hope in Rural Landscape?”

⁶⁵ Marvin L. Anderson. *Alive and Kicking, Revitalizing Rural Ministries*, for Educational, Congregational and Community Ministries Unit, General Council office, United Church of Canada, April 2008, p. 56.

more and more migrants poured into this region. It was also believed that this union would help consolidate ministry personnel and resources in eastern Canadian rural communities that were losing population in the east to west migration in late 1880s through the late 1920s. The desire by the Canadian church to serve rural communities better was a key factor in persuading these three mainline denominations to unite.⁶⁶ Sustainability in the rural context is negotiated between each and every generation of rural people that inherit the land and the communities in which their ancestors and relatives have lived, or that move and settle into those communities. It is not always successful transmission or an easy transition. The anticipated transformation that comes with this transition among Canada's diversity of rural people, communities and congregations is often accompanied by the seasonal changes in the land and weather in the harsh places where many of us live.

2.2. Conclusion:

In concluding this chapter in which I outlined the work and ministry that has already been done by the United Church in rural areas and also in Canada as a whole, I do wish to express appreciation for the work that has been done and all the resources put into this work. However, my concern still remains that a lot of work has been done at the highest level of the church, but implementation has not been done in the rural communities which need such kind of new innovation and focus. The focus of ministry in the church today is mainly in cities and bigger places. There was an officer in the General Council of the church who dealt specifically with how to revive the ministry in small communities. Due

⁶⁶ Adapted from Dr. John H. Young's chapter for *Gleaning the Stories of Resilience and Hope*, pending publication, written in collaboration with colleagues Dr. Marvin L. Anderson, Dr. Gary Goreham, Dr. Gilson A.C. Waldkoning and Dr. John H. Young.

to financial constrains this position has been abolished. I would argue that small communities are evaporating and we should be concerned on how we can bring them up to be a part of the church. It is true that people in small communities do not contribute much financially, but they should be allowed to come up with ways in which they can actively participate in the life and work of the church with full involvement. To stress my point that small communities are evaporating, let me give a brief history of the community of Burgeo. The history of Burgeo is written with reference to the Virgio Islands on the South Coast of Newfoundland and can be found on a Portuguese map dated 1628. This 250 year old document can be an appropriate place to start with a history of Burgeo.⁶⁷ The name has subsequently been changed to Birgio and lately Burgeo. Captain James Cook's account of an eclipse of the sun, seen at Burgeo in 1767, was published in the "Philosophical Transactions," and added greatly to his reputation as a skilled scientist; at Burgeo Islands, and several other places on the Newfoundland coast, his survey marks are still pointed out.⁶⁸ The first clergyman to be stationed in the Burgeo was Rev. Martin Blackmore. He came in 1842. During his six year stay he had the first Church as well as the first school erected here. The church was built between the two present gates nearer to the main road. During Rev. Blackmore's incumbency the first church was built at West Burgeo. It was on the west side of the island, a nice, quiet spot. It seated 80 people.⁶⁹ Along the years Burgeo developed to become a booming fishing community until the closure of the fisheries. The population of Burgeo has decreased since the closure of the fisheries it has seen the following trend over the years, 2,474 in

⁶⁷ Rev Martin Blackmore's Diary, *Journal entry*, written at (Burgeo: 1842-1848.)

⁶⁸ Matthews Aubrey. *A Souvenir of Burgeo's Come Home Year*, 1988, p. 1-6.

⁶⁹ Rev Martin Blackmore's *Diary, Journal entry*, written at (Burgeo: 1842-1848.)

1976, 3156 in 1991, 1,607 in 2006 and 1,364 in 2011.⁷⁰ Since coming to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador some five years ago, I have seen that the population is declining between 1954 and 1972 more than 27,000 people and more than 220 communities were resettled.⁷¹ This proved to be a heart-rending experience for many of those who were resettled, and encouraged a romanticized image of life in the former communities by those who found themselves growing up in urban centres and listening to the stories of life before the move. The widespread feeling of decline in rural Newfoundland, which was matched in rural communities elsewhere in the world, reached a new level in 1992 when the Government of Canada placed a moratorium upon catching northern cod.⁷² Many once-thriving out-ports now had to find new resources upon which to employ their population. While the harvesting of new species, and new industries such as tourism, gave some out-ports hope, most experienced a rapid decline in population. Municipal governments faced declining tax bases and difficulties in attracting new employers to their communities. Since young people with children are leaving, the continued viability of many out-ports is threatened. Some out-ports will cease to exist and others will evolve, as has always happened. The population of small communities in Newfoundland is declining, and the rate at which the population is declining in Newfoundland in the small out-port communities is a sure sign that these communities are evaporating. Since these communities are evaporating, the ministry of the church in these communities is a big challenge. I have observed that in the United Church in the West District of the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, there are a number of pastoral charges in small communities which have not had ministers for more than three

⁷⁰ *Burgeo Census*". Statistics Canada. Retrieved 7 October 2012.

⁷¹ www.heritage.nf.ca/society/outports.html.

⁷² www.heritage.nf.ca/society/moratorium_impacts.html.

years due to their isolation and they cannot afford to support ministers because they are too small due to decline in population. I am giving these few examples to further my argument that there is a need for the ministry in evaporating small communities to be revisited and to try and find ways which are relevant to care for the church in such communities.

CHAPTER 3

Ecclesiology/Church and the Theology of Ministry

3.1. Introduction:

In this chapter I will look at ecclesiology/church starting from the traditional model and I will moving to the New Testament understanding of ecclesiology and the way ecclesiology is understood in today's ecumenical context. I will conclude this chapter by talking about the theology of the ministry of the church.

3.2. Ecclesiology/Church:

Ecclesiology usually refers to the theological study of the Christian Church. The Church is a community of believers (*ecclesia*) called into existence by the presence of Jesus Christ and the call to continue Jesus' ministry in the world. Through the Spirit, who enlivens and renews the church, all members are empowered to share in Christ's ministry, the work of the church. The church is about God's mission in the world, living out the gospel message through action, that there will be shalom for God's creatures and healing for God's creation. Ministry serves God's mission in the world. However, when the word was coined in England in the late 1830s, it was defined as the science of the building and decoration of church buildings and it is still, though rarely, used in this sense.⁷³ In its theological sense, ecclesiology deals with the church's origin, its relationship to Jesus, its role in salvation, its discipline, its destiny, and its leadership. Since different ecclesiologies give shape to very different institutions, the word may also refer to a particular church or denomination's character, self-described or otherwise. Alister E.

⁷³ James F. White. *The Cambridge Movement: the ecclesiologists and the Gothic revival* (revised ed.). (Cambridge: University Press: 1979), p. 48–9.

McGrath summed up the definition of ecclesiology in this way, "Ecclesiology' is a term that has changed its meaning in recent theology. Formerly the science of the building and decoration of churches, promoted by the Cambridge Camden Society, the Ecclesiological Society and the journal. The Ecclesiologist, ecclesiology now stands for the study of the nature of the Christian church."⁷⁴ He goes on to say, Ecclesiology is that area of the theology which seeks to give theoretical justification to an institution which has undergone development and change down the centuries, set against an altering social and political context.⁷⁵ In the traditional way of understanding the church has been described in various terms, some of the common terms are, (i) the church as a spiritual society, which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world. (ii) All Christians are made one in Christ, despite their different origins and backgrounds. (iii) The church is the repository of true Christian teaching. (iv) the church gathers the faithful throughout the world together, in order to enable them to grow in faith and holiness. In trying to understand the church, there was the Donatist Controversy which has passed into the history of the church. Donatism was a Christian sect within the Roman province of Africa that flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁷⁶ It had its roots in the social pressures among the long-established Christian community of Roman North Africa (present-day Algeria and Tunisia), during the persecutions of Christians under Diocletian. The Donatists (named for the Berber Christian bishop Donatus Magnus) were members of a schismatic church not in communion with the churches of the Catholic tradition in Late Antiquity. Donatism was an indirect outcome of Diocletian's persecutions. The governor

⁷⁴ Alister E. McGrath. *"Ecclesiology". The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 127.

⁷⁵ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology, An Introduction.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 405.

⁷⁶ Norman F. Cantor. *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 1995:51f.

of Africa had been lenient towards the large Christian minority under his rule during the persecutions. He was satisfied if Christians handed over their Scriptures as a token repudiation of their faith. Some Christians acceded to this convenient action. When the persecutions came to an end, however, they were branded traditores, "those who handed (the holy things) over" by the zealous, mostly from the poorer classes.⁷⁷ The Donatists believed that the entire sacrament system of the Catholic church had been corrupted. The arrival of St Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo in the region is what helped to resolve the tensions, as St Augustine put his Augustinian view of the church which has remained influential ever since.⁷⁸ Augustine emphasized the sinfulness of Christians, in which he said the church is not composed of all saints, but it's a mixed body of saints and sinners. He emphasized that the separation of good and evil takes place at the end of time not in history.⁷⁹ The church is sanctified and made holy by Christ. There was also the Reformation Controversy that influenced the understanding of ecclesiology. There was the Magisterial Reformation by Martin Luther, in which he argued that because the Catholic Church had lost sight of the doctrine of grace, it had lost its claim to be considered as the authentic Christian church; this argument was open to the counter-criticism from Catholics that he was thus guilty of schism and the heresy of Donatism, and in both cases therefore opposing central teachings of the early Church and most especially the Church father St. Augustine of Hippo.⁸⁰ It also challenged the Catholic doctrine that the Catholic Church was indefectible and infallible in its dogmatic teachings. Amongst the second generation reformers was also John Calvin who stands out

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Henry Chadwick. *Saint Augustine Confessions*. (Oxford: University Press, 1991), p. xii.

⁷⁹ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology, An Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 409.

⁸⁰ Alister E. MacGrath. *Historical Theology, An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 200.

as supreme. He was faced with the challenge of developing a coherent and systematic ecclesiology, on the basis of the realization that separation from the main body of the Catholic church would continue indefinitely. For John Calvin the marks of the true church were: (i) that the Word of God should be preached, and (ii) that the sacraments should be rightly administered. Calvin further argued that there were specific scriptural directions regarding the right order of ministry in the visible church, so that a specific form of ecclesiastical order now became an item of doctrine.⁸¹ In defining the church, John Calvin said, the true church is to be found where the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. He stressed that the administration of the church should be based on Scripture. He also drew an important distinction between the visible and the non visible church. The visible is the community of Christian believers, and the invisible is the fellowship of the saints in the company of the elect. There was also the radical reformation understanding of the church, which said, There is no single Radical Reformation Ecclesiology. A variety of views is expressed among the various "Radical Reformation" participants. A key Radical Reformer was Menno Simons, an Anabaptist. He wrote:

They verily are not the true congregation of Christ who merely boast of his name. But they are the true congregation of Christ who are truly converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerate mind by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the divine Word, and have become the children of God, have entered into obedience to him, and live unblamably in his holy commandments, and according to his holy will with all their days, or from the moment of their call.⁸²

⁸¹ Aulen Gustaf. *Reformation and Catholicity*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961.)

⁸² George Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1988), p. 285.

This was in direct contrast to the hierarchical, sacramental ecclesiology that characterised the incumbent Roman Catholic tradition as well as the new Lutheran and other prominent Protestant movements of the Reformation. Some other Radical Reformation ecclesiology holds that the true church is in heaven, and no institution of any kind on earth merit the name church of God.

While we try to understand the church in the traditional sense, there are many problems that people have with the church today, there are several which are widespread. Misunderstanding and hostility to the church results from individualism that saturates American culture. In much of the North American Christianity, this translates into a self-centred piety in which the church is secondary and unnecessary. Being a Christian is an individual matter and is not essentially bound to life with others. This individualism hides the profound hunger for companionship and community that runs beneath the surface of life in America.⁸³ Religious belief is also privatized in which the process of privatization severs the message and mission of the church from the larger questions and struggles of life. The church is only recognized to serve the needs of private individuals. The church has also become a bureaucratic organization, the church is subject to bureaucratic pressures.⁸⁴ The church is thus caught in trying to shape itself into organizational structures and managerial techniques of profitable corporations. As a result of this, the church has lost its true identity and its distinctive mission in the world. Another major source of the problems that people have found in the church, is found in the conspicuous and disturbing discrepancy between the expressed faith of the church and its actual

⁸³ Robert N. Bellah. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1995.)

⁸⁴ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB Eerdmans, 1991), p. 187.

practice. As Nietzsche wrote, “They would have to sing better songs to make me believe in their Redeemer: his disciples would have to look more redeemed!”⁸⁵ There is a chasm between what is proclaimed and what is practiced. As a result, the language about the community called church sounds shamelessly triumphalistic and unreal.⁸⁶ The motto of the ecumenical church leaders in this century has been, “Let the church be the church.” Let the church live and act like the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, and the servant people of God.⁸⁷ The church is called to be the beginning of new human life in relationships, solidarity and friendship beyond all privatism, classism, racism and sexism.

In the New Testament the *ecclesia*, or church, refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in response to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The word church can designate either local assemblies of Christians or the universal Christian community. In the New Testament the *ecclesia* refers to the unique and transformed way of being human in relationship with God and with other people. It designates a distinctive form of human community characterized by mutuality, interdependence, forgiveness and friendship. In the *ecclesia* power and responsibility are shared and there is always a special concern for the poor, the weak and the despised. Ecclesial life is a new community of free persons centered on God’s love in Christ Jesus and empowered to service by the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ The church and its ecclesial form of life are related to the sign and manifestation of the reign of God. The New Testament describes the church, or *ecclesia* in many different

⁸⁵ Nietzsche. (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*), quoted by Huns Kung, in *the Church*. (New York: Seed and Weed, 1967), p. 150.

⁸⁶ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 187.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 188.

⁸⁸ Edward Farley. *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.)

images and metaphors. There are four images of the church in the New Testament: (i) The church as *the people of God*,⁸⁹ and especially the exodus people of God. The theme of both the Old and New Testament. “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” (Lev 26:12). You are God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9). According to this cluster of images, the church is not primarily a building, but a people, a community, and specifically the people of God who have been called by God. Related to this image of the church as the people of God are images such as chosen race, holy nation, new Israel, sons and daughters of Abraham, remnant, and the elect. (ii) A second set of images describes this people of God as *a servant people*.⁹⁰ This is a very prominent motif of the Old Testament. Repeatedly Yahweh calls for the liberation of the people of Israel “that they may serve me” (Exodus 8:1; 9:1; 10:3) The theme of a servant people is also important in the New Testament. Just as the Lord of this community is a servant Lord, so the community called by God is to be a community of servants. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Christians are to be servants for Jesus sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5). Called to serve God and others, the church is not to exercise power in self-centered ways or to lord it over others but to be ready for costly service. (Matthew 20:25-26). The people of God are co-workers, helpers, ambassadors, and witnesses. The church’s service of God finds expression in its worship, prayer, and praise, the church’s service to the world takes the form of witness in word and

⁸⁹ Johannes A. Van Der Ven. *Ecclesiology in Context*. (Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 191-193.

⁹⁰ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 190.

in deed to God's grace and God's call for justice.⁹¹ (iii) A third set of images focuses on the metaphor of the church as *the body of Christ*.⁹² This description of the church occurs in the Pauline letters, (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The community participates in one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism, and thus become one body. The image conveys the mutual dependence of all members of the community on one another, their variety of gifts which are for the enrichment and edification of the whole community, and the common dependence of all members of the body on the one head who is Christ. (Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 5:23). The unity of the church as one body is indispensable if it is to be effective in carrying out its mission in the world. (iv) The fourth and final set of images portrays the activity of God in creating a community of the end time, *a community of the Spirit*,⁹³ filled by the gifts of the Spirit. In the renewing experience of the Spirit of God, the New Testament church sees important evidence of the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets (Acts 2:17ff). Racial, gender and class divisions are broken down (Galatians 3:28); strangers are welcomed; the sharing of power replaces domination. Empowered and guided by the Spirit, the community is God's new creation, the first signs of God's new humanity, the first fruits of a glorious new age.⁹⁴ The church serves and suffers but also celebrates and hopes, because it already experiences a foretaste of new life and joy in the *koinonia*, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The church is thus a sign of the kingdom of God. As an alternative community in which a new Spirit of freedom reigns and in

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 191.

⁹² Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of the Small Church*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 15.

⁹³ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 191.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 191.

which the most wretched are included and even enemies are welcome, the church gives the world the reason for hope.⁹⁵

Daniel L. Migliore gives a critique to the current five most influential models of the church. (1) Institution of Salvation: This view defines the church primarily in terms of divinely authorized structures, officers, procedures, and traditions.⁹⁶ The church has a form and organization, the chain of power is clearly determined. Institutional structure belong to the humanity of the church. Order in this church is hierarchical rather than representative or interactional, power always flow from the top to the bottom. There is always the mentality of maintenance of the institution. Even though this portrayal of the church is more Roman Catholic, the truth is that the tendency of the institutional structures of the church to grow and harden into institutionalism has proved to be very real in both the Catholic and Protestant ecclesial life.⁹⁷ The more this happens, the more hierarchy triumphs over community, and the mentality of survival overpowers the spirit of service. In the Reformed churches, there has been much emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, on ordained ministry as functional and on the stirring motto, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* – “the church reformed, always in need of being reformed.”⁹⁸ The structures of the church must continually be changed and converted by the gospel as a way of avoiding the temptation of domination and abuse of power. (2) Another model the church portrays it as intimate community of the Spirit. According to this view the church is not so much a formal organization as it is a closely knit group

⁹⁵ David J. Bosch. *The Church as Alternative Community*. (Potschefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1982.)

⁹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 192.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 193.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 193.

whose members share a common experience of God's reviving Spirit. This gives the members of the church that mutual support for one another. The principal task of the church is to facilitate spiritual experiences and promote interpersonal relationships. The weakness of this model is that people only emphasize the spiritual aspect such as faith, prayer, meditation, spiritual exercises and exchange of personal experiences, and this neglects the reality of life. While the church is indeed the community of the Spirit in which all have gifts and in which power is shared, the New Testament views this new Spirit-guided community as called to serve God's purpose of both personal and world transformation. (3) Another current model of the church is as sacrament of salvation: The model of the church as sacrament emphasizes the continuing presence of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This has the emphasis on eucharist in which the community is nourished and renewed which is the redemptive work of Christ extended to humanity. This model's weakness is that it can lead toward ecclesiocentrism, often in the form of liturgism. This may result in a decline of emphasis on the social responsibility of the faith community. The church should as a sacramental community, signify both its internal structures and in its social praxis the liberation of life that it announces.⁹⁹ (4) The fourth prominent model of the church is that of herald of good news. This is the understanding of the church that has been primarily in the Protestant traditions. It is based on the conviction that the mission of the church is above all to the proclamation of the Word of God and to call the nations to repentance and new life. Men and women are to be summoned to put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. An evaluation of this model of the church as herald must begin with the acknowledgment that the proclamation of the gospel is a primary task of the community of faith. The danger though, is that, it is easy for the church to take a

⁹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez. *A Theology of Liberation*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1988), p. 143.

patronizing and self-righteous attitude toward people and culture to whom the gospel is to be proclaimed, leading to the church to only speak and not listen. The church as herald of good news must be willing to be instructed by others how they may have to give and receive as well. There is a need to have a holistic understanding in which the message doesn't override the concern to meet concrete human needs for a dignified human life. (5)

The fifth current model of the church portrays it as servant of the servant Lord. According to this view the church is not only an institution whose purpose is survival and expansion, it is a servant community called to minister in God's name on behalf of fullness of life for all of God's creatures. The church serves God by serving the world in its struggle for freedom, justice and peace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined the church as the community that exists for others. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving.¹⁰⁰ This model plays a very important role of the church in the emphasis of the church's mission of reconciliation and the call for the church to participate in the struggle of the oppressed. This model also encourages that power should be shared rather than centralized, and in the light of the gospel people analyze all kinds of oppression and they consider strategies of change and support to each other in their various tasks.¹⁰¹ The servant model of the church has much to contribute. Karl Barth insists that the church exists for the world, the church is to exist not for itself but for others.¹⁰² The missionary character of the church is not incidental but quite essential to its very being as the people of God. The dangers of this model is the temptation for people to reduce the ecclesiology to only social function. The church may as well focus on social and political change, and this is frequently accompanied by a loss

¹⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. (New York: Macmillan, 1967.)

¹⁰¹ Carl Mesters. *Defenseless Little Flower*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1989.)

¹⁰² Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.2:762.

of criticism and openness to reform. The church should never lose focus of Christ in fulfilling its calling. A Trinitarian ecclesiology would take a basic clue from the fact that the most fundamental Christian affirmation about the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ through the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit is that God is extravagant, outreaching love. The triune God is a missionary God, and the mission of the church is rooted in the trinitarian missions.¹⁰³ The very nature of God is communal, and the end for which God created and reconciled the world is depth of communion between God and creatures. The church is the community called into being, built up, and sent into the world to serve in the name and power of the triune God.¹⁰⁴ When the church is true to its own being and mission, it offers an earthly correspondence to God's own unity in diversity, to the inclusive and welcoming love of the other that characterizes the communion of the triune God. In the traditional and New Testament understanding of the church, the focus is on God who came in Christ Jesus to the world to save us sinners. The relationship between God and us is determined by God who has loved us and gave us his son Jesus Christ who came to die for us on the cross. (John 3:16). This gives us human beings the right to make our choices to believe in God and follow him. God doesn't impose himself on anyone, but each person has the free will to make personal choices. Some people may see God as judgmental and without mercy if people do not believe, the church is called to tell people of the love of God and that God is communal and relational. The grace of God welcomes and embraces us to be his children. The church has the calling to proclaim the salvific acts of God in fulfilling the work of justice in the world.

¹⁰³ Lesslie Newbigin. *The Open Secret: Sketches for Missionary Theology*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1978)

¹⁰⁴ Karl Barth. *Doctrine of the church in Church Dogmatics*, IV/1-3.

Moving from the biblical understanding of ecclesiology, we need to see how ecclesiology is being understood in today's ecumenical world. In Reformed theology, the church is understood to be called into existence by God's mission. It is not that the church of God has a mission in the world, but that the God of mission has a church. We should never think of the church apart from its purpose, why it exists and whose mission it serves. One way of thinking about ecclesiology in today's world is as a practice through which the church rethinks the meaning of its self-understanding as a community of Jesus Christ in every changing circumstance.¹⁰⁵ An important component of ecclesiology today has to do with the universal character of the church, what it is that makes us part of the one body of Christ. These universal claims on us have to do with shared theological and sacramental identity, as well as ecumenical connection. It is the interrelationship of the universal characteristics of the church woven together with the specific and particular characteristics of the church that speak to our own ecclesiological identity. The 41st General Council of the United Church adopted a document on ecclesiology in which it defines the characteristics of the United Church of Canada.¹⁰⁶ The Council affirmed that we are a church that does not hold Christology, the doctrine of Christ to be a static description; but rather a living and vital relationship with the risen Christ. For it is through Christ that the people have come to know the God of Israel, and to be a vessel put to the service of God's mission, leaving safe harbours and venturing into deep and uncharted waters of the future.¹⁰⁷ As the United Church we see ourselves to be fluid and changing, not bound by present day status or convention, but always grounded in Christ.

¹⁰⁵ Letty M. Russell. 'Ecclesiology' in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and Shannon Clarkson, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), p. 78-79.

¹⁰⁶ www.gc41.ca/ecclesiology report.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

We are a church that sees sin as corporate as well as individual. A church that believes that in the face of sin believers must act as members of the whole community as well as individually. We are a church desiring to be shaped by intercultural vision believing that God's transforming action for good in the world values the diversity of the world's languages, cultures and faiths. Therefore the church must always be self-critical about its own history, recognizing that differences in our own society and church continues to mean inequalities in wealth and power. And so we are a church that seeks to challenge injustice and build right relations that uphold the beauty and dignity of difference, cherishing these as resources of learning, wisdom and transformation. We are a church that sees right relations, partnership and mending the world as fundamental to its participation in God's mission. We are a church that is open to being challenged, inspired and transformed. The following theological principles were also affirmed by the 41st General Council¹⁰⁸ as reflecting the core values we hold as a church. (i) A church that holds scripture as foundational remembers the wealth stories and teachings collected in scripture and in continuing tradition. (ii) A church that is called into being as the body of Christ recognizes that those who come to the church, come through the invitation of Christ, and must be welcomed with the radical hospitality of the reign of God. (iii) A church seeking justice and resisting evil knows itself, confesses and repents its errors, serves with humility and acts with courage. (iv) A church that lives with respect in creation asks how all of its decisions will affect the flourishing of creation. (v) A church that is part of God's mission in the world asks how each of its decisions will promote or obstruct God's mission. (vi) A church seeking equity and justice honors the diverse experiences of those who may have been seen as other but who are never other to God. (vii) An

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

intercultural church intentionally risks engagement with difference as a God given gift, affirming the human dignity of all. (viii) A church open to transformation through relationships with others is committed to dialogue. (ix) A church which values partnerships and whole world ecumenism seeks out collaboration with people beyond our church in areas of common concern. (x) A church living faithfully in the midst of empire makes its decisions with the full and informed participation of all those affected. To me this is the definition of the church in today's world, the call to be open to embrace change and be prepared to take some risks. Furthermore the church is a place where justice should prevail and where all people are welcome and belong, no one should be discriminated against because of color, sex, sexual orientation. The church should celebrate diversity and be sensitive to people who are on the margins. Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd puts it this way, churches should take theology seriously and can begin by looking at themselves and recognizing the diversity within their congregations. Churches will find a fuller, much richer, much deeper sense of being the one body of Christ if we lift up and celebrate our diverse identities and gifts.¹⁰⁹ It is very critical that people seek dialogue in all what they are doing even with those people with which there may not be any common ground. As the church we are called to participate in the mission of Christ through listening and being open to new beginnings in our lives and in the life of the church. The calling of the church is to be a community of faith to serve people in a specific geographical area fulfilling the calling of Christ. The church of Christ remains the church regardless of the numbers, whether many or few.

¹⁰⁹ Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon. *Intersecting Voices, Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*. (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), p. 142-143.

Hendriks uses the metaphor of the cross to explain this approach of doing theology, which I think applies to the church. He speaks of steps, but in this paper they are viewed as dimensions. The eight dimensions are interwoven which means they cannot be separated. As explained by Faix and Kritzinger the methodology used in this research is dynamic and flexible.¹¹⁰ There is a continuous interplay between the eight dimensions. I will expand the eight dimensions of doing theology with reference to the United Church and the small communities outreach.

The foot of the cross: represents the first and second dimensions and deal with identity. This is about who we are. We are disciples of Jesus Christ living a transforming life. Our identity is not determined by what we do. We were formed to resemble God. The church is the body of Christ regardless of how small or few the people are. God is the Creator. The thesis believes that God is love and loves His creation. He wants us to be in a relationship with him as our Creator and wants to use us to live in a relationship with other human beings and the ecosystem. We can see all this in a complete way in the life of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is faith-seeking understanding.¹¹¹ It is to understand who God is in order to understand who we are and what we are to do. Theology is faith-based focus on God continues to say that a way to do theology is to “participate obediently” in the missional praxis of God. Theology is to know God, to discern his will and guidance for the way one should live and witness in pursuing the *Missio Dei*. As faith communities, people are called to a life of faith through obedience. Faith has a personal and purely historical reference. Faith concerns trust in the promises

¹¹⁰ T. Faix. *The Empirical-Theological praxis (ETP) cycle as a methodological basis for missiology*. *Missionalia*, Vol 35:1, 2007, p. 113-129.

¹¹¹ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991)

of God and unites the believer to Christ.¹¹² Martin Luther argues that a faith which is content to believe in the historical liability of the gospels is not a faith which justifies. Saving faith involves believing and trusting that Christ was born *pro nobis* for us personally, and has accomplished for us the work of salvation.¹¹³ Faith is to be understood as trust and faith unites the believer with Christ, it is a union between Christ and the believer.

The left side of the cross: refers to the world which God sent Jesus Christ (John 3:6). In this world there are the sent faith community, that is, the third and fourth dimensions dealing with the wider contextual situation and local analysis. The faith community, in discerning the will of God, should look at the world. As we look at the world (*context*), we should also look at the Word and keep them in dialogue in the discernment process. The faith community should analyse both the wider and local contextual situation. It is an inherent necessity for doing theology. The faith community is being sent by God to go into the world. The focus of the church is to participate in a context. Therefore the United Church of Canada should equip and empower all members as faith communities that endeavour to be faithful and effective witnesses in their cultural context. The research believes that theology is contextual by its very nature and that it must address the problems, needs and challenges of society in a holistic way. The faith communities are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. The theology of the United Church of Canada is to enable all believers in the confines of their world to ask and answer questions. Questions such as: Who are we? Why are we here? What is happening? Why is it happening? What is wrong and what is right? How should we address that which is confronting us?

¹¹² Allister G. MacGrath. *Christian Theology and Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 384.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 384.

Therefore it is important to develop a correlational, critical, dialogical, liberating and transformative hermeneutics to be in touch with local problems and realities and be connected to the people.¹¹⁴ The people of Burgeo, Ramea, Grey River and Francois must struggle to answer questions they have asked in their specific circumstances. The thesis proposes that the United Church may consider to follow a participatory action research approach with the people in small communities so as to be able to hear what the people want for the future of their ministry. The approach that doesn't allow the people on the ground to participate in their own future will make them subjects and result in the negation of the people's real needs.

The right side of the cross: refers to the Word, which is the fifth dimension that summarises our heritage or past. Scripture and faith traditions play a central role here. But the study embraces that faith traditions are subordinate to the Word of God, and are not equal. There is a relationship between the right and left side of the cross that is horizontal. In struggling to discern the will of God, the faith community should focus on the Word that is our heritage and past, the Scripture and tradition. Theological reflection is important, for Jesus stands at the heart of the Christian faith. Theology is contextual and also not static but a process. This means that what might be acceptable in one cultural context might be disapproved in another social context. In our communal and contextual understanding, the Holy Spirit must teach and guide us. The Holy Scriptures say, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13a). The Holy Spirit empowers the Faith community to bring the Gospel to the world. The understanding of mission is pneumatologically expounded, not christologically, and

¹¹⁴ Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of the Small Church*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 14.

stresses that God's Kingdom is being advanced by the Holy Spirit in this world. This calls the church to go back to the Holy Scriptures and review its mission.¹¹⁵ The Gospel is relevant to all ages, cultures and peoples, but its communication must be contextualised in order for it to be experienced as the living message of God.

The centre of the cross: is the sixth dimension where the faith communities struggle to discern the will of God for the present situation, where correlational hermeneutics are encountered (Philippians 1:9). Here we find a faith community in prayer, listening and discerning. In order to discern the will of God one should hold the four tension sides of the cross active in a critical hermeneutical and correlational dialogue. The faith community is the interpretive community. In 1 Corinthians 2:11, 12, 15 the Holy Scriptures speaks of knowing (v11), understanding (v12), and discerning (v15). Tillich advocated Christian existentialism. Miller notes that Tillich believed that theologians needed to adopt a theological methodology of correlation in which the existential situation posed questions and theologians used their knowledge of Christian symbols to respond. The church is to listen and learn, that is, to engage in continuous conversation. This calls for the involvement of the whole community of believers. The faith community should undertake a form of Biblical interpretation that focuses on ways of reading whereby the marginalised, local people can be empowered to become agents of self-actualisation in their worlds or contexts.¹¹⁶

The top of the cross: is the seventh dimension and shows where we are moving or heading, and deals with eschatology. The faith community is to be a sign of the Kingdom

¹¹⁵ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 167.

¹¹⁶ G.T. Miller. *The modern church: from the dawn of the Reformation to the eve of the third millennium*. (Nashville: Nashville, 1997), p. 254.

of God. It is about becoming what we received because of our identity in Jesus Christ. This will lead to a vision and a mission. This dimension reflects a vertical relationship between the foot and top of the cross. Metaphorically speaking, the top side of the cross defines our purpose or goal. As a faith community we are to work towards realizing something of the Kingdom of God in a very broken situation and society. This is a vision, that is, a dream about the future that shapes our reality.¹¹⁷ The United Church of Canada has a mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God, in word and deed, in its context. The communal-contextual approach should express it in all its ministries (example: in preaching, teaching, healing, striving for social, political, ecological, economical justice, in unity of all believers. This will bring about the Kingdom of God that will bring transformation to the people.

The movement from the bottom to the top of the cross: focuses on what we do and is the eighth dimension. The movement from the Alpha to the Omega describes the doing of transformative theology. It involves obedience and developing a strategy which should be implemented and evaluated. The thesis posits that what we do, does not determine what we are but reflects who we are, identity. During the process of implementing, of being involved in the church ministry work, the discernment continues, the correlation between the dimensions of the cross continues. They inform the process, one adjusts and develops. It is a process of reflective engagement. This process is about becoming what we already are in Jesus Christ. The faith community identity should not be determined by what we do. The thesis believes that what we do should manifest who we are. Our identifying with Jesus means imitating the character and mission of Jesus Christ, a life of discipleship.

¹¹⁷ H.J. Hendriks. *Studying congregations in Africa*. (Wellington: NetACT, Lux Verbi , 2004), p 82.

This identity, found in grace, in the creation of God and redemption in Christ, has to be realized in our lives and witness.¹¹⁸ It is the process of sanctification where the Holy Spirit guides and empowers the faith community. There is no church or ministry that is more important than the other and every ministry should be given room to function in its own specific way.¹¹⁹ The functions represent the different ministries in the faith community. Christ manifested all the ministries when he was here on earth and his body the faith community is to be embodying Him. In the process of the faith community participating in the mission of God, structures develop that are contextual. I would suggest that The United Church of Canada is to allow the outreach to people in evaporating communities to grow in line with their cultural context.

3.3. Theology of Ministry:

The church/ecclesia is called to fulfil the ministry of Christ, and this is the reason the church exists. In history the church has affirmed that all its members are called to ministry as parts of Christ's body. The ministry of Jesus begins with a community of people. These diverse communities actively participate in God's mission as disciples of Christ's ongoing ministry which takes many forms. The theology of ministry is that, we are called to serve in God's vineyard and the church must reach out where the people are.¹²⁰ There are various forms of ministry in the church which are expressed in the following ancient expressions and given current meaning:

- enlivening worship and celebration of the sacraments (*leitourgia*);

¹¹⁸ N.W. Wildiers. *Cosmology and Christology, in Process Theology*, ed. Ewert H Cousins. (MD: Newman Press, 1971), 269-82.

¹¹⁹ Anthony G. Pappas. *Entering the World of Small Churches*. (MD: Alban Institute, 2000), p. 62.

¹²⁰ Frank R. Tillapaugh. *Unleashing Your Potential*. (California: Regal, 1988), p. 32.

- interpreting and passing on Christian tradition (*kerygma*);
- responding to the needs of the community and the world (*diakonia*);
- nurturing faith, making the wisdom of the ages relevant for today (*didache*);
- building up the community of faith as the beloved community of God (*koinonia*).
- embodying the presence of Christ in the world (*marturia*).

Such ministries of leadership are all expressions of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Through these forms of ministry, leaders empower the community and its members to be representational, relational, collaborative, accountable, prophetic and charismatic in character. The word ministry has a broader and narrower meaning. As Christians we are called to worship and serve God. We are all called to follow Jesus Christ and to be faithful witnesses in word and deed. We are also given the vocation of loving of God and loving of neighbour. We are all given gifts by the Spirit to make a unique contribution to the life of the community and its mission to the world.¹²¹ In this broad sense of ministry, often expressed in the Reformation as the priesthood of all believers, all Christians are called to ministry and are empowered for this task by the Holy Spirit.¹²² There is also a narrower meaning of the term Christian ministry. Ministry in this sense is the calling and ordination of certain people to the ministry of word and sacrament. It is also an office that is ordained by God to provide for regular and preaching of the gospel, celebration of sacraments and leadership in the life and service of the church. The ministry of the Word

¹²¹ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 227.

¹²² Cyril Eastwood. *The Priesthood of All Believers: an Examination of the Doctrine From the Reformation to the Present Day*. London: Epworth Press, 1960, summarizes the doctrine according to various Protestant theologians and denominations.

and sacrament has both an inward and outward aspect. People are called to this ministry by the Holy Spirit, who gives special gifts and motivates their recipients to dedicate their lives to the gospel ministry. The call to ordained ministry has also an outward aspect. It is mediated by the community of faith when the community acknowledges that calling.¹²³ People who are called both inwardly and outwardly by the Spirit of God for leadership responsibilities are set apart by a service of ordination. Ministry is working in collaboration between ordered and the laity and these two are not to be separated for the success of ministry. The ministry we are called to is centred on Jesus Christ, and is characterized by service rather than domination.¹²⁴ The purpose of every ministry is to build up the whole people of God in faith, hope and love for more effective service in the world. All church orders must be open to reform and must recognize the need for new forms of ministry in response to new situations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All ministry should be inclusive and not exclusive. No group of people should be excluded from any part of ministry of the church regardless of their gender or race. A doctrine of ministerial inclusivity is based not on theory of natural human rights but on the free grace of God, who summons people of all races, classes, nations, and gender to all ministries of the church.¹²⁵ The church in small communities is the local visible functioning body of Christ and that gives us authority and credibility. I agree with Susan Willhauck in her book, *Ministry Unplugged, Uncommon Calls to Serve*, who sees ministry in this way; it is not a prize and it is not a badge of honor. Ministry belongs to God. Ministry in its specificity exists within our Christian living full of prayer, faith and love. Our task is to

¹²³ Daniel L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding, An Introduction to Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), p.227.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 229.

¹²⁵ According to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) new *Brief Statement of Faith, the Spirit "calls all women and men to all ministries of the church."* (1.64).

see, hear and act on God's grace and word to us.¹²⁶ Ministry is a calling in which we have to respond yes to God's direction, guidance and leading. The story of Abraham in Genesis is a good example of what ministry is and how we should obey God's call.

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you, and in you all the family of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. [Genesis 12:1-4a NKJV]

At the 41st General Council where I was privileged to be a commissioner in August 2012, the General Council of the United Church of Canada adopted a statement on Ministry. The Statement is meant to provide a clear and concise summary of the theological understanding of the church on the nature and meaning of ministry. The ministry and discipleship of all is reflected in the conciliar structure of the United Church, in which all believers are understood to have been called to the ministry of the church, and each one has a role to play in this ministry. It is the ministry of all and it seeks to be:

- representational, reflecting the character of Jesus the Christ, who is among us as one who serves;
- relational, originating in God's covenant and modeling mutual acceptance and respect with all creation;
- collaborative, recognizing that the church's life is based in partnership;
- accountable, being exercised on behalf of and therefore with the authority of the faith community;
- prophetic, enabling communities formed by God's Word and Spirit to be living messengers for the reign of God and to resist the powers of evil;
- charismatic, discerning and faithfully using the gifts and charisms of the Spirit for the building up of the church.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Susan Willhauck. *Ministry Unplugged, Uncommon Calls to Serve*. (Missouri: Chalice, 2010) p.12-13.

¹²⁷ www.gc41/StatementonMinistry.

The ministry of all takes place as the Spirit moves in known and unknown ways; bringing into the community of faith and sending into the world, the gifts of its people. “For the sake of the world,” says A Song of Faith, “God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry. To embody God’s love in the world, the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship of all believers.”¹²⁸

3.4. Conclusion:

In my own understanding, ministry is a call to obedience even though at some time we may not know where we are going and what God is calling us to do. Ministry is also a call to risk our lives for the sake of the kingdom of God. It is unfortunate that in today’s world we have changed the meaning of God’s call to ministry and we put our own interests first and never do we harken to what God wants for us. According to Howard Clinebell, ministry is prophetic in the sense that it seeks to change a community and its institutions so that they will support not stifle wholeness in all persons.¹²⁹ Luke records Jesus Christ defining the call to ministry in this way:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” [Luke 4:18-19: NKJV]

The ministry of the church today is to do justice with the attitude of Christ. God’s calling to ministry is a call to serve in areas which are not popular and offering services to the less privileged people. Evaporating communities need ministry of dedicated people even though there are some challenges with ministry in such communities. These range from limited financial resources, passiveness, isolation, neglect and long distances to go to

¹²⁸ www.ucc/songoffaith.

¹²⁹ Howard Clinebell. *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 40.

bigger centres, just to mention a few. Evaporating small communities need to be recognized and respected even if they are slow in the way they do ministry.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1. Introduction:

In this chapter I am going to talk about the methodology of the research giving details on how I gathered the data from the people who participated in the research. This research is a case study of a congregation in Newfoundland which includes my observations, data from interviews with members of the church and community, study of recent works on ministry in rural areas and what the United Church has documented on the topic.

In dealing with the research, I developed a questionnaire. There are ten questions on the questionnaire (*See Appendix A*) which are; Question 1: What do you think about the church in this community with regard to how the church operates? Question 2: How do you compare the church in the past 10 - 20 years ago to today? Question 3: How would you describe the uniqueness of the Newfoundland context? Question 4: How has this community changed? Question 5: What are some of the ways your church has engaged with and helped the community? Question 6: What do you think are the characteristics of a healthy church? Question 7: How well do you feel the denominations responds to the needs of the small church? Question 8: How much is your church able to set its own mission and ministry? Question 9: How much is your church able to set its own mission and ministry? Question 10: What are your hopes for this church in this community? I thought it will be helpful if I ask these questions as a way of getting responses from people, and what I wanted most was their life experiences as they responded to questions. Secondly the people who participated are mostly people who have lived in Burgeo for

most of their lives and they have seen the how the church works for a life time. In my opinion the questions are formulated in a way that is straight forward and easy to understand. I requested people to help me with the questionnaires and I asked members of the Faith United Church and from St John the Evangelist Anglican church. I gave people my request (*See Appendix B*) inviting them to participate in my research, and I gave them the consent form (*See Appendix C*) as required by the Research Ethics Board and the questionnaire. Participants signed the consent form and I gave each participant a copy of the consent form. I sent signed copies of the consent forms to my Supervisor Dr. Susan Willhauck, and I kept a copy for myself. I gave questionnaires to 100 people and 50 people participated. The breakdown of the participants is as follows, 38 are women and 12 are men. 35 people are members of the United Church and 15 are members of the Anglican Church. The ages of the people who participated ranged from 40 to 93. Overall, the people who participated are almost 4% of the population of the people who live in Burgeo. The challenges that I faced were that I was not able to record anyone on tape. The reason being, that people didn't want to be recorded, which in my assumption is because of the fear of being implicated if they say anything to criticize the church. I interviewed thirty-one people and the other nineteen answered the questions on their own. The research question for my thesis is: How can we Reshape Ministry in Evaporating Communities? The objectives as I stated in the proposal are: The purpose of my thesis as stated in chapter 1 is to examine how we understand ministry in evaporating small communities, and find ways in which we can start to appreciate and value this ministry. The study will also further determine how team work can help in discerning the various local dynamics of churches in neglected, small communities and how best to find applicable solutions. I will research current literature on ministry in small communities. I

will interview people in the community where I minister about what they think about the ministry in the community. The other thing will be to examine what strategies and roles, have been pursued by the Church with regard to ministry in evaporating communities in Newfoundland. This theological research tries to discern the dream or vision God has, for the small community church. It reflects the future, the eschatological hope, the Kingdom of God that is already present. The study will also further determine how we can help in discerning the various local dynamics of churches in neglected small communities and how best to find applicable solutions. The goal is to test my hypothesis and to outline a theology for the United Church of Canada that will empower the believers in small communities to actively participate in processes of addressing the needs and challenges of their own context. People are to be conscious instruments of their own transformation in their own setting and cultural context.

4.2. Research Findings:

People responded to questions and the answers they gave show how the people in Burgeo feel about the church. In maintaining anonymity of the participants, I have compiled the responses just as they were written so that I could capture the thoughts of different people. I give verbatim responses to each question below and at the end I will give an interpretation of the responses. In my interpretation of the data I will ask the question, what were the lessons learned?¹³⁰

Question 1: *What do you think about the church in this community with regard to how the church operates?*

¹³⁰ John W. Creswell. *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd Edition, (California: SAGE, 2009), p. 189.

• Very haphazard. Reactive to everything never proactive. About 5% of the congregation does all the work and gives the proper support. If it closed very few would miss it. Used mainly for baptisms, weddings and burials. • It is hierarchical. Hence it operates with/through rules and regulations guided by the dioceses. • Working very well, despite a declining population. Things seem to be going well and any concerns appear to be handled in a timely manner. • Good, but there are a few bad apples. • Population declining and older people are dying. Things seem to be running very well. • Operating quite well. The minister works well with the church and people. It may not have money, but it is rich in faith, hope and love. • Members in our community are kept in our subscriber's list even though they don't attend church or support the church financially. If we could reach some of those people we could grow as a church and a community. • We are a family friendly church and everyone is welcome when they attend a service. The atmosphere is very warm and comfortable. • Things are organized and traditional. Many people are involved and they volunteer to do the work. People put a lot of effort to serve. Impressed by the way the people have given themselves to keeping things so well. • Church operates well in our community. It has various functions even though it's only the older people who tend to participate. • Operates efficiently with limited funding. Ministers are very actively involved in most events. The church is dependable and provides efficient service to the community. Both denominations (Anglican/United) cooperate for the benefit of the community. • The church is wonderful and is serving our community well. • It is providing adequate service to the older generation, but appear to be struggling to keep the younger generation engaged. • Rules are no longer so strict. Participation in church affairs is diminishing. • Is involved. Church leaders are involved in community events, visitation and on important social services. • Operates in spiritual,

religious and uplifting way. The church unites us as friends and helps everyone in need. I feel the church is a pillar of the community and would not want to live without church.

- Operates well. There are helpers and assistants. In the events of the absence of ministers people are available to help and they put together the services so well.
- Operates in a way that provides Christian worship, support and fellowship.
- The church is open and people are allowed to express themselves in the best interest of how the church is run.
- There is a healthy ecumenical spirit which didn't exist a few years ago. We viewed the other denomination differently. Today we feel that we worship the same God. We are tolerant and friendly.
- Less participation and less involvement from the higher office.
- The vestry holds regular meetings and they decide on what should be done. This is working well.
- Church leaders are involved in community events. We work together and support each other even though we are from different denominations.
- Excellent service provided by the church. Ministry is important to a community.
- Many people feel they do not need the church and they do not attend, but when they need a service they do not hesitate to come forward to ask for help.
- Church should not be synonymous with the minister. There is the spirit of cooperation.
- The church has kept the tradition, fellowship and spirituality.
- Church needs attention even though it has survived over the years.
- We do not see leaders from District come to see how we are operating. Need to involve all ages. Church has often been led by particular families instead of the whole congregation. The younger families need to take part in the work and life of the church. Not many children attend Sunday school.
- People are there for each other.
- In the Anglican church the minister is too busy as he goes to other surrounding communities, Ramea, Francois and Grey River.
- Church operates within its budget.
- Church is financially stable. Do not agree with the perceived cover up associated with the church. There seems to be cover up

around internal stealing as it was in the past around sexual abuse. • Should provide individual classes for holy communion. We should use individual glasses for holy communion. • Operates on a limited budget and they have come up with good ideas to bring money to the church. • The church operates well with a wide base of volunteers. Ministers are in transit and people are permanent in the community. • Church should be more open to the needs of all the community regardless of denominational affiliation. • Church has become more of a business, focusing on money as opposed to religion and faith. • Church operates on a practical purpose. • What will happen after we die? The young people are not at all concerned about the church, and there is no interest whatsoever from the young people. We need to find a way to bring the young people in the pews. • Doing well and has a good volunteer base. The church has its own community of dedicated people who offer their skills and time.

Question 2: *How do you compare the church in the past 10 - 20 years ago to today?*

- In the past the church expected a degree of superiority, respect, authoritative, whereas today the church is more democratic. Minister and leaders are engaged in their community-there is more give and take. Fear of the minister is no longer there, we are equal with our ministers and we are friends. • Things have changed and there is no longer many young people going to church. • There isn't much dedication in today's church. People have lost the traditional way of worship.

- Sundays do not matter in today's world and it's like any other day of the week. • Less people attend church as compared to 10 to 20 years ago. • There is less attendance in church, no younger generation. • No commitment for church especially the younger people. People who go to church are at least in their 40's. • Decline in population has led

to few people attending church. It was very strict in the past and now there is a lot of independence and children can choose for themselves if they want to go to church. • There is a shift with regard to the church's role in family life. Long ago the church provided a more central role, but it's no longer the same today because things have changed. • The spiritual aspect of the church has been eroded and the church has become too liberal. • It was long the time taken for attending confirmation but now its two years, which is long. • Church is more modern and more comfortable. • Church has changed, there were no marriages solemnized outside of the church. It was more formal, now it's relaxed.

• There was no internet then and there was no social media. Back then there were Sunday school and youth picnics and ministers were involved in planning for such events. • The dynamics of the community have changed and this has affected the church in a tremendous way. People migrate for employment and this leads to low numbers in church. The size of the congregation has decreased. Due to other factors like individualistic world views on spirituality the prominence of the church in our community has decreased. • The church membership is aging; we are not getting new young families in church nor in the community. This is more of a social gathering than church. Youth programs are poorly attended and parents are not concerned about church anymore. • People are too busy for the church in today's life. • The numbers have dropped and this has had an impact in church membership. • The church was sort of dictation to people and they had no choice, they were forced to go to church even against their wishes. • Children attended church even after they were confirmed, but now confirmation is like graduation

of the young people from church. • We have become more flexible in our worship. • The way we do things has changed over the years.

• Church has become less formal and the congregation more casual. We are more open to the world views. • Church has lost a generation of people, the younger ones. • Decline in church membership because of many distractions and time change. Everyone joins together when things go wrong. • The church today does a better job than before because of the changes in the dynamics. The church has a higher social conscience and is far less judgmental and more welcoming. • The church back then seemed to hold people through fear of God, i.e., you must go to church, you must pay money. As the generations change the fear factor is not there anymore.

• Everything is changing, things are no longer the same. It is no longer possible to maintain the traditional way of worship because of the changing times. • The church is very consistent and plays the same role. Children and youth involvement has declined due to declining population.

• Ratio of older people to young people has changed. Females participate in church in bigger numbers as compared to male. • Children were to be seen and not heard. • Out migration has led to decline in population in our community. The young people seem to be distracted by so many things today. • There are less children being born due to family planning and the cost of living and this has led to small numbers in Sunday school attendance. • Church has lost power in determining how people live their religious lives. • Ministers back then were leaders and took part in community activities. Ministry now is just a job. People have left our denominations (United/Anglican) and have gone to Pentecostal and Salvation Army.

Question 3: *How would you describe the uniqueness of the Newfoundland context?*

• Made up of many, many communities of 200 to 1000 people each is an entity of itself. • People still live their traditional lives. That is a large number of people who pay the church and identify themselves as members of denominations. A large percentage of churches found in rural areas and research indicates that religion and church continue to play an important role in the lives of rural people. There are no rich patrons in small rural areas but one wonders how people can still raise large amounts of money. It speaks of communal responsibility. • Newfoundlanders are very close to each other; this is reflected in the small church. Everyone helps one another and people want to help. • People are more friendly and welcoming. Enjoy the traditional way of life, hunting fishing, berry picking. • People are unique, and have a different dialect because of the way the province is. • Very proud of being who we are. • We operate on blind faith and we do not care what those who think they are better than us say. • Our culture has been recycled and we have kept it and we will. • We are passionate about the other person and we do things communally. • It is very difficult for people who have moved out of the province for work to have their children baptized outside the province. They always bring their children back home to be baptized. • Newfoundland has a very unique identity due to a different culture from the other provinces.

• I think the world of my province. Even though some people see us as being backward, this is the best province because we have maintained our culture and traditions. • Close knit communities, more personal. • People are related to each other in many out-port communities and people take care of each other and being part of the church is very important. • Isolated communities some of which are difficult to reach. • The traditional

way of life has also affected the way the church is operated. • We are so easy to associate even with those who laugh at us.

• We have concern and care for one another. • When Newfoundland communities were resettled each community built a school and a church and this was the heart of the community. • Most people love their church willingly. It is very difficult for Newfies to accept change. • Communities are remote and isolated to an extent that we feel that we are on our own and not even part of the national church. • The culture of Newfoundland is vibrant and totally integrated into the community. Due to modernization I feel we are becoming a part of the wider world and our culture is slowly fading away. Most of the Newfoundland communities are geographically isolated but still hold a long standing connection with the love of our natural resources. • Some of the older people do not want anything to change as a way to keep their traditions. • Geographically it is difficult because of its location. • Tough weather conditions during winter make it very difficult to travel even to the closest community. • We are still harvesting from the land and ocean. There is no employment locally and people go away to find jobs-outmigration. We are also embracing new technologies.

• Even though television and internet are there, we still need to maintain our uniqueness. • Best province to live, we are blessed. • Fishing is a way of life to many people.

Question 4. *How has this community changed?*

• Seasonal migration – homes closed up for winter but most single parent families for a large 3 – 6 months. • The fish plant was closed and there is no work and people go away to work. • Crime is getting more and more due to exposure. No respect to elderly people.

Each person mind their own business and no one seems to care. • Competition, people are not content with what they have. • Numbers of the people living in Burgeo has declined. • Population a lot less. • Social media has attracted people of all ages in our community and not many people want to be left behind. • Many people go out west to look for jobs. • Burgeo is half the size it was when the fish plant was in operation. • Aging population. People have a variety of beliefs and values, as a result they have concern for church. • There were two schools in Burgeo but we now have one. There were four churches now there are two. • Many businesses were forced to close. • There are no jobs around. • Part time work has become the accepted norm. There is more money in circulation than back then. • There are mostly seniors living in Burgeo and only a few young people. • Outmigration impacted the younger population who go to raise their families else where. The numbers of children in school has been greatly affected due to a small population.

• Our community is mostly retired couples. • More than 90% of the people in our community own vehicles which was not the same some years back. • The fisheries collapsed in 1991 and our fish plant was closed, it employed 400 people and operated 6 days a week. This was a huge change to our community. • Burgeo has gone from a solid 2 income families to mostly retired people. The role of the church needs to change as well in order to provide services to meet our changing demographics. • There has been a change for the better, from being backward to being modern with paved roads, power, internet, telephone. • We export our children as our resources. We have nothing to bring our children back home. • The younger generation has become so closed because they find fulfilment with social network. They are no longer “people persons” They tend to keep to themselves. • There are less children being born and this has a big impact on the

population of Burgeo. • People are more and more distancing themselves from community events. • Burgeo has come full circle: transient people in the early 1900's, especially men who went to schooners to fish or to NS to work on the docks – to staying at home to work on the fish plant or on the draggers to returning to transient work again after the cod moratorium as they found work on tree farms in Ontario, apple picking in NS and seismic work in the oil fields of Alberta. Schools, as well, are much less responsible for the delivery of religious doctrine. (Burgeo has gone from having church schools to a more circular integrated system, to a non-denominational. • We now connect to the TCH by road, when our only connection to the outside world was by boats. People didn't help their neighbor like they used to. People now depend on government for everything, they have lost their independence.

Question 5: What are some of the ways your church has engaged with and helped the community?

- Lions club and fire department serve our community and this has sort of replaced the social work of the church.
- Church has given support to through cancer relays.
- Operation Christmas child.
- The Bargain Basement helps people find cheaper and good used clothing.
- Church brings people together for fellowship.
- Education the time the church owned and ran schools.

- Churches through UCW & ACW donate to the gift shop at the hospital.
- Visitation. Services that meets the needs of our younger generation.
- Hospital visitation and providing service to people in the chronic care every week.
- The church buries the dead, conducts weddings, providing communion for the shut-ins.
- The church is always there for you at any time you need it.
- Providing Christmas hamper to those who need it.

Leading the remembrance day service and leading the graduation service. • Prayers groups that pray for the sick in our community. • Church concerts and giving food to bereaved families. • The church has members serving on the Trauma Response Team. • Source of spiritual and moral strength to the community. • Lead the service for prayer for Christian unity, World day of prayer. • Since we do not have a funeral home in town, the church has doors open for the families to wake the remains of the deceased loved ones until their burial. • Mitten Tree. • United Church Women/Anglican Church Women deliver Christmas gifts to the people in the long term care. • Church participates in the cemetery committee. • Churches participate in the Cadets annual inspection. • Cold plate take out where lunch is sold to people of the community at a very cheap price.

Question 6: *What do you think are the characteristics of a healthy church?*

- Approachable, engaged in its community, responsive, adaptive, sincere, kind, non-judgmental and tolerant.
- Welcoming and caring for all people.
- Seeking justice and showing love to the people.
- Many people attending church.
- Knowing the needs of the flock.
- Visiting the sick and caring for the shut-ins.
- Bible studies more and try to get more people interested in the church.
- Serving the needs of community.
- Evangelization and outreach/bringing new people into church.
- Going back to the Bible and living the Bible.
- Being ready always and providing the needs of the community.
- Having many people involved with the work of the church.
- Be spiritual and uplifting at all times.
- Strong faith, good fellowship being helpful and available to people in their time of need.
- Have an approachable minister.
- Having a health financial background and meeting all financial obligations.
- Having people who are ready to support their church.
- Compassionate and understanding.
- People pray for each other.
- Has a strong presence

in the community. • Inclusive, open and accepting change and be willing to meet the changes and challenges. • Having a good Sunday school attendance and a youth program.

• Inviting, relaxing friendly. • People have the freedom to participate and share their views. • Friendly atmosphere and a positive minister. • People willing to listen to each other and learn, strong dedicated ministry which provide leadership. • Involvement of people of all age groups.

• Have social activities for young people. • Encouragement to full part of the church to feel your faith grow every day. • Mission and ministry sustained well. • Have an active and devoted board of elders. • Faithful, tolerant, kind, compassionate and open minded. • Support the work of the church fully from personal motivation. • All people feel valued and important, and if there are problems they should be amicably resolved. • Singing and praying together. • Viable, have supportive members, not struggling financially and members practice their faith in a Christian manner. • Willing to adapt to change in the society and everyone working together. • People own the church and they are involved. Make people feel they are needed. • Newcomers welcome, accepting opinions of others. • Shared responsibility. • Good support to the minister. • Transparent. • A place of blessing and freedom, humble leaders, sense of fellowship, leaders talk positively about other churches. • Able to adapt to changing times and the needs of its people. • Involvement in the society, ministers should be accessible to all. • Engaging children in all church activities. • Ministers working well with people. • Strong leadership supporting and organized. • Determination. • Spreading the gospel, alive and vibrant with people and music of all kinds. Ready to help people learn and grow in their faith and ministry. • Training more people to be involved in the church activities. • Good minister who is open

mindful, hope for the future of the church. • Preaching the truth of the gospel and teaching. • Being content with itself – no bickering among each other, fewer power tensions. One that is confident enough in itself that it can reach out to others. Seamless faith regardless of denomination. • Minister with good leadership skills.

Question 7: How well do you feel the denomination responds to the needs of the small church?

• Not very well. No leadership from District or Conference offices. Very little consultation with congregations. Everyone is busy with committees and are doing nothing. More structured red tape than Federal Government. • Congregations have differences within the workings of each of their individual churches that might be based on geography, culture and so forth. • This depends on the contribution of the congregation to the M&S Fund. • The wider church seem to care. • Depends on the minister who is there. • Yes, we are doing well. • Though we do things by the book, I think our minister are doing their level best that we do not remain stagnant. • Fairly well. • The church is doing well to fulfil its mission in our community. There are other people who support the church even though they do not go to church. • Church is able to set its own mission and ministry in a bigger way. • All organizations should have flexibility in order to fulfil their mission and ministry. • To some extent. • It appears as though the small community churches do not have their full autonomy, they rely much on the higher body of the church. • Our church is able to set its own mission and ministry very well. All what's needed to be done is done. • Operates under rules and guidelines. • We are able to meet our budget and do our maintenance well. • Church is doing what is expected. • All that need to be done is done and people appreciate. • Our church cannot survive on its own

mission and ministry. Its services have to be shared with surrounding communities due to outmigration and older people passing away. • Not very much. It's hard to find people who give themselves to do the work of the church. • Very difficult though because we have maintained the status quo and we do not care much about change. • Church doing very well with its mission and ministry. • It's in total disarray. More communication is needed and our leaders need to be more informed. • The church has to follow the mission of the larger church to fulfil its own local mission and ministry. • Partially able to set its own mission. • Not a lot, we have very little say in the way our church is run and where the finances are spent. • Not so much as we only focus on survival.

Question 8: *How much is your church able to set its own mission and ministry?*

- Not so much, because the focus is on survival. • Not so much. • Partially able to.
- To some extent.

Question 9: *As somebody who has lived in a small community for a long time, is there anything that you think needs to be done for the church to operate in a better way in this community and other small communities?*

- Explore the possibility of amalgamation, sharing of ministry between the two denominations. (United and Anglican). Will help sustainability. • More younger volunteers. • Encourage more young people to get involved in the church. • We should be equal to all other people on the church. • Consulted before decisions are made • Not to be ashamed of living in a small community. • Always have open minds. • Serious consideration in combining the two churches as this will reduce expenses. • People have to be willing to offer themselves, their talents and their resources. • The church has to

adapt to the changing times and embrace change. • Try new things. • Embrace the youth. • The uniqueness of small communities should be taken into consideration. • The church needs to be aware of differences and respond appropriately.

- Confirmation classes should be shorter. (Anglican) • Individual glasses for communion (Anglican) • Improve Sunday school program. • Find ways to get young people in church.

- Financial support from the District/Diocese. • Listen to the concerns of the people.

- We need to work towards unity to become one church as the population of our community decreases. • Cooperation and working together, involvement. • Children are the future of the church and they should not be left out. • If a minister leaves our community we should get another one quickly not to wait for a long time. • Give priority to small communities. • We need to have a fulltime priest. • Education to our leaders in the church so they can keep abreast with what is happening in the wider church. • We need to give more money to keep the church alive.

- Reach out preaching the gospel. • We should all belong to the church, and there shouldn't be anyone who should dominate. • Micro level: Cooperation between church and community. More cooperation between churches and our focus should be our Christian values, not our denomination. Macro level: rural churches should not be marginalized. • Research in rural communities that is framed in the specific context of small rural communities. • Be a more active force. • Speak out about social issues

Question 10: *What are your hopes for this church in this community?*

- That it sustains itself in a way that's collegial and reciprocal. Religion is more than a fiscal responsibility it is a moral obligation. • The larger structures should pay attention to

support the needs of smaller communities. • Church remains strong in our community. • Fish plant re-opens and people may come back to our community. • Churches work together and work on becoming one group of fellowship. • The church continue to grow and people should give financially to the church for its upkeep. • Church remains in our community. • Young people may come to church and be involved. • We become a stronger and stable church. • More cooperation. • Reach out to the community and draw the young people to church. • Have one church for our community.

- Always have a minister in the church and it shouldn't take long to replace a minister.
- Church can sustain itself. • We need to be positive and not negative in all church aspects. • Church be welcoming and be the light in our community. • Number of people attending church should grow. • The church continue to thrive. • Community bible studies for spiritual growth. • We be more open to change.

4.3. Interpretation of the Findings:

The responses given raise some important themes. In response to question 1, many people felt the church is operating well to some extent. There are concerns though with the attendance numbers which all participants noted to be very low, and the need to have the young people become involved in the life and work of the church. Many people just see the church as a place to be baptized, confirmed, married and buried without any need to be actively involved in the life of the church. The major concern that is raised is, in the case of the United Church it operates locally with minimum support from the regional church. In the case of the Anglican Church people felt there is need for more listen from the higher authorities and it appears as though decisions and made at the higher level and

the people have to just accept it as it's dictated to them. Most of the responses show that there is a great need to have more volunteers in the church because there is only few people who are always doing the work in the church. All participants felt the church is still the pillar of the community and should be maintained. It is my assumption that people are connected to the church and they want to continue to see the church alive in the community.

In response to question 2, about the way the compare the church 10 – 20 years ago and today, people alluded to the fact that the church has lost its authority today, that is the reason why people no longer have any concern for the church. Lorraine MacKenzie Shepherd notes that, going to church is no longer considered the proper thing to do in increasingly secular society. The church has also less credibility and perceived power than it once had.¹³¹ People noted that things have changed and the church now is very different from the past where it was very traditional and conservative. Now the church has become liberal and open. Other people raised the point that the church is for the elderly and not for the younger people any more. I remember very well one participant in her 90's saying, "What will happen to the church after we the older generation has died?"¹³² Many people feel the progress of technology with things like internet, television, i-pods, i-pads, smart phones and so forth, are contributing factors to the decline of membership in the church.

In response to question 3 people continue to see Newfoundland as a unique province in the way people have maintained their culture and traditional way of living. There is a

¹³¹ Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon. *Intersecting Voices, Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*. (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), p. 136.

¹³² Anonymous participant during the interviews.

large number of people who pay the church and identify themselves as members of denominations. A large percentage of churches are found in rural areas and research indicates that religion and church continue to play an important role in the lives of rural people. There are no rich patrons in small rural areas but one wonders how people can still raise large amounts of money. It speaks communal responsibility. Newfoundlanders are very close to each other, and this is reflected in the small church. Everyone helps one another and people want to help. People are more friendly and welcoming. They enjoy the traditional way of life, hunting fishing, berry picking and so forth. It is my assumption that people in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador want to maintain their identity and it is a very sensitive thing for people from other provinces to make stereotypes. The people are very protective of their culture, and it takes a lot of time for them to trust someone “who has come from away.”¹³³ I have realized this for the past five years I have lived in here in Newfoundland. I agree with Kathleen Norris when she said, “Small towns pride themselves on their sense of community, the neighbourliness which lack of anonymity is supposed to provide. When everyone knows everyone else, the theory goes, the community is highly valued.”¹³⁴

In responding to question 4 people raised the aspect of lack of employment in the community since the closure of the fish plant. There is no work, and as a result there is out migration as people go away to look for seasonal jobs in the oil of Alberta and in the apple farms of Ontario and Nova Scotia. On a positive note people acknowledge the pavement of the Burgeo Highway as the best thing that happened to this community as this eased the problem of longer time traveling by boats. There has also been a change in

¹³³ Newfoundland term that explains that someone was not born on the Island.

¹³⁴ Kathleen Norris. *Dakota: A Special Geography*, (New York: 1993),p. 111.

the demographics of the community because long ago there were big families, but now there are small families. Things have changed and they will continue to change. Embracing and moving along with change is the challenge that the people have. I am glad that people in this community realize that there has been lot of changes and they also acknowledge that no matter their attitudes are, change is a force to be reckoned with and it will not stop, people need to move along with change. Participants noted the way in which the church has responded to the needs of the community in that, the church is always there to serve the community and to offer help as needed. The church fully participates in all the events that take place in the community. I have seen that people value the church so much that in all the functions of the community the church is quite involved. All the community functions begin with prayer and end with prayer making the church become more involved. In response to question 5, members of the church in Burgeo are very proud to be able to offer service to their community. Their involvement in the fundraising efforts to support the cancer society and other initiatives means a lot to them. Churches are always ready to respond to the needs of their community. One thing I noticed which is good is that, whatever support they give in response to the needs of the community, they do not blow the trumpet, but they have always kept it private.

In responding to question 6 people define a healthy church as being, approachable, engaged in its community, responsive, adaptive, sincere, kind, non-judgmental and tolerant, welcoming and caring for all people. They also raised the point that it should be justice seeking and people should belong. Some people also raised the point that the church should maintain its biblical and spiritual identity. Some of the points which people raised are that a healthy church should have a good Sunday school attendance and a youth

program, should be inviting, relaxing friendly. People should have the freedom to participate and share their views and should have a friendly atmosphere and a positive minister. People should be willing to listen to each other and learn, with strong dedicated ministry which provides leadership and there should be involvement of people of all age groups. Peter L. Steinke defines health congregations in seven phases which are, sense of purpose, appraise and manage conflict, clarity, mood and tone, mature interaction, healing capacities and a focus on resources.¹³⁵ In responding to question 7, most of the participants feel the two churches in the community are not doing enough to respond to the needs of the churches in this community. There is very little consultation with congregations, everyone is busy with committees and are doing nothing and it's more structured red tape. This is where I go back to the reason for doing the research. It is my assumption that isolated evaporating small communities do not mean a lot in the eyes of the authorities of the churches and they are not given priority. In chapter 3, I talked about the church as the body of Christ that reaches out and serve the people. Let the church be the church even in the rural evaporating small communities and fulfil God's mission wherever the people are. Question 8 was difficult to most of the participants and as a result it was answered by few people, and their response was mainly to say the church in our community is not able to set its mission and ministry. In my opinion the church is able to set its own mission and ministry, but the challenge is that for so many years the community has relied on someone coming to do for them and providing everything on a platter. Now people cannot take responsibility because they rate themselves as not being able to do anything right.

¹³⁵ Peter L. Steinke. *Health Congregations, a systems approach*. (MD: Alban Institute, 1996), p. 26.

In responding to question 9 people came up with the following suggestions, explore the possibility of amalgamation, sharing of ministry between the two denominations. (United and Anglican) as this will help sustainability. There is a need for research in small rural communities that is framed in the specific context of these communities putting into consideration the uniqueness of small rural communities. Micro level: Cooperation between church and community. More cooperation between churches and our focus should be our Christian values, not our denomination. Macro level: rural churches should not be marginalized. In chapter 1, I talked about understanding the context as being very important in trying to deal with ministry in evaporating small communities. Participants also talked of the need for the younger generation to be involved in the church. The responses to question 10 show how participants feel about their community. They have a lot of hope for the community and some of the important points raised are, that the church sustains itself in a way that's collegial and reciprocal. Religion is more than a fiscal responsibility, it is a moral obligation. The higher authorities should pay attention to support the needs of smaller community church as it remains stronger. The church should continue to thrive. I have come to the realization that people who live in small communities have hope for their churches, and it is imperative that they be given all the necessary support to keep this hope alive.

4.4. Conclusion:

It was such a privilege for me to be able to interview participants who helped me with my research. I have come to know that people of this community are not so open and so protective of their community. One has to be so trustworthy for them to participate, especially if it is someone who come from away. I was so much humbled by the response

that I got from the community in doing my research. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all who participated to this research.

CHAPTER 5

Towards understanding reshaping ministry in evaporating small communities.

5.1. Introduction:

This last chapter has two sections. The first one is a summary of chapters one to five. The second section shall present recommendations to the United Church of Canada on how to consider reshaping ministry in evaporating small communities. The key question of this chapter is: What is the way forward? According to the methodological metaphor of the cross employed in chapter 3 of this thesis, the focus is on the movement from the bottom to the top of the cross, in other words: of becoming a visible sign of the Kingdom of God. The movement from the Alpha to the Omega describes the doing of transformative theology. It involves obedience and developing a strategy which should be implemented and evaluated. The thesis believes that what we do, does not determine what we are but reflects who we are.

Chapter 1 dealt with the background to the study and stated the problem about small communities which in my assumption are being taken off the map disappearing because they are not considered as vital and significant as compared to cities, larger towns and urban areas. Small communities are often isolated and a higher percentage of people are seniors who have retired. In Chapter 2 I analyzed the literature that deals with the work that has been by the United Church in dealing with churches in rural small communities. Chapter 3 dealt with Ecclesiology/Church explaining what the church is and its calling to serve. It also dealt with the Theology of Ministry. Chapter 4 reported the research that was done with the giving details of the process of the interviews that were done with

participants. Furthermore it looks at what the participants said with regards to the church in their community, and what hopes they have for their community.

5.2. Recommendations:

The thesis acknowledges that developing a way to reshape ministry in evaporating small communities cannot be an event, but is a process. For this process to have an impact, the involvement of all members becomes critical. I do understand that to change the focus of the church in order to see the value of evaporating small rural communities there are no quick fixes to the problem.

5.2.1. *We need to understand the “Context”*¹³⁶: In chapter 1 I addressed the importance of understanding the context of the people. It is very important that we understand the context of a specific community so that their needs may be known. It is also imperative that people in evaporating small communities be given an opportunity to speak for themselves and make their own proposals. Care should be taken that we do not impose from the top what doesn't fit for small communities. Each small community should be encouraged to organize itself and function in its own particular way. There should be consultation done at all times before programs are brought to small communities. Understanding the context will help to know who the people are and be able to faithfully serve them at the very point of their need.

¹³⁶ (i) I am aware of the nuanced challenge between confronting a context and inculturating in it. I am aware of the tension between getting to know the context, becoming inculturated in small evaporating communities, and there is need to confront or change that context. I challenge the United Church of Canada to get to know the context of the people in small evaporating communities. On the other hand, I challenge the people in small evaporating communities to be ready to lead themselves instead of depending on the United Church of Canada. (ii) In dealing with context, it should be tried, tested and proven to be helpful to the people and to the wider church. This doesn't refer to extreme indoctrination and fundamental ways of understanding. Everything has to be done in the parameters of the ethos and beliefs of the church. This is to build the body of Christ.

5.2.2. *Listening*: I cannot emphasize enough the need for listening. People in authority in the church should be able to listen and hear the cries of the people in evaporating communities. It is only after they have listened that they become aware of the needs and concerns of the evaporating small community. I want to speak with Howard Clinebell who talks of empathetic listening which he defines as, active listening demanding emotional investment in the other and relative openness to one's own feelings.¹³⁷ Being able to listen is the calling and ministry of the church. It is a call of justice to give an ear to the marginalized. Luke T. Bretherton sees listening as an act of faith, and through listening and responding to the word of God, the church is assembled as a public body – the *ekklesia* out of the world.¹³⁸ The people in the evaporating small communities should come up with ways in which they determine their destiny.

5.2.3. (i) I recommend that the church has to find ways and means in which the evaporating small community can be recognized and served well. I would suggest that the church refocus on the way ministry is done in these communities. I would further suggest that the church looks into the possibility of starting a ministry that focuses on the needs of the churches in evaporating small communities. This may include the training of ministers with the skills to serve in small communities. The church may also consider raising funds for the ministry in small evaporating communities and help these communities due to their financial constraints. Make the living conditions and salary attractive so as to attract ministers to go and serve in small communities.

¹³⁷ Howard Clinebell. *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling. Resource for Ministry of Healing and Growth*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 75.

¹³⁸ Luke T. Bretherton. *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*. (Oxford: Willey Blackwell, 2010), p. 100.

Since there is shortage of ministry personnel in small communities, I recommend that the church encourage the training of local willing gifted people who can serve as designated lay ministers who can serve in their own communities. The other recommendation under this is, to consult with the people on the ground to have them put into clusters and be served by one or two minister in their close proximity.

(ii) There is need to understand the differences between ministry in small communities from ministry in urban areas. In small communities, the past is considered to be very important. Ministry in small churches is not so much concerned with getting the job done but rather building up good habits and changing ingrained behavioural patterns. The focus of the ministry in small communities is transformation and not production. The ministry in small communities lives on the level of relationships and not tasks. These relationships require work, and they need to be kept. If we compare this type of ministry to the ministry we realize that there is a difference, because in urban areas, there is much organization and planning and the aim is to have the job done well. Having said this, I would recommend that the church has to recognize that these differences are there, and the way ministry is done should be different with a specific way of approach to small communities which is different from urban areas.

5.2.4. This recommendation comes out of the responses to the questionnaire. It is a reality that the communities of the South Coast are evaporating due to aging population. The big challenge is how we can bring people in the pews. As people suggested, I recommend that, since Burgeo and the surrounding communities are isolated, it is necessary for people to start exploring the possibility of sharing ministry with the Anglican Church with the aim of amalgamating in the future. I understand the complexity

of church traditions as far as denominations are concerned, and I know that there will be some hurdles in the process, but I would further suggest that people look at the church with an ecumenical world view and not be limited to our denomination only. The apostle Paul talks of our oneness in Christ in Ephesians 4:4-5 when he says, “There is only one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, and in you all.” I make an assumption that this is the reason why the church exists and that is our calling as the church. There is a need for people to think and do ecumenically. I would further propose the establishment of closer ecumenical ties which I think is not a transgression of ecumenical boundaries in order to meet the needs of geographically isolated Christians. The denominational boundaries established in Christendom are no longer working or make sense in this post-Christendom society. As we all know, denominations started as a way of expressing beliefs and dogmas by people from different faith persuasions, we are now in a post-Christendom time and people have to think of ways in which churches can all work together, and transcend denominational boundaries. We need to fulfil the call of Christ as one body and with one mind with an effort to embrace all people without limits.

5.3.5. Outreach and Evangelism: Jesus is recorded to have said in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe the things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.” I want to suggest that as a church we reconsider the way we do outreach and evangelism. Since there are few people who come to church, I would recommend that we start to reach out and evangelize as a way of our witness. I want to assume that this will help to bring more

people to church. We also need to target evangelism where we focus on young people and try to recruit them to come to church.

5.3. Conclusion:

The United Church is called by the missional God to be a witness of the Gospel in the world. This can happen if we submit ourselves to Christ as Lord and the Holy Spirit. The church's mission by the grace of God should transcend all the boundaries, and evaporating small communities should be given priority in the life and work of the church. The church is always faced with new challenges. There is a need to rethink the way we are doing ministry in rural small evaporating communities today. The beginning and foundation of the United Church should be the Kingdom of God. An inadequate understanding of mission leads to an unsatisfactory ministry. The United Church has to move away from the understanding that a church with a mission and embrace that God's mission has a church.¹³⁹ The Mission of God in the United Church calls for the participation of all believers. It is to be communal. It is the community of believers that is to be the primary bearers of mission; they are the operational basis from which God's purpose proceeds.¹⁴⁰ As the United Church we need to reshape the ministry in evaporating small communities as a way of fulfilling the call to reach out to all the people where they are.

¹³⁹ www.touchstonejournal.ca.

¹⁴⁰ David J Bosch. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions*. (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1991), p. 474.

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7. APPENDICIES:

7.1. Appendix A: Thesis Research Questions:

Wilson Gonese – 20100013

1. What do you think about the church in this community with regard to how the church operates?

2. How do you compare the church in the past 10 - 20 years ago to today?

3. How would you describe the uniqueness of the Newfoundland context?

4. How has this community changed?

5. What are some of the ways your church has engaged with and helped the community?

6. What do you think are the characteristics of a healthy church?

7.2. Appendix B – Invitation to Participate:

My name is Wilson Gonese and I am minister in the United Church here in our community of Burgeo. I am currently studying at the Atlantic School of Theology for a Masters of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies. I am working on my thesis with the topic: How can we reshape ministry in evaporating small communities? The information gathered in this research is entirely for the purposes of this thesis and the information and data gathered will be kept very confidential. May I kindly please request you to participate in this research either by me interviewing you or by responding to the questionnaire.

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Wilson Gonese

**7.3. Appendix C - Informed Consent Form:
Informed Consent Form
Student**

**Wilson Gonese
Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3B5**

[Phone #: 9024235592; Fax #: 9034924048; email: mmartin@astheology.ns.ca]

I am student enrolled in the Master of Arts Degree Programme at Atlantic School of Theology. As a part of my course work under the supervision of the Dr. Susan Willhauck. I am conducting a study on, How can we reshape ministry in evaporating communities interviewing people who are living in the community of Burgeo where I am serving as a minister. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the work is to examine what ideas and experiences have you gone through over the years. The purpose of this work is two fold: First, to increase the body of knowledge that we have on the topic of doing ministry in evaporating small communities. Second, explore how these themes might filter into the life of the church.

Your participation in this project is appreciated. The questions and the project are designed to move to the contours of your experience as you actively speak about what it is like to be a person living in a small community. The researcher will take notes and/or audiotape the conversation.

The tapes and transcript will be held in a secure environment until the completion of this course of study, at which time they will be destroyed. This project will be completed by the end of April 2013.

If you are willing to participate in this project please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by giving your signature at the bottom of this page.

I acknowledge that the research procedures outline and of which I have a copy have been outlined to me. I know that if I have any questions they were answered to my satisfaction. I know that I can contact the researcher at any time should I have further questions. I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I am assured that personal record relating to this study will be kept confidential, I understand that I am free to withdraw form this study at any time.

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Names and revealing facts will be changed, thus affording you anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, the results of this study will be presented as a group and no individual participants will be identified.

The following is a time line for the storage and destruction of data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants (by January 31, 2013), I will:
 - a) provide one copy for the participants

b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

c) provide one copy for my supervisor (Dr. Willhauck), also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.

1. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through the public Grad Project presentations (March 6-7) and until deleted permanently from my device (no later than March 11).

2. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final Grad Project paper is due on March 22, 2013.

3. The public Grad Project Presentations take place on March 6-7. On March 11, 2013 I will bring my recording device to my supervisor who will check to make sure all interviews have been deleted.

4. When the final Graduate Research paper is submitted to my supervisor on March 22, 2013, the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.

5. Dr. Willhauck will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing on April 27, 2014.

If you have any questions, please contact (*Wilson Gonese, at (7098862222 & wgonese@yahoo.ca)*),

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Atlantic School of Theology. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Alyda Faber at afaber@astheology.ns.ca, Chair, Research Ethics Board.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.