

**What is the Impact of Church Membership Decline on Clergy in  
Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of The United Church of  
Canada?**

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## Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0042017
Title of Research Project:	What is the impact of church membership decline on clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Susan Willhauck
Student Investigator	Simbarashe Mazhara

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: 8 September 2017 to 16 April 2018

Dated this 12th day of October, 2017 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Dr. Alyda Faber  
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## **Abstract**

This Project is in the area of Pastoral Theology. The project focuses on the impact of church membership decline on the clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada. The paper shall define membership to give the reader a clear meaning as defined in the United Church Manual. The research is based on the interview of six participants from across the conference. The method used in this research is qualitative in general and Phenomenological method in particular. This method is descriptive and will help me to bracket prejudices and preconceived ideas held before engaging in this research. The theological framework of this research is based on Matthew 16:16-19 and John 10:11-18. These passages present the nature of the church and elaborate the metaphor of the Good Shepherd. The method and the theological framework shall help in the discussion and analysis of the data. The data presents major themes, which shall be analysed and later evaluated. The internal and external statistical records shall be used to provide a critical analysis of the data. Eventually, evaluation and recommendations shall be provided before drawing up a conclusion.

## Introduction

In my first few years of ministry with United Church of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, I was struck by the number of invitations I received to attend ceremonies of closing congregations in the conference. While this directly affect the members of the closing congregations, the lay people get a lot of support and counsel to help them cope with their sense of loss, grief or any other painful experiences. The same cannot be said about my fellow clergy. As a clergy person, I was imagining how it must feel for a clergyperson to serve a congregation in decline or closing. In most cases, the clergy handle the stresses faced by their members yet they themselves are also affected by the same process. Generally, little or no support is offered to the clergy in those congregations, at least for now.

Taking into cognizance the fact that clergy and their livelihood mostly depend on these congregations, these closures should be more than a professional challenge. It should be personal too. The effects could be economic, emotional and many other forms. My concern for the clergy and their welfare in this case was the main drive behind my interest to find a way to listen to and ask for the clergy involved to share their experiences.

Church membership according to the United Church Manual is defined as; the children of full members, baptised children, full members or adherents, including clergy who reside in the area, not serving in that congregation. (Manual 2016 B3.2-3.3.1).<sup>1</sup> For statistical purposes, membership herein refers to recorded members on the roll, even

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<sup>1</sup>The United Church of Canada, *The Manual 2016* (Toronto: UCPH, 2016), 53-54.

though average weekly attendance, the number of households, among other categories also follow the same trend.<sup>2</sup>

The numbers from the official church books and those found in secular resources shall be under scrutiny, to try and find connections between the general portrait of Christianity in Canada and that of Newfoundland and Labrador Conference. The basic demographic details are also going to provide the basis for analysis, especially on numbers. Evaluation and recommendations shall follow before drawing up a conclusion.

### **Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this research is to find out the experiences of clergy who have witnessed or are witnessing church membership decline. To try and hear how the decline in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada might have impacted or might be impacting on the clergy. It further seeks to understand how that has influenced the clergy perception about ministry, their faith and other aspects of life and how they respond to such experiences. In such circumstances, it is important to hear what keeps the clergy going. This will also check how clergy experiences might shape the ministers or vice versa. To interrogate the themes drawn from the interviews over against the external records and demographic data. I will also use the Bible to further assess the theological truths/claims that emerge before making recommendations. (Matthew 16:16-19 and John 10:11-18).<sup>3</sup> Finally, to share the results with the organizational structure of the church, bringing awareness to the General Council, the Conference, the Presbytery

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<sup>2</sup> The United Church of Canada, *Year Book and Directory 2016* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, General Council), 2016,

<sup>3</sup> All Bible references are from New Revised Standard Version: Harper Study Bible. Matt 16:16-19, John 10:11-18.

and fellow clergy about the challenges that affect the clergy as they face membership decline and what could be done.

The above objectives led me to come up with the research question;

**What is the impact of church membership decline on clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada?**

**Review of Literature**

There is a lot of literature about church membership decline and the efforts to revive the church, and as many views and perspectives on both. While I have read many books, I am only going to review a few of those that pertain to my research topic. These include the works of Douglas Hall, Jeffrey Jonnes, Reginald Bibby and Phyllis Tickle, among others. The decline is not a welcome idea for all intended purposes, but reality has it that membership is declining in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, of the United Church of Canada, notwithstanding exceptions, who might be recording growth.

There is enough evidence for overall membership decline in this conference and other conferences across the country as shown by the statistical records of the United Church Year Book 2016. From 1993 to date membership has been declining, notwithstanding exceptions.<sup>4</sup> Stewart Crysdale, in a recorded interview, says a “Newfoundlander” responded saying;

Very sorry to say our church is lacking the spiritual aspect in the Bible study, prayer and evangelism. We seem to have got so modern that there is no time for fellowship we enjoyed. I am very afraid there is a breaking away from the Church because people are

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<sup>4</sup> The United Church of Canada, Year Book and Directory (Toronto: General Council Office, 2016), 16-20.

not getting spiritual food they need. I do hope and pray that our Church will speedily return to the fellowship it enjoyed.<sup>5</sup>

I may not wholly agree with Crysdale per se, but his view confirms that something was wrong with church attendance. While the allegations levelled against some other people could be debatable, there is no dispute about the decline.

Hall, a Scholar who is also a member of the clergy, in his book; *Has The Church A Future?* narrates the story of an empty Church in the Prairies of Saskatchewan, twenty years before the publication, describes the event as a symbol of a “dead Church,” and he was filled with sadness.<sup>6</sup> If Hall was sad and yet he was just passing by, how much more the clergy serving that congregation? He suggests that the Church has to accept the alternatives available. These include accepting where we are, that the Church has a new status different from “mighty army,” and remember that we are just but an option.<sup>7</sup> Our membership is based on volunteers and nothing much could be done. He however, pays very little attention to the feelings of the clergy in that case, hence this research.

Hall again in his book, *The Future of the Church*, cites an article that had a very detailed report by Oxford University. The article says,

Between 1900 and 2000 CE, Classical Protestantism in the United States of America will have shrunk from two-thirds of the population to a little over one-third. The most dramatic changes have been the rise, for the first time of atheistic and non-religious masses, (now at 20.8 percent of the world population as compared to 2 percent in 1900) and the precipitous decline of Chinese folk religions and tribal faiths elsewhere. After centuries as the predominant faith of the Northern Hemisphere, especially Europe, Christianity as of 1981, had a non-white Majority for the first time in 1 200 years. In 1900, two-thirds of Christians lived in Europe and Russia, by 2000,

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<sup>5</sup> Stewart Crysdale, *The Changing Church in Canada: Beliefs and Social Attitudes of United Church People* (Toronto: UCPH, 1965), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Hall, *Has The Church A Future?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas J. Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where are We Headed?* (Toronto: UCPH, 1989), 31-32.

three-fifths of them will live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while Westerners who cease to be practising Christians are at a rate of 7 600 per day.<sup>8</sup>

These predictions have become a reality after close to thirty years. While it could be argued that global membership has not declined but shifted to other regions in terms of concentration, it is in this shift that confirms the decline, which is the gist of this research.

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity claims a demographic shift in terms of concentration of membership, from the Northern Hemisphere to the South. Most Christians are currently and are predicted to be in Africa, Latin America and Asia, at least for some years to come. This shift was demonstrated by the election of the first Pope from Latin America, Argentina.<sup>9</sup> The United Church of Canada Year Book confirms the decline too.<sup>10</sup> The details of the decline is shown in both in the rolls and worship attendance. Hence, the need to find out how this decline impacts on the clergy.

Jeffrey D. Jonnes, argues that, the “world has radically changed in the past 50 years, and without a comparable radical change, congregations are destined to slow death.”<sup>11</sup> I think his view on exile was very positive, to which he admitted that it is overstated. “God allowed exile to systematically destroy old institutions of religions because they no longer served His mission but themselves and religion they had created.”<sup>12</sup> He views the temple and establishment as serving status quo, not willing to allow the will of God to be made manifest. Citing Isaiah chapters 60

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<sup>8</sup> Barrett David, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982) Douglas J. Hall, *The Future of The Church* (Toronto: UCPH, 1989), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Todd Johnson et al, Center for the Study of Global Christianity: *Christianity in Context, 1970-2020. Society, Religion and Mission* (Massachusetts: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), 2013. 7.

<sup>10</sup> General Council Office, United Church of Canada Year Book and Directory (Toronto: United Church of Canada) 2013. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey D. Jonnes, *Facing Decline: Finding Hope, New Possibilities for Faithful Churches* (New York: Rowman, 2015), 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

and 61, he rebutted the work done by Ezra and Nehemiah, as a way of clinging to the established or “organized” religion that stayed within the walls. For Israelites, the centre of the world was Jerusalem, not God.<sup>13</sup> Jonnes’ view may not be traditional but it welcomes change and willing to embrace whatever could allow God’s mission to grow, even at a cost. In this case, growth is enabled by the tragedy. Thus, if the decline will force “the powerful” and “the rigid” to think outside the box, then it is welcome. The same could be said about persecution of the Early Church. Jonnes also finds the emergence of the prophetic office more relevant than those established offices of the priests and kings. While Jonnes’ idea about accepting change is reasonable, unfortunately he did not focus on clergy experiences during the changes.

Reginald Bibby, in *Restless Churches*, presents detailed statistics on the decline of “organized religion” but the case is different with spirituality. He asserts that “the old story claiming that religion is going down” is a misreading of facts by the “elders,” referring to Social Scientists and other Theologians.<sup>14</sup> In as much as the author presents facts (surveys and census) about spirituality on the rise, the real interest of this research is on the impact of the decline in “organized religion” on clergy.

Grant says; “It depends on what you are counting.”<sup>15</sup> This view is consistent with the Bosch’s Church as God’s Mission, *Missio Dei*, or as catholic.<sup>16</sup> This view shifts the focus to God, away from humanity and the Church becomes Universal. While there is hope in the

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<sup>13</sup>Jonnes, *Facing Decline*, 19-27.

<sup>14</sup> Reginald W Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada’s Churches Can Contribute to The Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Tobin Grant, “Religion News service:” *Mainline Decline, Depends on What You’re Counting* (2015)

<sup>16</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10.

Universal Church and spirituality, clergy depends on numbers in “organized religion” for their work. Thus, there is need to look for answers to the questions raised in this research.

Tickle, in “*The Great Emergence*” contends that the changes that are emerging in Christianity and religion in general, confirm the definition that; religion is a social construct, the individual private being and understanding.<sup>17</sup> Tickle suggests that the cycles of history are there to stay, as evidenced by events from the Great Reformation of 1517 to the twenty-first century. Thus, the Great Emergence is an opportunity to participate in a great period of shaping the future, under the ineffable force of change.<sup>18</sup> This phenomenon could be argued to favor the resilience of the Church which has survived so many difficult experiences.

Scholars like Greg Scot, Rachel Lovell and others have also written about the need for self-care. They however focused on the workload generated by the amalgamation of congregations, in a bid to manage the financial aspect of the congregation.<sup>19</sup> Their concern for clergy is “mostly” considered after other traumatic experiences, not the decline in particular.

Clergy can also be viewed as part of the flock of Christ. Thus, for Bartlett and Taylor, the clergy are sheep among other sheep, yet they are the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd should be heard through them.<sup>20</sup> The predominant rhetoric for clergy should not be their rhetoric but that of God. While I acknowledge that clergy are the “shepherd” of the sheep, who should at times “pay the cost of discipleship,” I agree with Jonathan Merritt in his reflections on an interview he had with Thom Reiner, (identify Thom) that, the Church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians

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<sup>17</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is changing and why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Tickle, *The great emergence*, 20-22.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, Greg and Lovell, Rachel, “Pastoral Theology:” *The Rural Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry* Vol 64. (2015): 72.

<sup>20</sup> Bartlett and Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, 450.

12:12), where everyone has to contribute, not just to be served but to serve.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, I would appreciate if the attention given to laity is also given to the clergy serving in declining and distressed congregations.

## **Method**

The qualitative research method I will use is a Phenomenological approach. The phenomena of interest are “lived experiences.”<sup>22</sup> Manen says, “Lived experiences” are “texts” of life which need interpretation.<sup>23</sup> This is hermeneutical phenomenology, which in this case, interprets the “text” of day to day life experiences. This method requires the researcher to go directly to the phenomenon, in this case, the experiences of clergy in churches whose membership is declining. For Schram, phenomenology is the study of people’s conscious experiences, life-world, which is their everyday life and social action.<sup>24</sup>

This method assumes that there is an essence or essences to shared experiences. The very nature of a thing, is the essence.<sup>25</sup> The essence is the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. These experiences have to be bracketed, analyzed and compared in a bid to identify the phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> This helps to get to the essence or basic structure of experience. The capacity to trace the essence is the reason why I chose this method.

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Merritt, “Religion News Service:” *Rethinking Church Membership: An Interview with Thom Rainer* (2013)

<sup>22</sup>Max van. Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing* (California: Left Coast Press, 2014), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Max van. Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science For An Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: The State University of New York, 1990), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas H. Schram, *Conceptualizing Qualitative Inquiry* (New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003), 71.

<sup>25</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007), 59.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (California: Sage, 2015), 116-117.

Interviews are the primary way of data collection, making the researcher an important part of the process. There is need to practice “*epoche*,” which means becoming aware of one’s personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions.<sup>27</sup> Suspension of biases brings in the transcendental nature of the method, where everything is freshly viewed as if it is for the first time.<sup>28</sup> Transcendental or Empirical method focuses on the description of the phenomenon or lived experiences of the participants, without one’s own assumptions and perceptions. This is particularly critical given that the researcher is part of affected clergy. The practice of bracketing requires me to take a self-introspection, set aside my judgments and biases for an effective research. Nevertheless, critics argue that this state is seldom perfectly achieved, or doing so is an elusive exercise.

Horizontalization is another critical tool, which demands the laying out of data for examination, treating all data as having equal weight, and all pieces as having equal value at the initial stage of analysis. This data is to be organized into clusters or themes.<sup>29</sup> With the help of imaginative variation, data can be viewed from various perspectives or look at it from different angles. This method produces a “composite description that shows the essence of the phenomenon, called the “invariant structure.”<sup>30</sup>

The invariant structure is the essence, the original or basic structure, that without which, it is not. The thick description should help the reader to share in the original experience of the phenomenon. The theoretical framework to be used in this study is phenomenological. I will interview 6 participants for the purpose of this research.

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<sup>27</sup> Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (California: Sage, 1994), 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (California: Sage, 2013), 82.

## **Data Collection and Presentation**

The data in this research came from six clergy members whom I interviewed from across the Island. The research names of the participants are Polad, Wilad, Gupad, Malad, Kalad and Emad. I got each of my participants from the Northern Peninsula, Baie Verte Peninsula, Burin Peninsula, Avalon Peninsula and two from the Bonavista Peninsula. This provided a relatively fair spread of representation, despite my failure to get anyone from Labrador. The years of service for participants range from five to twenty (5-20), in the United Church of Canada only, even though some had served in other denominations or as Lay Readers before. The intention was to have a balanced gender but prevailing circumstances at the time did not permit. So I had five male and one female participants.

These interviews were carried out as follows: two by skype, one was live – one on one, three were by telephone. The interviewed participants were named as Emad, Kalad, Malad, Wilad, Palad and Gupad. Findings showed that there are themes that emerged from the participants

### **Themes:**

#### **1. Negative feelings**

The general response from all participants was that the decline generates negative feelings. The common vocabulary used by all the participants in responding to the question of how it feels to serve in a congregation where membership is declining include; despondent, depressed, struggling, difficult, discouraged, sadness, grieve, grief, losses, lows, challenge, afraid, a little disheartening, and discouraging.

The feelings expressed generally reflect low morale among the clergy. Emad said, “It’s discouraging or depressing.” Polad said, it’s disheartening and discouraging, Kalad said, “It’s difficult,” to mention a few. These phrases are a cause for concern in normal circumstances.

They also reflect the pain and sense of loss experienced by the clergy, either through frequent deaths of their members or their transfers. Gupad used the phrase, “One of these days, I will be hit hard” ‘by the death of “key” members of the congregation, if that happens, which is almost definite it will happen.’ The participants fear to lose “key” members in their congregations. These losses have a direct impact on the financial woes of the congregations and serving under these circumstances create uncertainty.

### **Doubt**

People are the most primary “asset,” in the church and their decline definitely impacts on clergy. Thus, people are the “currency by which we measure” the value/life of the church. The decline of church membership sometimes casts a cloud of doubt over most of the participants. At least four out of six questioned either their own calling, creativity, performance or competence. These participants raised questions within themselves such as; am I in the right place? Am I doing the right thing or not? Am I answering some of the society’s needs by being in ministry? Am I the one failing or not doing enough? Is this what I want my life to be and spent my time doing? These reflections are a window through which we can see that despite putting on brave faces in front of the people, clergy still face challenges that are rarely shared. Nevertheless, these questions present an opportunity for clergy to reshape themselves and their approach to ministry.

## **2. Positive Experiences**

There is a brighter side amidst the decline is the work ethic of the members. The participants positively described the attitude and response of their active members. Laity positively impacted the clergy by their commitment, devotion, dedication, determination, love and knowledge of the church, and their responsiveness. Thus, active members play a role in sustaining their clergy and encouraging them without saying anything. The members of the church have become their clergy's source of encouragement, and strength to keep them going.

The shrinking membership rolls and empty pews for Malad, forced the Church to leave the walls and reach out to the community. This led to the initiative of "back to school" program in her area as the church brings the community together and bless the children at the beginning of each school year. The church has been reminded that it exists for the community and not vice versa.

## **3. Migration**

The participants claimed that there has been an outbreak of migration of members, mostly the young people from rural to urban areas, either within the province or beyond, looking for employment or study opportunities. This movement continue to make the difference numerically, and more so negatively. Some elderly members are moving to places where they could get descent facilities like nursing homes or even hospitals. Five out of six participants said something negative about this issue. This brought in the aspect of increased workload since those members still need visits in those

distant places, despite one being a part or full-time minister. Kalad said; “driving an hour and half one way, visiting members in better nursing homes is difficult. They sort of expect you because they are paying members of the church and you still have to do other duties. It is difficult. There is no such thing as 40 hour week.” Thus migration had a negative impact.

The movement of young people from rural areas creates the difficulty of working with exclusively elderly members. For Wilad, it becomes difficult to introduce any change with predominantly elderly members, who prefer to have things done in their traditional way. New ideas are not welcome by most elderly people in general. I am not very sure however, that young people would come to church if they had stayed in the communities.

#### **4. Deaths**

While death is inevitable and is part of God’s design, the rate at which our members are dying is alarming. It is unfortunate that most of the participants continue have more funerals than baptisms and or confirmations. This was seen as a threat to the financial stability of congregations and the life of the church in general. Kalad said; “It becomes difficult to plan,” citing uncertainty. Gupad said; “It adds to the financial woes” of the congregation. They cited the pain of loss and grief since some have been there for more than a decade, and members have become “close family” to them.

#### **5. Aging Population**

While the commitment and dedication from elderly members have been and is still outstanding, the challenge is that most of them cannot do what they used to do

anymore. That is not a healthy situation for most ministers because they become much busier than anticipated. Kalad said, “You will be busy alone,” and that does not help in congregational development and work of the church. Age affects participation of members in the general life of the church like choir, Bible Study, and even Sunday Services. The pace becomes slower and some information is easily forgotten. Wilad mentioned the struggle faced by clergy in trying to implement new ideas in an aging congregation.

## **6. Calling**

The clergy continue to remain resolute because of their call to serve the Lord. The fact that one is called and believes the Lord has something for them to do, keeps the clergy going. The belief that “the Lord calls us, equips us, sends us, goes with us and walk with us,” in the field is the bedrock for the courage to face any situation, says Wilad. Even when the family life gets tough, Kalad said his wife asked him, “Who are you serving?” He claims that by remembering the call, he got renewed and revitalized.

## **Data Analysis and Theological Insights**

### **Causes of membership decline**

The demographic details provided by Statistics Canada shows that the decline of church membership is not solely dependent on the events taking place in the faith community. The records show that the communities in general have been on a population decline for the past three decades.<sup>31</sup> Statistics Canada points out that in 1993, the Newfoundland and Labrador population was above 580 000 and by October 2017, it had dropped to 528

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<sup>31</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/) (Accessed December 8, 2017).

000.<sup>32</sup> A decline in excess of 50 000 cannot be taken for granted. Lower birth rate is another factor that is adding to the decline, since there have been more deaths than births in the last ten years or more.<sup>33</sup> These facts contributed to the current situation. These figures are used for economic planning, health issues and most importantly for me, religious issues. The causes could be many but below are what the participants noted:

### **Migration**

The fact that Newfoundland and Labrador Conference has few cities makes it easier to see why people continue to move from rural communities to cities within the province or beyond. The main reasons cited were employment, studies, reunion with family members (especially grandchildren) and access to descent facilities like hospitals and nursing homes. The numbers continue to decrease in rural communities but either increase or at least remain stable in the cities and towns. Malad described this movement as “an outbreak of migration.” This seems to auger well with external information.

Statistics Canada figures suggest that there has been a consistent increase in population for Avalon Peninsula, St John’s Metropolitan and Central Newfoundland.<sup>34</sup> There has been no or marginal change in Hamper District (Corner Brook) and Labrador City. The rest of the province has been on a continuous decline for the last two decades, and the participants cited migration as the major cause.<sup>35</sup> The demographic information shows that the general population of the province is on the decline, the number of deaths are higher than the births and there are more people going out of the province than those

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population\\_Estimates\\_CDMA](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population_Estimates_CDMA) (Accessed December 8, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population\\_Estimates\\_CDMA](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population_Estimates_CDMA) (Accessed December 8, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population\\_Estimates\\_CDMA](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/PDF/Population_Estimates_CDMA) (Accessed December 8, 2017).

coming in.<sup>36</sup> Thus, achieving church growth in an environment where all numbers are on the overall decline is difficult, if not impossible.

There was one hundred percent agreement by all participants that there are no or very little number of young people in the church. Migration is assumed the major cause, after which most of them stop attending church services. However, this claim is debatable because it could be just lack of interest while others claim to be spiritual but not religious. Hence, a separate research may be necessary before making any conclusions.

### **Deaths**

Newfoundland and Labrador records shows that, since 1972 to October 2017, there has been fewer number of births and from 2007 onwards, there were more deaths than births in the province.<sup>37</sup> This corresponds well with the claim by participants that “there are more deaths in their congregations than baptisms and confirmations combined.” While there could be children who may not be brought for baptism, the general practice is that children are brought for baptism below the age of one. If the numbers continue to decline, most probably, that means the church and the community are losing more people than they gain, except for urban areas or progressive towns. These deaths create gaps in the pews, in the community and even in the financial books of the congregations.

### **Aging Membership/Population**

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<sup>36</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/)

<sup>37</sup> [www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/](http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/population/) (Accessed December 8, 2017).

Closely related to deaths, aging population is one of the causes of decline. The claim by participants that the average age for most of the congregations is around sixty is not a good sign for the future of the Church. This reduces both the pace and participation of the members. The efficiency of executing duties decreases and the availability for voluntary work is affected. The capacity to drive during the night or winter conditions is reduced, leading to low attendance. This makes the congregation to become smaller and smaller, creating difficulties in planning.

### **What Keeps the Clergy Going?**

The conviction that God has some work for them to do, that God is at work in the world and through them and to find their way in God's world and be witnesses,' keep them going. Wilad said, "We are called by God, and we need to respond with a 'yes.' He further asserts that the Lord sends us, goes with us, walks with us, and equips us for his work and that our calling will be rewarded one day." That means what energizes the clergy is beyond what they see but their faithfulness to God's call.

Malad said that "there is no need to focus too much on numbers and seats but we need share what God gives us and God will do the rest." I find this statement very interesting because it takes away the focus of the church from being defined by faces in the pews, to the will and intent of God. This is probably consistent with Bosch's view of the mission as *Missio Dei*. That is, it is God's mission.<sup>38</sup> Malad further asserts that, "we need to open up more to the rhetoric of what God can do instead of what we are doing," both in the church and in the world. This shift of focus from clergy to God opens up new

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<sup>38</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 10.

avenues of hope, since God is infinite and eternal. It is possible to keep the hope and faith because God can easily find another way to revive the Church.

Ecumenical relationships among the clergy proved to be beneficial in some places. Ecumenical programs provide an opportunity for ministry and a rare chance to meet with bigger numbers of people for worship. They are also means of collegial support in times of stress. Moreover, ecumenical fellowship demystifies the syndrome of “owning people/church as someone’s” or belonging to one denomination and not the other. Ecumenism transcends the protectionist mentality and jealous that may divide the Christian family and the exclusion element in Christianity.

The level of resilience and endurance in the conference cannot be ignored. There has been a consistent element of strength and renewed faith by all participants. All have experienced the low times but found ways of renewing their faith. It has been refreshing to hear of people who once used words like depressed, distressed, discouraged, and many others, coming out saying, their faith was not shaken, but got stronger. Probably, we are reminded that the Lord promised to be with clergy and all believers, sending the Holy Spirit to be with them in their witnessing ministry. (Acts 1:8).

It is important to acknowledge family support as one of the key sources of energy that keep the clergy going. Two participants mentioned support from their spouses and one cited childhood orientation towards Christian service. Family members are close enough to observe the stresses experienced by the clergy and chip-in with encouragement. The two participants cited how their spouses kept challenging them to remember their call and the God whom they serve.

One clergy member considered paid accountable ministry as a secondary development in her Christian life. For her, it has always been her practice to serve God before accepting the call to accountable ministry. The impression is that, the desire to serve does not depend on the current conditions of their service, but on the deep faith already established and obedience to the call. One has been serving before becoming a minister and will most likely continue to serve after leaving accountable paid ministry. It is the foundation laid by the family that keeps that clergy on course despite trying times.

Another aspect is that the clergy seem to be motivated to do more, instead of being discouraged by the decline. The issue of study cannot be underestimated as well, since new ideas can always be shared or learned. Through reading, one can widen their scope, learn new insights and approaches to respond to current situations.

### **Overview of the Plight of the Church**

The numbers of the Christian community in North America began to go down in the 1940s for the protestant groups, and in the 1960s began in the Roman Catholic.<sup>39</sup>

Reginald Bibby asserts that;

In 1945, 65% of the population of over 21 years and over attended a religious service or related over the Easter Sunday in Canada. Weekly service attenders in Canada were as follows; 1957 – 53%, 1975 – 31% and 1990 – 23% at the national level. The United Church was lower than the average national weekly service attenders as follows; 1957 – 40%, 1975 – 28%, and 1990 – 15% at the denominational level. The national percentage of Christian members who attended weekly worship services were as follows; 1957 – 82%, 1975 – 48%, and 1990 – 29%. The United Church members who attended weekly worship services were as follows; 1957 – 84%, 1975 – 52% and 1990 – 35%.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

These facts are showing that the trend of church membership decline has come a long way at the national level. These figures seem to agree with the United Church records from the Year Book, albeit starting from the end of Bibby's findings.

In 1988, the United Church membership was 849, 401 with a weekly attendance of 360, 157, in 1995 – membership was 728,134 and a weekly attendance of 303, 268, in 2000 – membership was 651,002 and a weekly attendance of 270, 611, in 2005 –membership 573, 424 and a weekly attendance of 225, 507, in 2010 – membership was 494, 791 and weekly attendance was 174, 660, and in 2015 – membership was 424, 419 and the weekly attendance was 138, 971.<sup>41</sup>

These figures from the General Council Office show the consistent decline for both, the membership rolls and average Sunday weekly worship attendance for quite some time.

We have a scenario where there is mutual agreement between the church records and the secular (sociological) findings. It is difficult to dispute the evidence from within and from outside the church.

Newfoundland and Labrador Conference membership points to pretty much the same scenario. A snap shot on the figures shows that;

In 2000 – membership was 23, 921, 2004 – membership was 23, 454, 2010 membership was 20, 981, and 2015 membership was 19, 975.<sup>42</sup>

The above figures agree with decline at national level. The figures further confirm that weekly worship attendance has been always lower than the membership. It is normal therefore, to have attendance of Newfoundland and Labrador Conference lower than the membership in the roll. The phenomenon of membership decline continue to reflect consistency and eradicating any doubt about the challenge faced by the church. It is a

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<sup>41</sup> The United Church of Canada, *Year Book & Directory: Volume 1 Statistics 2016* (Toronto: UCC, General Council Office, 2016), 16-18.

<sup>42</sup> The United Church of Canada, *Year Book & Directory: Volume 1 Statistics 2000/2005/2011/2015* (TORONTO: UCC, 2000/2005/2011/2015), 18.

development that affects Canada, if not North America. It comes down to the province and eventually we are facing it in the United Church as Newfoundland and Labrador Conference.

Does it mean that young people would attend worship services if they did not relocate? That is a big question and most probably the answer is, no! To use one participant's question; what is it that we do that does not attract people (young), that the secular world is doing right or, what do we fail to do that we should, to attract our target? Whichever way, the response should help us get a result. The United Church membership has been generally on the decline since 1970s. The decline stretched from membership roll itself, weekly attendance and even the household membership and individuals under pastoral care as cited above.

Do we as clergy fail to perform or this phenomenon has the roots deeper than just our competence as clergy? In my view, the scenario has very little to do with performance of the clergy, even though we cannot rule out the possibility. If clergy are not doing enough, probably another research will reveal that.

### **Evaluation and Implications for Pastoral Theology and Ministry**

It should be noted that the Church referred to in Matthew 16:17 is not denominational.<sup>43</sup> It is *Ecclesia*, to mean “convoked people” or people who are called out by God.<sup>44</sup> It is rooted in the self-giving and redeeming love of God, (John 3:16) and the Church body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12) whose Head is Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:23). It is “*Missio Dei*,” that is

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<sup>43</sup> All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>44</sup> Mircea, Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing House, 1987), 481.

God's Mission.<sup>45</sup> This makes it very difficult to believe that membership decline could mean the end of the church.

McGrath describes the Church as the people of God, a community of salvation, the body of Christ, servant people and community of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> In light of this definition, the Church as the people of God can be traced back to the Old Testament. In principle, the Church initially existed without the name "Church", both in the Old the New Testament times. McGrath says;

"It existed until close to the monarchy, without a temple, priests, sages, kings or prophets. Its identity as a people was not defined by institutions but by a common commitment to Israel's central story."<sup>47</sup>

This central story could be traced from Abraham's covenant, to Egypt, Canaan, exile and their return, persecution until Constantine relieved them.<sup>48</sup> They lived in exile under the prophets and they helped the Babylonian World to see the works of their God. Daniel 3:26 and 6: 20, Daniel and his three friends forced the king to pronounce that they were "the servants of the Most High God," and the "living God," respectively.<sup>49</sup> Their relationship with God runs like a red line across the generations of Israel until the New Testament Church, who were addressed as "Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16. Throughout her existence, the Church changed in structure and how it functioned but never stopped to function.

The Church, as a people of God, survived some of the worst times in history. Thus, this is not the first time the Church has faced such difficult times.<sup>50</sup> Times like the exilic period (587-6 BC) and the destruction of the Temple which subsequently led the emergence of the

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<sup>45</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission.*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Alister, E McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 354-355.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-356.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>49</sup> NRSV, Dan 3:26 and Dan 3:20

<sup>50</sup> McGrath, *Introduction to Theology*, 2017.

Synagogues.<sup>51</sup> When the “centre of worship” was destroyed (Jerusalem Temple), the worshipping community did not cease to worship but they came up with another and widespread structure in the form of Synagogues. The destruction, dislocation and the disruption of exile allowed the people of God to go under a new transition and seek God and not the system.<sup>52</sup>

Hall argues that these bad times of the church offers a chance for the people of God. He asserts that Reformation came when the worship terrain was not so good.<sup>53</sup> He argues that we are closer to the Christian origins than all other generations of the church of the New Testament. The Church was not might but scattered “little flocks.” These were the recipients of the letter in Hebrews 12:1 which says; ‘We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses;’ addressing it to a very small church, dispersed, poor and minority church that was lonely.<sup>54</sup>

The focus is directed not at the numbers but to the power of the gospel. The power of God does not depend on numbers but faith of the people. The Church is divine, not temporal hence, it cannot be conquered by the material circumstances. In this view, it makes sense to say the numbers could go down but the Church will survive.

It is in this view again that we should read Hall’s projections when he stated that,

in 1900, two thirds of Christians lived in Europe but in 2000, three fifths of the Christians will live in Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>55</sup> Phyllis Trickle later confirmed by stating that 80% of the Christians will not be resident in North America after 2000, and in 2010, Religion News services published that by 2009, Roman Catholic increased by 1% in Europe, 33% in Africa and 15.5% in Asia.<sup>56</sup> This shift of concentration have most probably contributed to the election of the first Non-European Pope in history in the Catholic Church, among other dynamics. The Church only shifted its concentration, not that it is under threat of extinction.

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey D. Jonnes, *Facing decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 18.

<sup>52</sup> Jonnes, *Facing Decline*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas J. Hall, *Has The Church A Future?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1980, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, *Has A Church A Future*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas J. Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where are we headed?* (Toronto: UCPH, 1989), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What it is, where it is Going, and Why it Matters* (Michigan: Baker Books, 2012), 22.

These facts shows that certainly this is not the first time the Church has faced such a difficult time. It has survived exile, persecution, Dark Ages, Reformation and Enlightenment, modernity and other eras.” Thus, I can argue that the Church will survive the onslaught of the current challenges of our day. It might have to change the form but it should be able to prevail.

The “Good Shepherd” metaphor is the second premise for theology. Bartlett and Taylor argue that “the story of the Hebrews was not our search for God but rather, God in search of man. It is the Shepherd who looks for the sheep.”<sup>57</sup> Hence, the claim by the Psalmist, “Truth, goodness and mercy shall follow me.” (Psalm 23:5). This points to the mission as God’s mission not that of the clergy. For Matthew 16:17, it is Jesus who builds the Church into what it should be. This puts the clergy in the same fold as other members, because they are sheep among other sheep. This seems to be in line with Malad’s claim that clergy should be open to the rhetoric of what God can do more than what we can do for the Church. The metaphor is closely connected to the Trinitarian aspect. Jesus says,

“The sheep hears His voice” (John 10:16.) This does not make the clergy equal to Jesus but in the spirit of unity of the Father and the Son, Christ is united with the ministers of the Word. Thus, the sheep hears the voice of the Shepherd (Christ) through that of the clergy.<sup>58</sup>

The clergy stand in for God’s voice.

It therefore means that they cannot die for the sheep. Actually, Paul escaped in Damascus in a basket, (2 Corinthians 11:33 and Acts 9:23-25) Jesus directed his disciples to flee persecution (Matthew 10:33) and Augustine (the Church Father)

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<sup>57</sup> David Bartlett and Barbara Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching Revised Common Lectionary Year B* (Louisville: Westminster, 2008), 438.

<sup>58</sup> Bartlett and Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*; 450.

concluded that pastors should not die for the sheep, if by preserving their lives, they can continue to safeguard them.<sup>59</sup>

The word “good” necessarily refers to kindness, mercy and patience in the nature of Christ, not of the clergy.

The clergy in congregations develop relationships as leaders, members of the community and as the voice of Christ. This makes it difficult to remain as professionals without being part of the church and community. For instance, two of my participants have been in the same pastoral relationships for thirteen (13) and eighteen (18) years, respectively. Polad said “it feels like burying friends and relatives, not members of the church anymore.” Gupad said, “it hits hard on me to lose such key members.” They suffer with their flocks although they are healing agents of their Lord. The voice of Christ in them becomes alive and effective to those who believe it.

### **Reflection and Recommendations**

For Wilad, we need re-envisioning the way we do church or move away from the traditional way we do church or worship. We should be creative and use approaches that are “appreciated by young people.” Bibby says that, “religious groups urgently need to rediscover why they were called into being if they are ever to move beyond current widespread self-absorption and address the spiritual needs of Canadians.”<sup>60</sup> There is a possibility that the Church might be losing its relevance or has neglected its outgoing and outreaching mantra that has led to the current situation. Roxburgh maintains that the church remains focused upon itself, while the new world needs a new church, especially for the young people.<sup>61</sup> If the church seeks to fulfill its calling, that of being God’s

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 282.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; 282.

mission, then probably the Church needs to try and understand Peter Burger's sociological claim of "looking at old things in new ways," to try and figure out how United Church could be a church for the people of the day and the future.<sup>62</sup>

While the General Council may have an obligation to provide support for all the clergy, it may take too long and may need some structured implementation, yet clergy get discouraged or even stressed as individuals. Some people are not comfortable to share their distress with church structures, hence there is need for collegial support. This is less formal if not totally informal, and may not need any official communication. One is guaranteed that there are no records of any kind with regards to their welfare. Collegial support could be from the fellow clergy from the United Church or Ecumenical structure. The objective is to create space for clergy who are facing discouraging situations. It could offer platforms for debriefing, encouragement and even humour.

It is my view that the General Church and the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference need to be conscious of the plight of our clergy. This awareness might help them plan some coping and intervention measures given that the phenomenon is likely to persist for some time. Support could be in form of ideas, copying workshops/seminars or whatever they would consider relevant. It could be helpful as well to check if the theological institutions which train our clergy are giving enough coping skills in this area.

Malad suggested that clergy should not forget that the Church belongs to Jesus Christ, as the head. It is therefore paramount to focus on what God can do than what clergy can do for the Church. The rhetoric of what God can do should be the predominant

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<sup>62</sup> Bibby, *Unknown Gods*, 288.

voice to be heard much more than the rhetoric of clergy. Wilad spoke about the calling from our Lord and the need to say 'yes' to the call. He stated that "The Lord calls us, equips us, sends us, goes with us, and walks with us in the ministry." This brings in a paradigm shift from the desire and passion for success into areas of faithfulness and obedience.

The clergy need to answer the call more than they need to pursue results. It is not always the case that all hard workers are successful. The prophets like those who witnessed the fall of Israel 722/1BCE and Judah 587/6 BCE were devastated but they kept their call. Isaiah (39:5-8), and Jeremiah continued to give hope in (29:1-11). If clergy like Emad, felt like doing more to get results fail, that might create frustration but doing it as obedience, one does not feel bad in case of unfavourable results. Nevertheless, this should not be an excuse for not doing enough.

All participants mentioned that their emotional wellbeing is affected. While it is normal to experience low days at work, the percentage for negative feelings is not very healthy. Moreover, the words grief, depressed and loss point to serious personal conditions that may threaten one's health and professional performance. Therefore, there is need for self-care and outside care.

The financial impact was not explicit but phrases used by some participants suggest the fear of it. For instance, Kalad said, "it is difficult to cover all the nursing homes, visiting senior members and yet one is expected to do other pastoral duties. There is no such thing as 40 hour week for clergy." This was an implicit complaint about the workload that half-time clergy have to handle within a week. It appears there is a challenge, either the clergy are failing to plan their time and exclude some of the duties to

focus on what fits their limited time or the congregations have to understand that they cannot get all the pastoral services from a half-time clergy. This area has to be addressed or there will be bitterness on the side of the clergy or suspicion of being shortchanged on the side of the congregation.

## **Conclusion**

Given the above discussion, it should be noted that the decline is having impact on the morale of the clergy. Some felt discouraged, doubtful, distressed, despondent, and depressed. On the other hand, the dedication of the elderly members was so encouraging. Clergy persons are sustained by their call, family support, ecumenical support and their resilience. It is encouraging to note that the Church, as the people of God, have survived many trying circumstances like exilic period and persecution, it means there is hope for survival. There could be a decline in this conference and North America in general but Christianity is on the rise elsewhere and that should give us hope. If God is the Chief Shepherd, self-giving, has created, still creating and at work in the world and in us, then we can believe that the Church will be alive in Newfoundland and Labrador, in one way or the other. In Mathew 16:17, where Jesus declared the victory for the Church against the torrents of opposition is our hope. Nevertheless, the structures of the Church should take action to help clergy cope with the situation.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Proposed Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been in the ministry with the United Church of Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference?
2. What do you consider as significant membership decline and do you see any?
3. Tell me about your experience as clergy working in a congregation with declining church membership?
4. Are there any special experiences that you would like to share?
5. How do you feel this impacts your faith?
6. How have those experiences impacted your understanding of ministry or influence your views?
7. What drives you to keep on?

## **Appendix B:**

### **Invitation to Participate**

Are you a clergy member of Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada? Are you or have you served in a congregation whose church membership was/is declining? If you answered yes to both of these questions, then I would like to talk with you. Your identity and anything you share will be kept confidential.

My name is Simbarashe Mazhara, and I am a Master of Arts, Theology and Religious Studies student at Atlantic School of Theology. I am conducting research on the experiences of clergy who have or are serving in congregations, whose membership is declining. Whether you had a positive or negative experience, your input into my research will help the academic community and also help the Church to know and probably respond.

If you are interested and willing to be a participant in my research, you can choose to speak with me either in person, or through a video interview. Either way, your participation will be kept anonymous through the analysis and presentation of my research.

This is an opportunity for you to reflect, share your experience and insight with the church, and safely add your voice to the research. If you would like to know more, or if you are interested in participating, I would love to hear from you. I can be reached by phone at (709) 674-4452, or by confidential email at [simbamazhara@gmail.com](mailto:simbamazhara@gmail.com)

Please consider participating, and thank you for that consideration!

Simbarashe Mazhara

## Appendix C:

### Informed Consent

What is the impact of church membership decline on clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of The united Church of Canada?

Simbarashe Mazhara

Atlantic School of Theology

660 Francklyn Street

Halifax, NS B3H 3B5

(709) 674 4452, [simbamazhara@gmail.com](mailto:simbamazhara@gmail.com)

I am a student enrolled in the MA Theology and Religious Studies program at Atlantic School of Theology. As part of my course work under the supervision of Dr. Susan Willhauck, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at AST. I am conducting a study on “What is the impact of church membership decline on clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada?”

I will be interviewing clergy in this conference and I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purposes of this work are to assess the impact of church membership decline on the participants in Newfoundland and Labrador, and what experiences have they gone through. This might add to the body of knowledge on the topic of “what is the impact of church membership decline on clergy in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference in the United Church of Canada?” And to explore how these experiences might filter into ministry, faith, the life of the clergy and church in general. The results will help to give the clergy a chance to tell their story and share with others and the wider world on what they go through, together with their congregations. This will provide insight to the academic community and the church at large.

Your participation in this project is appreciated. I will ask you a series of questions on your experience and will video/audio tape your responses. I am going to use one-on-one interviews but where it is not possible, I will Skype, video call or any other options that may apply as preferred by the participant. The tapes will help me transcribe word for word as spoken by the participant and keep the correct record of what was said.

The recordings and transcript will be held in a secure environment throughout this study and after the final project is completed, they will be held in a locked file in Dr. Susan Willhauck’s office for one year, at which time they will be destroyed by shredding or crushing.

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 end.

I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined have been explained to me, and that I have been given a copy of this consent. All questions I had, have been 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 understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I understand that the personal record relating to this study will be kept confidential.

The researcher will make every effort to keep all information obtained in this Study as confidential and anonymous as possible. Names and potentially revealing facts will be changed, thus affording me anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Above all, the results of this study will be aggregated and no individual participant will be identified.

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

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent form from research participants, the researcher will:
  - a) Provide one copy for the participants.
  - b) Keep one copy which will be placed in an envelope separate from all other materials and stored in a secure location.
  - c) Provide one copy for my supervisor Dr. Susan Willhauck, also, placed in a separate envelope. The supervisor will store these in a locked file cabinet.
2. Audio files of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device or password protected computer. These devices will be kept locked and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through the public Grad Project presentations and until deleted permanently from the device on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017.
3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document or pdf. 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 December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017.
4. The public Grad Project Presentations take place on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and the final project paper is due December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017. On that day I will delete recordings of interviews and bring all transcriptions and copies of Informed Consent to my supervisor by December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The supervisor will store these documents in a locked file cabinet at AST for one year, at which time they will be shredded on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

If you have questions, please contact me, the principal researcher at (709) 674 4452, Cellular: (709) 674 1169 or Email: [simbamazhara@gmail.com](mailto:simbamazhara@gmail.com)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology in keeping with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. If you have questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Alyda Faber, chair of the Research Ethics Board, at [afaber@astheology.ns.ca](mailto:afaber@astheology.ns.ca).

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.

## **Appendix D:**

### **Thank You letter to Participants**

<Name of Participant>

I'm writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for your participation in my research on clergy experiences. Whether you were looking for the opportunity or you had to muster your courage to participate, your involvement has tremendous value to this work. At this point, I have obtained everything I need to move forward with my project, so again, my thanks for your involvement in this undertaking.

Deeper understanding can only emerge through many divergent voices sharing stories of personal experiences. I have appreciated your willingness to engage a difficult topic, your integrity in speaking openly and honestly with me, and your trust and grace in opening yourself up to vulnerability in sharing your personal experiences. I do not take this sacred trust lightly, and am all the more grateful for your involvement because of it.

Your participation in this project has helped me to understand the pastoral role of ministers in congregational ministry, and to understand the unique situation that presents itself during a clergy affair, at a deeper and far more meaningful level. As I move forward with analysis and presentation of my research, know that I carry with me the responsibility to give your contributions a voice, and will work diligently to do so with the same integrity, courage, honesty, and grace which you have modeled through this process.

My research will be presented on Wednesday November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at Emmanuel United Church. 349 J.R Smallwood Blvd, Gambo. NL. At 2:30 pm NL Time. This presentation is open to everyone, should they like to be part of the audience and get first hand report on the findings of the research.

With thanksgiving,

Simbarashe Mazhara

Principal Researcher