

Submission to Plenary Council 2020

What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?

*If you want to build a ship, don't summon people
to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs, and
organize the work, rather teach people the
yearning for the wide, boundless ocean.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Paul Asnicar

Introduction

At Proclaim 2018, Archbishop Mark Coleridge asked this question: “what is the new paradigm for the church as we go forward?” He invited us to imagine a new paradigm of a parish community of faith.

New paradigms are exercises in imagination, and the plenary council is an opportunity to imagine a new way of being in the world.

In this submission, I hope to propose an answer to the plenary question: “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” by painting a picture of what this might look like in the neighbourhood and local community.

A taxonomy of responses and locating this response amongst them

I suspect that responses to the Plenary question would fall into three different areas or levels:

- the church as Institution – “Fix church”;
- the church as former of missionary disciples - “Grow church”; and
- the church as foretaste of the kingdom, agent of new creation, and participant in the renewal of all things – “Incarnational church”.

Level 1 - Church as Institution: “Fix church”

I expect that most responses would fall into this level, and deal with issues of governance, structure and risk management. Hot topics would include parish leadership, women priests and married clergy; responding to the child abuse scandal, inclusion of divorced and non-Catholic people, the formation of clergy, etc. Important as these issues are, this submission will not address them because they will already be well covered. Furthermore, I don’t believe these issues engage the prophetic imagination to address the challenge of a new paradigm. Fixing the institutional church is necessary, but not enough. In this sense, the crisis of the church today is a crisis not of institution, but of imagination.¹

The primary goal of this level should be to restore **trust** in the institutional church, so that it can support the following two levels.

Level 2 – church as maker of missionary disciples: “Grow church”

I anticipate (and hope) that there will be some responses at this level, proposing that God is asking us to develop local parishes as communities that facilitate an encounter with Jesus and form and nurture disciples.

¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Westmont, UNITED STATES: InterVarsity Press, 2015), accessed February 15, 2019, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=2120402>.

Last year (2018), my wife Kathy and I joined some other Australians in visiting parishes in Canada and USA leading the way in changing "from maintenance to mission." These parishes are primarily focussed on changing their own culture, and borrow from corporate success models and learnings from the mega-churches. They are attempting to revitalise, reorganise, and strategise.

St Benedict's in Halifax is forging a path at this level and are enabling other parishes to learn from their experience through the Divine Renovation books and network. I would hope that the plenary council process results in support and encouragement for parishes to move from maintenance to mission.

Level 3 – Incarnational – Church as foretaste and instrument of New Creation

This submission primarily focusses on the church as a model of a new way of being human and being in society. I expect that there will be very few responses at this level for reasons that I will touch on below. My fear, due to the statistical research methods employed by the plenary council, is that the few submissions in this level will result in relatively low statistical weight given to these types of submissions.² I hope that the council will somehow recognise this and bring out responses that may be prophetic calls for special consideration.

So why would there be so few responses in this area? I propose the following:

- This level requires a **prophetic imagination** – to create something that doesn't exist. I propose that a key contributor to the lack of imagination in the church is a narrow view of the gospel and eschatology. Therefore, I will spend some time expanding on this in the sections below.
- It is **counter-cultural**: it requires a subversive resistance to the dehumanising and the impersonal nature of the prevailing culture. Changing the culture within the church is hard enough, but demonstrating an alternative economy and social order which witnesses by living differently is extremely difficult, though not impossible as demonstrated by the early church.
- There is **no clearly defined template**. The approach is experimental, organic and emergent and will employ concepts like the 'learning organisation' and 'action research'. "The answer to the crisis will not be found at the level of method and problem solving, but in clarifying the churches' identity and task."³

The table below gives a summary of the three levels.

² I would contend that some of the promotional methods used by the Archdiocese of Brisbane facebook page would also skew and bias the research results. Statements such as "1 in 5 Australians agree women should be in key leadership roles within the Catholic Church. How can the church engage with you in 2019?" would bias results towards Level 1.

³ Darren J. Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne / by Darren John Cronshaw," 2009, 56, accessed February 7, 2019, https://repository.divinity.edu.au/18/1/Darren_Cronshaw_Thesis.pdf.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Description	Church as institution	Church growth – nurture missionary disciples	Church as incarnational kingdom community movement
Operating paradigm	Governance; risk management	Parish strategy and leadership.	Imagination: learning organisation, action research.
Purpose	Addresses culture of institution	Addresses culture of parish	Models an alternative way of being, and transforms the local neighbourhood.
Example text	Matthew 16: 16-18	Matthew 28:18-20	Rev 21:1-5

The rest of this submission will focus on fleshing out the third level, but before doing that, a few thoughts on how the levels relate to each other.

Authors such as Frost and Hirsh⁴ have argued that the institutional church is a hangover of Christendom, and therefore will struggle in a postmodern, post-Christendom, post-secular age. In a similar vein, some question the ability of the institutional church to reframe itself into a missional and incarnational church. Cronshaw's involvement in church, for example, prompted him to ask, "Is it possible to reshape established churches with emerging missional frameworks and how can this be done successfully?" and, "Is it more fruitful to plant new churches which are mission-shaped from their beginning?"⁵

The approach to these questions taken in this submission is along the following lines. Firstly, we do not need another 'church'. What we need is the Christian church (all parishes and denominational expressions in a neighbourhood) working together to outwork God's purposes in the neighbourhood. Churches working together, drawing on their diversity and charisms, will be one of the great signs of the kingdom, and will be an alternative sign to the ongoing fragmentation of society.

Secondly, rather than being antagonistic, each level can support and enhance the other. We need to build off the institutional and existing parish life while supporting both. The proposal in this submission is to first support, and then augment both with the missional-incarnational paradigm.

Structure of this Submission

Introduction: Locates this submission within a taxonomy of responses and suggests that a merely statistical research analysis may miss small but prophetic voices.

⁴ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Reprint edition. (Baker Pub Group, 2001).

⁵ Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now," 30.

Responding to a change of era: Briefly touches on the enormity of change happening at present, and the ability of society to address the issues that it faces. Suggests that the church is a gift to the world in addressing these issues but the church is presently relatively absent from them in the west. The Gospel lived out in the church changed society at the deepest levels of consciousness and has been the single most creative cultural, ethical, aesthetic, social, political, and spiritual force in history. Why is this not the case now?

“Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven”: Attempts to answer the question posed in the previous section. Suggests that the influence of Platonic thought is dampening the church’s imagination and agency in the world. Therefore I spend some time exploring the broader understanding of the gospel of the early church as ‘new creation’ and the implications of this.

The model and functions of new creation in the neighbourhood: Takes the implications drawn out in the previous section to propose what this might look like in an incarnational expression in a particular neighbourhood: a prototype of how it might be embodied and expressed so people can taste and see and understand at a primary level. The concepts, of course, need to be fleshed out in community. Once underway, the guiding methodologies will be one of prototyping as a learning organisation, using exploratory methods like action research.

I conclude with a summary, of what I think God is asking of us in Australia at this time, namely:

Level 1: For the church **institution**, to rebuild trust.

Level 2: For **parishes**, to become missional communities by facilitating encounter and the forming and nurture of missional disciples.

Level 3: To be an **eschatological community**; an anticipatory sign of the in-breaking presence of the alternative reign of God and foretaste of the kingdom, and to participate in the renewal of all things: the restoration and redemption of creation with all that entails: table fellowship, community, culture, economics, agriculture and animal husbandry, art, architecture, worship.

To be a **catalyst of community and neighbourhood transformation**. Empower whole communities through the utilising of strengths within that community - to help everyone make our neighbourhoods places of belonging, places of health and well-being, and places where people will want to live and work.

To **demonstrate an alternative economy** which witnesses by living differently. To demonstrate a different social order that is a subversive resistance to the dehumanising and the impersonal nature of the prevailing culture.

Responding to a 'change of era'

Some locate the church and change as being like Blockbuster around 2005.⁶ It's a good analogy, but I think it underplays the significant change we are currently experiencing. According to Phyllis Tickle in her book *The Great Emergence*: "Every five hundred years, give or take a decade or two, Western culture, along with those parts of the world that have been colonized or colonialized by it, goes through a time of enormous upheaval, a time in which essentially every part of it is reconfigured."⁷ Corresponding to this, every 500 years or so, there were tectonic shifts in the Christian tradition, resulting in huge changes of both understanding and of practice. The first was the time of Christ which Tickle calls "The Great Transformation." Then, in 476, it was the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. Then in 1054, came "The Great Schism," when the Christian Church split into the Eastern and Western branches. In the 1500s with the invention of the printing press, it was "The Reformation". It has been 500 years since the Reformation, and we are now in a period of rapid change and upheaval that will be hard to imagine.

But imagination drove the early church to conceive of and live out something transformative that had never been seen before. According to David Bentley Hart, "Christianity can be called in the fullest sense a "revolution": a truly massive and epochal revision of humanity's prevailing vision of reality, so pervasive in its influence and so vast in its consequences as actually to have created a new conception of the world, of history, of human nature, of time, and of the moral good."⁸

Biblical scholars are now coming to a better realisation of the worldview of the early Christians that drove this creative and transformative action in the world. I believe that this better understanding of the historical roots and the Christian Hope will fire the imagination of the church and unleash its missional impulse.

In the sections below, I will expand on the Christian Hope and explore the 'new creation' theology, predominant in the early church, as a prompt to an imaginative response to the new paradigm being sought. Following that, I will show how it might be expressed in the neighbourhood. Before doing this, however, let's take a detour into the neighbourhood to see what is happening there.

⁶ Fr Matt Fish tweet: "Said it before, and I'll say it again: working for the Catholic Church in America in 2019 feels something like working for Blockbuster Movies in 2005. We're still arguing about how we should display the DVDs, and meanwhile our current model and customer base is about to collapse."

⁷ Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 13.

⁸ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, 1st Edition edition. (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010).

The breakdown of the neighbourhood; Society's fragmentation

Recently the ABC News featured a story about the growing levels of social isolation, loneliness and attendant health issues, in our communities. The strongest predictor of how long a person will live is related to relationships and social integration.⁹ We in the west seem to be facing a loneliness epidemic¹⁰ which is affecting our health and wellbeing.

We are getting older: The Australian population is living longer,¹¹ but studies show that retirement can increase the likelihood of clinical depression by up to 40 per cent.¹² According to Robert Putnam, if you do not belong to any group at present, joining a club or society of some kind halves the risk that you will die in the next year.¹³

We are getting richer and damaging the environment, but are no happier. The consumerist society that we live in has resulted in more wealth and the accumulation of more stuff, but research shows that the greater wealth no longer makes us happier.¹⁴ According to McKibben, the very act of acquiring so much stuff has turned us ever more into individuals and ever less into member of a community, isolating us in a way that runs contrary to our most basic instincts.¹⁵

Our consumerist, disconnected society is detrimental to the environment. Sprawling subdivisions, while isolating their inhabitants, requires the use of cars. We use an 'extractive economy' of large retail chains to drive down costs, that enable us to fill these homes with stuff made by factories in China. We have moved away from local economies,¹⁶ that may yield less stuff, but produce richer relationships; they may grow less quickly, if at all, but they make up for it in durability.¹⁷ "The key questions will change from whether the economy produces an even larger pile of stuff to whether it

⁹ Susan Pinker, "Transcript of 'The Secret to Living Longer May Be Your Social Life,'" accessed February 19, 2019, https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life/transcript.

¹⁰ "Is There a Loneliness Epidemic?," *Russell Moore*, last modified December 12, 2018, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2018/12/12/is-there-a-loneliness-epidemic/>.

¹¹ "Tectonic Shift Coming Our Way," last modified January 30, 2019, accessed February 19, 2019, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/opinion/bernard-salt-demographer/the-rise-fall-and-rise-of-retirees/news-story/9511b2d8826d599ccd14b438296ef1e9>.

¹² "Men's Sheds May Come in Handy," last modified February 13, 2019, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/mens-sheds-may-come-in-handy-for-women-and-lessskilled-blokes/news-story/af3e612b3f2df0cd533a49bdb8dcefd5>.

¹³ "A Wellbeing Manifesto for a Flourishing Society," 16, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://neweconomics.org/2014/09/wellbeing-manifesto-flourishing-society>.

¹⁴ Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, Reprint edition. (New York, NY: Griffin, 2008), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁶ Shifting our focus to local economies will not mean abandoning Adam Smith or doing away with markets.

¹⁷ McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 2.

builds or undermines community - **for community, it turns out, is the key to physical survival in our environmental predicament and also to human satisfaction.**"¹⁸

So, community is not only better for the environment, it results in better quality of life, health and wellbeing:

*Humans seem to be genetically wired for community. As Layard points out, all primates live in group and get sad when they are separated: "an isolated individual will repeatedly pull a lever with no reward other than the glimpse of another monkey. Why do people look back on their college days as the best years of their lives? Usually, it's not because their classes were so fascinating. More important is the fact that they lived more closely and intensely in a community than ever before or since (college is the four years in an American life when we live roughly as we've evolved to live)."*¹⁹

Even secular commentators are calling for a culture shift. "Social guru Hugh Mackay says Australia needs a major culture shift towards compassion in a bid to prevent social isolation. Mackay, a well-known social researcher and commentator, says we need to connect with our neighbours and loved ones to prevent social fragmentation."²⁰

Some places have heeded the call. For example, Frome in Somerset, England, has seen a dramatic fall in emergency hospital admissions since it began a collective project to combat isolation.²¹

In another example, one deprived London borough, Barking and Dagenham, had shocking levels of unemployment, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence and early death. But it has been bringing people together to work, socialise and dream, and the results are extraordinary.²²

Denmark has been experimenting with co-housing communities, which have spread around the world. McKibbin again:

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 109.

²⁰ "(33) 'We Need Each Other': Mackay's Call for Compassion | LinkedIn," accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/we-need-each-other-mackays-call-compassion-julie-tullberg-murtagh/?published=t&fbclid=IwAR00cNzBRV1g5SyhN6XJClh4i-mNQjum-RfGpZTTntb2Wkmmml3e0Mi1Gag>.

²¹ George Monbiot, "The Town That's Found a Potent Cure for Illness – Community | George Monbiot," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2018, sec. Opinion, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/21/town-cure-illness-community-frome-somerset-isolation>.

²² George Monbiot, "Could This Community Project Be the Start of a National Transformation? | George Monbiot," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2019, sec. Opinion, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/24/neighbourhood-project-barking-dagenham>.

They're still relatively few in number in America, but they represent a powerful idea: that the desire for more community might begin to radically alter the ways we imagine our lives. Co-housing communities aren't communes. People have private dwellings, often attached condo style to a block of others. But the houses are small, because the community shares certain facilities: a kitchen and dining hall, playrooms for the kids, guest rooms for visitors, a laundry, tool sheds. Since the duties are shared - maybe you cook dinner once a week for the whole community - residents have more free time.²³

Perhaps these communities will start to reclaim the community and 'social capital' that was lost in places like Roseto,²⁴ and still just manages to hang on in the so-called 'blue zones.'²⁵

However, Government and welfare has limitations in responding to these challenges. Government is becoming more and more fragmented and therefore its ability to provide the sorts of solutions we need is becoming more limited. But even if it could, the way the state works will bring more problems rather than their solutions. The Barking and Dagenham story mentioned above talks about how Government services left the communities fragmented and without a sense of agency. In addition, each sector—business, education, government, social service, health care—are so focused on its own affairs that those who choose to commit to the well-being of the whole have a difficult time gaining a foothold.²⁶ Furthermore, community itself is disempowered, and each citizen's accountability for the well-being of community is reduced.²⁷ As soon as you professionalize care, you have produced an oxymoron.²⁸

Addressing social issues is not easy, and are often described as 'wicked problems'.²⁹ They don't respond to classic problem solving steps where it is believed "that the way to make a difference in the world is to define problems and needs and then recommend actions to solve those needs.³⁰ According to Peter Block, "We cannot problem-solve our way into fundamental change, or transformation, or community. To state it one more way: This is not an argument against problem solving; it is an assertion that the primary

²³ McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 155.

²⁴ The Connection, *The Remarkable Story of Roseto Shows the Power of Community*, n.d., accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnbPzXDco90>.

²⁵ Dan Buettner, "The Island Where People Forget to Die," *The New York Times*, October 24, 2012, sec. Magazine, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/magazine/the-island-where-people-forget-to-die.html>.

²⁶ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 45.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁹ Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (1992): 5–21.

³⁰ Block, *Community*, 77.

work is to shift the context and language and thinking about possibility.”³¹ Large system change is a useful way to think, but transforming action is always local, customized, unfolding, and emergent.³²

Where is the church? In the examples above, the church seems absent. Furthermore, in my experience, it does not form community within its congregation, let alone within the community. I would think that one of its callings as the body of Christ, would be to take on the wounds of the world in order that that the world might be healed. What other group of people would be prepared to take on a cruciform pattern of redemption – to absorb evil and turn it into something beautiful?

Yes, the church runs schools and hospitals, and serves the poor. In many ways these mimic Government services.

Take welfare for example. Shane Claiborne says that the great tragedy of the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor, but that rich Christians do not know the poor.” How can we move beyond a “welfare” model to one where the community is so integrated that the tags of rich and poor no longer apply? That neighbourliness means that community life is rich and abundant, and that no one is left to fend for themselves, everyone is known, supported and loved? There is no welfare in a village, only neighbourliness.

Why does the church not see itself as a key contributor to building community and driving an alternative economy, one that addresses those fundamental wicked problems? Why is even the notion that church could be a source of the solution seems to be absent? As Daniel Bell says in his book “The Economy of Desire”:

*“When you ponder the ‘big problems’ that confront humanity and society ... where does your thinking turn? To the state and the proper policies it should enact. You do not think first and foremost, “What should the church do?” or “What should General Motors do?” Instead, you think about governmental policies and action. It is a habit of mind that is deeply ingrained. We are used to thinking of the state as the chief social actor.”*³³

Why has the church seemingly ceded this space to Government, and instead seems to have retreated into a private and individualized spirituality? Why does it not consider its role to “help everyone make our neighbourhoods places of belonging, places of health and well-being, and places where people will want to live and work”?³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 80.

³² Ibid., 74.

³³ Daniel M. Jr Bell and James Smith, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 39.

³⁴ Block, *Community*, 187.

Why do we seem to lack imagination about how things could be different - a new way of being community and foster belonging? How would the neighbourhood church act as a platform to facilitate connection and fellowship across the community, particularly those isolated and on the edge? How can we facilitate everyone to be known and loved?

The way we function is powerfully impacted by our worldview.³⁵ In the following section I argue that many in the church have a Platonised worldview which has robbed us not only of our corporately embodied agency, but our prophetic imagination as well. Things will never be different if we see the Christian Hope limited to "going to heaven when we die." It isn't the case that Christians are taken from earth to heaven: that is Gnosticism. Rather the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth, so that heaven and earth are one (Rev 21 & 22), and the church is to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of this new creation. I propose that this understanding means we have to live into an alternative economy,³⁶ a "kingdom come economics that orders the world otherwise, bearing witness to the strange, upside-down economy of a crucified-now-risen King."³⁷ "Indeed, to focus our expectation on an otherworldly salvation has the potential to dissipate our resistance to societal evil and the dedication needed to work for the redemptive transformation of this world."³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁶ The word itself comes from the Church fathers who termed *oikonomia* to relate to the law or order of the household - the "housekeeping" of a thing.

³⁷ Bell and Smith, *The Economy of Desire*, 11.

³⁸ J Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 96.

“Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven”

In this section, I will expand on the influence of Platonism, particularly how prevailing ideas of Platonism imposed on eschatology rob Christians of their hope³⁹ and consequently rob them of agency. Following that, I will show how the biblical hope is distinctive to Platonism, and the implications of this distinction.

The influence of Plato and Gnosticism

Plato remains the most influential thinker in the history of the western world.⁴⁰ Plato's concept of forms, along with his cosmology and his views on the immortality of the soul, "probably has the greatest influence in the philosophy of religion."⁴¹

Plato was one of the first philosophers to argue that reality is primarily ideal or abstract. The Platonic view was that true reality was found in the "essence" of thing (or forms). It is invisible, eternal, higher, not subject to change (truth cannot change), ordered, balanced, and serene. In contrast, the world of matter, the visible world, is a lower world of illusion, one in which the "soul" is trapped.⁴² The hope for the Platonist is to escape this world, to "get in touch with the true reality, which is beyond space, time and matter."⁴³ It is very a dualistic worldview where "Matter doesn't matter - and what matters isn't matter."

Vlach, drawing on a number of authors, has surveyed the impact of Platonism on Christian eschatology. For example, Plato particularly influenced Augustine, and "Augustine's interpretation of Plato dominated Christian thought for the next thousand years after his death in the fifth century. In his Confessions, Augustine openly describes the help he received from the Platonists."⁴⁴

What the First Christians believed – “New Creation”

To contrast the Platonic view with that of the early Christians I will use shorthand and name two models as detailed in James and Bock:⁴⁵ The first model [which derives from Plato], **the spiritual vision** model, tends to view the eternal state as heavenly, timeless, bodiless, and unrelated to the materiality of the present creation. The second, **the new**

³⁹ Michael J Vlach, "PLATONISM'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY" (n.d.): 24.

⁴⁰ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, Re-issue edition. (London: SPCK Publishing, 2011), 7.

⁴¹ Vlach, "PLATONISM'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY," 18.

⁴² In Greek the word for body and tomb were similar. The Greek word for body was *soma*; and the word for tomb was *sema*. The idea was that the soul was trapped in the body, and that the body was the death of the soul. Everything that was wrong was because of the body - the body was just transitory - and the soul was attempting to break free of the body - and at death it had its glorious liberation - it could fly upwards.

⁴³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 100.

⁴⁴ Vlach, "PLATONISM'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY," 20.

⁴⁵ Steven L James and Darrell L Bock, "NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH: ANALYZING THE RECENT RISE IN NEW CREATION ESCHATOLOGY" (n.d.): 36.

creation model, emphasises an earthly, material, time-sequenced, embodied existence in a new heaven and new earth."

"The new creation model appears to have been the primary approach of the church of the late first and early second centuries A.D. It was found in apocalyptic and rabbinic Judaism and in second century Christian writers such as Irenaeus of Lyons."⁴⁶

The New Creation model, contrary to Platonism and the spiritual vision model, emphasises the physical, social, political, and geographical aspects of eternal life. It emphasises a coming new earth, the renewal of life on this new earth, bodily resurrection, and social and political interactions among the redeemed."⁴⁷ "The point of the gospel is not that we would go to heaven when we die. Instead, it is that heaven will come down, transforming and renewing the earth and the entire universe."⁴⁸ "The picture then is not of an eschatological flight from creation but the restoration and redemption of creation with all that that entails: table fellowship, community, culture, economics, agriculture and animal husbandry, art, architecture, worship - in short, life and that abundantly."⁴⁹

A number of biblical scholars, including NT Wright⁵⁰ and J Richard Middleton are driving this shift towards a more faithful reading of Scripture⁵¹ and a more holistic understanding of redemption.

Implications of New Creation

The *telos* of the cosmos – creation with purpose

The Platonic view of the cosmos was summed up in their Cosmic Ideal: ordered, balanced, unchanging, and perfect. What changes can't be true: Matter is of lower order; change is illusion, and where change exists, it was merely rotation. The biblical view, however, was that Creation is good but not perfected; it is unfolding – a narrative with a start and end, it develops with purpose.

"Redemption does not reverse, but rather embraces, historical development. Creation was never meant to be static, but was intended by God from the beginning to be developmental, moving toward a goal."⁵²

⁴⁶ Vlach, "PLATONISM'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY," 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ I was first introduced to the work of NT Wright when he visited Brisbane in 2006 to do a series of seminars at the invitation of Archbishop Bathurst. The recordings of these seminars are available on CD and I highly recommend them.

⁵¹ James and Bock, "NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH: ANALYZING THE RECENT RISE IN NEW CREATION ESCHATOLOGY."

⁵² Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 76.

The story of here and now: The particular over the universal

The Platonic view tends towards the passive conformance to the abstract and patterns. The biblical view emphasises a goal centred approach to the concrete and particular: According to Edwin Judge, “when we seek to work out the pattern of things, and to accept our place in it, we reflect our classical heritage. When we focus upon some goal that we see before us, and respond personally to its challenge, it is our biblically inspired understanding of the way the world works that we rely upon.”⁵³

The biblical story focusses on this world rather than on abstract themes. The focus on matter means that people matter, place matters, time matters. Scripture is an unfolding story of people place and time, and the incarnation calls us to live into time and place. 'When God chose to enter the world, it was not in some ethereal generic manner but in a particular family, in a particular town, in a particular country with particular socio-religious practices. Just as Christ “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood” (John 1:14 The Message), so also the people that comprise the local church in the parish are meant to be a tangible expression of God’s love in the everyday reality of life.”⁵⁴

Continuity - What is done in the Spirit continues in the redeemed world

The resurrection seems to show that there is continuity from this world into the next. While Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of an entirely new world, "Jesus' body is similar in many ways to the body that he had prior to his death.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, according to 1 Corinthians 15:58, there is continuity in what we do in this world, and everything we do for God is worthwhile. Anything that is Spirit led and in line with the character of Jesus will find its way into the new creation.”⁵⁶ Wright believes that while the Kingdom won't come in its fullness, what we do in the present as kingdom builders is not wasted. We are not oiling the wheels of a machine that is going to go off a cliff. As we work with God, by the Spirit, both in our personal life, and our work in the church in the world, we do things which matter because they will be enhanced, and ennobled and find their place in God's new world.⁵⁷

⁵³ E. A. Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 721.

⁵⁴ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014), 26.

⁵⁵ James and Bock, “NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH: ANALYZING THE RECENT RISE IN NEW CREATION ESCHATOLOGY.”

⁵⁶ Andre Van Eymeren, “The Kingdom of Communities: An Argument for Asset Based Community Development in Local Communities as a Practical Expression of the Kingdom’s Advance,” 2013, 14.

⁵⁷ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 219.

The Platonic view is bad for the environment

It is worth pointing out, that a view that devalues the current world leads to its exploitation. The Platonic view results in disastrous consequences for the environment.⁵⁸

The possibility of transformation in society

For Plato, society was to conform and reflect the cosmic ideal; highly stratified; and static. People were to know their place and act accordingly, and the status quo was to be maintained. Virtues were a property of the individual and reflect self-sufficiency, imperturbability, apathy and detachment.⁵⁹ The biblical view was that Christ has upended cosmic order and hierarchy, and there was the possibility of genuine transformation. Virtues of trust, hope and care were introduced and were relationship centred.⁶⁰ People are invited to participate with God in renewal of the earth (including society).

God is concerned about Shalom and human flourishing

J. Richard Middleton, draws on the first testament to show that God's will is for the holistic flourishing of earthly life.⁶¹

"The God of the Scriptures is concerned for the entire range of earthly life and desires flourishing, well-being, and shalom—in short, salvation—for both humanity and the nonhuman creation."⁶² This means that healing of the social order, human society and culture in all its complexity and fullness, is included in the new creation.⁶³

A basis for human agency, design and creativity

My current master's research is exploring the relationship between the biblical worldview and human agency and creativity. Judeo-Christian thought certainly appears to be an overhaul of the Graeco-Roman conceptual nature of reality (cosmos) resulting in a new way of formulating society and of being human in the world (anthropology). Drawing on historians such as Edwin Judge,⁶⁴ my research suggests that this new way of thinking gave rise to greater human agency in the transformation of the world as well as the transformation of the self.

⁵⁸ Howard Snyder, "Salvation Means Creation Healed: Creation, Cross, Kingdom and Mission," *The Asbury Journal* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 10, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol62/iss1/3>.

⁵⁹ Edwin A Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. Edwin A. Judge, Reprint edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), sec. 2034.

⁶⁰ Mark Strom, "'To Know as We Are Known': Locating an Ancient Alternative to Virtues," in *Wise Management in Organisational Complexity*, ed. Mike J. Thompson and David Bevan (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 92.

⁶¹ J. Richard Middleton, *New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), 100.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 104, 74.

⁶⁴ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 727.

As image bearers of God, we reflect God's creativity into the world. Matthew Fox argues that creativity is at the centre of God's nature; the Hebrew word *dabhar*, usually translated 'word', describes the creative energy of God that formed the world in all its diversity."⁶⁵

We partner with God in co-creation, we do not operate by our own efforts

That humanity is created with an earthly calling or cultural vocation suggests that although the world is "very good" when God has completed the creative process, it is not "perfect" in the sense that it cannot be made better.⁶⁶

"God invites His people into active participation towards the reality of His Kingdom come. Through being part of the new creation, we are the first fruits, participants in and sign posts to God's ultimate future. As such, we are given the task of building for the Kingdom."⁶⁷ But we do not do this on our own: "The Spirit was sent into the world to further and complete the work of redemption and liberation. The Spirit is present in everything that implies movement, transformation and growth."⁶⁸

What it means to be human

For the Platonist, the self to reflect the cosmic ideal and fit with society. The eternal soul trapped in a tomb (sema)-like body (soma). The ideal is to escape from the world of matter. The biblical view was that humans were a psychosomatic unity (body and the breath of God).

Embodiment

We have this extraordinary hope of new bodies.⁶⁹ In 2 Cor 4 & 5; 1 Cor 15, what Paul holds out before us is a transformed physicality within God's transformed creation.

NT Wright calls us to distance ourselves from the language of the soul. He contends that the language of the soul is not a particularly Christian language. In the new testament it is never said that human beings possess immortal souls. That is Platonic belief. Immortality is a gift according to 1 Tim. It is something that the Gospel has brought to light as God's gift to those that are in Christ.

It has been argued that where we adopt the anthropological dualism that appears to be a characteristic of the Hellenistic world, that is, the view of a person as a disembodied ideal, it results in practices that "tends the soul" with resulting inwardness, individuality, and dampening of agency. The Judeo-Christian view of the person as a psychosomatic unity however, could result in different practices. Neuroscience

⁶⁵ Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now," 26.

⁶⁶ Middleton, *New Heaven and a New Earth*, 45.

⁶⁷ Van Eymeren, "The Kingdom of Communities," 57.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, chap. 10.

highlights the formative importance of practices related to our very physical nature like empathy,⁷⁰ trust,⁷¹ relationships and social interactions, the experiences of everyday life.⁷²

Giftings and diversity: The introduction of open-ended, other focused diversity of gifts

Another difference is the notion of gifts of a diverse community in the service of others as compared to the classical desire for order through “selective participation.”⁷³ Judge contends that Greek political thought was “essentially a rationalising defence of the established order.”⁷⁴ And because society was rational and thought to be in accordance with the cosmic order, there was no basis for human action to drive for change or reform of the order.⁷⁵

The concept that everyone contributes, based on their individual and unique giftedness, also appears to be new to the classical world according to Judge: “Such a mode of tackling the problems of oppression in human culture and society is an historical innovation of the first order.”⁷⁶

A blessing to the world – not salvation from it

Wright draws on the story of Abraham Genesis 12 who was blessed to be a blessing to the nations. “God longed to re-establish his wise sovereignty over the whole creation, which would mean a great act of healing and rescue. He did not want to rescue humans from creation, any more than he wanted to rescue Israel from the Gentiles. He wanted to rescue Israel in order that Israel might be a light to the Gentiles, and he wanted thereby to rescue humans in order that humans might be his rescuing stewards over creation. That is the inner dynamic of the kingdom of God.”⁷⁷

Similarly, the church has been blessed to be a blessing: an instrument for God's mission of love towards people and all creation.⁷⁸ The church is perhaps the only organization that is not inherently designed to be another special interest group: we need to be listeners, integrators and relational bridge builders.⁷⁹

The church is a sign and foretaste of the kingdom. It does this corporately
Lesslie Newbigin wrote in his great book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*: “The church in each place is to be the sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God present in

⁷⁰ Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church*, 1 edition. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33.

⁷¹ Ibid., 34.

⁷² Ibid., 50.

⁷³ See further analysis of Plato's Republic and the contrived selection of Guardians in a following section.

⁷⁴ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 728.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, sec. 2922.

⁷⁷ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 214,215.

⁷⁸ Van Eymeren, “The Kingdom of Communities,” 74.

⁷⁹ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 111.

Christ for that place; a sign, planted in the midst of the present realities of the place but pointing beyond them to the future which God has promised; an instrument available for God's use in the doing of his will for that place; a foretaste—manifesting and enjoying already in the midst of the messianic tribulations a genuine foretaste of the peace and joy of God's reign."⁸⁰

It does this not only by individuals working in the world, important as that is. To be a sign and foretaste requires a corporate community dimension. "The people of God, then, are not only the voice of this message but are called to live it as an alternate community, by being a sign, seeking justice locally and globally and celebrating God's good creation. Through this they generate a new type of community and help the announcement of the whole gospel make sense."⁸¹

"As well as being the determinative inner shape of the community, love is to be its proclamation and witness to God's will for the world. The community in its corporate life, is to embody an alternative social order that stands as a sign of God's redemptive purposes in the world: this is the concrete social manifestation of the righteousness of God."⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁸¹ Van Eymeren, "The Kingdom of Communities," 23.

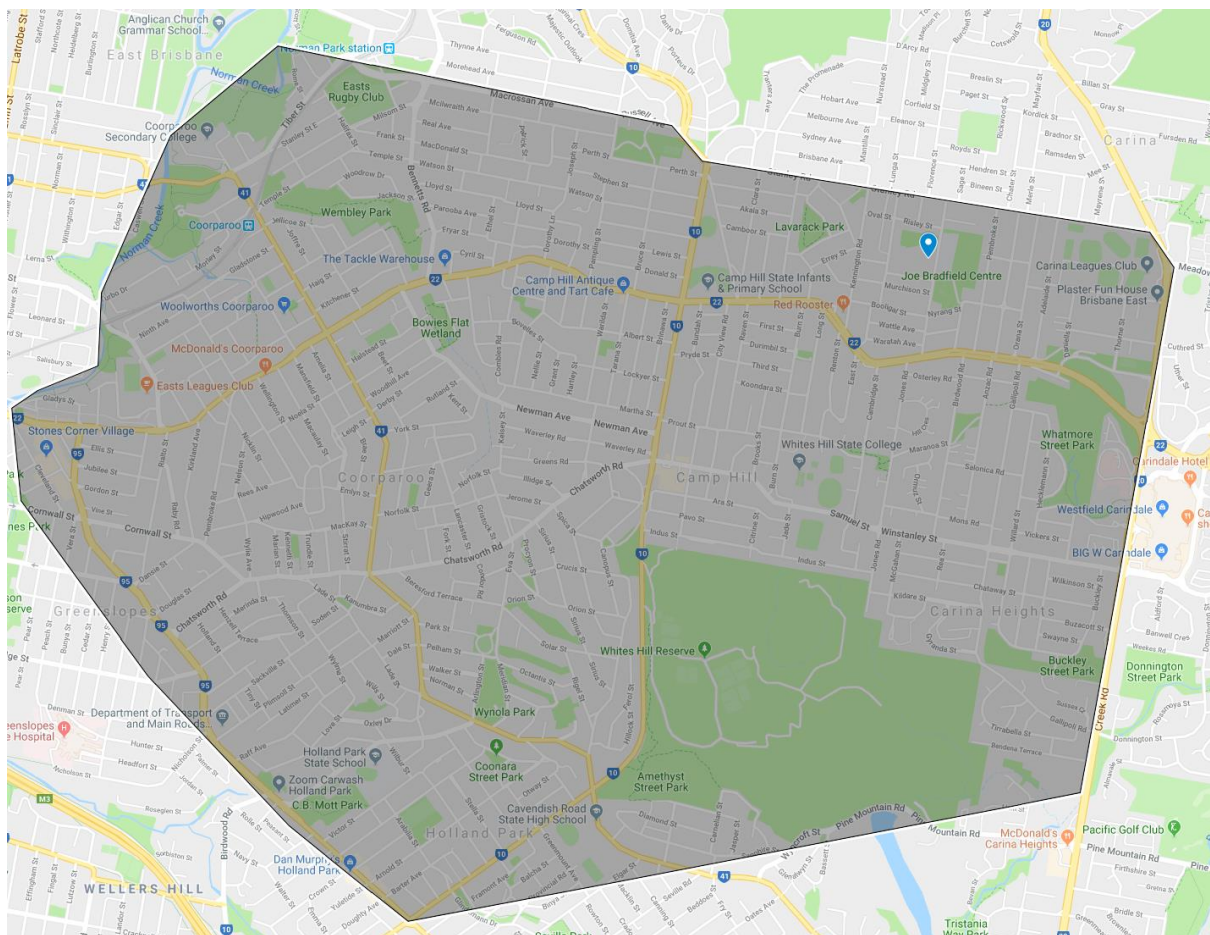
⁸² Ibid., 37.

A model and functions of new creation in the neighbourhood.

The discussion so far presents a number of principles, one being not to live outside of place and time, but to the focus on God's dream and purpose in caring for a particular place.⁸³ Therefore, in this section I will try to paint a picture of what all this might look like in a particular neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood – Integration and empowerment

I've chosen my own neighbourhood of Coorparoo-Camp Hill which seems to have a natural locality about it as defined by the natural boundaries of Norman Ck and the bushlands of Whites Hill and Seven Hills.⁸⁴



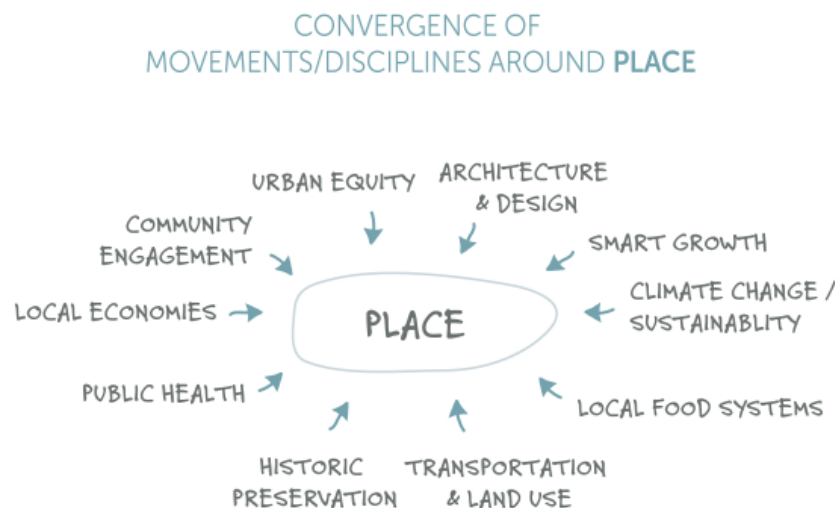
The Brisbane East Deanery would also be a natural locality, but may be a little large to be defined as a neighbourhood. Paul Sparks uses the word 'parish' to define a locality:

⁸³ "A Thriving Future of Places: Placemaking as the New Urban Agenda," accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.pps.org/article/a-thriving-future-of-places-placemaking-as-the-new-urban-agenda>.

⁸⁴ Includes the parish centres of: Coorparoo: Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; Camp Hill: St Thomas; Cannon Hill: St Oliver Plunket; Carina: Our Lady of Graces; Coorparoo Heights: Regina Caeli; Coorparoo: St James. Along Cavendish Rd there are a number of denominations in close proximity: St Stephen's Anglican; Coorparoo Presbyterian; Faithworks Uniting; City South Baptist. Camp Hill Church of Christ meets at Whites Hill State School.

“By crafting a life together in a definable place, the parish becomes a platform for a whole new way of being the church.”⁸⁵ His use of the word parish refers to all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together. I will not use the word ‘parish’ because of the connotations that it has in catholic use.⁸⁶ I will use the word neighbourhood. This is meant to define a “geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it.”⁸⁷

The neighbourhood becomes an integrational platform; a relational microcosm that helps bring many cause and effect relationship back together again.⁸⁸ “A focus on place can be a means through which we coalesce, and more fundamentally address, otherwise disparate causes,”⁸⁹ as shown in the diagram below.



Thinking in terms of neighbourhood has implications for the Christian church in an area. The neighbourhood looks on, and it has a right to ask the Christian church, what does it contribute to the benefits of the neighbourhood? Would there be any difference if it did not exist? Is the church, with its Euro-tribal boundaries, part of the fragmentation of society, rather than its healing? ‘Neighbourhood’ forces us to know that we are in relationship with all those in the locality, including other denominations.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 22.

⁸⁶ Although it is meant to define an area, we often seem to think of it in terms of the people who gather at a church building. This misses the integrative effect spoken about further on.

⁸⁷ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 22.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁹ “A Thriving Future of Places.”

⁹⁰ For the purposes of this exercise, my view is that there is one church of Coorparoo/Camp Hill with various denominational expressions.

Thinking in terms of “place” and neighbourhood empowers a local community and subverts two false narratives of the economy: the extreme individualism of ‘do it all on your own’; or wait for bureaucracy to drive systemic change.⁹¹ The integrational empowerment of the neighbourhood begins to address the fragmentation described in a previous section.

The ‘third place’ – church as town square

For millennia, people have gathered in informal public gathering places the town square or the commons. In his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg demonstrates how and why these ‘third places’⁹² are essential to community and public life.⁹³ I think our communities have lost the art of the third place. The local shopping centre, Carindale, is a swarm of strangers, and does not build community. Shopping centres, sporting events give the illusion of community, but people merely gathering is counterfeit community. In my experience, our mass centres are much the same: people swarm for sacramental consumption but do not know each other. There seems to be no intentional effort to build connection and facilitate community. Parishes not only are called to be places of community, but to foster community in the neighbourhood - a ‘catalyst of community.’ The limited role imagined for churches has meant that they are not set up with the infrastructure for developing and sustaining community, particularly if they want to do this around hospitality and a shared meal.

The priority for any programs, according to Frost and Hirsch, is developing proximity spaces for Christians and ‘not-yet Christians’ to interact meaningfully, shared projects to engage together in useful community activities and commercial enterprises to establish relationships and address particular needs.⁹⁴

In this proposal, I imagine church as today’s town square,⁹⁵ bringing together a rich, mutually-reinforcing and complementary mixture of third spaces that provide the proximity space and support shared projects, community activities and commercial enterprises. The functions within these spaces will be explained below, but for the time being, imagine the following spaces, most likely set within an industrial/warehouse type area due to the size requirements, but central and close to the railway station (this is possible in Coorparoo): dining hall with catering kitchen; library; café; gym; co-working space; some co-living space; and ideally space for a community garden if possible. The economic case for this prototype may require the co-location of a

⁹¹ “A Thriving Future of Places.”

⁹² “Oldenburg identifies “third places” as the public places on neutral ground where people can gather and interact. In contrast to first places (home) and second places (work), third places allow people to put aside their concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation around them.”

⁹³ “Ray Oldenburg,” accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.pps.org/article/roldenburg>.

⁹⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 24.

⁹⁵ Mel McGowan, “Designing the Church as Today’s Town Square,” *OutreachMagazine.Com*, June 28, 2015, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://outreachmagazine.com/ideas/12074-designing-the-church-as-todays-town-square.html>.

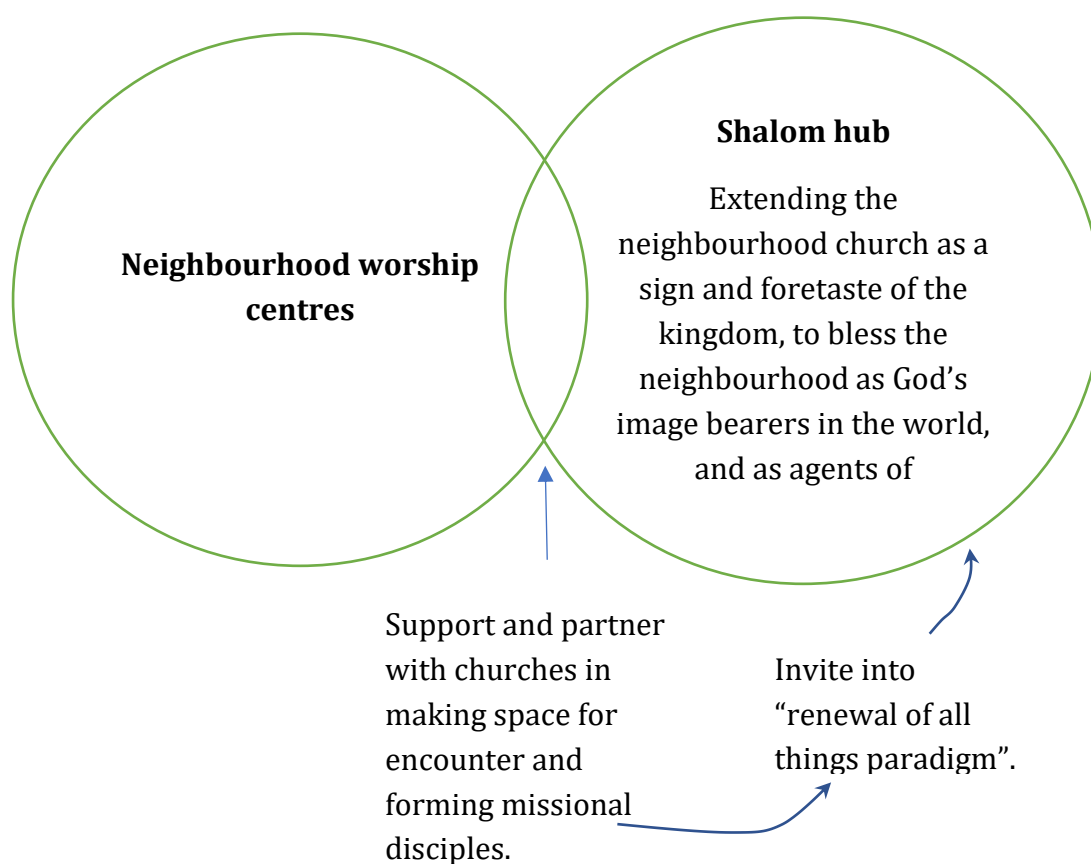
business (e.g. a book shop) which would financially support the hub through its rental payments. The book shop also acts as a third space.

For ease of writing I will term this grouping of third spaces as “Shalom Hub”.

Relationship to local church – Shalom Hub support for Level 1 and Level 2

The Shalom Hub will support and augment the local church. The hub will have the facilities and infrastructure that individual churches do not have.

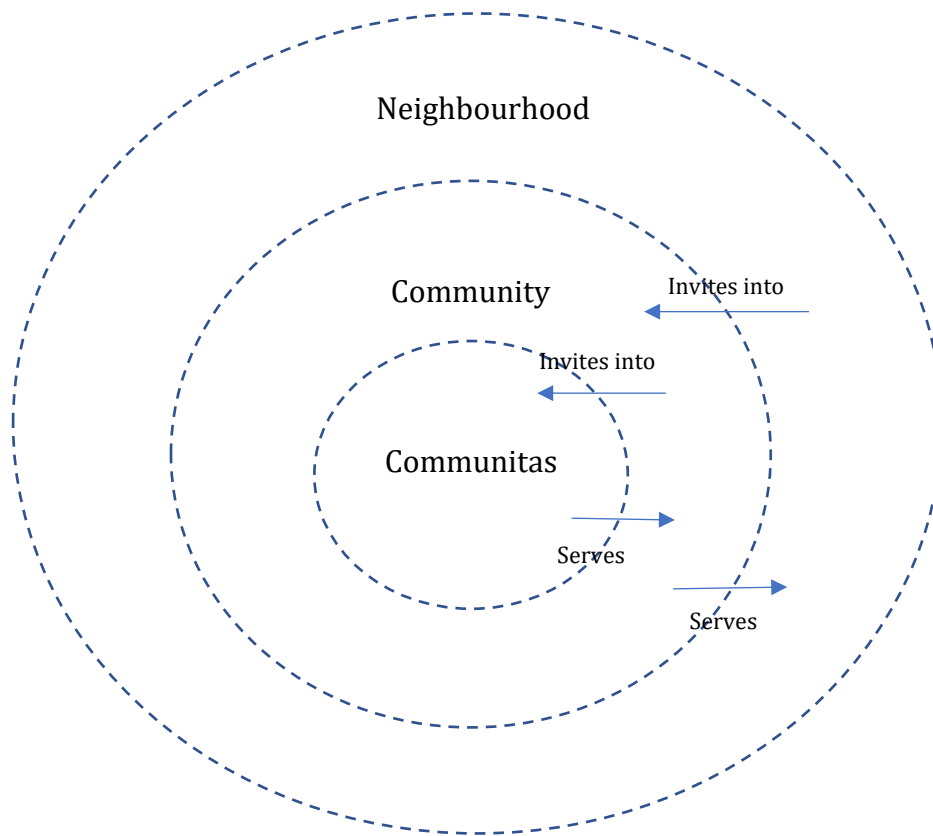
The following diagram shows the relationship as one of mutual support and partnership.



Hospitality and Community: authenticity, love, prayer, hospitality

The fundamental expression of the hub revolves around *oikonomia*, a household economy that extends a radical hospitality. The Shalom Hub is not just a place of activity, but a community built around the presence of God extending the invitation into the life of God. It is to be a sacrament of God's love in the world; a sign of the in-breaking presence of the alternative reign of God on the earth; and a subversive resistance to the dehumanising and the impersonal nature of the prevailing culture.

I imagine three porous circles of community, porous because people will move freely between these communities, or the disciplines that form these communities. I have based these circles on Fitch's three disciplines as explained in his book "Faithful Presence : Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission."⁹⁶ Each circle serves the circle around it, and each invites into the shared life and hospitality generated within it.



To describe the first circle I have used the term "communitas," a term borrowed from Victor Turner's anthropological studies, describing a deep sense of bond and shared life that arises from a common experience or pursuit of a cause."⁹⁷ This vigorous community has come together as a group with a mission that lies beyond themselves and thus initiating a risky journey. The members have taken on the gospel to the extent that they have given up safety and security, comfort and convenience to take on the adventure of God's call.⁹⁸ The group will test the principle that when a small, committed

⁹⁶ David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove, UNITED STATES: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 40, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=4783919>.

⁹⁷ Allan Effa, "Missional Voices down under: A Canadian Response to the Missiology of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch," *Missiology* 38, no. 1 (January 2010): 68.

⁹⁸ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2006), 25.

group of Christians lives faithfully in a neighbourhood, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God really does come on earth.⁹⁹

Ideally, if the hub has the capacity, it will accommodate the group to co-live on site. This has a practical dimension because the “household” of the hub will require significant attention, and needs to be able to offer hospitality to whoever needs it at any time. Co-living, however, also enables the group to develop a common life and discipline that it shares with the next circle, extending a continual invitation into that life.

The second circle is the community life of the hub as it interacts with the neighbourhood. This space is represented as a dotted circle because, even though this space is still defined by a circle of committed followers of Jesus, there is space for neighbours and strangers to enter in and watch what God is doing in this circle. This is where the community life of the church is demonstrated to the invited neighbourhood, and where formation and outreach can occur. Here the church offers a radical hospitality that enables people to feel that they belong, but also opens space for people to encounter Christ. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.¹⁰⁰ A primary motif at this level is that the kingdom of God is a party, and the shared meal is the key discipline that forms this community.

The Christian challenge is to live together in Christ’s kingdom and invite the world along.¹⁰¹ According to Fitch:

“It is through a visible social life ... that people can see what the reconciled, forgiven, and renewed life of the kingdom looks like. We need a discerning presence that comes from the close gatherings around the table and proclaiming gospel Without such communities, God’s witness will be limited to private, subjective, individual experiences. We need regular disciplines that shape us into God’s presence... It is therefore essential that individuals doing mission form organized communities of the kingdom in the world.”¹⁰²

Some possibilities that will be run out of the centre and hosted by local churches follow below. At the heart of each is a radical hospitality built around a shared meal. To be sustainable, however, this requires an economic model. The model is built around the following notions: (a) Economies of scale – it is less expensive to buy and cook in bulk than to do this separately. (b) Convenience – the meal is prepared; the shopping and

⁹⁹ Andrew Menzies and Dean Phelan, *Kingdom Communities: Shining the Light of Christ through Faith, Hope and Love* (Morning Star Publishing, 2018), 128.

¹⁰⁰ John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (Chicago; San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012), 113.

¹⁰¹ Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 182.

¹⁰² Ibid., 200.

cooking is all done. (c) Connection – as families get smaller and people move into units, there is less scope to entertain. The communal eating provides connection.

Sabbath long lunch

The Sabbath has been called one of the most subversive ideas brought into the ancient world. Walter Brueggemann demonstrates how subversive it was to Pharo's world of endless production and consumption.¹⁰³ The Sabbath is also subversive in today's world: "Brueggemann speaks to a 24/7 society of consumption, a society in which we live to achieve, accomplish, perform, and possess. We want more, own more, use more, eat more, and drink more. Keeping the Sabbath allows us to break this restless cycle and focus on what is truly important: God, other people, all life." "Sabbath is not simply a pause. It is an occasion for reimagining all of social life away from coercion and competition to compassionate solidarity.¹⁰⁴ "Sabbath is an arena in which to recognise that we live by gift and not by possession, that we are satisfied by relationships of attentive fidelity and not by amassing commodities."¹⁰⁵

The Sabbath is therefore not only a time to build community, but is a demonstration of the alternative economy where humans are placed above the consumer culture.

The hosted Sabbath long lunch would include curated conversations which will allow people to go deeper, share their story and become known. It may feature guest speakers from the community based on their giftings that offer a point of conversation and reflection. It may include entertainment and the arts from local artisans. Through economies of scale and with the support of volunteers, those on the margins can be invited into the shared meal for free. This is not welfare, this is inviting our neighbour into the life of the community.

Sharing the kerygma, open space for encounter: Alpha

The ministry of Alpha is built around a shared meal. Often churches do not have the resources or infrastructure to run an Alpha, and people's homes may not accommodate the numbers. The Shalom Hub would have the all the facilities to run an Alpha. But there are also benefits when local churches get together to run Alpha. In 2015 three churches in Melbourne's Inner West collaborated to run Alpha in their community. By 2018 five churches were involved.¹⁰⁶ They found that there was a multiplier effect in terms of promotional spread and reach and benefits in terms of training and shared leadership. The Shalom Hub would allow churches to host a table at a combined Alpha.

¹⁰³ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, New edition. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Pr, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰⁶ Alpha Australia, *What Happens When Different Local Churches Run Alpha Together?*, 2019, accessed February 19, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/318111238>.

A combined Alpha would also be a demonstration of the Kingdom to the neighbourhood as it brings the denominations together in combined witness.

Discipleship and formation

The hospitality can extend to supporting other discipleship formation groups, connect groups, mens'¹⁰⁷ and womens' groups, etc. All of it goes to support what St Paul discovered everywhere he walked: that when followers of Jesus were sharing life together and living in the midst of the everyday realities of a particular place, there was a vibrancy and growing maturity to their faith.¹⁰⁸ A radical hospitality supports the conviction that humans are meant to share life together, to learn to fit together as a living body in relationship with God, with one another, and for the place to which they are called.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, that when followers of Jesus share life together in a particular place they become much greater than the sum of their parts,¹¹⁰ and the parish becomes a platform for a whole new way of being the church.¹¹¹ "Rather than being a voluntary association, a chaplain to society or vendor of religious goods and services, ... the church becomes an alternative community which witnesses by living differently."¹¹²

It must be stressed that doing mission is not separate from formation and community, and our own need for continual formation and discipleship: Mission is held in tension with our own need for the Spirit to transform our life.¹¹³ God's plan is to become present to the world in and through a people, and then invite the world to join with him.¹¹⁴ We participate in his work in the world, and his presence becomes visible. The world then sees God's presence among us and through us and joins in with God. And the world is changed.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ It has been near impossible to find a place for a men's group in Coorparoo to meet for discussion and prayer on a Sunday morning that also served breakfast, and offered a semi private area with audio visual equipment.

¹⁰⁸ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 23.

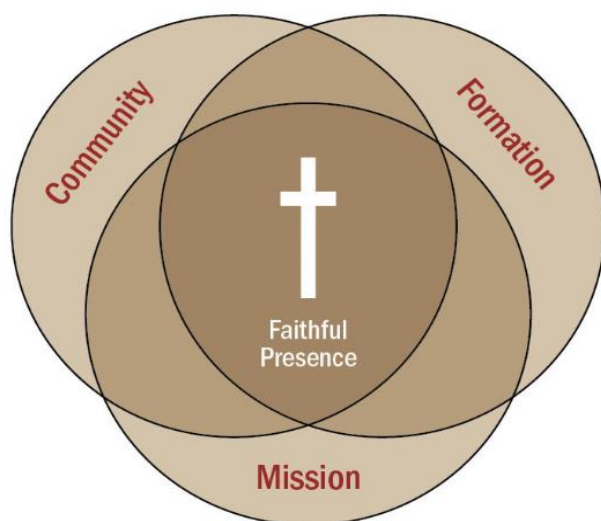
¹¹² Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now," 56.

¹¹³ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 82.

¹¹⁴ Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 26.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Sparks et al advise that community, formation and mission are not separate, but happen together, and the overlap represents God's vision for human flourishing.¹¹⁶



Community focuses on developing a common life together in the way of Christ. This includes knowing and being known by God and one another. It also means recognizing that each person has unique gifts to bring to the life of the body.

Formation has to do with developing the practices and postures that shape us into mature people of faith both personally and collectively.

Mission is bearing witness to the love of Jesus and the reign of God. It is joining the Spirit's movement in the neighbourhood and seeking the reconciliation and renewal of all things. "The church is only the church when it exists for others."

Café

The Café acts a welcoming third place while also supporting the hub as a legitimate business. It fits strategically with the bookshop, library, gym, co-working space, and raises the asset utilisation of the hospitality catering kitchen. A couple of models serves as the inspiration for possibilities with the Café: L!VE café in Oak Park, Illinois, and STREAT in Melbourne.

Some quotes from L!VE's website will give a picture of what is possible:

"L!VE is a transformational experience café that leverages an artisanal, destination coffee experience towards community development and human transformation. With an intentional eye towards blurring the lines and divisions between communities like Oak Park and Austin, L!VE sets out to create a quality coffee experience, while also being intentional about curating experiences that allow people to get to know each other and do life together who might otherwise not have the opportunity to do so.

With a heart for people and a passion for entrepreneurial innovation, L!VE serves as a hub for coming together, resting in tensions, practicing failure, and living in community with grace and room at the table for all. So, let's do a little living together; we want to L!VE with you!

While more people are drinking coffee socially throughout the day, there are fewer opportunities to do so in a way that allows cultural coffee drinkers to engage in relationships and community, especially in the Austin/Oak Park communities. L!VE café

¹¹⁶ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 86.

will leverage the success of the “recession proof” coffee industry, while creating access to people who use coffee as a means by which to build relationships and discover transformation in and through community. We are a boutique coffeehouse company that focuses on transformation through social innovation, experience, and enterprise.”¹¹⁷

STREAT is a Melbourne café chain that, while serving good coffee, offers disadvantaged youth aged 16-25 a supported pathway from the street to a sustainable livelihood.¹¹⁸

We often work towards developing drop-in centres for the homeless, and rightly so. But often some of the most socially isolated people are those in their homes. The focus for the café and hub is to be a drop-in centre for everybody. We don't need to wait until someone is homeless before forming intentional community. We need to support all people in their mental health and well-being and prevent people becoming disadvantaged while also connecting those disadvantaged into the wider community.

Gym and the celebration of the physical

As described in a previous section, in contrast to Platonism, Christianity celebrates and values embodiment and the physical. Spiritual, mental and physical health are interrelated.

Fostering community, as we have seen, has clear and positive impacts on members' health and well-being even when the social support of a network is not based on fitness or wellness. Belger, in her book “The Power of Community: CrossFit and the Force of Human Connection” describes how the phenomenon of crossfit has benefitted people through facilitating the human drive to bond with others and helping find a safe place of connection. Crossfit gyms seem to develop a higher level of connectedness that eludes many parish communities, partly because of the shared experience of vulnerability, primal physicality, risk-taking and discomfort, and the mutual support through all of this develops closer links between people.¹¹⁹

The aim of the Shalom Hub will be to break the notion that “God” is only interested in one's “spiritual health.” It will be open to everyone: a place to bring people together in shared experience and connection, while improving people's quality of life through exercise.

¹¹⁷ L!VE Exclamation via PeopleVine, “L!VE Café - Oak Park, IL,” accessed January 31, 2019, <https://livexclamation.com/>.

¹¹⁸ “STREAT | Tastes Good, Does Good,” accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.streat.com.au/>.

¹¹⁹ Allison Wenglin Belger, *The Power of Community: Crossfit and the Force of Human Connection*, Original ed. edition. (Las Vegas: Victory Belt Pub, 2012), 12.

One of the greatest effects on quality of life as we age is the loss of physical strength and all its associated problems: the loss of muscle mass, bone mineral loss and osteoporosis, hip fractures (a terminal event for many older people), loss of balance and coordination, diabetes, heart disease related to a sedentary lifestyle, and the loss of independence.¹²⁰ Our exercise prescription/training program must specifically and effectively combat what Dr Sullivan calls the Sick Aging Phenotype: metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, sarcopenia, osteopenia, and loss of strength, function and mobility.¹²¹ The criteria for our exercise program is contained in the side box.

Social capital through physicality – wholeness and wellness

The emphasis on the whole person is supported by the gospel of new creation, but appears to be a rare thing. Mental health programs such as Grow's¹²² often don't include the wider community and physical aspects. Studies show that exercise has positive benefits for people with addictive disorders now in recovery. Regular exercise appears to mitigate many risk factors commonly contributing to addictive tendencies, including depression, anxiety, and stress.¹²³

The hope would be for the Shalom Hub to partner with organisation like Grow to offer infrastructure and support through community and exercise. In this sense it could adopt practices and lessons from the Mercy Street church in creating a shame-free sacred space where the Christian community becomes a safe and helpful place for

Our exercise medicine must be **safe**.

Our exercise medicine must have a **wide therapeutic window**, meaning it should be available in a broad range of effective doses, from low at the beginning of therapy to higher doses as we get healthier.

Our exercise medicine must be **comprehensive**. Our exercise prescription should be as integrated and complete as possible.

Our exercise prescription must **specifically and effectively combat the Sick Aging Phenotype**: It should attack the metabolic syndrome, reduce visceral fat, arrest or reverse sarcopenia and osteopenia, and fight frailty by retaining or restoring strength, power, endurance, mobility, balance, and function. Ideally, it should also reduce the requirements for additional medication (polypharmacy).

Our exercise prescription should be **efficient and as simple** as possible.

The prescription must be **practical, accessible, and time-efficient**. This will promote compliance, enjoyment, and long-term success.

¹²⁰ Jonathon M. Sullivan and Andy Baker, *The Barbell Prescription: Strength Training for Life After 40*, First edition. (Wichita Falls, Texas: The Aasgaard Company, 2016).

¹²¹ Ibid., sec. 1590.

¹²² "Grow - Community Based Mental Health Support | A Proven Program for Mental Wellbeing," n.d., accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.grow.org.au/>.

¹²³ Belger, *The Power of Community*, 189.

people in recovery.¹²⁴ We need to regain and reclaim a deep sense of vulnerability and be a place where people can process their pain.

Co-Working space

With the digital age and the 'gig economy', people are no longer tied to a desk, or even a building as they do their work. However, people do miss being part of a vibrant work community, and the serendipitous interactions required for motivation in the start-up space. Hence the rise of the co-working space such as Fishburners, River City Labs; Salt Space etc.¹²⁵

Salt Space is a vibrant community of coworking freelancers, creatives, companies and remote workers.¹²⁶

Co-working spaces are mostly clustered in the inner city or close to it. They are not focussed on a neighbourhood. The offering of the hub will be coworking space for the neighbourhood, and will support neighbourhood interaction and work for neighbourhood development coming out of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and local design, innovation and entrepreneurship as described below.

A platform and catalyst for neighbourhood transformation - ABCD

Andre Van Eymeren in his book 'Building Communities of the Kingdom' presents an argument for Asset Based Community Development in local communities as a practical expression of the Kingdom's advance. "The process of ABCD is one that the Church can lead in any local community. It recognises the value and worth of each individual, and encourages them to share their skills and gifts with the whole community."¹²⁷

It is proposed that local churches, supported by Shalom Hub, become an organizing agent¹²⁸ and catalyst for neighbourhood transformation. It would do this by using the methodology of ABCD, grounded in Kingdom theology, as a framework for engagement with local communities."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ "Creating Shame-Free Sacred Spaces – Matt Russell," *Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry*, last modified November 13, 2014, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.fullerinstitute.org/creating-shame-free-sacred-spaces-matt-russell/>.

¹²⁵ A review of Brisbane's coworking spaces can be found here:

<https://thecontentdivision.com.au/blog/brisbanes-best-coworking-spaces/>

¹²⁶ "Salt Space Is a Coworking Space in New Farm | Salt Space," accessed February 13, 2019, <https://saltspace.com.au/our-coworking-space/>.

¹²⁷ Van Eymeren, "The Kingdom of Communities," 83.

¹²⁸ McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 109.

¹²⁹ Van Eymeren, "The Kingdom of Communities," 7.

Put simply ABCD is a process, developed by Kretzman and McKnight, for the empowerment of whole communities through the utilising of strengths within that community.¹³⁰

Van Eymeran describes Kretzman and McKnight's five-step process that outlines how a whole community can be mobilised to better meet its own needs¹³¹ (see box for the five steps which begins with an intensive mapping exercise that includes the interviewing of individuals and the creation of a skills registry, indicating what people are willing to offer into the community.¹³²)

Asset-based development contrasts to needs-based development; the central idea is to approach transformation in our neighbourhoods by identifying and connecting the dreams and assets of the people, associations and institutions that are already there.¹³³

Two important aspects come out of ABCD. The first is supporting people in the identification and nurturing of gifts. The second is that it will uncover many social entrepreneurship ideas that could be nurtured through a design and innovation process. Both of these aspects are expanded on below.

Identify, develop and harness gifts

One of the distinctive differences between the early Christians and the Classical world was the notion of many gifts within one body. In keeping with the new creation gospel, it is important for the hub to help churches identify, develop and harness the gifts and talents of everyone in the service of others. Quite a number of tools and formats are available for identifying gifts and strengths, for example: Clifton Strengths finder; 5Q; the Eneagram; Called and Gifted; etc. The hub could use these tools to help individuals in their calling and purpose, and also help parish and church teams in team formation and development.

Given the aging population, a particular role the hub could adopt would be to provide a platform for those on the second-half of life towards realising their purpose, working

Step 1: The development of an asset map that recognises and values the skills and contributions of individuals, associations and institutions within a geographic community.

Step 2: Relationship building between assets, particularly including strangers, or the marginalised within a community.

Step 3: Creative approaches to using skills to stimulate the local economy, with a focus on helping the community become self reliant. Step 3 also includes being aware of and informing the information flow within a community.

Step 4: A process of community vision and planning, where there is basic consensus on solutions to community issues.

Step 5: The use of outside expertise, in the context of the development of genuine partnerships with that expertise, as opposed to being passive recipients.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹³¹ Ibid., 72.

¹³² Ibid., 66.

¹³³ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 130.

towards community transformation and supporting those on the first curve. There is great potential for the neighbourhood to mentor the next generation: to engage elders noted for wisdom and experience who can be sought for advice, help, support and direction.¹³⁴

Design, Innovation and entrepreneurship

As discussed above, the biblical worldview and the classical worldview had very different attitudes to change. It has been argued that one of the gifts of the Judean-Christian heritage to the world was the ability to imagine a new future and work towards change and transformation. Design and innovation are part of the 'grammar' of the Christian, so much so that Tom Sine suggests a radical proposal for followers of Jesus—that all of life is a “design opportunity!”¹³⁵ Can the church be intentional about being a social laboratory for the sake of the world? It has the diverse community, which models the needs of the wider society, and it has the giftings, love and relationships to do so. Human Centred Design offers the methodology for this to take place.

'Human Centred Design' and 'Design thinking', as a field of academic exploration, came out of Stanford University,¹³⁶ from which a consulting arm emerged called IDEO.¹³⁷ Essentially, “human-centred design” is a unique approach to innovation that focuses first on the people to be served—whether by a corporation, a humanitarian organisation, or a social enterprise.¹³⁸

The Shalom Hub could offer a sandpit and training ground in the 'human-centred design' methodology to nurture social innovation and train people in the design methodology. The Hub community would be an incubator of new ventures requiring empathy and love to address issues for a better world. If the Kingdom of God applies to all of life and supporting God's renewal of creation, then supporting local and social entrepreneurship with investment capital, wisdom and mentoring, along with an incubator community for testing and iteration, all fall within the church's mandate.

A potential model and partner in this area is SEED.¹³⁹ SEED describes its role as follows:

“We help individuals and organisations create things (products, services, strategies, businesses) that show the world what Jesus is like. Our distinctive approach to design is deeply embedded in the Christian story and effective for achieving positive social change. Through thought leadership, training, incubators and consulting we help design

¹³⁴ R. Paul Stevens, *Aging Matters: Finding Your Calling for the Rest of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2016), 17.

¹³⁵ Tom Sine and Walter Brueggemann, *Live Like You Give a Damn!: Join the Changemaking Celebration* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 28.

¹³⁶ <https://dschool.stanford.edu/>

¹³⁷ <https://www.ideo.com/about>

¹³⁸ Sine and Brueggemann, *Live Like You Give a Damn!*, 40.

¹³⁹ “Seed,” *Seed*, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.seed.org.au/>.

solutions to some of society's most pressing problems and contribute to a world where all people enjoy the fullness of life God intends."¹⁴⁰

The hub could also partner with tertiary institutions such as ACU, Alphacrucis, Christian Heritage College etc and provide an arena for training and experiencing the innovation process and social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The cover page of this submission has a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. By now it should be apparent that the 'ship' has parallels with the church, and the 'yearning for the wide boundless ocean' has parallels with the imagination and the transformative effects of the gospel. This is the gospel that unleashed a "'revolution': a truly massive and epochal revision of humanity's prevailing vision of reality, so pervasive in its influence and so vast in its consequences as actually to have created a new conception of the world, of history, of human nature, of time, and of the moral good." What God is asking of us in Australia at this time, first and foremost, is to announce to the world this gospel, that Jesus is Lord and has inaugurated new creation. This will once again fire the imagination of the church and unleash its cruciform missional impulse; to give of itself for the life and transformation of the world. This starts in the particular and mundane – in the local neighbourhood.

In summary, what I think God is asking of us in Australia at this time is:

Level 1: For the church **institution**, to rebuild trust.

Level 2: For **parishes**, to become missional communities by facilitating encounter and the forming and nurture of missional disciples.

Level 3: For each of the first 2 levels to support this: To be an **eschatological community**; an anticipatory sign of the in-breaking presence of the alternative reign of God and foretaste of the kingdom, and to participate in the renewal of all things: the restoration and redemption of creation with all that entails: table fellowship, community, culture, economics, agriculture and animal husbandry, art, architecture, worship.

To be a **catalyst of community and neighbourhood transformation**. Empower whole communities through the utilising of strengths within that community - to help everyone make our neighbourhoods places of belonging, places of health and well-being, and places where people will want to live and work.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

To **demonstrate an alternative economy** which witnesses by living differently. To demonstrate a different social order that is a subversive resistance to the dehumanising and the impersonal nature of the prevailing culture.

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