REACHING OUT BEYOND ITSELF
A Framework for Understanding the Community Service Involvement of Local Church Congregations

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Australia
The Church’s vocation in each and every locality is to be a worshipping, healing, learning, serving community, faithfully living by the values of the kingdom, modelling and embodying a counter-cultural vision, looking and reaching out beyond itself with a wider vision, to discover the light and love of God in engagement with the life of the world, standing up and speaking out against all that diminishes and disempowers humanity. In so doing it will dream and explore, it will be open, flexible and ready to take risks; it will be generous, hospitable and ready to celebrate; it will not be a ghetto but keen to cooperate and engage; it will be a transforming community – influencing others for good, and being transformed itself in the process; it will be resilient and persistent, however hard the way and it will be marked by joy and an eagerness to celebrate.

Quoted from
Norman Shanks, 1999,
Iona - God's Energy: The Spirituality and Vision of the Iona Community,
Abstract

Historically, religious congregations and other church organisations have had a long involvement in the provision of community services in English-speaking societies. Nonetheless, despite the development since the 1950’s of extensive government provision, the growth of large church-sponsored agencies, and the advent of secular community services, there is reason to believe the trend for congregational involvement persists. However, there is also reason to believe that provision of services by congregations is not well understood, an issue of more significance in view of recent policy shifts, especially in the US and UK, promoting an increasing emphasis on government support for welfare service delivery by these “pervasively sectarian” groups. Within the Australian setting little is known about the contribution of local religious congregations to the provision of local community services, although limited data from the 1996 National Church Life Survey indicates in excess of 65% of congregations claim some local community involvement.

Recognising the international context and the present lack of knowledge of congregational community activity in Australia, this thesis seeks to examine congregational community service provision more closely. Initially it reviews the recognition of congregational community involvement in Australian community research and, finding that very limited, it then examines the congregational research from the US and UK. Although more extensive, that research remains limited in its consideration of how and why congregations get involved in community services. The thesis then uses a qualitative research methodology, known as grounded theory, to study congregational community service activity through the thematic analysis of data obtained on the experiences in these settings of a small group of social welfare professionals, and the involvement of a small number of Australian congregations. Based on this analysis, a framework is proposed for understanding how these congregational services are developed, sustained and changed. This framework is extensively elaborated through linking it to the data upon which it is based.

In light of this framework, the thesis finally argues that these services need to be better recognised as a part of local community service delivery, and better understood with regard to how they work. Key insights drawn from this framework suggest it is potentially useful to congregations involved in providing services, social workers working in or consulting with congregations, central church agencies supporting and partnering congregations, and others associated with social policy involving such services, despite these being secondary to the religious activities of congregations.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises my own original work towards the PhD;

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used: and

iii. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of acknowledgements, preface, tables, figures, bibliography and appendices.

Signed

Ian A. Bedford

27 Jan 2004
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I suspect one of the most frequently heard comments about the experience of tackling a PhD is the sense of loneliness that many report as intrinsic to the task. In the academic sense that certainly has been my experience over the past nine years during which I have been exploring the research reported here. In the early stages of this research Wendy Weeks, one of the senior staff in the School of Social Work at Melbourne University, commented that my research topic didn’t have a local “critical mass” of people with whom to share it; and she was right. Unlike my 12 month experience of research in Upper Atmospheric Physics many decades ago, this time I was not a member of an overlapping research team and did not have mentors who had researched aspects of the area before me. My colleagues undertaking other PhDs and the research staff within the School of Social Work were not addressing related matters. I was, as far as I knew, breaking new ground at least as far as research in Australia was concerned, and especially within social work, for no serious attention appeared to have been paid previously to the role of church congregations in local community service delivery. As the literature review shows, some research on the nature of congregations in Australia had occurred, but my focus on this dual area of community services and congregations was apparently without precedent.

Surviving the PhD process has therefore not been easy – and that succinctly is why the project has taken double the time it should have taken. Needless to say, that I am now at this point having seemingly survived, is a matter for grateful “Thanks”, albeit which I express here most inadequately. It is needful to first acknowledge the support of Elizabeth Ozanne as my academic supervisor throughout this extended process. Whilst at times I’m sure Elizabeth must have felt exasperated by my slow progress, she never gave up believing I could do it (even when I had!), and never undermined my struggling efforts with sharp criticisms of my inadequate progress (as I hear some PhD students experience from their supervisors). For the pervasive encouragement of that belief, an encouragement I really only came to appreciate as I neared the end of this process, I say “Thanks”. There was also Elizabeth’s strong sense that what I was researching related to aspects of non-profit organisations and so, through introducing me to the Australian and New Zealand Third Sector Research (ANZTSR) group, she also introduced me to the US-based Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA). Through ARNOVA members attending my initial ANZTSR Conference, I encountered the ARNOVA journal* and, subsequently, their email list, and discovered the growing interest in researching congregational community service involvement in the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK. For those links I was most grateful. Through the “magical” world of email with its instant communication with large numbers of people, and its capacity to exchange documents (so long as the formats were compatible!), together with the relative speed of air and rail travel, I discovered in that community the previously unimagined “critical mass” of researchers that I had not located in Australia.

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* Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly.
Wineburg in Greensboro NC each provided amazingly generous hospitality to this stranger from “down under”, about whom they knew nothing except what a few emails revealed. Their friendly generosity placed a whole new perspective on Americans for me; and their willingness to discuss the issues of congregational community involvement from their own personal and professional experience was more than I had even wildly imagined. My efforts here are much the richer for these opportunities to share and stay with them.

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Another major “Thank You” must go to those 29 anonymous people who agreed to allow me to interview them at length for the primary data for this research. They, and the other members of the three congregations who informally chatted to me to help “fill me in”, were generous with their time and interest. I’m only sorry it’s taken so
long to give shape to what I was able to learn from them. I trust in all I’ve done to analyse the richness and frankness of their spontaneous responses I have given new insight into the issues they raised whilst remaining faithful to the substance of what they shared. It seems trite, yet so true, to say that without them this thesis would not exist.

I must also thank my ever tolerant and faithful family, Cameron, Amanda, Kylie and Adam, and my greatest supporter and confidant Judy (who was also my long-suffering “tour guide” on my first US trip and my UK visit), who allowed me to inject extended uncertainty into their lives as I tackled this “left field” task, who put up with my frequent ambivalences about it much more than anyone else, and with more patience and persistence than anyone else required. Words are not enough to say “Thanks”. Hopefully this piece of work constructively adds just a little to a practical understanding of the way our real-life congregations can go about being God’s Light and Life in this hurting world, and this will be the “Thanks” that makes ultimate sense. For it was with that purpose in mind, in commitment to that faith, that this research was primarily undertaken.

I cannot close without acknowledging the support of the Commonwealth Government of Australia through the funding provided for the Australian Postgraduate Scholarship awarded to me by the University of Melbourne to help meet my family’s living expenses during much of the time this research has been undertaken. Although this Scholarship was never able to support the expenses of a mature-age student with a range of diverse family responsibilities, without it this research would never have been tackled.

In addition I acknowledge the efforts made by Guin Threlkeld to provide me blocks of time for thesis writing, and the support of my other colleagues, in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University’s Albury-Wodonga Campus, to which I returned in the final stages of this project. It was this support that finally enabled this drawn out project to reach its completion – “Thank You”.

Finally, I express particular appreciation to my long-time friend, Geoff Leunig, who meticulously worked through each sentence of this thesis to help ensure it read more easily. I’m sure this was something of a daunting exercise, given my tendency to generate long and convoluted sentences – and he even volunteered for the challenge!

As a last comment, I note with a sense of awe that this thesis even exists. Throughout its writing I struggled to articulate the many ideas and understandings that swirled around my head in incomplete form, feeling incapable of finding words or coherence that could adequately encompass them, let alone doing so succinctly enough to be intelligible within the word limit. That this thesis exists at all is testimony to the grace of the Creator’s Spirit working within each of us, enabling us to achieve goals that reach beyond our own human capacities. For that I am more grateful than I can say.

Ian Bedford

27 January 2004
Preface

My faith as a Christian has always been important to me throughout my social work career. Indeed the challenges of social work have led me to new and fundamental understandings of the call of God to any who seek to live in obedience to this call. Issues of social justice and concern for the oppressed came starkly into view as features of a biblical understanding of this call, along-side and integrated with challenges of personal commitment and community worship. Consequently a quest to explore the links and tensions between my professional and my faith journeys has always been a “given” in my personal agenda.

Hence it should be no surprise that, whilst tackling a Community Work assignment in the final stage of my initial qualification in Social Work, I felt drawn to examine a dream raised within a nearby local church congregation to initiate a Crisis Care Centre for the wider community. Based on the social planning and community development literature of the day, my assignment outlined a strategy whereby this local church could pursue “appropriate implementation of this idea”\(^1\). Within the context of the assignment there was no assumption that the congregation itself would directly own or operate this service. However the approach identified clearly reflected one particular form of congregational involvement in local community service provision. And so began my fascination with congregations providing local community services.

Since then four experiences have raised issues for me about how “appropriate implementation” of this type of involvement might be achieved. As it turned out, my first 11 years of social work practice occurred in congregationally-related settings. For the first 6 years I was employed as a family counsellor in one of five divisions of a congregationally-based Welfare Agency in a large, outer-suburban public housing estate\(^2\). At that time the position was funded through the contributions of other congregations and the general community, although other divisions within the Agency received government funding. Whilst there I frequently felt that I did not communicate effectively with the Management Committee about the issues raised by work in such a setting. I was troubled that even my annual reports seemingly went unread. Yet, having become a member of the congregation within which this program was physically located, I maintained a strong identification with the ideals which I understood had initiated this community service.

Subsequently I moved to a provincial town in another state and, for 5 years, coordinated the establishment of a new Family Support Service for a different denomination. Whilst this Service was formally auspiced by the central church body and funded primarily from investments earmarked for this purpose\(^3\), its initial focus for service delivery was the provincial town itself, within which there were 5

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\(^1\) Quoted from the introduction to my assignment paper titled “A Program for Planning a Crisis Care Centre” submitted to the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne, July 1976.

\(^2\) More accurately this Agency was parish-based, where one congregation was the actual location of four of the services and 4 additional, surrounding congregations (3 of which were outside the public housing estate) all comprised the parish. One of these congregations was in a middle-class area and it provided most of the committee members for the Agency’s programs.

\(^3\) Approximately 25% of this Service’s funds were provided via a government grant; 50% came from funds derived from the closure of the denomination’s local children’s substitute care institution, with the rest obtained through local fund-raising.
parishes (and 7 congregations). The issues which here arose for me related not only to my sense of the limited support from most members of the Management Committee (who in the main seemed to see their role as fundraising) but also from the limited involvement within the Service of members of the local congregations, including the congregation in which I and my family were active.

My third experience of congregational community services arose when, after taking up employment unrelated to churches in yet another provincial location, I accepted an invitation to join the Management Committee of a Care Service being developed by the congregation I then attended, and funded by a bequest left for this purpose. Initially, as I implemented my ideas (born of my past experience) about supportive committee involvement with the staff and the programs, a sense of team-work developed. However after almost 3 years I left that Committee when staff-committee difficulties arose concerning the staff’s autonomous use of certain funds designated for other purposes.

Some years later a fourth experience furthered my desire to understand the processes for developing congregational community services. At that time I had joined an outer suburban congregation whose members encouraged me to facilitate the development of new and more involving community service responses within their congregation. Whilst initially a group of about 20 members expressed interest in this process, I found active involvement hard to obtain, and commitment to action all but impossible. It seemed there was an implicit assumption that they would attend meetings to hear my suggestions and support my actions on those ideas. In fact I did neither, taking instead a stance that the ideas needed to arise from the congregation through its concern for its community, and that my role was to support them in developing their collective action. Apart from a few brief responses, the process quietly died after 12 months when I was no longer available and the people who volunteered to take the proposal further did not do so for various personal and contextual reasons.

Whilst my own role in the problems encountered in each of these four experiences of congregational community involvement cannot be left unchallenged, the larger issue is the identified lack of any systematically developed knowledge about the unique features of congregational community service involvements, despite these activities apparently being such wide-spread features of congregational and community life. There appeared to be little understanding of what they were trying to do. Indeed the models that were brought to them seemed to derive more from anecdotal reports of other church projects, from theological perspectives, or from the management models of private enterprise. Hence, when in later professional study I was challenged to consider how congregationally sponsored community services might accurately be understood as human service organisations⁴, I identified a need for research to systematically explore the issues and processes experienced by congregations as they developed and implemented responses to their perception of wider community needs. It is with the hope of contributing a little to a better understanding of these issues and processes, which in turn can then lead to more effective development and operation of congregational community services, that this research project has been undertaken.

⁴ This issue was explored in a paper titled “Organisational Factors Influencing the Involvement of Locality-Based Church Groups in Direct Service Delivery” submitted to the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne, June 1993.
Introduction

In his Foreword to the book, *Issues Facing Australian Families: Human Services Respond* 3rd Edition (Weeks & Quinn 2000), Brian Howe, a Uniting Church clergymen, public policy academic, and former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, states that “the churches remain very important intermediate organisations and...play a prominent role in most communities and many social networks” (p.xxi). Whilst making this comment to counter an assertion by his former parliamentary colleague, Mark Latham, that “Australia has not accumulated a tradition of intermediate organisations bridging the work of citizenry and state” (Latham 1998, p.288), Howe’s comment presents more as an aside not directly related to the thrust of the book which contains it. Howe bases his assertion on research attributed to Mark Lyons who identified that Australia’s 113,500 incorporated (i.e. legally registered, though in diverse ways) nonprofit organisations employed around 6.5% of Australia’s labour force (570,000 employees), had an annual expenditure of $AU26.5b (5.4 % GDP in 1995-96, 30% of which came from government grants) and, on a per capita basis, approximated the more recognised US nonprofit sector (Lyons 1999). In particular Howe noted that churches “auspiced” a “large share” of this sector. When collating the statistics as Lyons did, it is easy to overlook the contribution of church-related bodies to this “intermediate” or nonprofit sector of Australian society. However his article consistently mentions church-related or auspiced bodies in the education sector and, more pointedly for this discussion, in the community services sector, so giving the substance behind Howe’s comment.

As I will outline below (see Section 1.1 page 7), there is indeed a history of church-related initiative in the provision of community services in the development of white Australia, and even in the much-vexed provision for indigenous Australians. This is

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5 Howe’s comment actually includes the phrase “along with a range of non-Christian religions”. He offers no basis for identifying the role of such groups, and his sources likewise offer no substantiation of their inclusion. Whilst I do not in any way suggest non-Christian religious groups play no role as intermediate organisations, less is apparently known about them. In the literature that is later discussed in this thesis such groups are infrequently noted, even the better known ones such as Jewish Community Services. This may well say more about the western and Anglo-Celtic bias of the research cited than about the community activities of non-Christian groups. With my apologies to any Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu or other non-Christian readers, this is a limitation my own research was not in a position to redress.

6 Howe does not cite the specific reference, however it appears likely to be Mark Lyons’ chapter “Australia’s Nonprofit Sector” in *Year Book Australia, 1999* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999).
hardly a new phenomenon; rather Howe is right in asserting there is a tradition that Latham overlooks too easily. Whilst the book for which Howe writes the “Foreword” may well not give overt recognition to the church-related aspects of this tradition, he is nonetheless right that it continues to be a feature of modern community services that should not be ignored. To recognise something reflecting the contribution of religious congregations in the provision of community services is therefore, in part, the motivation behind this research.

The modern expression of church-related community services is more generally associated with central Church agencies such as Centacare, St Vincent de Paul Society, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service and Jesuit Social Service within the Catholic Church; the Salvation Army in its various guises; the network of services associated with the Anglican Church now known as Anglicare, and other Anglican associates like the Brotherhood of St Laurence; and the collective UnitingCare agencies of the Uniting Church (eg Kaldor, Dixon & Powell 1999 p. 67; Saltau 2000). The less well known religious associations of groups such as World Vision, Mission Australia and Melbourne City Mission represent different types of church-related agencies, ones the US might term “faith-based”, as they originate from a faith-related perspective but are not associated with any particular Christian denomination. These too reflect this tradition of church involvement in the community services.

However, in seeking to expand the substance of Howe’s assertion, a more basic contribution of churches to the provision of community services has been chosen as the focus of attention in this research; and that is the community service involvement of local church congregations. As shall become evident, this is an aspect of church contribution to social functioning that is rarely publicly recognised, and about which we seem to know little. Occasionally such activities do make the media, such as occurred in Melbourne in 2001, although the discussion gives very little insight into what congregations do and how they do it. As reported in Melbourne’s Age in June, a Uniting Church congregation publicly commented that patterns in the increased demand for emergency relief service suggested government was expecting churches to pick up deliberately unmet social needs, such as those of refugees (Wroe 2001):

7 As my location, and much of my experience, is based within the State of Victoria, it is acknowledged that many of the illustrative examples of community services are drawn from that area.
[A clergyman] also attributes the rise in demand for emergency relief to increasing drug dependence among young people and the lack of government support for refugees on temporary visas. “The government actually has a policy not to support them,” he says. “But that doesn’t remove the need. There is still the need. They are relying on churches and other agencies to pick that up.”

Another *Age* article in April raised concerns about the safety of congregational clergy and their families in the face of some people’s aggressive expectations for assistance after being referred by government income support offices (Birnbauer & Murphy 2001):

[One clergyman] has noticed a big increase recently in the number of people seeking help. “A lot of people tell us they’re being referred here by CentreLink, and they think they have a right to demand money,” he said. “The [central church leader] is considering writing to CentreLink asking them to stop referring people to churches”.

Both these media reports refer to normal local congregations with small emergency relief services, whose capacity to respond seems to be “presumed” by both government and those in need. This aspect of local church life and engagement with the community is part of what this research sets out to understand – What services do congregations provide? What motivates congregations to provide them? How do they provide them? What influences them? These are just some of the aspects of these less recognised activities of local church congregations.

Somewhat in contrast is the extensive publicity given, as a result of “scandal” accusations, to the congregationally-related community service of the Uniting Church’s Wesley Central Mission in Melbourne, thought to be one of the larger congregationally-related community services in Australia (Ellingsen 2000a). Whilst the issues that drew public attention were accusations that the Mission’s then Superintendent minister received a remuneration package more like that of a corporate executive than of a minister in the Uniting Church, and that he had authorised a $0.5m development for a supervised drug injection facility without due consultation with the community or the congregation, the trigger for this acrimony seemed to be a breakdown in relations between the Mission’s administration and its sponsoring congregation, Melbourne’s Wesley Church (Ellingsen 2000a; *The Age*, 14 Jul. 2000, editorial). This aspect was given more attention in the Uniting Church’s own newspaper report of the issues (Zeigler 2000):

“The tensions are palpable,” says the [secretary of the Wesley Church council]. “The mission’s directions, for example as outlined in the proposed corporate
plan, don’t seem to include the congregation. There’s been a real lack of [the superintendent minister] bringing issues to the congregation…If we ignore the congregation we might as well give up having church and just become a welfare agency. [The superintendent minister] doesn’t seem to understand this”, he says (p.8).

Whilst this publicity was far from affirming of this congregation’s community service, it reminded the community that such forms of congregational community involvement have existed for over 100 years and were generally accepted parts of the community service system. It also identified that certain values were presumed to be associated with them. Further it indicated that, if the relationship with the congregation was not better understood and addressed, changes in these Services’ could result in significant tensions between their existence as “an outworking” of their sponsoring congregation’s “life and witness”\(^8\), and their role in the community as professional welfare services.

In some ways it is not surprising that neither the people seeking assistance from these congregational services, the government officials referring people to them, or even the administrators of such large, congregationally-related agencies found the problems they did because little research appears to have been undertaken on this form of community service beyond some published histories, such as that of Wesley Central Mission itself (Howe & Swain 1993). Each of the persons mentioned in these media stories probably had only their own assumptions to work from regarding what congregationally-related community services were, how they worked, and what their attributes might be. It is not surprising therefore that, when government oversight and funding strategies query some churches’ “fragmented management structure”, the response is along the lines reported for the Uniting Church in Victoria which is said to be planning to consolidate its church-based community services away from local boards of management into a centralised governance council (Best 2003). Whilst this response is identified with “good governance”, it seems likely that it overlooks many other key aspects, such as the unique contribution brought by congregations associated with these local community services. Indeed a review by Kissane (2003) of this corporatising trend within church services raises concerns that taking on government efficiency agendas may risk the churches’ own capacities for

\(^8\) Attributed to the secretary of Wesley’s congregational elders (Ellingsen, 2000a).
enabling the altruism and quality relationships intrinsic to much of this community service work.

This corporatising trend can only occur if the process operates from inadequate understandings about the nature of local and congregationally generated community services. Nevertheless, that these exist at all, and this pressure for change is so apparent, remains one form of validation for Howe’s assertion that churches play a “prominent role in most communities”, even though the extent of community engagement remains uncertain.

This thesis therefore sets out first to explore what is known about local, congregationally-related community services, as opposed to central church-sponsored agencies or separate faith-related non-profit community services, and to then present some preliminary research on the processes by which congregations initiate, operate and modify these activities. From this it seeks to draw conclusions that will enable others in the community services industry, including social workers, and especially people who work within congregational activities, as well as members of the congregations who develop and support them, to better understand and relate to this form of church life and community service provision.
PART I – THE CONTEXT

1 Introducing the Research Focus

The rationale for congregational community services can be identified in many theological writings cutting across traditional denominational lines, and this would be one place to start an examination of this form of community service provision. However it is not the intention here to focus on the theological rationale for these visions of human social engagement. Indeed, that would be another complete thesis, as much has been written that endeavours to present a social theology able to justify to Christian and non-Christian alike that God is concerned about the human condition and that Christians have an obligation and a calling to respond (eg some recent expressions of this from Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Mennonite theologians are Ellul 1989 [1948]; Fox 1991; Gill 1990; Kraybill 1990; Leech 1981; Miranda 1977; Moberg 1972; Moltmann 1983; Stringfellow 1962 & 1973; Wolterstorff 1983; Yoder 1972). Rather the focus is a more practical one; that of considering what happens in the social world as an outworking of this enduring theme of socially relevant religion as it applies today in the social involvements of Christian congregations. To do this, I will briefly look first at the historical role of church social involvement in the development of the social and community service system as it exists today. I will then consider some broad features of the social welfare setting and the place of religious participation in it. This chapter will then finish with a clarification of the particular focus this research will pursue in the light of this context.

1.1 Religious Involvement in the History of Welfare

Any history of social welfare (and social work as its associated profession) begins with an acknowledgment of the influence of religion in its “prehistory” (Marty 1980). Welfare historians date the welfare era, in part, from the efforts by educated middle-class “charitable ladies” to promote social rehabilitation among the socially and morally degraded members of the Nineteenth Century working class in the industrial slums of England and USA (Chambers 1986; Jordon 1984; Leiby 1987; Munday 1986). And whilst it is evident that there was little uniformity of belief or purpose in the activities of these women and the clergy who became involved, it is
evident that some form of religious conviction was a key factor for them. For example, in England, Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer, was a Quaker; Octavia Hill, the slum reformer and co-founder of the Charity Organisation Society, a member of the Christian Socialists; and Samuel Barnett, the founder of the early settlement house, Toynbee Hall, was an Anglican cleric. In the USA, Jane Addams, the founder of Chicago’s Hull House and promoter of the US settlement house movement modelled on Toynbee Hall, was also a Quaker and, influenced by that viewpoint, her pacifist stance won her the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize.

It was only after the passing of this early era and the formalisation of social work as a separate "profession" that social work’s pervasive silence on issues of religion became the norm (Marty 1980). Jordan (1984) in fact argues that the Christian basis of the moral consensus of early social work dissolved in the face of the insights of Freud and Marx as their theories challenged accepted views on human motivation and social structures. The influence of these views on the training of welfare professionals moved the underpinnings of social work from the religious values of the Victorians to the “psychological profundities” initially of Freud, and the “political polemics”, initially of Marx (Jordan 1980, p.43f). Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie (1999) expand this logic when arguing that (1) belief in the priority of professional knowledge independent of religion and (2) the subsequent quest for a professional status for social work based on (3) empirical research, are some of the key “reasons for the rift” between social work and religious faith (p.70). Of course the link between religion and welfare was also not without its critics who viewed motivations for involvement as questionable, addressing some other religious or social agenda rather than the social well-being of those receiving the welfare service (Horsburgh 1988). The subsequent development of the welfare state and its associated bureaucracy (Jordan 1980) also assisted the progress to professional and secular welfare service delivery.

Welfare activity in Australia was, in this respect, similar to developments in England and America. As early as 1813, just 25 years after the original penal colony was established at Sydney Cove by the British Government, the New South Wales Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Benevolence in these Territories and Neighbouring Islands was established for “relieving the distressed and enforcing the sacred duties of Religion and Virtue in N.S.W.” (Dickey 1987,
With Governor Macquarie’s encouragement, this Society began dispensing “outdoor relief” in NSW and, by 1818, became the Benevolent Society of NSW with the religious, as opposed to the moral, goals dissipating. From 1828 onwards the NSW government provided funding for the Society’s work until about 70% of its income was from that source. In Melbourne a parallel development occurred with the founding of the Presbyterian Female Visiting Society in 1845 (Dickey 1987, p.37) just 10 years after it was settled. By 1851 this had become the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society which saw its role as providing food, clothing and necessities to the deserving poor of Melbourne. It too received government grants to assist its work, with this fast becoming the major source of its income. In 1854 the Melbourne City Mission was formed as a:

Non-denominational Christian Agency founded by people from various Christian denominations as an expression of their concern and desire to serve their fellow men and women in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, irrespective of religious beliefs, racial origin, class or gender” (Melbourne Citymission Annual Report 1994-1995).

In 1881 the Catholic parish-based laymen’s Society of St Vincent de Paul established its first Australian conference to support Catholic men in visiting and assisting the poor. Likewise, around the same time, the Salvation Army established itself in Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere in Australia and, by the time of the 1890’s depression, had found that its “social wing” was overtaking its evangelistic aims (Dickey 1987, p.66f). In 1887 the Melbourne branch of the non-sectarian but religiously motivated Charity Organisation Society was formed. As also developed in the UK and USA, it was through the “scientific assessment” practices and training work of this Society that what is now identified as the profession of “social work” evolved (Chambers 1986, p.5f; Kennedy 1985, pp.44 & 197f; Leiby 1987, p.768).

Whilst other non-sectarian charitable societies were also being formed in this era, historians repeatedly note that the religious connection was strong in one way or another. In Catholic charities this was evident through the work of the religious orders; in the case of organisations not directly church run, it was evident through church representatives participating on management committees. In particular, the “evangelical” Christian convictions of involved individuals were frequently noted features (Community Services Victoria 1992; Horsburgh 1988; Kennedy 1985; Swain 1996, 1997). However, more typically, church agencies continued to be
formed. Some were sponsored by central church bodies, such as the then Methodist Church’s inner city **Central Methodist Mission** in Melbourne in 1893 (Howe & Swain 1993), and the Anglican **Mission of St James and St John** Melbourne in 1919 (Swain 1997). Others began as local initiatives but quickly developed into central church agencies, such as the local Anglican bequests which established **St John’s Homes Canterbury** in 1921 and 1924 (Swain 1997). Yet others were established as separate bodies whilst retaining formal links with a particular denomination, for example the Anglican identified **Brotherhood of St Laurence** in 1933 (Swain 1997).

As is considered below, even though the 1960’s and 1970’s saw a “flourishing of community managed organisations” controlled by local people themselves (Lyons 1990), this pattern of church agency development continues to be a feature of Australian welfare to this day (eg Linossier 1994 provides evidence of this trend in the Uniting Church). Kaldor, Dixon & Powell (1999) assert that churches are Australia’s largest non-government providers of community services and that denominational estimates indicate Anglican and other Protestant churches spent about $AU1,000m in 1993 on their various welfare and community services (Kaldor, Bellamy & Moore 1995 p.39). Even though there were difficulties due to the inability to include collaborative structures where records were not centralised (eg the St Vincent de Paul Society with an income estimated at $AU114m), in its examination of **Charitable Organisations in Australia**, the Industries Commission (1995) identified the 50 largest charities of which 20 were identifiably related to central church bodies (one was Jewish, the rest Christian denominations) and 4 were publicly identified as non-denominational but religiously linked (i.e. faith-based). In 1993-94 these 24 organisations accounted for 52% (i.e. $AU820m) of the total income for just these 50 organisations. In addition at least 3 other bodies were thought to have had significant religious input at their foundation, even though that association is no longer overtly evident. Clearly these large groups do not cover all

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9 In an article in **The Sunday Age** in 2003, Kissane asserts that “In 1997-98…the non-government welfare sector that [churches] dominate accounted for $6.5 billion-worth of community services spending, 59% of the total” (Agenda p.1). She goes on to indicate that the Catholic Church and the Uniting Church, the two biggest, spent “well over a $1 billion a year” on welfare, that the Anglican Anglicare network spent half that, whilst the Salvation Army spent a third of it. Kissane does not identify the source of her figures.
church-related or faith-related community services in Australia, but they do indicate the significance of this church-related contribution to overall community services.

1.2 Trends in Welfare Activity

With federation of the Australian states in 1901, the Commonwealth Government also became involved in various aspects of welfare service delivery. One feature of this was the evolution of a Commonwealth government funded social security system that gradually displaced state involvement with income security. However the major source of government subsidy for the welfare organisations which had grown up remained the states, and these remained the main means for the delivery of welfare services (Dickey 1987).

A change during the 1960’s and 1970's saw the growth of new community-based structures for the delivery of services, especially within child care and neighbourhood centres. These were sometimes established to administer funds already allocated by the government, though on other occasions they developed independently under local initiative (Community Services Victoria 1992; Lyons 1990). This process gained a unique impetus in the mid 1970s through the briefly funded Commonwealth Government *Australian Assistance Plan* (Community Services Victoria 1992; Dickey 1987 p.176f) which sought to promote local decision-making about programs funded to meet local need. This development grew from increasing community activism which challenged Australia’s Vietnam involvement and, more significantly, which flowed from second-wave feminist enthusiasm for community development, particularly in promoting women’s services (Weeks 1994).

In contrast to the earlier era’s “charity societies”, there is little in the recorded histories to identify religious factors as a significant influence in these more recent developments. Indeed, in reviewing the development of the involvement of Melbourne Anglicans in welfare provision, Swain (1997) records that a 1972 Synod Steering Committee noted “few parish-based programs”, and recommended the encouragement of programs at this level.

It is therefore noteworthy that, in that same era, the community study of a new industrial housing development by Bryson & Thompson (1972, p.269-289), gave
particular attention to the role of the “PAM clergy” (referring mainly to the ecumenically-minded clergy of the Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist Churches). This group of clergy were identified as active members of the local Civic Group, as external caretakers within this “Newtown”, and as professionals who saw themselves having a place in community organisation, a view motivated by their particular conception of Christianity. Likewise, in a study of a rural community "Smalltown", Dempsey (1983a) identified that clergy in the town saw their involvement in community activities, including in marriage or personal counselling, as a means of making the church relevant to everybody, even though they chose not to challenge any social structures.

A third suggestion of church involvement in social issues during this era is recorded by Swain (1997) when she mentions that some Anglican parishes did respond to the previously mentioned Synod concern. One such response is amplified in Browning’s reflections on his eight year Anglican ministry in the inner Melbourne area of Kensington, commencing in 1977 (Browning 1986). Browning makes clear this required immersion in the social issues of this inner urban locality, an immersion he justified through his understanding of the Kingdom of God in the world. Whilst it is yet another research project to clarify the extent and nature of church involvement in social issues in this latter era, these three references are at least suggestive that churches, and people acting from a religious or Christian motivation, whether misplaced or not, were indeed part of this less institutionalised, new, so-called “grassroots” development of community programs aimed at addressing various social issues from within the locality.

However the most recent trend in community services saw a move away from grassroots services towards the development of the “contract state”. With these arrangements, funding by government was being changed from the historically established processes of government grants to “voluntary”, “non-government” or “nonprofit” organisations, to contracts for the provision of specific and comprehensively defined services awarded after what was initially a competitive tendering process involving any interested parties (Hoatson, Dixon & Sloman 1996; Ellingsen 2000b). The motivation for this at the political level arose from a desire to both curb and reduce the apparently ever-increasing costs of what had become the “welfare state”. The impact of this government imposed change is still being
absorbed by the affected community groups and organisations; it has already led to a number of organisational amalgamations, e.g. three Anglican agencies forming Anglicare Victoria in 1997 (Swain 1997), as organisations sought economies of scale in order to streamline their management, diversify their programs and locations, and ensure their bids were competitive. Whilst a well-developed critique of this process and its corporatist or managerialist context already exists (eg Considine 1988a, 1988b, 1990; Jones & May 1992; Kramer 1994; Lewis 1993; Rees & Rodley 1995), its implications for community services operating at the local level, such as in a congregation, are only gradually becoming understood (Best 2003; Carter 2000; Ellingsen 2000b; Kissane 2003).

1.3 Indicators of the Current Level of Local Church Participation

Having briefly outlined aspects of the history of church involvement in social issues, it is relevant to consider more recent indicators of the extent and nature of church involvement by Australians. The most significant finding arising from the available research is the substantial fall in church participation within Australian society (Bouma & Mason 1995). Whilst in the 1991 census, 74% of the population claimed some Christian denominational affiliation (Kaldor et al 1994, p.343), Bouma & Mason (1995) cite other studies which indicate weekly church attendance had fallen from a high of 27% of the Australian population in 1961 (Gallop Poll data) and 1966 (Mol’s Religion in Australia Survey) to 17% in 1989 (National Social Science Survey data). Bellamy et al (2002) cite later results from the Australian Community Study that indicate only 13% claimed weekly church attendance in 1998.

Hughes, Thompson, Pryor & Bouma (1995, p.6) express the results differently to indicate that actual church attendance of at least once per month has fallen from 47% in 1950 to 24% in 1993. Kaldor, Bellamy, Correy & Powell (1992) quote research which similarly identifies that monthly church attendance has declined from 41% in 1960 to 24% by the mid-1980’s. Later research in 1998 put this at 20% (Bellamy et al 2002). Recalculation of data provided by Kaldor et al (1994, p.344) in a later report on their National Church Life Survey (NCLS) indicates that participation on the day the NCLS was undertaken in 1991 actually averaged 17% of the nominal affiliation identified in the ABS Census data i.e. approximately 12% of the
Australian population. These results can be compared with similar attendance data referred to by Black (1991) for the United States (40% approximately attending weekly) and the United Kingdom (10% approximately attending weekly). Black notes that there is a greater integration of religion into mainstream life in the US compared with Australia (Black 1991, p.2), an issue of contextual importance in later discussion considering research from the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK.

Bouma & Mason (1995) also record results from the 1989 National Social Science Survey which indicate that claimed monthly or more church attendance varies with age group: of the “Pre-boomers” (born 1925-1940) 28% claimed monthly attendance, “Boomers” (born 1947-1961) 19%, and “Post-boomers” (born 1962-1975) 16%. Roof, Carroll and Roozen (1995) note that this pattern tends to be reflected across many nations and varieties of Christian traditions and that it is linked to social processes of secularisation, the value placed on religious choice, and changes in attitudes towards religious institutions and styles of religious expression. Hence it seems that those who do attend church are also likely to be older, a result confirmed by Kaldor et al (1994, p.346f). Overall it suggests that despite a high level of claimed affiliation with Christian churches, the actual participation is much smaller (roughly 20% in Australia) and apparently decreasing.

This age-related pattern is consistent with the qualitative results found by Mackay in his interview-based research into the differing views of the three current generations of Australians (1997, p.112). Mackay discusses the perspectives involved in this change as seen by each successive generation concerned. These he identified as:

- the older **Lucky generation**, whose sense of morality and community was rooted in religious dogma through their exposure to at least religious education even if they did not have “a deep sense of spirituality”;
- the middle-aged **Stressed generation** (the “Boomers”), who were the last generation to have attended Sunday School but who have shifted their religious focus away from mainstream churches and conventional religion and who more latterly report a sense of having spiritually “missed out”; and
- the younger **Options generation**, who are seen as the first generation to grow up without a moral framework, some of whom are prone to seeing a solution to their
discomfort with “hanging loose” in some version of religious, political or economic fundamentalism (Mackay 1997, pp.20, 112f, 146 & 150).

It is within this broad context that the discussion of local church involvement in community service provision is set and needs to be understood.

1.4 Operationalising the Research Topic

With the history of church involvement and welfare, the changing levels of participation of Australians in churches, and the increasing efforts of government to contract out the provision of social services, it is timely to systematically address the little understood role local church congregations actually play in the contemporary provision of formal and informal welfare services within any local community. In particular there is a need to understand not only the extent and nature of the services provided to the community in this way but, more especially, to understand the processes and issues which impact on congregational involvement in these social issues.

Hence this thesis sets out to address the topic of the community service involvements of local church congregations with research focused on the identification of a framework for understanding the processes encountered in the development and operation of these local community services. Specifically the focus is on congregations which are defined as local organisations of people who regularly assemble primarily for religious worship, the nurture of religious commitment and the promotion of religious mission (adapted from Warner 1994, p.54 and Harris 1998). The term, congregation, was chosen in preference to any other as, following Warner (1993, 1994), congregations are understood to be the fundamental locus for religious activity irrespective of the formal relationships which might exist with regional, national or global religious bodies (an approach that Warner terms de facto congregationalism, meaning that irrespective of any formal denominational links, congregations have their own identity and idiosyncratic ways of functioning and can therefore be treated to some degree as separate entities). In reviewing recent research on congregational life, Warner also asserts that congregations comprise religious amateurs “spending disproportionate time on activities that are hard to define” (1994, p.61) unlike denominations which are staffed by religious professionals. Such an assertion underscores the potential for
congregations to develop unique ways to function. Likewise congregations are seen as voluntary religious communities whose loyal adherence should not be assumed (Warner 1994, p.63).

As used here the term therefore contrasts with the concept of a parish, which is taken to mean a geographically defined area officially linked with a church organisation comprising one or more congregations of a particular religious denomination that forms the territory within which the constituent congregation(s) undertake their religious ministry (also adapted from Harris 1998). It also contrasts with the term Church Agency which is understood to be an organisation formally sanctioned by a regional or national church body specifically to carry out usually professionally-based services within the community in the name of the sponsoring church (c/f Garland 1994, p.96ff). These church agencies may or may not have historical and/or operational links of some type with congregations that are also linked with the sponsoring church body.

More specifically the research will focus on Community Services provided by or in conjunction with one or more congregations. These Community Services are defined as organisational arrangements established to address some issue or issues affecting the social functioning or welfare of individuals or groups within society especially within a defined locality (see Ife 1995, p.133; Donovan & Jackson 1991, p.21). As used here the term is not necessarily distinguished from the terms Social Services, Human Services or Welfare Services. However Community Services is preferred in order to emphasise the congregation’s link with the location targeted for the service. In contrast the other terms would appear to emphasise the target of the service (humans), the purpose of the service (welfare) or the nature of the issues addressed (social), all of which are, nonetheless, applicable to the services being considered.

The involvement of a congregation in community service activities is taken to mean an organised arrangement, whether formally structured under church or civil statute or informally structured as an agreed component of the congregation’s activity, and which may involve some type of cooperation with other bodies with compatible aims, by which at least some participants in a congregation intentionally contribute their skills, time, money, facilities and/or congregational name to activities which are primarily directed at the needs and concerns of people in their locality who are not
necessarily participants within their congregation’s religious activities\textsuperscript{10}. The time offered may be unpaid or paid, and the organisational arrangement may or may not involve formalised associations with other congregations, church agencies and/or local community service providers. The activity may include use of facilities away from the congregational base; it may also use the time and skills of people who are not participants in the congregation and who may or may not be formally trained in relevant skills, and it may attract funding from outside its organisational arrangement and associations.

In order to identify existing understandings of this topic, including gaps in knowledge, a review of the literature on congregations and community service organisations is initially undertaken. This is followed by the actual research which explores the characteristics of the factors that influence how these congregational involvements develop, and how they are operated. The links between these factors and the options for dealing with them in order for the congregation to develop and maintain an effective and viable community service will also be explored in order to propose a framework that assists interested participants and observers to grasp how these operating factors might inter-relate.

\textsuperscript{10} It is this aspect of the definition of the research topic which distinguishes this type of congregational involvement from “member-serving” organisations and “self-help” groups.
2 Reviewing the Literature

A scan of the “Ministry” section of a Christian bookshop, publisher’s catalogue, or theological library, or even the average cleric’s professional library, will quickly identify a plethora of references to congregational ministry in the community. However it will be readily noted in this scan that most of this literature can fall into one or both of two types - narrative and theoretical. The narrative writings tend to be the stories told by key leaders of actual community “ministries” or “activities” and reflect the anecdotal and idiosyncratic perspective of its author (a point also noted by Cameron 1998). Often that writing contains a discussion of the theological or philosophical concepts that the author believes underlies the story being told (eg Bakke 1987; Banks 1982; Benington 1973; Browning 1986, 1992; Burke 1992; Costello 1991; Holman 1986; Gill 1990; Morisy 1997; O’Connor 1963, 1968, 1976; Randerson 1992; Ringma 1994; Shepherd 1974, 1983; Sider 1977; Tillapaugh 1982; Vanier 1979; Wallis 1976, 1994). The theoretical writings tend be theological and/or sociological in orientation and argue for a particular emphasis in the reader’s and a congregation’s presentation of the Christian faith (eg Anderson & Mavor 1994; Chester 1993; Ellul 1989; Furness 1972; Gladwin 1981; Hessel 1982; Holland & Henriot 1983; Kraybill 1990; Malchow 1996; Mead 1991, 1994; Miranda 1977; Nichols 1984; Sider 1999; Stringfellow 1962, 1973; Wirt 1968).

Whilst the distinction between these two cannot and need not be rigidly made, these writings are crucial to an effective understanding of “parish community work” (as Burke 1992, terms it) as they often provide critical evaluations of the idiosyncratic practice approaches. They therefore provide inspiration and direction for others seeking to promote similar local church community service ministries. Indeed, that is often their stated purpose. Although these writings almost always provide extensive discussions of the motivations and perceptions of those involved in the experiences being described, they do not usually attempt to include any systematic data collection on the programs under discussion, either from an action research or participant observation perspective, let alone by way of a more traditional survey.

While it is recognised that the collective themes in these writings of themselves could form an important study, it is not the intention of this research to explore this
literature. More relevant is the literature based on systematic collection and analysis of data rather than literature which is essentially one person’s anecdotal view.

An initial overview of the literature quickly identifies, however, that congregational community service activity has not long been seen as a legitimate focus for social research (Cnaan & Milofsky 1997; Cormode 1994; Hall 1997; Harris 1995b; Jeavons & Cnaan 1997; Lyons 1996b; Stone & Wood 1997; Wineburg 1993). Indeed, Jeavons & Cnaan (1997) cite one scholar’s demeaning description of small, religious non-profit organisations as “trivial organizations” not worth studying. But change over the last decade has resulted in a recent upsurge of research into the social activities of faith-based groups such as religious congregations. This has been most noticeable in the US with its higher levels of religious participation, its federal government’s recent retreat from direct provision of welfare services (Wineburg 1996), the introduction of “Charitable Choice” provisions in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996 aimed at encouraging states to “utilize charitable and faith-based organizations in serving the poor and needy”11, and its expansion of those provisions through the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and its related Offices in now seven government departments (Bush 2001; Woodwell 2003). There has however also been some Australian literature reporting research related to congregations and their community engagement, a review of which follows.

2.1 Australian Community Studies

On the assumption that the community support services of church congregations should be evident in community research, a review of known studies found three which presented results that recognised the activities of local churches in their wider community.

2.1.1 An Australian Newtown Study

The first study, An Australian Newtown (Bryson & Thompson 1972), as previously noted, explored at some length the role of Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist (PAM) clergy in the so-called Newtown’s social issues. Despite these clergy being

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transient professional “imports” to the locality, Bryson and Thompson noted they saw themselves as having a social role based on their understanding of their Christian perspective. However they also identified that the approach of the clergy was not congruent with the social class of Newtown. In particular the authors observed that the PAM clergy tried to use formal organisations and programs to address the various issues they perceived. For instance, they set out to plan youth activities via a formally established youth research committee (p.277). Bryson & Thompson also observed that professionals such as these needed to better understand the local people and value the perspective they took on social issues (p.289).

A restriction associated with this study however is that it explores the role of clergy in the local community, rather than that of the congregation as a whole. Whilst giving specific attention to the place of churches within the community, the only reference to “assistance with residents’ personal and family difficulties” (p.252) notes, firstly, that the various churches’ ministers varied in the degree to which their values fitted that of the local people, and that, secondly, the response of the PAM clergy in conjunction with the Civic Group was to establish a formal counselling service which was linked to a church-related agency. No other recognition of congregational involvement in community service provision was identified. Hence this study, whilst supporting the view of local church community involvement, raises two particular problems - the apparent dominance of the clergy in social activity, and their tendency to respond without recognition of either their own status as external caretakers or their incongruent responses which reflected their own social values and preferences rather than those of the community itself.

2.1.2 The Care-Taker Networks Study

The second study, also from that decade, seeks to explore the nature of local Care-Taker Networks available to families in need of assistance (Shaver 1977). This Melbourne-based study identified that three local congregations had combined to provide material relief, housing, kindergarten programs, marriage guidance, counselling and recreational activities within their local community (p.212). Those in need were able to access these services through the clergy and a local medical practitioner who was a member of one of the churches. Whilst it was reported that the purpose of these community activities were for “community welfare, not
denominational interest”, it is not clear what role if any the congregation themselves played in the provision of these services. What is clear is that the author of the study saw the clergy as filling an important local care-taker and welfare role from which they should not seek to “displace” themselves (p.229). Hence this study reiterates, as with the previous study, that the clergy dominated congregational involvement in community service responses. It also added a suggestion that their involvement in this role, as distinct from their formal religious role, was a social expectation.

2.1.3 The Family Support Networks Project

The final study considered here was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and examined support networks in three different localities (McCaughey 1987; d’Abbs 1991). The study sought to distinguish between the levels and types of support offered by formal networks to residents in these communities and informally by neighbours, friends and family. This was achieved by a statistical survey of nearly 800 households and qualitative interviews with 100 of this randomly selected sample. Whilst the data indicated clearly that family were the more likely source of informal help, especially with more intensive issues, friends were more involved and available than neighbours were. Within this study, church-related help was only marginally noted (eg McCaughey 1987 p.218). However d’Abbs (1991, p.76) comments that such help was typically “classed as part of the household’s informal network” and therefore was not separately explored. Reflecting on examples from the case studies, McCaughey (1987, p.72) acknowledges the transformative effect of church involvement in two cases but expresses concern that the involvement had become so all-embracing of the lives of those families that, if it broke down, they would again be left isolated. In fact a close reading of McCaughey’s report on 64 of these case studies found that 21 identified some degree of church involvement; however in only these two cases was the nature of this explored. It appears therefore that this study’s analysis may well under-identify the extent of church related community support, and indeed suggests that it may well be overlooked because it was perceived as part of the family’s informal support network rather than a notable form of support in its own right.

This study also raises another matter of concern; that is, the ethics of using social need as a basis for building congregational involvement with people, a matter which
needs more attention. Further, whilst only marginal recognition of the congregational response was noted, it is recognised that respondents also accessed the larger church agencies. It is unclear if any of these agencies had any direct link to local congregations.

2.1.4 Summary

Overall these community studies confirm that congregations do provide community services to some extent. However they also indicate unresolved issues concerning:

- the expectations of community and church people alike that congregations should be involved in community services,
- the respective roles played by clergy and lay people in these activities,
- the difference between formal and informal approaches for helping which sees congregational helping overlooked,
- and the ethical issues of using community services to draw outside people into congregational life.

2.2 Australian Congregational Studies

In addition to these Community Studies a number of projects examining aspects of Australian congregational life itself were identified. These were reviewed for their discussion on the nature of congregational community engagement.

2.2.1 Dempsey’s Barool and Smalltown Studies

Possibly the earliest specific study of congregations in Australia was undertaken by Dempsey in 1967 (Dempsey 1983b) with his ethnographic research on life in the Methodist Church in rural “Barool” NSW. Despite its rich analysis, Dempsey’s only discussion of the social involvement of this congregation focuses on it being a source of conflict between the lay leaders in the church and a number of the congregation’s successive clergy. These clergy, even one whose incumbency was not conflictual, saw their role as encompassing community welfare activities. However any effort to promote lay involvement was rejected, so raising doubt about whether community welfare was actually a clergy activity rather than a congregational one.

12 “Barool” and “Smalltown” are Dempsey’s own pseudonyms for the towns researched.
From 1973 through to 1987, Dempsey also undertook a longitudinal study of congregational life in the churches of “Smalltown” Victoria (1977 1983b, 1985, 1991). Dempsey particularly recorded changes in the congregational processes of most local churches over this period, and noted tensions similar to “Barool” between the clergy and lay people. However, in “Smalltown” it appeared that clergy moderated their willingness to challenge lay people on the issues in order to make their incumbency tolerable (1983a, p.32). He also noted that there were class distinctions between congregations that reflected a level of sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics, and a growing feminization and aging of congregational membership, but with congregational control still in the hands of males (1991). Also reflected is the dominance of clergy in any community service activity and the refusal of congregational members to become involved as members of the congregations, though individual acts of caring were recognised (1983a, p.41; 1991, p.76). These dilemmas led Dempsey to suggest that the Protestant churches in Smalltown “are proving unattractive and even irrelevant to an increasing number of people and unless rapidly altered may become moribund” (1983a, p.40f).

Hence Dempsey’s research gives a picture of congregational involvement in community service activity as a cause of tension within congregations, especially between clergy and lay people, as well as an activity that may well be the response of a few people, perhaps even the clergy alone. Yet implicit in both of Dempsey’s studies is an assumption that congregations should be involved, despite unresolved tension for clergy and church members concerning the place of “comfort” and “challenge” in both congregation and community (1977, p.15; 1983b, p.177).

### 2.2.2 Blaikie’s Study of Victorian Parish Clergy

A study contemporary with Dempsey’s is that by Blaikie (1979, 1983) in which he analyses his 1969 research into the perspectives of 943 Victorian Anglican and other Protestant parish clergy (1983 p.2). The relevant aspect of this detailed quantitative study is the identification, through additional open-ended qualitative data, of various ministry styles adopted by these clergy, possibly also in tension with their congregations (1979, p.158; 1983, p.59). These ministry styles include three related to nurturing people’s faith (Reaper, Teacher and Enabler who trains others in evangelism) each identified with about 19% of respondents; three related to spiritual
and/or personal care of the congregation (Priest, Pastor and Team Captain who trained others as pastoral carers) each respectively identified with 5%, 18% and 6% of clergy; and three that reflected priority engagement with wider society (Interpreter, Catalyst and Activist), identified with 6%, 8% and 1% of clergy respectively. Whilst these latter three styles engage clergy the least, they are the styles most applicable to a perception that some congregations engage with their community. Although confirming that social engagement is a focal priority for only 15% clergy, Blaikie identifies two associated problems. One is that job-related frustration is likely to be the highest for any of the styles - up to 62% for activists (1979 p.175); and the other is that its goals are least likely to be shared with their congregation (1979 p.178). Hence Blaikie’s research helps clarify the conflict found in Dempsey’s analysis, and reinforces that community engagement as an aspect of congregational life was a contentious issue, even where clergy acted alone (as Bryson and Thompson’s research on the PAM clergy seemed to imply).

Worth noting here is the work of Grierson (1984) which emphasises a need for clergy to both understand and work with the culture of a congregation before setting out to transform it into “a fuller and richer expression” (p.34). Rather than research, Grierson’s work presents a systematic ethnographic framework enabling clergy to be “not so easily tempted to ignore the local congregation and to look for signs of the presence and action of God elsewhere” (p.36). In part, the book is based on a model implemented by ministry students which reflects three steps:

The first step is to set about naming the culture of a particular congregation. The second step is interpreting what is thereby identified. The third is the process of remaking, directed to using the possibilities for change and growth which have been called ‘openings for ministry’ (p.42).

This perspective, and the applications of it underlying Grierson’s writing (p.10f), involve using participant-observation in congregational work (p.42f) to avoid the type of conflict identified by Dempsey and Blaikie, enabling a wider sense of congregational ministry to be promoted. That this should include community engagement is explicit in Grierson’s later work (1991) where he comments:

…the role of the congregation is to be that agency at work at the heart of cultural expression as light, salt and yeast. Within its neighbourhood it is to regulate, regenerate and transform the conditions of the human and physical environment so that it approximates to that vision of life in the Kingdom which guides and directs our actions (p.60).
2.2.3 The National Church Life Surveys

The most extensive research on church life in Australia has been undertaken by Kaldor and the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) team (Kaldor et al13 1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, & Bellamy, Kaldor and NCLS Team 2002). Data was gained from an attempted census of Anglican and other Protestant congregations in 1991, 1996 and again in 2001 on a specific Sunday soon after each year’s Australian national census date, with a sampling of Catholic congregations included in 1996 and 2001. In 1991 310,000 responses to pre-coded questionnaires were received from individuals aged over 15 years who attended church services in about 6,700 congregations covering 19 denominations (Kaldor et al 1994 p.xvii). In 1996 the response was 324,000 Protestants from 6,900 congregations in 20 denominations and 101,000 respondents from 281 Catholic parishes (Kaldor et al 1999b p.3). In 2001 the overall response was from 435,000 attenders in 7000 parishes and congregations covering 19 denominations; estimated to have incorporated 80% of church-goers (Bellamy et al 2002 p.3). In addition, church leaders were asked to complete a questionnaire for each congregation. The overall aim of the survey was to gain data on congregational life and its involvement with the wider community (Kaldor et al 1995).

Prior to commencing this extensive survey Kaldor set the scene for this ongoing NCLS study when he published a secondary analysis of data obtained from a range of other sources in order to identify patterns in church attendance and non-attendance within the Australian community (Kaldor 1987). One conclusion drawn from this study was a strong affirmation for denominations and their congregations to be aware of their social environment and to find ways to bridge the gap that was observed to exist between them. This work was followed up by a volume of collected stories of Christian congregations and their efforts at promoting involvement with the wider community (Kaldor & Kaldor 1988). Whilst there was no actual analysis of this latter information it provided some substance to the later NCLS data on community involvement which confirmed that many congregations and other church-related groups (para-churches, as they were sometimes termed) were indeed exploring ways

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13 Because of changes in the many authors cited in these NCLS publications the collective citation ‘Kaldor et al’ has been adopted here. The full list of authors associated with each publication is included in the Bibliography.
to build “bridges” to people outside the church. This collection had all the hallmarks of community service activities rather than formal evangelistic or recruitment programs for the churches. It is those activities about which more knowledge is sought in the current research.

Of the many aspects of congregational life covered in the NCLS surveys, one section of the congregational questionnaire concerning Social Involvement is of particular interest. Percentage results are summarised in the following Table.

Table 1 - Levels of Congregational Community Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Community Engagement</th>
<th>NCLS 1991</th>
<th>NCLS 1996&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>NCLS 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congregations allowing facilities to be used by community groups</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations participated in special community events e.g. fairs, peace activities</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational representatives on the management committees of community groups</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations providing some type of welfare or counselling services directly</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations provided activities for mothers and/or children</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations providing aged care activities</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations providing emergency relief</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations providing prison, hospital or fringe attender visiting</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations providing social justice/political activities</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with much of the NCLS data, neither the exact nature nor the intensity of congregational involvement in the activities is identified. For example does a local church-based counselling service mean one that employs specifically qualified counsellors within a formal agency operating under the congregation’s auspice, or does it refer to the availability of the parish clergy for any who seek pastoral support whether participants are part of the congregation or not? Likewise a financial counselling service does not require the same level of accessibility or resources as an emergency frozen food “bank” distributed by clergy at their door. Also, there is a large variation between the surveys which is not explored in NCLS discussion,

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear from the sources that these activities have the same meaning between the respective years of data collection.
although it seems likely this results from an open question in 1991 and a closed options list in 1996, a modification based on that previous response.

The NCLS reports also note that these congregational activities are actually carried out by a minority of congregational participants, (Kaldor et al 1995, p.17f & 42f) and identified these levels of involvement, as summarised in Table 2 following.

Table 2 - Levels of Attenders Community Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Community Engagement</th>
<th>NCLS 1991</th>
<th>NCLS 1996</th>
<th>NCLS 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attenders involved in congregational care/justice activities</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attenders involved in non-church community care or welfare activities</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attenders involved in non-church social action, social justice or lobbying activities</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, NCLS data demonstrates a higher level of “support” for social action/justice activities in the community than there is actual participation from church attenders. For example, 44% of church attenders state they support environmental groups but only 5% are actually involved, and 36% claim to support peace and justice groups while only 4% are involved (Kaldor et al 1995, p.29ff). Whilst expressing the view that this discrepancy demands further thought, Kaldor et al (1995, p.35) note that this is similar to data from the Australian Values Study for the community at large.

Although participation in social issues in either church or non-church settings is limited, this data nonetheless confirms there is indeed a significant pool of community-minded people linked with local church congregations and that involvement is broader than just clergy, as suggested by previous research. The NCLS researchers in fact cite the Australian Values Study Survey which suggests that, at 27%, highly religious people are actually twice as interested in involvement in voluntary community work as the least religious people (Kaldor et al 1995, p.18). Later data from the Australian Community Survey indicates that 21% of church attenders are involved in “care, welfare and support groups” (Kaldor et al 1999b, p.72) compared with 7% of non-attenders.

As a conclusion, the NCLS researchers suggest that, relatively speaking, community participation by church attenders is high and that commentators, in ignoring it,

15 Personal correspondence from NCLS staff member, Ruth Powell, Sept 1998.
underestimate the impact of the churches on contemporary Australian life (Kaldor et al 1995, p.25; Bellamy et al 2002 p.27). This conclusion therefore adds emphasis to the stories of community bridging collected by Kaldor & Kaldor (1988). It also provides a better insight into congregational community engagement than the limited understanding reported in earlier studies, even though this NCLS study does not clearly identify the exact nature or extent of that involvement. It has to be recognised however that in the decades between the earlier studies cited and this later research there may well have been a change in congregational activity in the community, together with more acceptance of the work of those earlier clergy who sought to include such activities in congregational life.

2.2.4 Uniting Church Victorian Commission for Mission Review

More detail of how congregations in one denomination engaged in local community service activities has been collated by the Uniting Church in Australia Victorian Synod’s Commission for Mission. In 1994 the Commission completed a policy review of that church’s involvement in community services and, as part of that review, it undertook an overview survey of the community service activities of parishes and Uniting Church sponsored agencies (Linossier 1994). Although data from the Uniting Church’s Aged Care Services was not incorporated, the report is the first comprehensive picture of the Mission activities of Uniting Churches. Based on the 215 Uniting Church parishes who responded (73% of the Victorian total), the survey identified that, in 1993, 65% of parishes had their own welfare programs, and in many cases more than one program. These church programs were staffed with 202 effective full-time volunteer positions and 61 effective full-time paid positions. The program costs were $AU2m, with only 10% receiving government funding, amounting to almost $AU430,000. Eighty percent (80%) of the programs had commenced since 1980, with 45% commencing since 1990. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the expenditure was in metropolitan parishes and 50% of the programs were directed at adults and the aged, with recreation and social support being the major category. The next most frequent program type was Emergency Relief (13%). In addition the survey identified that 62% of parishes gave support (money, volunteers, rental subsidy) to Uniting Church sponsored welfare programs outside of
their parish, 14% gave to welfare programs sponsored by other denominations, and 21% to other community-based programs.

The survey data (Linossier 1994, pp.3-15 - 3-57) also identified that 21 out of 43 Uniting Church non-Aged Care agencies were officially sponsored by local parishes (including 3 listed as sponsored by 2 parish missions); this contrasts with the other 22 agencies which were sponsored by the regional church (presbytery) or the Commission for Mission itself.16 These 21 parish-related programs had expenditure in 1993 of nearly $AU5m, of which 70% was from government funds (this figure is dominated by one parish-sponsored program operating family support services throughout the wider metropolitan area with a budget of $AU2.6m, 89% government funded, with 63 EFT professional staff). Collectively, these programs employed 108 effective full-time (EFT) paid staff and 98 EFT volunteer staff. Of the other 22 agencies, 9 were the remaining Parish Missions which, in the main, are much older services and which, historically, were also linked to local congregations even though they were not listed as such in the report. These 9 missions had an expenditure of nearly $AU17m of which 58% was government funding. They employed 381 EFT paid staff and 176 EFT volunteer staff.

In all, these Victorian Uniting Church sponsored community service activities, which developed as part of local congregations and parishes rather than merely being centrally developed church institutions, account for nearly $AU24m of the total Uniting Church Victoria sponsored program expenditure of $AU33m. Of that amount, 58% was derived from government funds compared with the overall level of government funding of 61%. In total 550 EFT paid staff were employed in these activities, and 476 EFT volunteer staff. It is not stated how many volunteers this actually represents or what their links with the Uniting Church may be.

Nonetheless, this data is broadly consistent with the NCLS data which confirms there is, perhaps even to an increasing degree over more recent years, a level of community service activity within Victorian Uniting Church congregations which is distinct from the community service activities sponsored by central Uniting Church structures. The issue of interest here is the lack of any clarity about how these

16 The figures listed here and below were calculated from data contained in the report (Linossier, 1994) and are not presented in that document in this manner.
activities are, or could be, expressions of focus for the involvement of local congregations. Likewise the data does not identify actual congregational involvements (though it would seem reasonable to presume at least some of the volunteer workers represented that link), or their intensity. Similarly the data provided does not identify how these community services came to exist or how they are actually found to function by the various participants in the service programs.

2.2.5 Anglican and Catholic Church Reports

Additional glimpses of congregational community involvement were located in some Anglican research reports and one report of Catholic activity. Specifically the experience of Anglican Clergy in congregationally-based welfare delivery was explored by Hollingworth (1980) and Colliver and Seiffert (1998) who considered how parish clergy cope with and understand the welfare demands they encounter.

Firstly, Hollingworth’s survey of 164 Anglican clergy in Melbourne parishes identified that generally Anglican clergy do not see welfare as a specific aspect of their parish work; the exceptions were those in working class localities. Rather, clergy reported experiencing this “functional” role as conflicting with their perceived “master” role of addressing the religious and spiritual needs of their congregations, an emphasis consistent with Blaikie’s study for Anglican Clergy (1979 p.151). The research also raised concern about the lack of resources at the congregation level to respond to welfare concerns. Such a result, Hollingworth noted, is at odds with both church social theology as well as community expectations of the church, both of which viewed clergy as “locally-based community generalists”. He therefore suggested this aspect of church life needed addressing in clergy training and parish organisation. Yet despite this recognition, Hollingworth did not consider where the congregations themselves fitted into any development of this emphasis.

Secondly, Colliver’s and Seiffert’s research on clergy patterns for coping with “unexpected callers” at their residences also noted that clergy reacted ambivalently to this welfare role and often placed their responses in a “different compartment” to their theology (1998, p.5). Their research also identified that, whilst some clergy struggled in isolation with these demands, others sought congregational support in their response. The most effective approaches they found were those where the
clergy and congregation formed a partnership arrangement with other local services to access more integrated and effective responses.

In another Anglican study, Henigan (1995) identified that despite apparent ambivalence, some congregations promoted community service “ministries” by appointing parish-based community workers. Analysis of this “parish community work” role identified that the 15 workers surveyed typically found themselves encountering conflicting role expectations, with workers noting that:

- clergy tended to use them in “matriarchal” support roles whilst they themselves retained their “patriarchal” roles within church structures;
- congregations expected workers to provide welfare services for congregational members; and
- workers saw their own role as facilitators of congregational action for structural justice within the wider community.

Workers also reported finding they had a different theology to congregational members which made resolution of these competing expectations difficult. The similarity between these observations and those of Dempsey cannot be ignored, as this suggests not only clergy, but also welfare professionals working within congregational programs, are likely to encounter conflicts in role expectations and differences in their underlying social theology and social analysis. Further, it is apparent that both are also likely to encounter significant differences of views, thus presenting more difficulties with the processes of developing and operating congregationally-based community service activities. Yet clearly, the fact that these workers were appointed supports the perception that congregational involvements are seen to have a place.

In seeking to support such developments, the Social Responsibilities Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Australia published a handbook designed to encourage Anglican Parishes to take up some sort of community service activity (Social Responsibilities Commission 1997). This handbook outlined some collected wisdom about the development of community service activities and, by way of illustration, presented “examples” or “practical models” (p.3) already operating in congregational settings throughout Australia. These projects were categorised into 4 broad approaches to community involvement (termed “social
change”) and, as summarised in Table 3, provide direct evidence for the types of services actually found in congregations and parishes.

Table 3 - Example Service Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Change Approach</th>
<th>No (%) of Model Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Service</td>
<td>19 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>14 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Transformation</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic (all 3 approaches)</td>
<td>6 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonetheless the detail, like that for the services cited in the Uniting Church Report (Linossier 1994), is limited, so adding little clarification to the questions raised about the NCLS data above.

The final information relates to the St Vincent de Paul Society of the Catholic Church, best known for its ready provision of emergency relief to families in crisis and homeless persons. This provides further confirmation that local church congregations (“parishes” in Catholic terms) operate community services. Whilst this work of lay Catholics is well known, it is often not realised that, via its “Conference” structure, its local presence is closely tied to local catholic parishes and the resources directly available there. Unlike the Anglican and Uniting Church involvements previously mentioned, this community involvement does not depend on clergy, welfare professionals, or any central structure. In fact the Industries Commission Report on Charitable Organisations in Australia (1995, p.C3f) identifies the St Vincent de Paul Society as a “decentralised coalition of local service providers” with a combined annual income of $AU114.6m where each “grouping” in the society has its own autonomy and authority. In all, nearly 2000 Conferences are involved, which would translate into each Conference on average handling nearly $AU60,000. These Conferences, however, are linked through regional councils and diocesan councils to the State and National Councils that then have the status to negotiate with the respective governments. Whilst from time to time issues might arise about the skills needed by individual representatives of the Society as they relate to their service users, the Society succeeds in maintaining its commitment to lay volunteer workers as the primary means for achieving its purposes and, as such, is a well-established formal community support service.
2.2.6 Summary

Overall, this Australian literature supports the understanding that congregations are involved in local community service delivery in a range of ways, most especially in direct service provision such as Emergency Relief. However the processes around this involvement are not identified and this involvement is not without problems, some associated with the ambivalence of clergy about their participation, some associated with the capacity of a congregation to provide the resources and skills needed, and some about conflicting role expectations for any professional welfare personnel who might be employed. How these involvements originate is not clear although in some cases it is apparent that clergy play a leading, and perhaps determinative, role. It seems therefore that we must turn to literature from elsewhere to seek a greater understanding of what is presently known about how congregational community involvement might work.

2.3 Conceptualisations of Congregations in Community Service Activities

The literature found, which was mainly from the United States of America (US) with a little from the United Kingdom (UK), initially seemed to be based on particular conceptualisation of congregations. Hence, the following outline of insights gained from these sources uses a broad framework reflecting those conceptualisations to help explore what has become a vast literature, unlike that in the Australian setting. Although these conceptualisations became less discrete as this research was shared, they are used as a tool to aid this review.

2.3.1 Religious Presence

Sociologists of religion, affiliated in part with the Religious Research Association, have been researching religion in US society since the late nineteenth century (Fukuyama 1986), but a new focus on congregational life has emerged during the 1980’s (Roozen & Carroll 1989) and gradually incorporated a qualitative emphasis eliciting views beyond those of key leaders (Ammerman 1994). Three key studies were identified because they analysed congregational perceptions of engagement with their surrounding community i.e. their approach to being a religious presence.
Hartford Congregational Religious Presence Survey

The first study, *Varieties of Religious Presence* undertaken by Roozen, McKinney and Carroll (1984), researched the public approach to “mission” of 177 congregations in Greater Hartford CT (representing 42% of all Hartford congregations). This was the first significant attempt to identify ways in which congregations, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, related to their locality. Researchers used a questionnaire which, in mapping congregational understanding of their public role, incorporated insights from two theologians, Avery Dulles, a Catholic theologian whose views were presented in *Models of the Church* (1974), and H. Richard Niebuhr, a Protestant theologian and author of *Christ and Culture* (1951). These insights were used because of their clarity about modes of religious presence identified as “combative, converting, milieu transformation, [and] passive solidarity” (Roozen, McKinney & Carroll 1984, pp.21 & 32). Respondents identified the extent to which a list of community-based activities were “basic to” or “contradictory to” the congregation’s understanding of its ministry.

*Table 4 - Characteristics of Congregational Mission Orientations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This-worldly</th>
<th>Civic Orientation</th>
<th>Activist Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stress the establishment of the kingdom of God in society</td>
<td>• Stress civil harmony and avoidance of confrontation and conflict</td>
<td>• Stress justice and a critical posture towards existing social structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concern for the welfare of all people</td>
<td>• Individual members making their own decisions on moral and social issues</td>
<td>• Affirmation of member and congregational involvement in social action, including the expectation that pastor/rabbi will be leader in this regard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ecumenical cooperation</td>
<td>• Affirmation of existing social structures</td>
<td>• Openness to confrontation, conflict, and civil disobedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Membership involvement in public life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educate members on social issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Otherworldly</th>
<th>Civic Orientation</th>
<th>Civic Orientation</th>
<th>Civic Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stress salvation in a world to come</td>
<td>• Acceptance of one’s status in life</td>
<td>• The congregation as a refuge from this world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sharp distinction between the religious and the secular</td>
<td>• Tradition and doctrine</td>
<td>• Oppositional to congregational involvement in social change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acceptance of existing social structures</td>
<td>• Oppositional to congregational involvement in social change</td>
<td>• Patriotism and adherence to civil law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opposition to “sinful” lifestyles</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Table extracted from Roozen, McKinney & Carroll 1984, p.87.

Four different “mission orientations”, termed “activist, civic, sanctuary and evangelistic”, were identified as underlying patterns within the congregations. These related to being “this-worldly” as against “other-worldly”, and “member-centered” as against “publicly proactive” with the cross-cut of each dimension yielding the four orientations (Roozen, McKinney & Carroll 1984, p.86f). Their respective characteristics are summarised in Table 4 above. The analysis further revealed that,
Whilst most congregations displayed each orientation to some degree, one or two orientations tended to dominate, with few strongly reflecting only one orientation. On the criteria used, the orientations found were 4% activist, 5% evangelistic, 17% sanctuary, and 22% civic. Results also indicated that 40% of congregations exhibited two or more orientations (the most frequent being civic-activist and sanctuary-evangelistic), and 20% of congregations did not score significantly on any (Roozen, McKinney & Carroll 1984, p.88f).

Researchers also noted that this mission orientation quite noticeably affected community-oriented mission planning by congregations. Activist congregations were more likely to be involved in social services and advocacy programs; civic congregations more likely to support community groups such as elderly citizens and scouts; sanctuary congregations more likely to maintain schools and give attention to public policy issues associated with personal morality; and evangelistic congregations more likely to be active in membership recruitment and vacation schools (p.94). Further, whilst noting a denominational correlation, researchers found that mission orientation was more likely to be of significance in a congregation’s response to social issues than denomination, size, or location within Hartford (i.e. inner city, suburban or rural fringe).

This study also undertook qualitative participant observation in 10 congregations representative of the four mission orientations, gaining additional data during 6 days of interviewing and observation within the congregations’ locality and facilities. Results were presented as 10 case studies that developed a detailed image of the operation of the various orientations. In summary, additional insights were:

- Activist congregations depended on strong pastors and had an explicit theology for their social involvement. They developed their social programs co-operatively, accessing any available government funding.
- Civic congregations focused on educational input rather than action and were less clear about their theological basis. They had a strong emphasis on tolerance.
- Sanctuary congregations didn’t emphasise “action in the world” and tended to hide behind fences etc. They emphasised individual
responsibility to be “exemplary citizens” and exhibited ambivalence about community involvement.

- Evangelistic congregations were clear in their belief and organised for their mission. They had strong pastoral leadership and high lay involvement. They sharply distinguished moral and political issues and were intentional about action taken. Their theology promoted acts of charity but not action for social justice.

Overall this study highlights that all congregations do not relate to their locality identically. Rather they reflect different orientations, with some congregations more likely to undertake community service activities than others, and with the focus of those activities varying. It also identified the possibility that conflict within congregations between clergy and lay people, and amongst lay people themselves, is likely to arise if there are strong internal differences in preferred mission orientation, an analysis which makes sense of the clergy-lay conflicts found by Dempsey in Australia (1977, 1983a, 1983b). It further suggests professionals that working at developing community service activities within congregations need to understand and work with these differences, a position congruent with Grierson’s insights (1984), and found to be an issue by Henigan (1995).

Given that this research was undertaken in one American city with a particular, long-established culture derived from its history of liberal religion and insurance-related business, its relevance to other settings may be questionable. This is partly addressed by Carroll and Roozen (1990) through their study of over 600 Presbyterian Congregations throughout the United States. Whilst their cluster analysis resulted in 6 congregational identities being defined, three were very similar to the Hartford Study in more than label (Civic, Evangelical, and Activist). The remaining 3 (Sojourner, Family and “Old First Presbyterian”) seemed to be focused inward to retain an identity separate from the others but not overly dissimilar to that of the Hartford study’s “sanctuary” orientation. A problem shared with the Hartford study, however, was the assumption that congregational leaders (pastors and/or lay leaders) validly spoke for the whole congregation. Given the congregational conflict identified by Dempsey (1977, 1983a, 1983b) regarding social involvement, the validity of these results must be questioned. Becker’s later study of 23 middle-class
congregations in Chicago identifies four different “models” reflecting congregational identity and mission (Becker 1998a, 1999). Whilst these four models, House of Worship, Family, Community and Leader, were not identical to the Hartford “mission orientations”, there were evident similarities. More significantly Becker’s work also noted the existence of “mixed” model congregations in which serious conflict ensued because the different models of congregational identity and mission were not reconcilable. This gave clearer insight into the nature of the conflicts that intruded into so much congregational life, what Becker termed as “between frame” conflicts, because these conflicts were about the core assumptions of how congregations operated within their local cultural setting.

Whilst the naming of the “forms” of religious presence might vary, congregational research identifies different “bundles” (Becker 1999 p.7) of features that clarify variations existing between congregations, and become the basis of conflict when existing within congregations. These research projects also made clear that “forms” of religious presence varied within traditional denominations, reflecting Warner’s previously mentioned “de facto congregationalism” (1994) i.e. the tendency for each congregation to determine its own identity and practice independently of official structures.

**Church and Community Project, McCormick Seminary, Chicago**

This second US project, undertaken by Dudley and colleagues (Dudley 1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1997; Dudley & Johnson 1993; Mock 1992), appears to be the most directly relevant to the current research focus. However this project has not been comprehensively published; rather the full nature of the project has to be deduced from a number of separate publications, some of which present more as self-help guide books than reports of a significant longitudinal research project in congregational community service.

The most complete outline of the project is presented by Dudley in his keynote lecture to the Religious Research Association just prior to the project’s formal completion (Dudley 1991b). Commencing in 1986, the Project was funded to provide 40 mid-western (Illinios and Indiana) congregations with 3 annual grants of $US20,000 to initiate local community service programs that addressed community needs related to “hunger, health, housing, education, employment and world peace”
The purpose was to observe the “social dynamics of program development through a period of several years” in order to better understand how congregations might reclaim their “primary community function” in the face of the disintegrating commitments of government to local community (1991b, p.196). Congregations were selected in conjunction with denominational leaders on the basis that they were “typical churches - not already heavily involved in social issues but willing to begin or expand a ministry program” (1991a, p.vii). The project aimed to work with these congregations for 12 months during 1987-88 in planning, provide the seeding grants for 1988-1991, and then have congregations independently continue their program for a further two years. The congregations were to appoint lay church members to chair each project committee.

Dudley noted that around 20 congregations declined to be involved either because their pastors said lay people would not be interested or because the congregational leaders could not imagine what the program might become after 3 years of development. Those which did participate were characterised primarily by “‘imagination” and “risk” [sic]’ (Dudley 1991b). The planning year was structured around the Handbook for Congregational Studies co-edited by Carroll, Dudley and McKinney (1986). Based on insights from its authors’ respective social science disciplines (Dudley 1991b), this handbook presented a four stage congregational framework of context, identity, program and process. This framework Dudley redrafted into a simplified guidebook, along with illustrations of how the congregations applied the 3 Parts - Social Context, Congregational Identity, and Organizing for Social Ministry (1991a). Dudley (1991b) indicated three data sources were used:

- Project staff observed and interviewed congregational participants, monitoring both administration of the actual project and descriptions of the processes involved.
- Surveys from over 5000 congregational members administered at the project’s commencement in 1987, midway through in 1989, and at the funding cessation in 1991 collecting congregational views on social ministry and beliefs. These results were fed back to other project participants.
- Reports written by congregational leaders illustrating, amongst other aspects, the dynamics of project decision-making.

Dudley saw this approach as “Research-in-Action” which allowed for a methodological triangulation and exploration of “correlation” between theological and sociological perspectives (1991b, p.206ff).

At the end of the project in 1991, 36 diverse churches (Catholic, mainline Protestant and evangelical; Anglo, African-American, Hispanic and Asian; rural, small city, suburban, and metropolitan; having from a handful to “several thousand” members) had been fully funded to establish community ministries. Of these, twenty-five completed the full 3 years of the project’s development (Dudley 1991a, p.vii; 1996, p.ixf). Over the ensuing 5 years to 1996, despite no further funding, 24 of these programs were still functioning. In addition, participants had revived one that had been discontinued early in 1991. Collectively these 25 programs had 30 full-time staff, at least 200 part-time volunteers and annual budgets totalling $6m. The most common programs related to education support for minority groups (9), while others were elderly ministries (4), housing (4), “comprehensive community-wide ministries (5)” and justice ministries (4) (Dudley 1996, pp.113-119). Two areas were not taken up – hunger and world peace.

Whilst no complete report on this project has been published, three key reports were considered.

1. Mock (1992) outlined an analysis of the identity of 62 congregations initially surveyed in 1987 as part of this project. He explored the link between “religious orientation”, defined theologically as liberal, moderate and evangelical, and “orientation to society”, defined sociologically as sanctuary, civic and activist (p.23f). Whilst previous research suggested these were linear (p.21), Mock’s analysis, based on data that included congregational members and not just leaders, did not find this linear relationship. Rather he discovered “Evangelical Activist” and “Liberal Sanctuary” congregations that contradicted earlier research (p.24). According to Mock, the implication is that linear assumptions about the link between these issues “overestimates the constraints which a congregation’s religious identity can place on its perceptions of the social
world and its role in it” (p.24). He noted that identities were not entirely defined by denominational affiliation either (p.26). However, location of the congregation was influential with Activist correlating with inner city, and Sanctuary with rural.

2. Dudley and Johnson (1993) presented their analysis of five guiding “images” that correlated with the development of community ministries. They identified Pillar and Pilgrim responses, which acted to support a defined place or a defined people; Survivor and Prophet responses, which reacted to crises of the congregations own survival or were proactive regarding a perceived crisis in the locality; and Servant responses, reflecting congregations expressing a need to care for others (1993, p.3-7). Their analysis indicated these images also described what congregations do best, predicted leadership styles, committee patterns and program choices, and inspired congregations to explore alternative congregational ministries (1993, pp.2 & 8). They images were illustrated by stories of representative congregations, drawing out further features of these images. In concluding, Dudley and Johnson identified implications of this research for the processes of leadership in these respective congregations, noting strategies for developing community ministry (1993: pp.87-108). Some of the key conclusions were:

- Pillar churches approach programs with an emphasis on “being professional” and utilise community agencies in program development.
- Pilgrim churches focus on respecting cultural-heritage in developing programs and build networks with other similar churches, including Pillar and Servant churches.
- Survivor churches require leaders with tenacity and seek supportive partnerships with Pillar churches.
- Prophetic churches need leaders with energetic vision for new quests and build coalitions with secular organisations with similar concerns.
- Servant churches need sensitive, caring leadership as they quietly care as individuals, for individuals.
In a later interview Dudley emphasised the need for clergy and leaders to respect the guiding images that work in given congregations (cf Grierson 1984), rather than imposing different images which might lead to clergy-lay conflict. Dudley noted especially that new pastors tended to arrive with Prophet and Pillar images and experienced difficulties with Pilgrim and Servant congregations17, an observation consistent with the research of Dempsey (1983) and Blaikie (1979) in Australia.

3. Dudley published an edited collection of articles written by key participants about process insights gained from the overall project (Dudley 1996). He also presented a summary of 19 unexpected insights identified in the research (Dudley 1997). These publications seem to present the most comprehensive outcome of this research project, but lack specific analysis of how these insights were gained. Some of the significant conclusions reached were:

- Volunteers were changed in the process of involvement as they became more informed about and sensitive to others needs.
- Pastors were more effective in their leadership role when they recognised their own style of leadership and when they modified their style to match the “maturing sequence of each ministry”.
- Pastors were found to significantly and consistently underestimate their congregation’s support for community ministry whilst lay people were found to need permission to go-ahead.
- Ordinary people were found able to become leaders when they believed in what they were doing.
- Community ministries developed with one of two structures; a formal organisational style which was slower to act but easier to track, and a relational or familial organisational style which acted more quickly with larger numbers of people but had difficulties with records and incorporation of partners.

17 This 1996 interview between Carl Dudley and David Miller of The Lutheran was located at http://www.thelutheran.org/9603/page12.html.
“Bridge people” able to translate project expectations across racial and cultural differences were found to be important in the developing organisations.

Although lay people were more inclined to develop service ministries than advocacy (justice) ministries, when services encountered structural problems, congregations frequently moved on to advocacy.

Congregations expanded their available resources through fund-raising approaches and through forming partnerships with other congregations, including those from other denominations, as well as with other community groups and services.

Partnerships risked a diminished sense of ownership, divided loyalty, and difficulties with the different identities of the partners.

In being so inclusive, the uniquely Christian roots of these programs could be “neglected or obscured”, even whilst faith was being put into action.

This community ministry development project has clearly identified some important processes involved in the establishment and operation of these modes of religious presence. However in claiming to have undertaken its work with “typical” churches a selective sample is used. In particular, the lack of any identified equivalent to the Hartford project’s “evangelistic” congregations is readily apparent (“evangelistic” being a mode of social interaction, in contrast to “evangelical” as a particular theological orientation, as used by Mock 1992, amongst others). This raises the probability that such congregations were not invited to participate or chose not to accept the invitation, perhaps perceiving the proposal for community ministry (or perhaps its leaders seeing it) as incompatible with the congregation’s existing mission orientation. Likewise it is unclear if any equivalent to the Hartford study’s “Sanctuary” congregation were involved as they too may adopt a stance which excluded community ministry. Whilst Dudley and associates do little more than acknowledge in passing the Hartford mission orientations, and whilst the images for energising ministry are derived differently, a similarity between Activist and Prophet, and between Pillar and Civic, are noted (Dudley & Johnson 1993, p.113). This therefore suggests that this typology may not apply to all congregations, though it may well assist them to shape their community ministries strategies.
Another limitation of this project is that this initiative for congregational development was external to the congregation and had significant facilitative and financial resources – something which appears to be quite atypical. This would clearly produce a different type of motivation through an opportunity not normally available for such ministries. However its action research approach allowing for program monitoring is a unique and significant contribution to organisational knowledge about congregational ministry. The fact that these results were written up, not as academic works, but as guidelines for congregations, is both a strength and a weakness of this project - a strength because it allows the outcomes to be available to more congregations in a format they are more likely to use; a weakness because it limits the extent to which researchers can compare it with later projects on congregational community ministry.

Finally this project identifies for the first time that the theological orientations of congregations may not be as significant in motivating them for community ministry as had been thought (Mock 1992) from studies based on interviewing congregational leaders (as the Hartford study did). The triangulation research process, and the survey of congregational members, seems to be crucial in challenging the previously identified nexus between theological orientation and social involvement as an expression of that religious presence.

**Study of Congregations in Changing Communities, Boston**

In the third study, Ammerman (1994, 1997b) explores congregational responses to significant social change in their locality. She considered data on 300 congregations in 9 localities where significant social change had occurred and examined 23 case studies of 2 or 3 congregations undertaken in each locality in 1992 and 1993. In 18 of these case studies, questionnaires were distributed to the whole congregation and detailed interviews conducted with staff and 10 to 15 members. A simplified approach was used with 5 additional “congregations that did not appear likely to survive”.

Ammerman (1994) described her approach as “[taking] my research down a notch - from denomination to congregation”, looking at the “common sense and experience of everyday life” and finding a different story about the relationship between religion and society than that told when looking at “numbers” and the “grand theories” of
theologians and [social] scientists. Hence she asserted the value of listening to the people in the congregation and in contrast to church and denominational leaders, as was typical of earlier research. Consequently, Ammerman claimed to have heard different understandings about the blending of mission orientations (1994, p.297; 1997b, p.358) because people “are putting together an everyday faith”.

Ammerman used a data analysis framework that explored the Resources, Authority Structure, and Culture (which included Activities) of each congregation. This approach identified that congregations either:

- Actively resisted the social changes around them, with the result that they faced serious decline to the extent that their survival was in doubt;
- Ignored what was happening around them, but sought survival through relocation or development of a niche identity which appealed to a “non-neighbourhood population”; or
- Developed new programs leading to new constituents, new internal structures and new congregations reflecting the new social environment, thereby helping to sustain the congregation for the long term (Ammerman 1997b, p.322ff).

Ammerman also noted the development of completely new congregations in demographically changing localities, responsive to the spiritual cultures of the neighbourhood. Because her work identified that “adaptation and innovation are at least as visible as decline and death” for congregations, Ammerman concluded that a “religious ecology” operated which reflected not an overall decline, but a change in location and/or the norms of religious participation (1997b, p.321).

According to Ammerman, congregational openness to change was related to:

- Denominational support for, but not control of, the changes;
- Attitudes of the congregation to their buildings and the associated costs of maintenance or mortgage payment;
- Appointment of visionary clergy who teamed with strong lay participation (if only one of these were evident problems were noted);
- High commitment from the congregation especially in the early part of the change period (although it was also noted that actively resistant congregations also had high commitment);
• Higher educational levels amongst the congregation and/or congregational leaders willing to train “indigenous” leaders; and
• A congregational capacity to tolerate the conflict that was inevitable with change (1997b, pp.324-329).

In relating the 23 cases to the mission orientations of the Hartford study, Ammerman also observed that:

• Civic congregations needed to be clear on their constituency or else they lacked motivation to change,
• Activist congregation would inevitably explore change in response to local environmental changes,
• Sanctuary congregations provided a place of nurture when local people under stress were seeking support,
• Evangelistic congregations exhibited fervour that assisted new congregations to establish and could adapt to other local changes when they were “inclusive” in their approach to mission, and
• Actual theological orientation did not matter, providing congregations were willing to work at reshaping their particular theology and ideology for their new situation (1997b, pp.338-343).

Data on actual community service programs in these 23 congregations was incidental in each case study. However Ammerman noted that, overall, 60% of congregations had undertaken some sort of “social benefit program”, 88% of people in congregations saw helping the needy as important or essential to their understanding of Christian life; and 92% saw service to the needy as important or essential for a congregation (1997b, p.366f). Whilst making no analysis of how the programs provided in each congregation related to the congregation’s particular orientation to mission or their particular local demographic shifts, Ammerman still concluded that congregations were indeed “among the most effective generators of ‘social capital’” (1997b, p.362).

Overall this study extends the research that congregations do not follow uniform patterns of behaviour, but are complex social organisations taking on different forms and responses in different settings. It also strengthens the qualitative social research on congregational dynamics which highlight mission orientation rather than theology
as the key factor in developing congregationally-based community service activities. Other factors identified are the need for clergy with a vision of the future, the capacity of the congregation and clergy to work supportively with each other towards the future, an initially high level of commitment to the ministry goals, an openness to developing local leadership, an acceptance of all constituent groups within the congregation, and an acceptance of a degree of conflict as development is undertaken. The main limitation of the study is its failure to specifically explore the local impact of these congregational community ministries.

### 2.3.2 Social Work Locations

Very little discussion of the links between professional social work and congregational community service activity appears in the professional literature, even from the large denominational agencies. However two specific US sources were identified which, although involving minimal formal research, were largely based on reflections of professionals’ emerging practice wisdom. Both sources clearly emphasise that this is a significant professional issue requiring further research.

**National Conference of Catholic Charities, Washington**

The first study, by Joseph and Conrad (1980), survey the relations between Catholic Charities and local Catholic congregations, one of the few recorded examples of links between denominational welfare agencies and its congregations. Recognising churches as examples of society’s “mediating structures” (Berger & Neuhaus 1977) between government and individuals, and that the informal helping networks of parishes were an under-used resource, they reported on a project that promoted the linking of parishes to the services activities of formal Catholic agencies. It was also noted that, at the time, parishes had already begun developing their own “social ministries”. This exploratory-descriptive research described the emerging programs and examined the role of the social agency and its “social work technology” in the project’s development (Joseph & Conrad 1980, p.426).

The results revealed a heavy reliance on social workers to facilitate the outreach of church agencies to parish programs (45% of the 628 of the staff involved). Yet only 18% of the staff based in the parish service and community programs were trained social workers. The other 65% had other related qualifications such as teaching,
pastoral counselling and nursing (Joseph & Conrad 1980, p.427). One consequent role identified for church agencies was the provision of supervision for the parish-based social workers, otherwise without formal links to agencies. The programs themselves were dominated by practice models which, rather than using single models, integrated direct service with social action (80% of 62 agencies in the research) (Joseph & Conrad 1980, p.426). Funding for these was shared jointly by the affiliated agency and the parish involved, although parishes were thought to be gradually accepting more responsibility via public funding, foundation grants and private monies (Joseph & Conrad 1980, p.427). It was found a “certain ease” developed in building relationships between agency clients and parish people, thus promoting a new “interdependence” and social competence among people who previously were multi-users of agencies. The study also noted that social workers functioned as facilitators rather than direct service practitioners, and worked to locate, utilise and optimise existing natural and professional helping resources within the locality. It also identified potential resources without providing meaningful detail of the processes actually involved in promoting these cooperative ventures (Joseph & Conrad 1980, p.430).

The importance of this Catholic research is its recognition of the potential for linkages between parish community service activities and church-sponsored agencies, its recognition that effective intervention includes linking service users with the helping activities of locally-based natural networks accessible through parishes, and the provision by professional agency staff of training, consultation and supervision at the parish level.

**North American Association of Christians in Social Work.**

A second source, based as much on practice wisdom as formal research, was associated with Diana Garland and her colleagues from the *North American Association of Christians in Social Work* (NACSW) (Garland 1986, 1992b, 1994, 1998, 1999 & 2000b; Garland & Pancoast 1990). These articles, published in the NACSW journal, *Social Work and Christianity*, and the more recent collection edited by Hugen (1998), are important because they reflect a systematic exploration of the links between congregations and professional social work practice. They identify congregations or parishes as contexts for direct social work practice (Bailey
1992; Ferguson 1992; Garland & Conrad 1990), as sites of church-agency consultancies (Watkins 1990), as sources of volunteers for church agency programs (Freidrich 1990; Garland 1994, pp.141-191), and as community resources available to social workers in non-church-related settings (Garland & Bailey 1990) – all of which constitute “Church Social Work” as a practice context (Garland 1986). In each case literature and practice experience are used to propose practice models relevant to particular congregational community service involvements. This work therefore identifies procedural frameworks for facilitating and developing professional social work involvement with interested congregations, a goal further developed in Garland’s ongoing research about individuals’ experience of faith in their lives, and the impact of community services on congregational life (Garland 2000a, 2000b; see also Thornburgh & Wolfer 2000).

2.3.3 Community Service Provider

A number of American researchers, often associated with the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), have sought some understanding of the extent to which religious congregations actually provide community services, their range of activities, and/or the implications for wider social policy (eg Farnsley 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b & 2000; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Kirsch, Noga & Gorski 1992; Printz 1998). This research became more significant with the 1996 Charitable Choice provisions of US federal welfare legislation and its goal of increasing activity by congregations and other “faith-based” organisations (Castelli 1997; Farnsley 1999a & 1999b; McCarthy & Castelli 1997). The establishment in 2001 of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and its associated offices in several Federal Departments further reinforced this goal through its active promotion of these government and faith-based links (Bush 2001).

Three key researchers were identified in the literature. Firstly, Wineburg, who first identified the phenomenon of congregations responding to gaps in services created by withdrawal of federal funds (Wineburg, Sparkes & Finn 1983; Wineburg & Wineburg 1986, 1987; Wineburg 1992, 1993, 1994)18 then tracking this phenomenon

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18 See also Cnaan, Boddie & Wineburg, 1999 & Wineburg, 2000b for summary discussions of this research and its policy implications.
in his home community of Greensboro NC; secondly, Cnaan (1998)\(^{19}\), who undertook the first extended study identifying patterns of congregational community services; and, finally, Chaves (1999a, 1999b & 1999c) who undertook a representative study of the extent to which congregational community services actually occurred. This focus on congregational community services providers is therefore a different perspective which requires consideration.

**Wineburg** (1990, 1991, 1992) initially studied the response of 128 congregations out of 330 in Greensboro NC to the 1980’s US federal government funding cuts to community services. He firstly asked which of 31 social service activities (defined as *in-house services*) they offered and, secondly, which ways they supported three religiously-based community agencies (defined as *community outreach*). Results indicated many services commenced following the 1980 budget cuts and were provided to both the wider community and congregational members. The most frequent services offered were personal counselling, financial assistance, and emergency food and clothing. The most frequent mode of support for the community agencies was individual volunteer time, followed by cash donations, and finally the donation of goods. Further analysis of these results by Wineburg (1993) identified that 32% of congregations provided volunteer support to a specific housing program, while 23% provided finance. Similarly a high number of congregations supported a local food bank with 40% providing goods, 29% finance and 19% volunteers. It was then found that, by grouping the 31 service types into 6 categories, 22% of congregations had begun new food, shelter and cash assistance services since the 1980’s cut, 8% new counselling services, and 7% new child, adult and after school care services. The remaining categories were substance abuse assistance, homebound assistance, and information and referral assistance, each with 4% of congregations commencing new programs. In all, these 128 congregations were identified as providing 632 social services from their own premises. However, Wineburg also noted much duplication in the development of these services and a failure to evaluate these services in any way (1993, p.293). This suggested a need to coordinate these congregations to maximise this community resource.

\(^{19}\) See also Yancey (1998), Cnaan, Boddie & Wineburg (1999) and Cnaan, Boddie, Handy, Yancey & Schneider (2002) for further developments in this study.
In a follow-up study Wineburg (1994) focused on the collective response to local issues of six congregations in Greensboro which fitted the Hartford Study’s “Civic” mission orientation (Roozen, McKinney & Carroll 1984). These congregations began with forums to educate their members about social issues, so opening the congregations to contact with local “black” congregations, and to congregational and individual involvement with some of the local issues. Wineburg deduced that, as this process continued, these congregations moved slowly and cautiously towards the Hartford Study’s “Activist” mission orientation. To check the hypothesis that these 6 congregations were intrinsically different, Wineburg went back to his earlier Greenboro data and re-analysed it with these 6 congregations as one group, and the remaining congregations as another. Whilst statistically dubious because of the disparity in numbers, Wineburg identified that the Forum congregations were more active as volunteers and financial contributors to the local social services, so suggesting a longer term sensitivity to social issues.

Cnaan (1998) initially explored patterns of congregational community involvement in 111 congregations occupying older church centres in 6 urban areas throughout America. The study involved intensive interviews with pastors, lay leaders and program directors. It was later extended to include an additional 140 congregations in these 6 locations (see Cnaan et al 2002), with similar studies undertaken in Ontario Canada (Cnaan & Handy 1998, 2000) and, more extensively, in Philadelphia PA (Cnaan 2000; Cnaan & Boddie 2001).

The original study identified that 93% of congregations had one or more social service program and that the 103 active congregations provided 449 programs. The main program areas identified were:

- food pantries: 60%
- clothing closets: 51%
- international relief programs: 51%
- recreation programs for teens: 46%
- alliances with neighbourhood associations: 45%
- tutoring for the disadvantaged: 41%

The provision of services to others compared to congregational members was in a ratio of 4.2:1. The provision of service by others compared to congregational members was 1:1:1. Overall the estimated net contribution by each congregation to these programs was $US35,803/program/year, or $US144,643/congregation/year as
each congregation operated an average of 4 programs. The concerns of congregational members (clergy, individuals or group within) generated most programs, with only a few initiated through requests from outside, the main ones being about community changes and cutbacks in social service provision. The related studies presented similar results with around 90% of congregations consistently identifying social service activities amounting to a net replacement value of around $US8,000 to $US15,000/congregation/month.

Chaves (see Chaves, Konieczny, Beyerlein & Barman 1999) sought a more representative understanding of congregational involvement in community services by developing a “hypernetwork sample” of congregations rather than the biased “random sample” of Hodgkinson et al (1992), the single locality sample of Wineburg, or the non-random samples of Cnaan. His sample of 1,236 congregations was derived by identifying the congregational attachments of a random sample of 2,862 individuals, so locating a random sample of congregations not identifiable by other means. Interviews with key leaders of these congregations provided the data for Chaves’s analysis, which suggested that only 57% of congregations engaged in community services (Chaves 1999a), unlike the approximate 90% found by other studies. It seems likely however that the open question used by Chaves to identify the range of community services provided by congregations is likely to underestimate the actual services offered, a difficulty overcome by Cnaan through using an extensive “check list” of possible options (see Cnaan et al 2002 p.62 & 87). Chaves also found that the main services offered were very different to those found by Cnaan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless support</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 This point was discussed by Cnaan and Chaves at the ARNOVA Conference New Orleans 2000 where there seemed to be consensus that Chaves’ sample was more representative but Cnaan’s listing of congregational activities more complete. It was therefore suggested that the true level of congregational community service involvement was somewhere between Chaves’ 57% and Cnaan’s 90%.

21 See page 51 above.
The data allows a limited comparison with the Australian NCLS data previously cited where 35% and in excess of 64% of congregations were found in 1991 and 1996 respectively to provide some form of welfare or counselling service (see page 27 above). Farnsley’s work in Indianapolis (1997, 1998a, 1998b), in which the community engagement of 145 congregations was surveyed, likewise questioned the extent and range of engagement identified by the earlier studies. The amount of congregational financial contribution was put at $US4,500/year, which was much less than the replacement values assessed by Cnaan. Farnsley also found that in seeking partnerships with government, an involvement actively promoted within Indianapolis, congregations seemed not to have the expertise to handle the complex proposal and accountability procedures required by government. This caused Farnsley to question their capacity to meet the expectations of the promoters of Charitable Choice (1999a, 2000). Farnsley suggested that the models, drawn from the practices of larger and older congregations, did not apply to the many smaller ones that had emerged.

Overall, these studies clearly identify that religious congregations exhibit major initiatives in the provision of local community services, as a “secondary goal”, although the emphases seem to be more on practical supports than professionally based services. However the estimates of the financial contribution of the congregations seems somewhat artificial and excessive; for example, few if any churches would place an imputed rent value on their empty buildings if programs were not running. Likewise the equivalent wage value of volunteers is a dubious figure as it is rarely replaced in congregations by actual wages. Whether congregations can be expected to provide further services, and whether they are interested in government funding to do so, are matters of debate in the light of this data (Chaves 1999c & 2001; Cnaan et al 2002; Wineburg 1999).

2.3.4 Local Nonprofit Organisations

Whilst also associated with ARNOVA discussions, a somewhat different perspectives on congregations comes from separate research, such as that of Milofsky (1987, 1988b, 1997, 2000a) and Jeavons (1994), where congregations are essentially viewed as examples of small, local nonprofit organisations which include religious attributes. As such, their operating processes are brought more into focus.
Milofsky’s understanding was derived from ethnographic case studies of community organisations in various Pennsylvania localities (Milofsky 1998), and in particular an action-research variant termed *Transparent Research* in which the participants being researched also assisted with data collection, analysis and reporting (Milofsky 2000a). From this approach applied over a number of years and settings, Milofsky identified that congregations, like other neighbourhood-based organisations, were embedded in an overlapping network of local non-profits i.e. people participated in multiple organisations and therefore the demise of an organisation did not necessarily mean the loss of its “organizational intelligence” to the community (Milofsky & Hunter 1995). Congregations were also identified as generating other “mutual aid and community-betterment services” (1987 p.280) using, for example, opportunities created by gaps experienced in local interorganisational service linkages and resources accessible through local congregational connections (eg Milofsky 1997, 1998). In this sense Milofsky sees congregations as part of the larger local community network, and should not be considered independent of it. The desire to connect constructively with this community and its needs typically contributes to congregational efforts at community service provision (Milofsky 1997 p.S142).

Rather than being solely owned by their founding entrepreneur, Milofsky (1999c) also identified the intrinsic importance for such services to be “picked up and ‘owned’” by a community, or a section of it, for such services to “prosper”. He in fact identified the possibility of a “duality of ownership” involving both the founding person or group and the community that “picks up” the project concerned as part of their community “fabric”. One consequence of this embeddedness of congregations and their community involvements in their locality is therefore their deep roots in the local culture which, Milofsky indicated, must be affirmed in effective work with congregations (1997 p. S152). Milofsky noted that, in congregational development, clergy were examples of “temporary stewards” with limited capacity to facilitate new developments in these local groups “before leaving” (1999c). That members rather than clergy “own” these organisations is a crucial issue which leadership must take into account (Milofsky 2000b). Hence working with them requires a “strategic” process for work towards longer term goals (Milofsky 1999c).

Jeavons’ emphasis is more on the implications of the religious aspect of congregations (and other faith-based) non-profit organisations (1994 p.58). In
researching this he undertook case studies of seven “Christian service organizations” which claimed to both provide a service to defined communities and promote the values and beliefs that underlay the organisation’s commitment to that task (Jeavons 1994 p.87). Just what constituted “religious” was an issue needing clarity and Jeavons suggested this could be deduced by considering the organisation’s self-identity, its participants’ identity, its resource sources, its goals and services, its decision-making processes, its assignment of power, and its organisational fields (Jeavons 1998). He saw congregations as the “ideal-typical case” of religious organisations (p.93). A similar consideration by Smith and Sosin (2001) explored resources, authority, and culture as the identifying parameters that influenced the religious dimensions. Service organisations that interacted more with congregations were seen as more “tightly coupled” religiously and the best examples of religious non-profits. The key conclusion from Jeavons’s study is the identification that organisations that claimed this religious coupling should also apply to their own management practices the values which they primarily hoped to communicate to their service users (Jeavons 1993, 1994 p.205). The negative consequences of this not occurring were elaborated further in his work.

In a similar study of 5 “small religious nonprofits” Jeavons explored the organisations’ development and detailed critical incidents encountered. He then combined these insights with the work of Cnaan from his 6 city study of 111 congregations to analyse patterns in the evolution of religiously-based community service programs (Jeavons & Cnaan 1997). Results suggested 5 general “templates” outlined their birth and early development:

- Individuals within a congregation saw a need, and felt “a call”. The resulting program remained under congregational control.
- Individuals in a congregation or group of congregations saw a need. The program then become freestanding and drew resources from a larger base than the sponsoring congregation(s).
- A “religious entrepreneur”, most typically clergy, presented a vision to a congregation which then adopted and materially supported the program.
- Congregational leaders formed an organisation to address an identified social issue.
People from outside the congregation sought tangible support and a suitable location from which to work. Such programs have more of a service than a faith focus (1997, p.66f).

Issues about ownership, shedding religious identity, physical location, and control (e.g., establishing organizational independence from the sponsoring congregation) arose with each approach and led to critical incidents in program lifecycles.

Jeavons and Cnaan also identified two predictable crises: firstly, a crisis of “foundation” related to the transition from idea to actual program and then from program to organization sponsoring the program; and, secondly, a crisis of “institutionalization” related to its transition from a small, volunteer-managed and informal organization to paid staff, formal structure, and professional emphasis (1997, p.69). These researchers noted that, as organizations evolved, their operative goals significantly differed from their espoused goals, with the program therefore becoming different to the original intent (1997, p.72).

Other nonprofit research by Stone and Wood (1997) noted 3 different governing board structures for religious nonprofits:

- A “department” within congregational structures needing internal legitimacy i.e., needing to further the overall mission of the sponsoring congregation.
- A “religiously infused” independent structure, found to vary in how tightly coupled the project was to its religious base. Founding board members favoured informality and new, non-religiously affiliated members sought change.
- A local agency of a religiously infused franchise, e.g., denominationally-related welfare agencies, varying in the formality of central control.

Typical problems encountered included management of volunteers, especially related to a volunteer tendency to overlook efficiency and performance standards, and expectations about board members’ adherence to sponsoring body values. Resulting from this they found cyclical phases of organizational governance, identified as:

- The founding period - initially fairly informal with a relatively homogenous board reflecting the founder’s intuitions. Moves to governing board behaviour begin when externally controlled resources are accepted.
- Supermanaging phase – characterised by high level activity of core board members. The board recruits new middle-aged professionals (MAPs) to resolve crises. New recruits prefer formalised rational approaches. With the loss of religiously-oriented MAPs, religious values dissipate.

- Corporate phase – board becomes internally secularised, and the executive becomes powerful.

- Ratifying phase – board rubber-stamps executive proposals. There is increasing secularisation except when presenting the organisation to religious constituencies. Phase ends with questions raised about agency’s mission, legitimacy, or accountability procedures.

- New supermanaging phase – religious roots reclaimed by recruiting board members sharing those values. The governance cycle recommences (Stone & Wood 1997).

Stone and Wood found that organisations established as congregational departments remained within the “founding period” because external actors could not influence the congregation’s governing authority sufficiently to instigate change.

From this research certain processes associated with congregationally-related community services can be inferred. These include certain cycles in management (including a potential for congregationally-initiated services to develop their own autonomy), and a need to actively reflect the values of the congregation whilst also recognising its embeddedness in its local community network and the service opportunities available within it.

### 2.3.5 Community Asset

Resulting from the social policy developments associated with the US welfare reform legislation known as Charitable Choice (see page 20), certain researchers, often in association with the Center for Public Justice, adopted a strongly supportive stance on this policy. Their emphasis was to sanction congregational involvement in community service provision whilst retaining affirmation of the spiritual dimension of congregational life, so enhancing the church as a community asset. For Sherman such congregations developed genuine relationships with the “poor and needy”, made “strategically foolish investments” in distressed neighbourhoods with no expectation of economic return, and exercised “legitimate authority” by “being
“there” in “anarchic ghettos” to promote stable, safe and moral community life (2000c).

One key project with this emphasis was the *Congregations, Communities, and Leadership Development Project*, begun in late 1996 by Sider and Unruh at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary near Philadelphia PA (Sider & Rolland 1996). Having noted purported correlations between religious commitment and social well-being, this case study approach researched characteristics of links between community service provision and spiritual mission in 15 Philadelphia congregations (Sider & Unruh 2000). Their aim was to examine the way congregations related their social outreach to their evangelism. The insights drawn from these case studies addressed an aspect of congregational community service not examined in other studies, leading to publications that explored the nexus between evangelism and social involvement (Sider, Olsen & Unruh 2002; Unruh 1998, 1999a & 1999b; Unruh & Sider 2001). Sider and Unruh summarised the types of religious elements identified as *Environmental* or *Active*, outlined in Table 5 & Table 6 below. The range of strategies for integrating these elements with social outreach were then identified, and outlined in Table 7. From this it is clear that congregations exhibited a range of approaches to interfacing their spiritual and social missions, and that their community service activities cannot necessarily be understood in solely social terms, as seemed to be assumed in much of the research discussed above. Unruh and Sider contend therefore that these different *kinds* of faith-related approaches constitute a variable in understanding the effectiveness of these service.

**Table 5 - Environmental Religious Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Objects (Images and Words)</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Policies / Norms</th>
<th>Mission statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>• program has a religious name</td>
<td>• a cross or picture of Jesus is in the space where the program meets</td>
<td>• board members and/or staff are selected (or self-selected) for religious beliefs</td>
<td>• staff manual calls for serving clients in the spirit of Christ's love</td>
<td>• mission statement includes spiritual nurture as program goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• program receives funding or volunteer support from a church or denomination</td>
<td>• religious tracts are set out on a table in the lobby</td>
<td>• staff regularly meet for prayer</td>
<td>• preference given to clients from the sponsoring denomination</td>
<td>• brochure describes program as &quot;Christ-centered&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table extracted from Unruh & Sider (2001)
Table 6 - Active Religious Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Invitation to religious service / activity</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Use of sacred texts</th>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Personal testimony</th>
<th>Religious teaching / discussion</th>
<th>Invitation to personal faith commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>• inviting patients at a health clinic to attend Sunday church services</td>
<td>• saying Grace before a soup kitchen meal</td>
<td>• materials for a job training seminar cite Bible references</td>
<td>• chapel services for prisoners in a recidivism prevention program</td>
<td>• giving your faith testimony at a drug rehab group</td>
<td>• leading a devotional at an AIDS support group</td>
<td>• inviting a GED* student to dedicate her life to Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• placing Bible study flyers in food bags</td>
<td>• opening a community organizing meeting with prayer</td>
<td>• quoting Scripture in a counseling session</td>
<td>• singing praise choruses with kids at day care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples extracted from Unruh & Sider (2001)

* Note – “GED” apparently refers to a sub-program within a congregational welfare-to-work program.

Table 7 - Strategies for Integrating Religious Elements into Social Outreach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the religious element ...</th>
<th>Active?</th>
<th>Part of the planned program design?</th>
<th>Mandatory?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TYPE:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitational</td>
<td>No in the program; Yes in other activities to which clients are invited</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>No in the program; Yes in informal conversations with staff</td>
<td>No in the program; Yes in intentionally cultivated relationships</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated-Optional</td>
<td>Yes, unless clients decline to participate in religious activities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated-Mandatory</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table extracted from Unruh & Sider (2001)

This research project also examined issues resulting from the restrictions placed on congregational use of government funding noting that the few congregations who sought these funds had difficulty adhering to the funding requirements (Sindha 1999). It is this aspect which raises concern when religion and social services are linked through government support of congregational community involvements as is promoted elsewhere by these researchers (Sider 1999; Sider & Unruh 1998).

Sherman was likewise an advocate for congregations to take the Charitable Choice option (1997a, 1998) and continued to monitor its impact. Her follow-up research
examined the extent of congregational community engagement associated with Charitable Choice implementation in 9 US states. She identified that although the response was “modest”, there were 80 congregations who had entered into financial partnerships with the government, and 40 congregations that had entered into non-financial arrangements. She also noted the forms of involvement reflected a move away from provision of “commodities” (e.g., food and accommodation) to provision of “relationships” through, for example, mentoring in welfare-to-work projects (2000a & 2000b). Although others had argued that congregations were already heavily committed with uncertain capacity to do more (e.g., Cnaan et al. 1999; Wineburg 2001), Sherman also discovered a pattern of previously uninvolved congregations developing services in this way, much as Sider and colleagues suggested. Elsewhere Sherman acknowledged potential pitfalls in this collaboration with government (1997b), although this doesn’t appear in the analysis of her research.

The conclusion drawn from both studies is clearly that a crucial component of effective intervention in the lives of people and communities in need involves church communities seeking to address the spiritual dimension of people’s lives in overt yet informal and relationship-oriented ways, rather than merely through formal services. This is substantiated by case studies of congregations in action, viewing these two components as variously interconnected, not separate, so enabling these congregations to be a community asset in an holistic manner, rather than in the restricted way conceived by the framers of Charitable Choice. However, the ways in which this interconnection is experienced by service users themselves remains contested (Elasser 2000; Woodwell 2003).

### 2.3.6 Voluntary Associations

A greater emphasis on the voluntary nature of congregations and their members’ came from work undertaken at the Centre for Voluntary Organisations, London School of Economics in the UK (Cameron 1999a; Harris 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998a & 1998c). Firstly, in a study of volunteer leaders in volunteer welfare associations, Harris noted that around 50% of leaders in voluntary welfare agencies were identified as “practising members of a religious denomination” (1990 p.162) and that religious commitment was sometimes the prime motivation for involvement. Among Harris’s conclusions was that “active members of religious institutions” were
potential leaders elsewhere because of their experience in the voluntary activity of congregations.

Harris noted little research had been undertaken on the welfare contributions of religious congregations, despite indicators that these “constitute a significant, if largely hidden, part of our welfare system” (1995b p.54). She then reported on her study of the nature of this welfare provision in four congregations; a Catholic parish, a Pentecostal church, an Anglican church and a Jewish Reform synagogue. She identified that all congregations had regular, largely self-funded welfare activities established by one or two lay people, with clergy support and encouragement. The main recipients of these programs were not members of the churches (1995b p.57f). Congregations were also found to participate in welfare provision in other ways:

- through referring people to, and funding of, outside agencies;
- through informal practical and emotional support given to others in the congregation even when previously not known to each other;
- through organised informal care, such as prison visiting, which straddled informal contacts and formal projects;
- through mutual aid activities like weekly groups, sometimes involving “serial reciprocity”…[where] people were helped in their own need and then helped others” (1995b p.62); and
- through social integration of people with problems via explicit ‘befriending’ action or drawing people into congregational activities.

Harris identified that congregations provided an “organisational framework within which care initiatives can be developed and supported” (1995b p.69) usually with a measure of quietness and informality, that motivation for involvement reflected congregational religious norms about individual caring activities, and that religious and welfare purposes were not distinguished from each other (1995b p.63f). However, limitations noted were that these involvements competed for congregational resources, they depended on the enthusiasm of one or two committed people, and they confronted untrained volunteers with complex social problems (1995b p.69). These volunteers found boundary and priority setting difficult (1995b p.65), including balancing resource requirements with programs. Further, due to the continual need to recruit volunteers, congregations had difficulty sustaining their care
programs (1995b p.66). However, success placed a burden on volunteers when programs “outgrow” the capacity of existing congregations. Such difficulties led to programs being adopted by outside funding bodies, risking congregational resentment at the ensuing loss of control and increased formalisation. The link to the congregation then became tenuous (1995b p.67) risking the very autonomy that made this “Quiet Care” attractive.

Harris (1996) also explored the roles undertaken by volunteers within 3 of the congregations being studied, identifying 4 different roles:

- a small group doing large amounts of unpaid “governance work”;
- a small group providing care services;
- a small group doing support roles (eg fundraising, newsletters); and
- a larger group doing occasional roles (eg flowers, coffee).

Issues related to recruiting and retaining volunteers, their time demands, and the relationship of volunteers to clergy. She also identified a tension between the member-benefit work of congregations and their public-benefit functions.

Cameron (1998a) explored congregational community involvement from a social policy and intra-organisational perspective by undertaking detailed case studies of 5 congregations in an English city. She found that the social issues these congregations set out to address were not determined by a formal social needs analysis, but by responding to needs members and their acquaintances personally encountered. She also identified that these reflected gaps in the broader social service provision and therefore constituted an implicit local social policy critique. In addition Cameron found that the activities operated in informal ways with only a lose association with the more formal structures of the congregation, expressed often through supportive encouragement from the clergy. Congregational volunteers were found to view their involvement as an aspect of the congregation’s overall mission i.e. that there was a conceptual if not explicit organic link between the congregation’s main religious purposes and its support for community service activities. Cameron also noted that the volunteers providing the services did not marginalise service users as occurred in more formal services, but that they instead developed friendship-type relationships which blurred giver–receiver boundaries (1998a, p.319ff).
In summary, these works constitute a timely if yet still unclear warning that the voluntary role of congregational members is itself an issue in congregational community service activity, and that the fluid organisational context of congregations is a unique and not well understood setting which impacts on how community service activities arising from within are viewed, organised and supported.

### 2.3.7 Generators of Social Capital

Together with its implications for a “civil society”, Putnam’s metaphor of “Bowling Alone” as symbolic of the alleged decline of “social capital” in US society clearly promoted much interest in the nature of relationships within social networks and associations (1995, 2000; see also Cox 1995; Onyx & Bullen 1998). Yet, the debate about whose definition of the concept of social capital, with its notions of social trust and norms of reciprocity on the one hand, or its sense of resource access or exclusion through a variety of social linkages on the other, remained much contested (see DeFilippis 2001; Edwards & Foley 1998; Foley & Edwards 1999; Portes & Landolt 1996; Portes 1998; Siisiäinen 2000). Within that debate, some writers have asserted a link between religion and the generation of social capital (Greeley 1997a, 1997b & Ladd 1999). Ammerman (1996, 1997b) and Harris (1998b), researchers already considered, found evidence of this in their reflections on their data analysis, however one US researcher, Schneider, and two UK researchers, Bacon and Smith, have made this perspective on congregations a focus in their work. An outline of the results of their research follows.

Based on her understanding of social capital as “the social relationships and patterns of trust that enable people to gain access to resources” and the intrinsic requirement for “knowledge of cultural cues which indicate that an individual…should be given access” (Schneider 2001 p.iii), Schneider undertook a number of ethnographic studies of local communities and their community service organisations in Philadelphia PA and Milwaukee and Kenosha WI. She particularly noted the participation of various congregations in the existing community care networks, the most comprehensive being in *The Kenosha Social Capital Study* (Schneider 2001). Schneider identified in Philadelphia’s Quakers that church-based social service involved more than just a willingness to provide an instrumental service (1999a). She concluded congregational involvement was most effective when a sense of faith-
based mission was retained, citing an example of a Quaker neighbourhood house losing its link and its resource access when outsiders took on the leadership roles (1999a, p.289). Here Schneider identified that social capital functioned as an exclusion mechanism. This contrasted with a community burial ground project which continued to share resources because an alliance had formed between the Quakers and the community where the ground was located (1999a, p.284), whilst a youth group functioned well in the community because it shared cultural cues so enabling participants to learn to “walk in each others worlds” (1999a, p.282). These social services necessarily involved interaction between two different cultures, but the religiously generated social capital was only accessed when cultural cues were respected.

When studying welfare reform implementation in both Philadelphia and the two locations in Wisconsin, Schneider (1998) identified two features:

- Some participants accessed supportive resources such as childcare, transport, and emotional support, more widely than family and friends through their links with local congregations. Further, these primary sources of social capital located jobs more effectively than the institutionalised support of the formal agencies (p.17f) because people within these networks knew the cultural cues that accessed these resources.

- Even though other groups had sought identical changes, cross-congregational coalitions were more effective in modifying the polices controlling welfare reform because of existing trust patterns within this religiously-based social capital (p.31).

As an illustration, Schneider cited a low-income Milwaukee neighbourhood where, despite an apparent convergence of interest, social capital (what Schneider later terms “closed” social capital) operated to exclude access to needed community resources. Despite other combined involvements between a Catholic congregation and a local Settlement House, a resource the Settlement House needed, and the congregation’s school possessed, was denied because the Settlement House staff and school principal lacked prior links. This lack of trust was traced to lack of knowledge of their visions and appropriate cultural cues (1999b, p.40f). Schneider believed people participating in both communities could foster bridges across their boundaries as occurred when residents participating in both groups accessed the Settlement
House staff’s support for the congregational outreach group’s efforts to contact other residents (p.38).

Schneider’s point is more emphatically made in her Kenosha study (2001) in which she identified differences between “Closed” and “Bridging” social capital and the capacity of congregations to offer both whilst often offering only closed social capital. Schneider saw all Kenosha congregations offering supportive resources within their own group (p.91), but noted two congregations developed participation with other congregations and community networks to gradually alter inter-group interaction in Kenosha (p.91). Development of this bridging social capital was a “slow process”, both within the ethos of the congregations involved and wider the community as it depended on developing community and trust among members (p.90). Schneider also identified that churches provided support “on their own terms” (p.94), and could not be viewed as simply needing money to “provide additional formal programs” to the community. For Schneider, congregations were clearly a source of social capital for the community, but limited by restrictions reflecting their cultural norms and ethos.

Within the context of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland, Bacon explored the ways in which church congregations, and faith-related groups emerging from them, contributed to “revitalising civil society through social capital formation” (2002). His initial survey of congregational voluntary involvement throughout the district of Coleraine made clear that churches contributed “voluntary effort” that was “too great and too various to measure” (1998, p.45), that without it the social fabric would be “thinner” (p.51), yet that this congregational contribution remained unrecognised by civil authorities.

Bacon then focused this congregational contribution (and that of faith-based groups associated with or arising from them) through twelve case studies (2000, 2002; see also Bacon & Milofsky 2003) within this context in which, for some, “religion” marked off “specific loyalties”. This meant projects were delivered in two separate communities (2000, p.9), so presenting a dilemma concerning the role of churches in resolving harmful social separations. Undertaking both qualitative and quantitative data collection from key personnel in selected services, Bacon inductively explored the quality of embedded social capital, identifying that it was the faith dimension
which motivated the quest for social change and inclusion, and that this required the building of links which were “trusted” across formal church boundaries (2000, p.19). This also required ensuring these efforts did not instead “leave the congregation behind” (2002, p.16) as actions beyond self-interest promoting “social cooperation” (2002, p.20) and “a sense of belonging to the wider community” (2002, p.22) were dependent on supportive congregational belief systems (2002, p.23). Bacon saw bonding, bridging and linking social capital all in evidence when program personnel “come together” in shared mission, develop “collaboration” across boundaries, and engage “horizontal linkages” for support.

Related research with 88 individuals associated with these case studies (Bacon & Milofsky 2003) indicated that people who became community leaders were first drawn to the congregation itself. They then who bridged and linked with others in the community, thereby extending congregational involvement into the wider community. The leadership capacity they gradually developed within the bonded congregational setting of worship and faith nurture became valued in wider community roles. Bacon and Milofsky concluded:

Their church leadership links into community leadership and this is an important way that the bonding social capital of the church becomes social capital available to the community (2003, p.6).

Within the multi-cultural setting of East London, Smith explores the extent of religious identification and its implications (1999, 2001 & 2002a; see also Smith 2002b for a related research project). Based on survey work for a local religious directory Smith identified a high level of diverse religious involvement and an increase in the number of religiously-related organisations in that community (1999, 2001). Part of this growth involved activities not associated with public worship, around a third of which were open to the wider community, and mainly originated in Christian congregations (2001, p.144). Smith saw in these activities examples of support social capital that assisted people in the community to access resources that enabled them to “get by” (2001, pp.146,149) in contrast to leverage social capital (assisting people to “get ahead”) which seemed to be limited (2001, p.146). Because of these activities Smith concludes:

…the churches remain one of the most important players in civil society and provide a huge reservoir of social capital. …in East London it would be hard to find many other community or voluntary agencies with the long term social
capital resources to develop and sustain projects involving the mobilization of so many locally resident volunteers (1999, p.15).

With somewhat different emphases, these three researchers explore the social capital that religious congregations potentially offer wider society. Schneider indicates that sometimes this works to exclude rather than include, and that cultural cues specific to congregations are the key to accessing these resource across community boundaries. Bacon indicates that social capital both strengthens congregations to sustain community engagement, and enables them to build bridges to the wider community and gain supports from related networks, apparently through leaders nurtured within congregations who move into bridging and linking roles. Smith sees that congregations provide resources to their diverse wider community. Much of it helps people support their social situation but some provides leverage for people to improve their social circumstance.

### 2.4 Conclusions Drawn from the Literature

Whilst little attention had been given to the area of congregations and their community services until the mid-1990s, the more recent research, involving mainly case studies and ethnographies with a few larger congregational quantitative surveys, has rapidly expanded our knowledge about the place of congregations in the provision of community services. Whilst only some of this literature has been reviewed, it clearly confirms that local religious congregations are indeed involved in providing services to the wider community in all four countries from which it is drawn. Despite some debate about its extensiveness, and its focus beyond provision of basic concrete services such as emergency relief, the research identifies a vast array of features apparently associated with how this involvement is perceived, provided, and influenced\(^\text{22}\). Yet, although this literature does not identify obvious contradictions among these features, it presents only limited understanding of this aspect of congregational life. As outlined here it presents more as a cluster of insights akin to the proverbial collection of blind people trying to describe an elephant whilst perceiving only a limited aspect of it. The consequential questions are therefore not hard to identify: Is it possible to develop a more coherent framework for understanding this phenomenon of religious congregations delivering non-religious

\(^{22}\) See Appendix 1 for a brief summary.
services to the wider community? If so, what would such a framework be like? It is the challenge of this research project to pursue these questions.
3 Explaining the Methodology

When discussing sociological research and the tendency for much of it to be descriptive, Giddens suggested that:

the best sociological research, however, starts from problems which are also puzzles [sic]. A puzzle is not just a lack of information, but a gap in our understanding [sic]...Puzzle-solving research tries to contribute to our understanding of why [sic] events happen as they do, rather than simply accepting them at their face value (1993, p.676).

In order to identify the coherence that seemed lacking in the literature, the purpose of this current research is not simply to describe the events that occurred in the development and operation of congregationally-based community service activities as the literature seems largely to have done, but to identify the relationship between these events. It is hoped that some understanding might emerge as to why congregations get involved in these activities as they do, why they select the activities they do, how they operate these activities, and why they operate them as they do. The research therefore seeks to identify critical processes and “decision points” that impact on the development and operation of congregationally-based community service activities, the options for responding, and the dynamics of selecting and implementing particular ongoing responses.

At its most basic, therefore, the research aims to describe key features of congregational community services and then model linkages which impact on their development and operation, thereby deriving a program development framework specifically applicable to this context. Such models of congregational community service processes seem lacking in the literature23. Given the plethora of research methodologies now associated with the social sciences (Grbich 1999; Sarantakos 1993; Wadsworth 1991) and the debates concerning their respective philosophies (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Fine 1994; Greene 1990; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Peile 1988; Pieper 1985, 1989; Rodwell 1987; Ruckdeschel 1985), the choice of approach becomes a crucial issue.

23 Dudley’s work (1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1997, 2000) offered an outline of processes involved, but these processes were initially prescribed as part of his “social experiment” which involved promoting congregational community involvement rather than discovering its intrinsic processes. The literature presents little evidence that such external influences could typically be expected as features of congregational community engagement, even though it is reasonable to assume some commonality. Harris (1995b), Jeavons and Cnaan (1997), and Stone and Wood (1997) also offer some limited process insights from their case studies.
3.1 Choosing a Methodological Approach

There is little value in debating here all the issues involved in choosing the methodological approach, but some key aspects in this decision relate to a qualitative versus a quantitative approach, data collection techniques, and mode of analysis. After consideration of the diverse literature, these crucial decisions about methodology were made and these are briefly outlined here.

In order to undertake a traditional quantitative enquiry, the research approach would need to identify a range of variables related to the various aspects of congregational community services and propose [hypothesise] some sort of relationship between them. It would then need to define measurable indicators for these variables and set out to collect data on their occurrence. Statistical tests would then need to be used to ascertain if the anticipated relationship was observed in practice. The basis for this approach, however, is an assumption that either from analysis of the pre-existing literature, and/or personal idiosyncratic reflections on practice experiences with congregational community services, it would be possible to validly predetermine relevant variables and/or define measurable indicators that impact on the phenomenon being studied (Sarantakos 1993). To achieve its goal, this research can make no such assumption. Such a methodology could perhaps validly discover the extent of congregational community service activity in any defined locality, and patterns in the types of services offered, funding obtained, and personnel accessed as service deliverers or service users; but these are not the issues ultimately identified here.

As a search for coherence in the processes impacting congregational community service provision is new research, an exploratory qualitative methodology was considered best. Such a methodology allows data collection from the various participants of congregational services to be in their own words, and according to their own perceptions (Sarantakos 1993). This is achieved primarily through in-depth interviewing (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 1995) rather than structured or semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, or a mixture of the two. In-depth interviews permits open-ended discussion between researcher and respondent and, although risking the inclusion of data potentially unrelated to the central research focus, it was less likely to prematurely foreclose on any particular
respondent’s perspective or distort it into the researcher’s pre-formed concepts. In effect it allows the respondent to more readily control the interview to present their own understandings and experiences more fully.

The main disadvantages of qualitative research are that data analysis is time-consuming, such data making respondents’ anonymity harder to totally guarantee\(^\text{24}\), and data is less readily analysed into tight categories because understandings were not necessarily uniform. The in-depth approach also allows my own perceptions, as the researcher, to influence the discussions; however it is arguable that no methodology is devoid of such limitations. Further, in this approach respondents are able to expand, modify or contradict such inferences to better focus their own perceptions, something they would not be able to do in traditional surveys. It is therefore my judgement that the advantages of a qualitative approach outweigh the disadvantages in achieving the goal of gaining some clarification of the *puzzle* about how congregational community service involvement actually “works”.

In addition to data from in-depth interviews, some data from pre-existing documents are also used. Mostly these allow contextual aspects of each dataset to be clarified, however one dataset substantially consists of these pre-existing documents. Both these sources enable “thick description” (Gribch 1999; Sarantakos 1993; Taylor & Bogdan 1984) of respondents’ perceptions of congregational community services to be made available in written form for analysis.

It is noteworthy that the use of qualitative methodology is consistent with recent changes in the methodological approach to the study of religious settings. Sociologists of religion report a change from secondary analysis of census data on religious denominations, to sampling populations on religious affiliations and attitudes, to quantitative surveys of denominations and congregations and, most recently, to narrative studies of congregations (Fukuyama 1986; Roozen & Carroll 1989; Roof 1993). The work of Ammerman (1994, 1997b), Becker (1999) and Eiesland (1999) represent this change.

\(^{24}\) It is worth noting that one especially insightful response was removed from this analysis because, in consultation with the respondent three years later, it was deemed to remain “too revealing” of the people and issues concerned, even though no individual or context was identified.
3.2 Choosing an Analytical Method

Qualitative data could have been collected as a series of case studies and analysed for their inherent processes (Grbich 1999; Sarantakos 1993). From this a generalised framework could have been proposed for the process of congregational community engagement. However, the Grounded Theory approach to qualitative data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967; see also Taylor & Bogdan 1984) was chosen as the analytical strategy, despite no example being found in the literature of this approach being overtly used in researching congregations. With its emphasis on the emergence of theory rather than theory confirmation, it was seen as more systematic and integrative in the development of the proposed process framework or model concerned. Grbich contends that a grounded theory approach is “best used for small scale, everyday life situations where little previous research has occurred and where processes, relationships, meanings and adaptations are the focus” (1999 p.173). These criteria are substantially congruent with this research. Hence this project explores new ground even in the application of this research framework.

The grounded theory approach was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and expanded separately, with somewhat varying emphases, by each of them (Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1994). It recognised the type of situation envisaged in this research, with its goal for developing a “theoretical” frame for understanding a social phenomenon rather than mere description or hypothesis testing. In Glaser’s words:

> The grounded theory approach is a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area. The research product constitutes a theoretical formulation or integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about the substantive area under study. That is all, the yield is hypotheses! Testing or verificational work on or with the theory is left to others interested in these types of research endeavour (1992, p.16).

The key features identified in this approach are:

- Concurrent cycles of data collection and thematic coding which enable the categories identified, with their properties and dimensions, to evolve as the data is collected;

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25 Becker (1999), Eiesland (1999) and Harris (1998) are examples of congregational researchers who make reference to grounded theory but give no indication of how they may have used it.
- **Constant Comparisons** by which data is examined for similarities and differences as coding progresses in order to extend existing and identify new categories;

- **Theoretical Sampling** which means that later data is collected with a view to developing more detail about categories already emerging but not adequately developed (not “saturated”) in the already existing data; and

- **Theoretical Sensitivity** gained through valuing the relevant prior experiences of the researcher and/or the already available literature related to the broad area of research, both of which are used by the researcher to inform their reflections on the processes of data collection, coding and analysis. 

A grounded theory is “discovered” when a relationship “between conceptual codes (categories and their properties) which have been generated from the data as indicators” (Glaser 1978, p.55) can be hypothesised as an underlying pattern – an outcome of theoretical sensitivity.

This approach contrasts with traditional research because of its emphasis on inductive reasoning by which the researcher:

- gets data in an area of substantive interest, and then analyze[s] what is going on and how to conceptualize it, while suspending one’s knowledge for the time being. The researcher starts finding out what is going on, conceptualizes it and generates hypotheses as relations between the concepts. At this point the researcher starts deducting where more data can be found (theoretical sampling). As he [sic] goes for other and more data previous data and conceptualization are corrected (verified). Thus in grounded theory both induction and deduction are going on. There is just a considerable preponderance of induction over deduction. And most importantly the latter is in the service of the former…The theory is not logically deduced from the literature. The focus is on induction from the meanings of participants’ experiences…and therefore it excludes deductions or inferences of what should or might be going on, and includes deductions about where to further collect data on what is going on (Glaser 1998, p.95).

As will become apparent, this approach is not adhered to in its strictest sense, even if that were possible, given the divergent emphases of Glaser and Strauss (see Glaser 1992; also Babchuk 1996; and Grbich 1999). Each interview was not coded prior to the next interview and was not explicitly used to guide the nature of the subsequent data collected, although some implicit influence was noted when issues raised in

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26 This is one area of disagreement between Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and Glaser (1992). Whilst being totally uninfluenced by the literature already known, as Glaser advocated, is an impossibility when coding, a preference that the data rather than the substantive literature inform the coding categories was a conscious methodological choice.
earlier interviews were raised again in later interviews. Instead, each of the four datasets was coded using the constant comparison method before the next dataset was obtained, and each dataset thereby influenced the choice of subsequent datasets and the focus of data collection – reflecting the process of theoretical sampling. A further limitation was that theoretical saturation\textsuperscript{27} was only partially used to indicate when a thematic direction was terminated; rather the practicality of the amount of data for a single researcher to analyse was more significant. Nonetheless, a sense that key themes were saturated was surprisingly evident as the data analysis progressed. Overall it is concluded that the grounded theory approach was applied in essence.

To assist with the mechanical processes of data analysis, and to maximise reliability of data handling, the computer software \textit{QSR NUD*IST 4} (Qualitative Solutions and Research 1997; Richards 1998) and, subsequently, \textit{QSR NUD*IST Vivo} (NVivo) (Fraser 1999; Richards 1999) were chosen. As discussed in the literature on qualitative data analysis (Coffey, Holbrook & Atkinson 1996; see also Kelle 1997a, 1997b; Lee & Fielding 1996; Richards & Richards 1999), the advantage of these tools for assisting coding, recoding, and linking of data in modelling processes is their consistency with grounded theory coding logic.

While only a small number of community service programs were able to be researched within the constraints of this sole researcher project, this proved sufficient for analysing the overall dynamics of congregational community service involvement as perceived and reported by the respondents associated with it. The relevance of the framework formed to more general settings is, however, a matter for later exploration\textsuperscript{28}.

\textbf{3.3 The Specific Methodological Approach}

Within these broad choices, the specific methodology used involved an initial decision to undertake data collection in two stages. Each stage was separately submitted to the \textit{University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee} for approval - the first stage on 03/07/95 and the second stage on 02/05/96. Stage 1 was

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Theoretical saturation} occurs when coding no longer yields new categories or sub-categories, i.e. the categories appear adequately developed at that stage.

\textsuperscript{28} Glaser and Strauss term a hypothesis formed in relation to the research focus, in this case congregational community services, “substantive theory”. The subsequent identification of substantive theory with other substantive areas is part of their process for generating “formal theory” (1967, p.79).
approved on 04/09/95 and Stage 2 was recommended for approval on 29/07/96 subject to small adjustments to the submission. These adjustments were submitted on 09/10/96 and subsequently accepted. As part of this approval, all people interviewed were provided with a letter of introduction and invitation to participate. Agreement to be interviewed was confirmed by signing a consent form which also stated that the interview would be recorded on audio cassette, and the data subsequently used, anonymously, in the research analysis.

The first stage of the research involved approaching a “convenience sample” of 15 Professional Informants. The theoretical basis for this sample was that these initial respondents should be mainly social workers who were known to have experience at the interface of church life and community service involvement. It was considered that these people would have informed perspectives concerning congregational community services which could be analysed and then used to guide subsequent data collection. Interview transcripts from those who agreed to be interviewed formed the first dataset to be coded.

Subsequent to this analysis, it was decided that the second stage interviews would be sought from stakeholders in three viable congregations of “typical” size who operated congregationally-based community services. For two of these second stage community services, interviewing commenced with the key congregational leader, followed by other identified stakeholders with informed perspectives (the theoretical sample). These stakeholders, the transcripts of whose interviews formed the second and third datasets, were committee members, employed and voluntary staff, congregational clergy, key congregational members not directly involved, or congregational members who were directly involved. In the third congregation, gaps in understanding were clarified with a supplementary interview with the minister, the transcription of which was returned for checking and included in the dataset. In all

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29 Copies of these forms are contained in Appendices 2 to 5 on pages 323 to 331.
30 In the strict sense this is only partially reflective of Grbich’s definition of a “convenience sample” as quickly accessible (1999, p.70). The sample was made up of people whom I knew or knew of, and who met the theoretical criteria identified. The need was to begin the generation of relevant data categories, and such a sample provided a methodologically sound way to do that. More correctly it was an initial theoretical sample; “convenience” more aptly describes its use of existing contact networks.
31 Congregations of a typical size of 60 to 120 participants were approached in order to avoid the potentially more complex issues of small, barely viable congregations struggling to survive and, conversely, the atypical advantages of large congregations with their more substantial resources.
three congregations, pre-existing documents concerning the congregation and its community service were accessed, although only in the third were these used as the dataset for coding. For the first two congregations, the documentary data described the local and congregational context and was used to generate an overview of each congregation and its community service activities. For the third congregation, in addition to the contextual documentation, the documents accessed as the dataset formed a chronological record of the development of their community service.

The issues identified in the first stage transcription analysis were loosely used to guide the interviews in the first congregation, whilst the process model then emerging from the transcription and analysis of that second dataset influenced the data sought from the second congregation forming the third dataset. With the third congregation the documents and the single transcription forming the fourth dataset were coded around these emerging concepts. This process followed the cycle of coding and analysis relevant to grounded theory research.

The application of this methodology to each of the datasets is more specifically identified through separately considering each in what follows.32

### 3.3.1 Professional Informants

The 13 people who agreed to be interviewed in December 1995 for Stage 1 were invited to discuss two broad themes - their experiences of the interface of social welfare and congregational life and, in the light of that experience, their reflections on the issues impacting on congregational community service involvement. The interviews were otherwise entirely unstructured. They lasted on average 50 minutes but ranged from approximately 25 to 90 minutes and involved 211 pages of transcript.

The aim of Stage 1 data collection was:

- To use a range of practitioners working at the church-community service interface to identify issues which could be further explored in Stage 2 of the research, and

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32 To retain the anonymity of each respondent, the datasets are referred to by research descriptors which reflect their main defining characteristic – “Professional Informants” and respondents who came from “Congregation A”, “Congregation B” and “Congregation C”.
To use this first stage to practice and review the data collection and analysis process in order to ensure the effective application of this methodology during Stage 2.

The interviews were undertaken over 15 days with tape recordings and summary notes written during the interview. These were then progressively transcribed between January 1996 and July 1997. After transcription a preliminary thematic coding was manually undertaken in order to directly gain a sense of the coding process and develop an initial summary of the perceived themes. The transcripts, their thematic coding, and thematic summary were returned to each respondent to check for accuracy and additional comment. None of the respondents requested changes. In March 1998, a further letter was sent to all respondents providing them with an overview of the early literature, a summary of the manually coded themes from this first stage of the research, and an appreciation for their participation.

Subsequently these interviews were re-coded using NUD*IST 4 and this coding formed the data collection framework for Stage 2. Using this framework, a detailed analysis was drafted and forwarded in December 1998 to all first stage respondents for comment. The sole response requested that a recognised quote be slightly reworded for grammatical correctness. Other respondents informally acknowledged receiving the draft, with one requesting permission to allow a colleague to read it due to its perceived relevance. The draft was additionally circulated to a small number of people familiar with the church-welfare interface, including a religious sister who, as a social worker, was the former head of a provincial Catholic Family Counselling agency. Despite none of the respondents in the First Stage sample coming from a Catholic setting, this former agency head commented that “although none of your data was collected from Catholic Church organisations, the issues are very familiar”.

3.3.2 Congregation A

Congregation A was recommended by an Anglican Diocesan Community Development worker. It was located in a provincial public housing area and provided

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33 Delays were caused by a personal need for a number of periods of leave from this research project.
34 Appendix 6 commencing page 333 provides a copy of this draft.
a range of informally organised services to the community. The congregation was formally approached on 27/01/1999 via a letter to the minister seeking the agreement of the congregational Council for their participation in this research. After a meeting with the minister, the letter was presented to the Council and approved in February 1999. Through attending 3 subsequent Sunday worship services, and being introduced to the congregation at the first, I informally met people, observed their interaction together, and gained a general sense of their view of the community service activities. Interviews with 7 stakeholders (2 of whom were interviewed twice, resulting in 9 interviews overall) explored their association with congregational community services and how these services developed. They occurred in February and March 1999 during a series of weekday visits, lasted on average 58 minutes but ranged from approximately 15 to 90 minutes, and involved 169 pages of transcript. Each visit was recorded in my research journal for later reference; however these records were not treated as formal data.

Interviews were progressively transcribed between February and May 1999 and forwarded to each respondent for correction and/or further comment, though none responded. The interview records were subsequently coded for concepts, categories, sub-categories and dimensions with the assistance of **QSR NUD*IST 4** and, later, **NVivo**. A final visit to the congregation was made on 10/10/1999 for further informal contact and to obtain feedback on a summary description of the congregation and its activities which had been sent to all respondents in September. At this time some information was clarified through informal discussion with two respondents.

### 3.3.3 Congregation B

Congregation B had also been mentioned by the Anglican Community Development worker, but was visited at a Sunday worship service on 01/08/1999 because of a salaried position advertised in the June 1999 Anglican newspaper. During a discussion with the minister after this service he expressed interest in the congregation participating in this research. This was relevant because of the congregation’s difference to Congregation A. It was located in an older upper middle-class suburb and operated a formally incorporated community service with two part-time employed staff other than the minister. A letter formally requesting congregational involvement was sent to the congregational council and management
committee via the minister in August 1999 and approved in September. Nine interviews, similar in approach to those with Congregation A, involved 8 respondents (2 of whom were interviewed twice and 2 interviewed jointly) and were undertaken between October 1999 and December 1999 in a series of weekday visits. Interviews took place in the church complex, private homes or the respondent’s normal workplace. They lasted on average 62 minutes but ranged from approximately 20 to 120 minutes and involved 169 pages of transcript. Two further visits were made to Sunday worship services in October and December 1999; the October visit providing an opportunity to inform the congregation at both morning services about the research project. On all 3 visits contact was made with congregational members who informally discussed their congregational life and their understanding of its official community service and the other community activities. As with Congregation A, notes summarising each visit were made in my research journal but not used as data.

Transcriptions were made between December 1999 and February 2000 and, as previously, each respondent was mailed a copy and invited to make any corrections or other adjustment they saw fit. Two respondents forwarded back minor factual or grammatical corrections which were incorporated into the transcript and a corrected copy returned. These interviews were then coded for concepts, categories, sub-categories and dimensions using NVivo. Again a summary description of the congregation and its services was provided to these respondents in August 2000 and, on a follow-up visit to Sunday worship services on 20/08/2000, two respondents advised me of the usefulness of this summary in congregational discussions, and a third offered some updated information. A later informal Sunday visit occurred on 04/11/2001.

3.3.4 Congregation C

In the late 1980’s Congregation C responded to its awareness of local issues by negotiating with a Central Church welfare agency to jointly initiate a community service activity based within the congregation’s own facilities. This arrangement had existed for 10 years at the time of this research, and had been extensively evaluated throughout, resulting in longitudinal documentation outlining its development. A casual conversation with the agency coordinator at a national church agency conference in May 1999 suggested this congregation was relevant to the research
because of its location in a culturally and socially diverse area, and its partnership with a central-church agency – two key differences with Congregation A and, subsequently, Congregation B.

Formal permission was requested from the Advisory Board to access key documents for use in this study; this was given in June 1999. The assumption was that, if the emerging theory was “grounded” in the manner intended, and if there was some uniform pattern in the developmental process for community services in church congregations, then that pattern should be evident and able to be further explored in the development of this congregation’s services. The congregation was visited on three occasions; in August 1999 and March 2001 for Sunday worship services, and on 01/07/1999 to obtain 23 documents and clarify their context with the co-ordinator. These documents were scanned in October 2000 for computer-based coding using NVivo. A follow-up interview with the minister was undertaken in March 2001 to clarify gaps in information. The congregation was also visited for two promotional events; for the launch of the history of the community service program in March 2000, and for a public fund-raising and information evening in September 2000. Covering 9 years of operation the documents provided identified an array of activities that had operated within this agency. Whilst not all activities were ongoing, most were, so giving the impression of a highly active community service responding to a range of community needs with varying modes of operation and degrees of formality.

3.4 Summary of the Methodology

In identifying the limited consideration of the processes of congregational community service found within the literature, a research focus to explore that puzzle was identified. It was decided to undertake this research using a qualitative methodology because it both allowed respondents to speak with their own voice, and allowed the research focus to be explored without any necessary presumptions. The use of a grounded theory approach ensured the analysis would be based on the data directly obtained, rather than “forced” into a pattern largely deduced from pre-

36 Published as Shared Journey: A partnership between a local church and a large welfare agency by Kathryn Sheddon (Acorn Press, Melbourne, 2000). Whilst this was accessed during the analytical write-up, it was not coded or cited. Instead, earlier versions were included in the dataset as Documents 23 and 24 (the latter made available in January 2000) – see Table 17 page 103.
existing literature or prior personal experience. From the process of thematic coding for categories, sub-categories, dimensions and properties, and consideration of the evident links between them, a framework outlining how congregations undertake community engagement could be inductively identified.

Data was sought from four sets of respondents, each chosen because of particular broadly identified characteristics that ensured their contribution was derived from a different context to the other datasets. Interviews were transcribed and, together with the documents forming the fourth dataset, were coded using qualitative data analysis computer programs as a tool. This coding provided the concepts around which the analysis has been developed.
PART II – THE ANALYSIS

4 Examining the Datasets

This chapter provides a contextual overview of each of the four datasets upon which this research is based. Some statistical data on the postcode and Statistical Local Area (SLA) surrounding the geographic location of the three congregations is explored. A brief outline of the congregation’s development within its local setting is followed by a summary of its associated community service activities. Finally a brief summary of data sources is given for each dataset. The chapter finishes with a brief comparison of the three congregational datasets in relation to their surrounding demographics, congregational attendance and financial situation.

4.1 Professional Informants

The characteristics of the thirteen professional workers whose transcribed interviews form the first dataset for this research are summarised in Table 8 page 84 below. This group offered a diverse range of experiences in church-related social welfare work. Six respondents were female and seven were male; three were clergy but five others, including one female, had formal theological training. Four worked as chief executive officers (CEOs) of central church sponsored welfare agencies, whilst one was a policy officer for such a body and another a facilitator for a national network of denominational agencies. Two were academics, but both had worked extensively in the community service sector. Only one was not in a formally designated social welfare role but, as a congregational clergyman, he remained involved with a church-sponsored community service agency. Three were based in provincial locations, whilst another had previously worked in provincial settings. Seven identified as Anglicans, four as Uniting Church members, one as a Baptist and another as a member of the Church of Christ. However one had had prior involvement with the Catholic Church, two with the Uniting Church, four with the Baptist Church and one with the Salvation Army.

When combined with previous experiences, eight had worked as volunteers in congregationally-based community service activities, whilst four had been employed as professional social workers in such settings. Nine had also been “coal-face” practitioners within church-sponsored agencies, whilst six had had formal
responsibility for managing them. Eight had worked in “coal-face” social work roles with government departments in three states whilst two of these had also been regional managers for government human services departments. Overall no respondent had experience that was limited to just one aspect of the church-welfare interface. In most cases this experience was actually too complex to categorise, having developed over a period of between 15 and 30 years. Hence the experiences reported in the interview transcripts were diverse and informative, reflecting many settings, and so drawing out many issues relevant to this research.37

Table 8 - Characteristics of the Professional Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Profession Training</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role when Interviewed</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Denominational Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 1</td>
<td>Social Worker Clergyman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Parish Parson38</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 2</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Church Agency Network Coordinator</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 3</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 4</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 5</td>
<td>Teacher Psychologist</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Church Agency Administrator</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 6</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Church Agency Administrator</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 7</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 8</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Policy Officer and Consultant</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker 9</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Baptist Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Worker 10</td>
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<td>Provincial</td>
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<td>Social Worker 11</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Worker 13</td>
<td>Social Worker Clergyman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Church Agency Administrator</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37 An initial analysis of the issues drawn from this dataset was presented in a paper at the 28th Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) in Washington DC, November 1999 (see Bedford, 1999a).
38 Various names are used to identify the specific role filled within a congregation by an officially appointed and institutionally ordained person titled “Reverend” – minister, priest, vicar, rector, preacher and pastor are probably the most common in the Christian tradition. I have chosen to use “Parson” for this person as, unlike most of the others, it is no longer a term formally associated with any particular tradition (indeed it appears to have fallen from use), is less cumbersome than the more generic, gender neutral term “clergyperson”, and is less archaic than the related term “cleric”. However, where I am referring more generally to these people, I still use the term “clergy".
4.2 Profile of Congregational Case Studies

4.2.1 Congregation A

Congregation A was an Anglican congregation located in a provincial city in Victoria. The immediate locality included a substantial public housing development which historically provided a workforce for nearby manufacturing industries. New housing developments also extended beyond this area. At the time of the interviews the area was seen by all respondents as socially disadvantaged with above average numbers of lone parents, pensioners and unemployed people. As summarised in Table 9 page 86 below, according to the 1996 census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) the postcode area geographically closest to the boundaries of Congregation A had a population of 25,707 whilst the surrounding Statistical Local Area (SLA), which approximated the official Parish boundaries, had a population of 52,399. The 1996 Census Data indicated that the postcode area’s unemployment rate was 20% compared with 15% in the surrounding SLA. With the Australian rate less than half this at 9%, this serious social concern within Congregation A’s locality was immediately evident. With more of its population below 15 years of age (25%) compared to the surrounding SLA (23%), the state and nation (both around 21%); more lone parent families (23%) compared with the SLA (17%), the state and the nation (both approximately 14%); and less of its population participating in the labour force (40%) compared with the SLA (42%), the state and the nation (both around 47%), it was evident that an above average number of families in Congregation A’s locality were likely to be facing serious challenges to their capacity to cope.

In addition, household and individual incomes were lower (Postcode area, $300-$499/week and $160-$199/week respectively; SLA, $542/week and $218/week respectively; state and nation around $640 and $290 per week respectively), despite having average household sizes (2.8 persons) when compared with national figures (SLA is 2.8 with state and national sizes at 2.7 persons). Of its population, 23% were born overseas, which is similar to the SLA and the state (both around 24%) and the nation as a whole (22%), although approximately two thirds were born in countries with a main language other than English (compared with three quarters of immigrant Victorians). However, within this postcode area only 11% of people had a formal
qualification (vocational or other tertiary training), clearly less than the SLA’s 15% and the state and national rate of around 21%. Of the households in Congregation A’s locality, 17% rented public housing, compared with the SLA’s rate of 9% and the state and national rates of 3% and 5% respectively. Finally, with 31% of its population having relocated in the last 5 years (same as the SLA rate but smaller than the state rate of 36% and the national rate of 40%), the population surrounding Congregation A would seem to be more geographically stable than Australia as a whole. Overall this presents a picture of a more residentially stable, younger, largely English speaking community that is less educated, more likely to reside in public housing and be headed by a lone parent, more likely to be unemployed or not in the workforce, and more likely to have a lower than average income. Such a picture is consistent with the impressions of the respondents from congregation A.

Table 9 - 1996 Census Data for Congregation A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Surrounding Postcode</th>
<th>Surrounding Statistical Local Area</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons</td>
<td>25,707</td>
<td>52,399</td>
<td>4,373,520</td>
<td>17,892,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged &lt; 15 yrs</td>
<td>6,350</td>
<td>11,814</td>
<td>927,429</td>
<td>3,852,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Born</td>
<td>16,866</td>
<td>37,983</td>
<td>3,168,848</td>
<td>13,227,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - English Speaking</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>3,571</td>
<td>927,429</td>
<td>1,545,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - Non English Speaking</td>
<td>4,063</td>
<td>9,146</td>
<td>3,168,848</td>
<td>2,362,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (% of Lab Force)</td>
<td>2,046</td>
<td>3,366</td>
<td>196,189</td>
<td>771,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Labour Force</td>
<td>10,146</td>
<td>22,241</td>
<td>2,081,069</td>
<td>8,408,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff Address 5 yrs ago</td>
<td>7,951</td>
<td>16,002</td>
<td>1,560,608</td>
<td>7,141,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parents</td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>2,492</td>
<td>161,731</td>
<td>672,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Public Housing (% of H'holds)</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>161,731</td>
<td>672,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally Qualified (&gt;Vocation Skill)</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>3,366</td>
<td>943,681</td>
<td>3,780,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household size</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Weekly H'hold Income</td>
<td>$300-$499</td>
<td>$542</td>
<td>$542</td>
<td>$542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Individual Income</td>
<td>$100-$199</td>
<td>$215</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Anglicans</td>
<td>4226</td>
<td>7804</td>
<td>763,566</td>
<td>380,324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to religious affiliation, of the postcode area population, 4226 (16.4%) identified as “Anglican”, compared with the surrounding SLA with 7804 (14.9%), the national proportion of 21.8%, and the Victorian proportion of 16.4%. Yet participation among these Anglicans is very low as, on the three occasions I visited for Sunday worship, the attendance was no more than 50. Congregational records suggest there have been about 100 regular attenders.

Congregation A is itself a recent merger of 3 congregations from 2 adjoining parishes. These had briefly been congregations in a single parish in the 1960’s but historically had been separate congregations since the most recent one was
established in the early 1950’s. This period of separation had inevitably seen
different traditions develop, described variously by respondents in terms of two
being “very traditional” and the other being more “free” and “community minded”.
Hence the merger in the early 1990’s was not without tension. The impetus for the
merger arose in the late 1980’s after a regional review of congregational and parish
viability in the face of declining participation. A trial period of cooperation between
the two parishes began in November 1991 and, within twelve months, the decision to
amalgamate was formally ratified. At the same time a decision was made to sell the
existing facilities and construct a new and more accessible worship and community
centre near a busy local shopping complex.

The first step in this redevelopment process began in February 1993 with the closure
of one worship centre and the merging of that centre’s “free” congregation with one
of the “traditional” congregations. Another development occurred in July 1996 when
the smaller, third congregation in another nearby locality also joined this combined
congregation, so allowing its church to be sold. In March 1997 the final worship
centre closed, and the combined congregation moved to a temporary worship facility
at a nearby church agency, forcing them to “become” a single congregation. These
progressive moves allowed the purchase of a new site for this merged
Congregation A. The redevelopment program was completed in July 1998 when a
far more substantial church complex was officially opened with much celebration.
The Anglican Diocese assisted this redevelopment with a grant exceeding 60% of the
costs, whilst to sustain the congregational ministry the Diocese meets about 15% of
the annual budget.

Information supplied by parish reports indicated that these congregations, when
separate, had a combined regular attendance of about 100 people, out of a then
population of 5,300 nominal Anglicans (based on the 1986 Population Census
figures recalculated for the parish boundaries as they then applied). However, one

39 Quotes from the respective datasets are indicated by the use of italics. Brief quotes are incorporated
into the text using quotation marks. Longer quotes are incorporated as indented paragraphs without
quotation marks.
40 The parish of which Congregation A is a part also includes another congregation in an outlying area
some distance away. This outlying congregation was not directly involved in this merger process or
the community services.
end of the congregation’s area was designated as a growth centre for the provincial town, thus raising expectations of church growth and pastoral challenge.

In 1994 the combined congregation reviewed its demographic indicators, based on 1991 Census data, local council data and its own local survey. This study identified that 43,000 people lived within the parish boundary; 15% identified as Anglican (34% as Catholics), 20% had non-English speaking backgrounds, 50% were under 30 years of age (64% under 65), 15% were single parent families, 13% lived in public rental housing, 70% had no formal qualification of any type, and 18% were unemployed. In contrast, for the 110 people then participating in Congregation A, 65% were over 45 years; the largest group were homemakers and the next largest retirees (40% were over 65). Congregational members were predominantly “White/Anglo” in ethnic origin; and there were then 25 other churches within the Anglican parish’s boundaries.

As a response to this review, Congregation A drafted a vision statement which included a goal of “active mission in the community” expressed through “providing care, support and programs relevant to the Christian faith, focusing on the needs of our community”. As an official objective this goal was restated more concretely as:

“To address possibility of [Congregation A] working in company with one of our principal mission agencies, offering outreaching professional lay ministries to the residents…Development of lay ministry to [the local] Prison. Shop front counselling ministry to [the local shopping centre].”

These aspirations reflected some continuity with a mid-1980’s discussion of community ministry which occurred in one of the original congregations forming Congregation A. Indeed any discussion of community ministry typically began with reference to the Emergency Food Cupboard, Opportunity Shop, and Drop-In coffee and chat service that began there in 1986. These activities had developed at that congregation’s old, out-of-the-way facility as a small, volunteer-based operation. Energy to continue these community outreach activities was apparently undermined in mid-1990 when this congregation lost $40,000 through the collapse of a local investment company. However the congregation nonetheless felt a need to sustain

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41 Except for the changes indicated in square brackets to preserve anonymity, this is quoted as originally written. Three stops, i.e. “…”, are inserted where a section of text has been omitted in order to link words related to a common theme. Also slight editorial adjustments have been made to some quotes in order to improve clarity e.g. words such as “sort of”, or repeated parts of phrases, are omitted.
and increase these caring responses as many local people became destitute through this same collapse. This was enabled through the support of a local large church agency. Consequently the original congregation, now merged into Congregation A, experienced a growth in its community involvements.

From the interviews undertaken for this research, 13 mainly informal activities (described in Table 10) had been developed, despite the various congregational changes outlined.

Table 10 - Community Services Identified in Congregation A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. *Opportunity Shop* | • Markets second hand clothing and other items at lower than common “Op Shop” prices.  
• Provides clothing and other items free to people in immediate need, including through overseas aid programs.  
• Opens 3 days/week and is staffed by 14 rostered volunteers (the manager works each day and is paid a small honorarium).  
• Only half the volunteers were members of Congregation A.  
• Began in 1986. |
| 2. *Emergency Food Service* | • Provides packet, tinned and some fresh food 3 half days/week to people in need.  
• Eligibility defined by entitlement to a pension or health care card and is restricted to 4 occasions/year.  
• Staffed by volunteers with the organiser paid a small honorarium.  
• Began in 1986 and grew significantly from late 1993 when relocated to a house opposite the local shopping centre on the site purchased for the new church complex. |
| 3. *Meals Ministry* | • Provided a 2 course meal once a week to people in need.  
• Entirely organised by about 6 volunteers.  
• Began in August 1993 and ran for 12 months. |
| 4. *Listening Lounge* | • Provides a “drop-in coffee and chat” community support service in the local shopping centre.  
• Operated every day by rostered volunteers from a number of local churches.  
• Began in August 1998. |
| 5. *Special Needs Assistance* | • Provides assistance with bonds and advanced rent payments for people who would otherwise be homeless.  
• Administered entirely by the Parson using a grant of around $2,000 from a central church trust fund.  \(^{42}\) |
| 6. *Community Support and Advocacy* | • Provides pastoral and advocacy support to people who walk in off the street seeking that assistance.  
• Is operated entirely by the Parson.  
• Demand has grown since the new church complex opposite the shopping centre was opened in mid-1998.  
• Most frequent user group are people with mental health problems. |
| 7. *Community Support Program for People with Disabilities* | • Parson acts as Congregation A’s representative on the management committee.  
• No others from the Congregation are involved. |

\(^{42}\) The previous Parson told of a similarly used rotating fund that was anonymously donated by a congregational member and was reused about 4 times before it was finally not repaid.
8. Community Participation Activities
   - Individuals in the congregation reported a history of voluntary involvement within other local community activities e.g. scouts.
   - These involvements the result of their faith-based commitment to assist others.
   - It is unknown how many members participate in this way.

9. Emergency House
   - Provided emergency accommodation for families in need.
   - Operated from December 1993 in one of the houses purchased as part of the site to which Congregation A eventually relocated.
   - Ceased operation prior to July 1996 when the house was demolished as part of the new development.

10. Support Service to International Workers
   - Volunteers developed an increased involvement with the support work of the Anglican agency linked to international workers temporarily in Victoria.
   - Appears to have begun in mid 1995 and developed further from July 1996 when this agency’s facility became Congregation A’s temporary location.
   - Volunteers assisted by offering friendship contact and by operating a canteen at the agency’s centre to which international workers came.

The following activities functioned in varying ways on the boundary between general community care and congregational care for church members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Prison Ministry</td>
<td>Provided a worshipping environment at a nearby prison for inmates who wished to attend;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operated by the Parson and a few volunteers who helped provide a more normal atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the time of this research, this activity was in recess.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Pastoral Care Program
    - Involves congregational members in visiting mainly congregational members to provide caring support and listening.
    - One congregational member was officially designated a pastoral worker between April 1993 and June 1995 and was paid a small honorarium.
    - 12 congregational members were trained specifically for this role in 1996.
    - Some congregational members reported providing this support on an unofficial basis.
    - Since 1998 congregational teams have been encouraged to provide regular pastoral support and to seek the Parson’s involvement if this encountered particular crises.

13. Faith Development Programs
    - Congregational volunteers were trained to present an introductory faith development program to any in the congregation or community who wished to attend.
    - This program ran once in 1998 and there were plans to re-run it in 1999.

Only the Opportunity Shop and the Emergency Food Service were managed by a committee; in this case a single auxiliary made up of all involved volunteers. However in some way all activities were overseen by the Parson and/or the Congregational Council, although there is little suggestion of “hands-on” control being exercised.

The 7 people interviewed as part of this research were in some way associated with these activities, as specified in Table 11 below. Documents used for data were the 1990 Parish Development Paper, the 1993 to 1996 and 1998 Annual Reports,

Table 11 - Characteristics of Informants from Congregation A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organisational Context</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Data Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Congregational Parson</td>
<td>All Parish Programs</td>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>Recorded Interview; Interview notes from a second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Opportunity Shop</td>
<td>Volunteer Experience</td>
<td>Recorded Interview; Interview notes from a second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Emergency Food Service</td>
<td>Volunteer Experience</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Parson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Congregational Parson</td>
<td>Opportunity Shop, Emergency Food</td>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>Telephone Discussion Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Pastoral Care, Meals Ministry</td>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner D</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parishioner</td>
<td>Parish Council</td>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Opportunity Shop Committee</td>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Congregation B

Congregation B, also an Anglican congregation, was located in the southern area of Victoria’s capital city, Melbourne. The locality was an established, largely residential suburb with few industries. It clearly reflected a higher socio-economic class than did that of Congregation A: its houses tended to be older and often larger, there were a number of well established church schools in the surrounding area, and there seemed to be adequate local shopping facilities and other community resources. Casual observation also suggested a trend existed towards the development of newer clusters of town houses and units. As Table 12 below indicates, 1996 Census Data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) indicates the immediate postcode area, a reasonable approximation of the formal boundaries of Congregation B, had a population of 14,386 while the surrounding Statistical Local Area, which is much larger than the area covered by Congregation B, had a population of 84,738. The 1996 Census Data indicated that unemployment within the postcode area was 6.5%, much lower than that for the surrounding Statistical Local Area (SLA) with 8% and that for the state and nation as a whole (slightly over 9% for each). In addition, with 50% of people in the labour force, the postcode area has slightly more than average for the state (48%) or nation (47%), as well as for the surrounding SLA (49%).
Further, the percentage of people with formal vocational qualifications (27%) is also around 5% more than in the surrounding SLA, the state and the nation.

Table 12 - 1996 Census Data for Congregation B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Postcode</th>
<th>Surrounding Statistical Local Area</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons</td>
<td>14,386</td>
<td>84,738</td>
<td>4,315,520</td>
<td>17,892,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged &lt; 15 yrs</td>
<td>2,289</td>
<td>15,800</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>2,955,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Born</td>
<td>10,555</td>
<td>54,374</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>13,277,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - English Speaking</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>6,695</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1,545,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - Non English Speaking</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>21,050</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>2,362,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (% of Lab Force)</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>3,852</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>4,086,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Labour Force</td>
<td>7,241</td>
<td>2,081</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>4,086,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff Address 5 yrs ago</td>
<td>5,339</td>
<td>2,081</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>4,086,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parents</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>672,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parent Families (% of Families)</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>672,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Public Housing (% of H'holds)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>326,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally Qualified (&gt;Vocation Skill)</td>
<td>3,821</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>3,780,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household size</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Weekly H'hold Income</td>
<td>$500-$699</td>
<td>$661</td>
<td>$642</td>
<td>$635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Individual Income</td>
<td>$300-$399</td>
<td>$297</td>
<td>$290</td>
<td>$292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Anglicans</td>
<td>2942</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>390,3324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst the number of lone parents is about the same as the surrounding SLA and the state (all just under 4% of individuals and 14% of households), the proportion of households in public housing (1.2% in the postcode area) is about a third that for the state (3.3%). These characteristics confirm that Congregation B is not in an obviously disadvantaged area, a view consistent with the median household and individual incomes which, for the postcode ($500-$699 and $300-$399 respectively) and the surrounding SLA ($661 and $297 respectively), are in the same range or slightly higher than the median state and national incomes (approximately $640 and $290 respectively).

Consistent with this higher median income is the fact that the population of the postcode area and the surrounding SLA tends to be older, with around 5% less than the state and national averages aged below 15 years. Whilst the population of the postcode area is just as likely to have been born overseas as is typical for Victoria and Australia (around 27%), it is worth noting that the proportion born in English-speaking countries (10%) is around 3% larger than for the state as a whole. It therefore also has a similarly lower level of people from non-English speaking origins (14%) which contrasts with the surrounding SLA where there is around a
10% higher proportion of Overseas born people (36%) with around 10% more being from non-English speaking locations (25%). Appearances would therefore seem to be that Congregation B is not located in an area in which social needs of the type encountered by Congregation A would be readily encountered. However this does not mean these needs will not be found to some extent, along with other less readily apparent needs.

Religious affiliation in Congregation B’s postcode area indicates around 20% of the population identified as Anglican, a proportion similar to Australia as a whole but 4% higher than for the surrounding SLA and for the state (16% in each case). Whilst this represents nearly 3000 people in the postcode area, the actual congregational participation by these nominal Anglicans is low as, on each of the 3 Sundays I visited this congregation, there were around 50 or 60 people at the main service whilst the earlier service, which I attended only once, had about 30 people. Annual reports for Congregation B indicate an average of 45 throughout 1991 to 1999 at each of the 3 communion services per week, a figure consistent with my brief observations. These reports also indicate that about 130 people are eligible to vote at annual meetings, and evidence a fairly active congregational life despite these low levels of participation.

Congregation B has functioned as a separate parish since the late 19th Century. Its current church complex has been modified at least 3 times: the first in the 1960’s when transepts were added to the worship centre, presumably to accommodate a much larger congregation. About a decade ago the worship centre and one of the two church halls were integrated into a more open and flexible complex to form a meeting area with upgraded facilities. The most recent alteration was refurbishment of the rear church hall to provide a counselling centre, a coffee lounge, and a function centre. This new development, specifically planned to implement the congregation’s new focus on community service, was officially opened in November 1999, just after the completion of data collection.

Many years earlier this congregation initiated a private school, which is now highly respected and organisationally independent of the congregation. The congregational worship centre still functions as a chapel for regular school worship services,
however little other formal involvement was mentioned, either in the formal interviews or in informal conversation.

The move to develop an intentional community service appears to have been conceived by the Parson, who commenced there in 1986 and brought with him a particular conception of effective local church ministry developed through his previous ministry experiences. However it was not until another congregational member shared similar aspirations with the Parson in 1992 that a move to formal action commenced. A meeting of interested persons was held, resulting in the mid-1994 legal incorporation of an organisation to promote and operate such services. The emphasis on legal incorporation reflected the belief of both people that any intentional community service needed to be legally structured independently of the congregation and professional in its approach.

However, this formal program was associated with only some of the community service activities of Congregation B as 13 activities, many fairly informal, were identified during the interviews as having or potentially having relevance to the wider community. These are summarised in Table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Counselling Service | - Provides individual counselling free of charge.  
| | - Began public operation in February 1995 as the original focus of the Incorporated Service and has been the main community service activity offered through its auspice.  
| | - The counselling was provided initially by the congregational Parson, with the gradual addition of a small number of counselling professionals from a variety of disciplines who provided their services part-time on a voluntarily basis.  
| | - Since early 1996 two successive professional psychologists have been employed, initially for about a half-day a week with more time as the demand for the service increased.  
| | - Each of these psychologists has subsequently been appointed to a salaried half-time position, working as both the main counsellor and as the professional director for the service.  
| | - At the time of this research two volunteer counsellors continued to work with the service. |
| 2. First Contact Interviewing | - As a part of the formal counselling service a team of volunteers, mainly from Congregation B, were rostered to work for 1½ to 3 hours each day as the First Contact person for any people seeking to make use of the professional service.  
| | - Their primary role is to ascertain from the prospective service user the particular type of counselling assistance being sought so that an appointment could be made with the appropriate professional counsellor.  
| | - To assist with this the Incorporated Service has a separate telephone number to that of the church.  
| | - Should somebody make contact outside the hours covered by this volunteer, then a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>message requesting an initial contact could be left on an answering machine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- At times an initial intake interview is provided by the congregational secretary who works on site 4 days each week and who has previous training and experience in telephone and pre-marriage counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The listening offered during these first contacts has been, in itself, of considerable significance for some people contacting the Incorporated Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seminars</td>
<td>- As a new development during 2000 a series of seminars and workshops were offered on aspects of human development and relationships eg stress, marriage, anger, abuse, sport, writing, assertiveness, parenting, self-esteem, problem-solving, forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- These were intended to provide preventative support to people as well as raise funds for the Incorporated Service by charging a fee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The presenters of these seminars were people with expertise in the particular seminar focus who offered their services voluntarily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The original professional director had earlier also offered a few similarly focused seminars, as a series or as one-off sessions, but with limited success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Crisis Support</td>
<td>- Counsellors from the Incorporated Service have also been involved in a partnership with another local agency to facilitate a mutual support group for people who have had family members suicide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>- This group meets away from the congregation’s facilities but is seen as part of its service to the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Training in</td>
<td>- A training course, initially intended for the volunteer First Contact personnel, had been offered by the previous professional director with the intention that it also serve to train the wider congregation in general pastoral care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Caring</td>
<td>- Recent developments of this training have aimed to resume this approach and then make it available on a fee for service basis to other interested congregations along with other types of program consultancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Opportunity Shop</td>
<td>- Established primarily as revenue-raising for the congregation many years prior to the Incorporated Service in conjunction with 9 other local churches, the Parson is able to obtain clothing and other relevant items for distribution to needy people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The substantial revenue raised for the congregation ($42,000 in 1999) also indirectly enables the congregation to underwrite the operating costs of the Incorporated Service ($10,000 transferred in 1998, $5,000 in 1999) however there is no formal or operational link between this activity and the Incorporated Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Coffee and Chat</td>
<td>- An informal process by which somebody from the congregation, often the congregational administrator, offers coffee and time for a chat to anyone who walks into the church complex during the week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-In Centre</td>
<td>- This is viewed as a part of the culture of the congregation and succeeds because of the steady flow of congregational members as they undertake various commitments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- With the redevelopment of the third part of the complex, the entrance for which is physically separate from the church office entrance, there are expectations that this Coffee and Chat activity will be made a more intentional part of the congregation’s links with the Incorporated Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- However it is understood that this will involve developing a new rostering system of congregational volunteers willing to resource this activity in its new setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Emergency Food</td>
<td>- Since the early 1990’s the congregation has provided tinned and packet food and “other essentials” for distribution to people in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>- These items are made available either through another congregation in an inner metropolitan area, another local agency, or within the church complex itself to any person requesting it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There are no formal criteria or arrangements for accessing this service. Whatever the congregation have donated to the “food trolley” is simply made available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Now said to be part of the Incorporated Service although there are no apparent structures for this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Characteristics of Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9. Money for Work              | • The Parson uses a discretionary fund to provide cash assistance.  
• People seeking cash assistance are offered an opportunity to do some sort of work for which they would then be paid without being interviewed.  
• This assists with the maintenance of the church grounds and, at the same time, avoids unnecessary assessments of these requests.  
• If the Parson is not available the person is advised to return at another suitable time expecting that some work be required in return.  
• In 1999 $2,300 was distributed in this way. |
| 10. Special Needs Support Groups | • A weekly small support group facilitated by the Parson operates for people with special needs (for example, related to head injuries) meeting in local cafes for social interaction.  
• Some have been contacted initially through the church setting, others through requests for money.  
• Up to 6 people participate at any one time but congregational people have yet to be involved.  
• Another independent mutual support group for people with chemical dependencies with limited informal support offered by one of the volunteer counsellors also operated from the congregational premises. |
| 11. Aged Persons Events        | • Two activities are provided for Aged persons, either from local hostels and/or nursing homes or from private homes, in the church complex.  
• One is a weekly lunch organised in partnership with another local agency, and the other is a quarterly meal and concert arranged with the support of local schools aimed at building contact between the two groups. |
| 12. Pastoral Presence Development | • A number of approaches were being used to develop a culture of care within congregational life. Included in this were the “ministry of laying on of hands” during congregational worship for any who were sick, pastoral counselling with the Parson, pastoral support by congregational members, a prayer support network, congregational visiting to nursing homes, and prayer within formal counselling sessions for any who desire it.  
• This culture has also been promoted through the development of neighbourhood congregational groups caring for each other.  
• The training for the Incorporated Service’s First Contact Interviewers serves as training for participants in these local networks.  
• Whilst these activities mainly focus on the members of the congregation, it was expected their development would help increase the culture of care within the congregation, so leading to an expansion of the congregation’s overall community involvement as well as to a balance between the spiritual, the social and the counselling aspects of the congregation’s service. |
| 13. Faith Development Programs | • As yet not especially clear in approach, exploration of the place of faith development in involvement with people has occurred.  
• This has included counsellors supporting service users’ expressions of interest in the church setting, counsellors recognising new people who come looking for faith-related counselling and/or are open to further faith input, and the facilitation of groups focusing on faith development.  
• Such events have promoted policy discussion on the issue of “holistic” counselling and care. |

In addition, 2 further activities were identified as potentially operating on the boundary between church and community life but at the time of this research were seen more as relating to congregational life.
Overall the activities formally associated with the Incorporated Service and the Opportunity Shop were the only ones with committees directly overseeing the congregation’s involvement. However the Parson, sometimes with the back-up support of the congregational secretary, generally oversaw other activities.

Additional Documents used as data sources were the 1997, 1998 and 1999 congregational Annual Meeting Reports (which included minutes of the previous year’s annual meeting, treasurer’s reports, Parson’s reports, and warden’s reports) and Minutes of the Incorporated Service’s Annual General Meetings for 1995 to 1999 inclusive, the Incorporated Service’s Certificate of Incorporation from 1994, Rules of Incorporation, Statement of Purpose, Procedures and Policy Manual, and various pamphlets advertising the congregation and/or the incorporated service. Table 14 provides the details of those interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organisational Context</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Data Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Congregational Parson</td>
<td>All Parish Programs</td>
<td>Theology Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Recorded Interview Notes from a second Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Voluntary Worker</td>
<td>Incorporated Services</td>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Congregational Secretary</td>
<td>All Parish Programs</td>
<td>Volunteer Counsellor Training</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Incorporated Service</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Two Recorded Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parishioner</td>
<td>Incorporated Service</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor C</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Incorporated Service</td>
<td>Theology Psychology</td>
<td>Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner C</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Incorporated Service</td>
<td>Volunteer Experience</td>
<td>Jointly Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioner D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Various Parish Programs</td>
<td>Volunteer Experience</td>
<td>Jointly Recorded Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3 Congregation C

The third congregation, Congregation C, was another Anglican congregation. In the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, it is surrounded by small industry and two large community service “industries”, a large hospital and a growing tertiary education campus. In the 1950s and 1960s this once rural locality was caught up in the developing suburban industrial belts of Melbourne. A working class population, especially immigrant workers, was attracted to it, as had happened earlier in Congregation A’s area. As the 1996 Census Data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) summarised in Table 15 on page 98 suggests, the postcode area surrounding
Congregation C’s physical locality, and the Statistical Local Area (SLA) in which its facilities are based\(^\text{43}\), indicate that 41% and 34% respectively of the respective populations of 17,800 and 39,600 were born in non-English speaking countries, significantly contributing to the total of 47% and 40% respectively being born overseas. These levels compare to state and national figures of 24% and 22% respectively i.e. Congregation C’s locality has almost double the state and national average for overseas born residents. Another contrast with Congregation A is relatively low levels of public housing in these surrounding areas; 1.2% and 1.5% of households, well below state and national averages and similar to the figures for Congregation B. Higher levels of unemployment (14% and 10% respectively), slightly lower individual and household incomes (on the data available in Table 15 this can only be said with confidence for the surrounding statistical area), a higher level of domestic mobility (with 45% and 40% respectively having relocated in the previous 5 years), and higher costs associated with non-public housing all present an image of a locality with probable serious financial and domestic stresses.

Table 15 - 1996 Census Data for Congregation C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Area</th>
<th>Surrounding Postcode</th>
<th>Surrounding Statistical Local Area</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Characteristic</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons</td>
<td>17,786</td>
<td></td>
<td>39,618</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged &lt; 15 yrs</td>
<td>2,524</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>6,182</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Born</td>
<td>8,715</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>22,099</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - English Speaking</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2,359</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - Non English Speaking</td>
<td>7,316</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>13,688</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (% of Lab Force)</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>1,386</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Labour Force</td>
<td>7,735</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>18,210</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff Address 5 yrs ago</td>
<td>7,971</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>15,033</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parents</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parent Families (% of Families)</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Public Housing (% of H'holds)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally Qualified (&gt;Vocation Skill)</td>
<td>4,060</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>9,142</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | | | | | | | | |
| Average Household size | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| Median Age | 33 | 33 | 34 |
| Median Weekly H'hold Income | $500-$599 | $623 | $642 | $635 |
| Median Individual Income | $200-$299 | $255 | $290 | $292 |
| Identified Anglicans | 1,686 | 9.5 | 4,211 | 10.6 | 716,356 | 16.4 | 390,3324 | 21.8 |

A countering influence is the slightly higher than average proportion of the population who are vocationally qualified, reflective perhaps of the growing community service “industries” in the area which are apparently gradually displacing

\(^{43}\) Personnel at Congregation C regularly note that their “area” is located across two Local Government Areas, and therefore across at least two of the smaller Statistical Local Areas. The SLA which surrounds the actual site where Congregation C is based has been used for these comparisons.
the more traditional blue-collar industries. These levels, akin to the state and national averages of 21%, are around double the vocational qualification levels for Congregation A, and on a par with those for Congregation B. This suggests that, unlike Congregation A, Congregation C may well be similar to Congregation B in successfully accessing professional people for its community programs.

The average age in the postcode area and SLA surrounding Congregation C (30 and 33 respectively) is just below the state and national averages, similar to Congregation A, but much lower than congregation B. With an average number of sole parent households in this surrounding population (around 15% for each area compared with the state average of 14%), a much smaller proportion of its population under 15 years (14% in the surrounding postcode area) than applies for the state (21%), the nation (22%) or Congregation A (25%), and a lower average age than for the state (30 years in the surrounding postcode compared with 33 for the state) there is a hint that Congregation C is in a locality which possibly also houses many young adults. An inference therefore was that many of these local young adults may well be migrants with concerns about English, and that households may be experiencing financial strain due to lower incomes and higher private accommodation costs, this demographic breakdown points to a different constellation of social problems confronting Congregation C than those encountered by either Congregations A or B.

This difference between Congregation C and Congregations A and B is further heightened when it is noted that the proportion of the population in the surrounding postcode area and SLA who identify as Anglicans is also around half the state and national averages – possibly a reflection of the much higher population of people from non-English speaking origins. Although this represents some 1700 people in the related postcode area, as with the first two congregations, actual church participation is low. On the two Sundays I have attended, there have been around 70 people at the morning worship service. Around a third of this congregation were migrants from the Indian sub-continent and there were only around a dozen primary school-aged children.

Congregation C began its life around 100 years ago when the locality was a rural community but it was not until the early 1960’s that it became a parish on its own. In the late 1980’s a new Parson, noting the developing tertiary education campus, the
new hospital nearby, and the multicultural nature of the locality, began to explore ways of orienting the congregation’s ministry to the people associated with these new local features. This exploration coincided with a 1987 review by a central church Family Service Agency of its location and type of services. In 1989 this review led to “soundings” with churches and other community groups in the area to which it had relocated one of its family counselling programs. Its proposal was to form a partnership with the local community to operate an “extension” group activity program based in a Community Centre that was located away from the counselling centre.

The ministry team of Congregation C, including an assistant appointed in early 1988, responded to this overture because it blended with the ministry opportunities they were seeking. A committee to develop this partnership was established in early 1990, with a detailed agreement for a joint program between the Agency and the Congregation formalised by early 1991. The Congregation’s formal community service activity began officially soon after, with various responsibilities carefully split between the Congregation, the Agency and the two joint committees designated in the agreement to oversee the project.

Initially this activity was funded by a special grant acquired by the Agency from a philanthropic trust. Problems in locating a suitable Community Centre elsewhere in the locality led to a decision by the Congregation to offer its Parsonage on the condition that the Agency paid a rent to the Church for the site. This had the benefit of assisting the congregation to finance the acquisition of another Parsonage away from the church property and basing the Community Centre with the congregation. The program was operated with three part-time employed staff and a diverse group of volunteers. Two of the part-time staff were from Congregation C, as were a large number of the volunteers, and the other part-time staff member was the community consultant who previously researched and developed the proposal for the Agency. In addition, staff from the Agency’s nearby Family Service Centre initially participated in developing a number of group activities within the Community House.

Over the 9 years of operation covered by the documents provided as data for this research, there have been quite an array of activities within this Community House. The impression is of a highly active community service responding to a range of
community needs with varying modes of operation and varying degrees of formality. The activities identified are outlined in Table 16 following.

**Table 16 - Community Services Identified in Congregation C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Emergency Relief       | • The provision of food parcels, clothing and some household goods began with the commencement of the community service and has continued as a core activity throughout.  
  • Items are donated by other congregations and community groups and, soon after commencing, Commonwealth Government Emergency Relief grants.  
  • Initially this assistance was available whenever the Community Service Centre was open, but as other programs developed, some restrictions on times of availability were introduced.  
  • At Christmas there is a special distribution of food and toys.  
  • The provision of emergency relief was subsequently linked to at least one other service as an attempt to overcome its “one-off” limitations.  
  • This service is perceived as one of two key bridges to the wider community, although a problem in linking those seeking assistance to the other services being offered was frequently noted.  
  • Eventually, from 100 to 130 people a month sought this assistance.  
  • In 1992 this program worked from a pantry set up so participants could select from the food available themselves.  
  • Later on vouchers were made available. |
| 2. English and Literacy Classes | • One of the original activities of the Community Service Centre which commenced as a conversational English group.  
  • Although initially volunteer-based, by 1997 congregational and community volunteer tutors began to be paid through grants from Adult Community and Further Education.  
  • Became a high demand activity among the locality’s many non-English speaking immigrants.  
  • Links made with other community centres providing similar programs and with other congregations seeking to participate in this type of involvement.  
  • Became the second main service stream for the Community Service Program and the second bridge between the congregation and the wider community. |
| 3. Family Support          | • Since the commencement of the Community Service Centre a general service of support to families with children has been offered through a part-time paid worker.  
  • Service was absorbed into the Family Counselling pilot project.  
  • Available by appointment only. |
| 4. Craft Group             | • Originally beginning as an activity group for anyone interested, this group developed a focus on integrating participants from the wider community and adult patients of the nearby Hospital who experienced mental health problems.  
  • Since early 1995 this activity has operated jointly with the hospital, the coordinator having successfully negotiated for the participation of a professional mental health staff member and for other professional support and training concerning mental health issues for all the community service staff. |
| 5. Pastoral Care Support   | • Pastoral Care developed in 1994 through support being offered to regular users of Emergency Relief.  
  • Initially it was informally provided in the “nooks and crannies” of the Community Service Centre while people waited to have their material needs addressed.  
  • Because formal counselling was meant to be provided by another service of the partner Agency, pastoral care was aimed at providing people with a caring listener with whom they could discuss their need for emergency relief.  
  • Gradually it developed as an intentional activity in its own right.  
  • This approach was adopted because of the availability of volunteer clergy who had prior pastoral care training. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The link with the Emergency Relief service was at times problematic and so various attempts were made to modify it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One attempt involved the inclusion of the pastoral care volunteer staff in a pilot Family Counselling project, and the subsequent renaming of this service as Supportive Counselling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The tension between Pastoral Care as a non-directive approach to helping people and more structured formal counselling was a matter of much discussion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family Counselling</td>
<td>• Under the initial agreement between the congregation and the Central Church Agency, this service was not provided from the Congregationally-based Community Service Centre, but rather from the Agency’s professional staff at their nearby Counselling Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This never really developed so, when the Agency’s Counselling Service moved away from the area in early 1997, funding became available for a pilot Family Counselling Service to be commenced within the Community Service setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This formalised a change from non-directive pastoral care for people needing support to a formal appointment-based approach offered to selected families whereby the pastoral care staff provided goal-focused family counselling as their intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For this they were supervised by an external consultant social worker and paid an honorarium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Later this was renamed Ongoing Counselling in order to identify its availability to people without children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Legal Advice</td>
<td>• Offered by volunteer solicitors soon after the community service commenced for one evening a fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Financial Advice</td>
<td>• Whilst originally intended as a component of the community service, this activity did not commence until around 1995 when a suitably qualified volunteer became available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Once a team of volunteers had received basic training, this was offered one evening per week, although a volunteer daytime service commenced later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Opportunity Shop</td>
<td>• Early on a “shop” was developed by congregational volunteers to sell good quality, low priced clothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Since early 1992 this operated from a room in the Community Service Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It was closed in mid 2001 due to a need for more space within the Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Playgroup</td>
<td>• This time-limited play group was aimed at giving parents low cost ideas about simple play options for their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. New Baby Provisions</td>
<td>• Baby Bundles were provided to new mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The extent to which this service continues was unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Unemployment Task Group</td>
<td>• This group sought to assist unemployed people to write resumes and locate work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It proved to be heavily dependent on staff resources although eventually a volunteer from another congregation became the facilitator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It closed in 1995, because it was too big for this type of congregationally-based service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Marriage Counselling</td>
<td>• Provided for a brief period early in the life of the Community Service as an evening activity by arrangement with staff from another Church-sponsored Agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Health and Fitness Group</td>
<td>• Operated in conjunction with another local service, this low fee-based service sought to promote exercise, stress management and nutrition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Information and Referral Service</td>
<td>• Community information on available services, particularly those applicable for women, was systematically collected so that pathways for self-help within the wider community could be identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Spanish Speaking Women’s Group</td>
<td>• This ethnic-specific support and friendship group apparently operated for a few years early in the life of the Community Service Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Characteristics of Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. <strong>Friday Women’s Friendship Group</strong></td>
<td>• Began originally as a support and friendship group for people not in crisis. • It was redeveloped to include educational activities promoting personal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. <strong>Child Care Groups</strong></td>
<td>• Operated by volunteer child carers as a support to the various groups being provided for women within the Community House program. • Provided under supervision of the Family Support worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. <strong>Local Exchange and Trading Scheme (LETS)</strong></td>
<td>• Enabled low income people to exchange goods and services in-kind. • It is not clear whether this involvement continues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. <strong>Sewing Group</strong></td>
<td>• Another group that operated early in the life of the Community House but which is now defunct.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these 20 programs clearly directed at the wider community, one program was aimed at bridging the boundary between the life of the congregation and the users of the community service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Characteristics of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. <strong>Bible Study Group</strong></td>
<td>• This operated from the early days of the Community Service, initially as a congregational group which later became part of the community service. • It was only ever small, but was consciously made available to interested participants of the Community Service as an opportunity to informally explore faith issues. • It ceased some time prior to 2000.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Documents resulting from the partnership’s commitment to ongoing evaluation were used as the basis for exploring this example of congregational community involvement. An overview of these documents is contained in Table 17 following. In addition notes from the interview with the present Parson were also included with the documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organisational Context</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document 01 Mar 91</td>
<td>Partnership Agreement</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 02 Feb 92</td>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Policy Officer Consultant</td>
<td>Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 03 Mar 92</td>
<td>Internal Report</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 04 May 92</td>
<td>Internal Report</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 05 Jul 96</td>
<td>Congregational History</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parishioner</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 06 Jul 96</td>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Policy Officer Consultant</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 07 Aug 96</td>
<td>Internal Minutes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 08 Oct 96</td>
<td>Report to Congregation</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 09 Apr 97</td>
<td>Internal Paper</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 10 Apr 97</td>
<td>Internal Memo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document 11 May 97</td>
<td>Internal Report</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Comparing Congregational Datasets

Whilst some contrasts between these three congregations have already been noted, Table 18 reproduces all three sets of local data to assist with a full comparison.

Table 18 - Comparison of 1996 Census Data for Congregations A, B and C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Area</th>
<th>Congregation A</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Congregation B</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Congregation C</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons</td>
<td>25,707</td>
<td>52,399</td>
<td>14,386</td>
<td>84,738</td>
<td>17,786</td>
<td>39,618</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged &lt; 15 yrs</td>
<td>6,350</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>11,814</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>2,289</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15,680</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>2,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Born</td>
<td>18,866</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>37,663</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>10,555</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>54,374</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>8,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - English Speaking</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3,571</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>6,659</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/Seas Born - Non English Speaking</td>
<td>4,083</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>8,146</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2,075</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>21,050</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>7,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (% of Lab Force)</td>
<td>2,046</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>3,356</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3,883</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Labour Force</td>
<td>10,146</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>22,241</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>7,241</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>41,450</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>7,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff Address 5 yrs ago</td>
<td>7,951</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>16,002</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>5,339</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>27,998</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>7,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parents</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2,492</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3,217</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parent Families (% of Families)</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Public Housing (% of H'holds)</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally Qualified (Vocation Skill)</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>7,605</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>3,321</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>18,493</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>4,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household size</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Weekly Hourly Income</td>
<td>$300-$499</td>
<td>$542</td>
<td>$500-$699</td>
<td>$591</td>
<td>$500-$699</td>
<td>$561</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Individual Income</td>
<td>$100-$199</td>
<td>$218</td>
<td>$100-$199</td>
<td>$297</td>
<td>$200-$299</td>
<td>$255</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Anglicans</td>
<td>4226</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>7804</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>2942</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>14001</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>1686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Table identifies clearly that Congregation A is located in an area with lower median incomes than Congregation B, whilst Congregation C is moderately higher...
than Congregation A. Congregation C is clearly located in an area with a larger non-
English speaking population than either Congregation A or B. Conversely
Congregation B is located in an area with a more highly qualified population than
Congregation A, whilst Congregation C’s population also tends to be higher than
Congregation A’s. This is consistent with Congregation A’s surrounding population
experiencing higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of labour force
participation than either of the other two congregations. Congregation A’s locality
also has a younger population than the other two areas, but a higher level of public
housing access, consistent with higher levels of sole parent families.

The three congregations therefore are relating to three quite different surrounding
populations, resulting in three quite different characteristics of their respective
church-goers. However, the core community service activities offered by each
congregation appear congruent with these demographic characteristics –
Congregation A focuses on Emergency Relief and access to cheap clothing and
household items; Congregation B focuses on personal counselling and personal
development groups; and Congregation C focuses on both Emergency Relief and
English Language tutoring.

Table 19 below provides a comparison using data extracted from official
congregational records. Each congregation has between 100 and 150 participants,
which is slightly larger than typical Anglican or Protestant congregations of
approximately 70 (Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Castle & Hughes 1999), so confirming
that each congregation is “typical” with regard to size.

However, the financial characteristics of each congregation are very different:

- Congregation A has one staff person, the Parson, while Congregation B has two
  (the Parson and a half time office administrator) and Congregation C has two
  clergy (the Parson and the assistant).
- Congregation A has the lowest congregational giving and the largest dependence
  on central church financial support, while Congregation B has the largest giving
  and the most significant income from small trading businesses. Congregation C
  has the largest income from property.
- Each congregation has recently undertaken a substantial rebuilding program. Congregation A borrowed significantly to cover the expenses not covered by the
sale of the previous properties of the merged congregations. Congregation B both fund-raised and borrowed but is quickly paying that back. It also undertook its building program in the period during which this information was collected, thus explaining the large overall loss in the figures quoted. Congregation C undertook its redevelopment, substantially through a sizeable bequest.

Table 19 - Comparison of Congregational Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish Statistics 1999</th>
<th>Congregation A</th>
<th>Congregation B</th>
<th>Congregation C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Av No Attenders</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Attenders Christmas</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Parish Electors</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>$34,664</td>
<td>$76,621</td>
<td>$61,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading Activities</td>
<td>$8,025</td>
<td>$54,592</td>
<td>$6,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Income</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td>$6,208</td>
<td>$108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Income</td>
<td>$10,174</td>
<td>$2,244</td>
<td>$64,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diocesan Grants</td>
<td>$10,375</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Total Income</td>
<td>$70,507</td>
<td>$212,881</td>
<td>$150,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Stipends/Salaries</td>
<td>$40,868</td>
<td>$72,094</td>
<td>$71,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest on Loans</td>
<td>$5,587</td>
<td>$2,549</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan Repayments</td>
<td>$3,941</td>
<td>$7,001</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (Contribution to the Central Church body)</td>
<td>$4,500</td>
<td>$17,900</td>
<td>$4,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenses*</td>
<td>$70,451</td>
<td>$381,108</td>
<td>$147,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income – Expenses</td>
<td>$56</td>
<td>($145,227)</td>
<td>$3,746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extracted from the Melbourne Diocesan Year Book 2000

* Note that neither the Total Income nor Total Expenses represent the sum of the respective Income and Expenses figures quoted. The figures given are selected for illustrative purposes only.

Overall it would seem that Congregation A only just covers its financial obligations and risks a financial struggle. Congregation B covers its obligation well despite being a similar size. It has significant independent fund-raising capacities. In contrast, Congregation C seems to be covering itself financially but has little apparent latitude for further development. None of the figures quoted incorporate the direct costs associated with the Congregational Community Service activities. The activities of Congregation A actually contribute a small amount to the congregational budget whilst Congregation B covers its core costs through its congregation budget. Congregation C gains indirectly from the Community Service through the rental income for the Community House. It does not of itself directly fund any aspect of the community service program.
5 Generating a Programmatic Framework

Once having obtained each dataset, the research analysis involved fracturing the data (Glaser 1978 p.55) into themes through a steady process of coding each segment of text according to themes that seemed evident within the meaning of the text. This involved establishing a computer “reference” between the text passage being coded and a “node” stored within the \textit{NUD*IST 4} or \textit{NVivo} computer programs. Each node was given a name which reflected the theme in the text so that, when opened, a given node displayed all text fragments linked to it. Text was often coded at more than one node, reflecting its association with more than one theme. “Coding on” (Fraser 1999 p.192), a process of coding for more detailed sub-themes, was then undertaken so that text already linked with particular thematic categories was re-coded for the dimensions, properties and/or range of each category evident in the data.

Coding was time-consuming, but revealed rich detail concerning congregational community services, and the overwhelming complexity of those services. Gradually patterns were identified; in grounded theory terms, they were found to inductively “emerge” (Glaser 1978 p.62; 1992 p.12) or be “discovered” (Glaser & Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990 p.114) from the data through constantly comparing each new portion of text with the thematic codes already established. The progressive application of this process to the four datasets obtained in this research facilitated the gradual recognition of inter-related concepts forming the framework derived from this research. This section outlines the steps by which this hypothesised framework was identified.

5.1 Issues Emerging from Professional Informants

As the first dataset was gained from interviews with professional informants concerning their experiences of community service provision associated with church congregations, the initial coding sought to identify categories of “issues” raised, and the features of those issues. By this means 14 issues were recognised. Once coded, these issues seemed to cluster into 3 groups, as identified in Table 20 below. As

\footnote{The fragment of text associated with a theme being coded in \textit{NVivo} could be a few words, clause, phrase, sentence, cluster of sentences, or paragraph.}

\footnote{See Fraser (1999) or Richards (1999) for more detail on the coding process.}
previously noted, the detailed analysis drafted at this stage was forwarded to respondents for their consideration. Subsequently this analysis was drafted as a paper for the 1999 ARNOVA Conference in Washington DC. The issues identified were also used as the framework for a reflective review of my own experience as a congregationally-employed social worker and presented as a paper at the 1999 NACSW Convention in St Louis MO. This review confirmed that the analysis provided a congruent set of issues suitable for understanding specific congregational community service settings.

Table 20 - Identified Issues from the First Dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Informing Theology</td>
<td>7. Professional Involvements</td>
<td>11. Life-Cycles of Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Congregational Agendas</td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Deterrents to Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this “issues” analysis was derived from wide-ranging reflections of professionals, it offered little insight into the overall processes by which congregational community services operated. However a category named “Lifecycles” was identified and included process issues concerned with the initiation of services, subsequent changes in service focus, the passing on of the vision, and the degree of independence of the service from the congregation. This emerging category clearly needed more elaboration in later datasets, but suggested that some concern was evident among first dataset respondents regarding the operating process of congregational community services.

5.2 Framework Emerging with Congregation A

Interviews with the respondents in the second dataset, those associated with Congregation A, changed focus, as previously mentioned, to explore the respondents’ involvement and their consequent awareness of the development of the various service activities. This data was first analysed through constant comparison.

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46 See Appendix 6 page 333.
47 See Appendix 7 page 367
48 See Appendix 8 page 393.
49 This review was presented for illustrative purposes only; the reflections on which it was based did not form data for any of the research presented.
50 See Appendices 6 and 7 pages 333 and 367 for a complete analysis of this category.
of each text segment with the 14 issues previously identified, but kept separate in the “node” structure of NVivo to allow easy identification of the coding nodes associated with this dataset. This analysis confirmed and elaborated the issue categories already identified, whilst adding another “Personnel” category related to the congregational service’s “Community Linkages”, as it became clear that the professional respondents’ focus related to what happened in congregations rather than the nature of outside linkages, an issue more relevant in particular local settings.

Given that these respondents discussed how activities happened, transcripts were then re-coded for a new set of “process” categories, reflecting the development and operation of these community services. Three broad, roughly linear phases in this process were identified in the data derived from Congregation A and outlined in supervision reports, a summary of which is presented in Table 21 page 110. The basic notion was that moves to begin an activity would go through a process of being presented to the congregation; if supported to some degree the program would commence, albeit in a fairly informal and uncertain manner. At times moves to modify the activity in response to particular influences might then follow.

To better grasp this analysis, two further analytical techniques were used at this point:

- The “modelling” tool within NVivo (see Fraser 1999) was used to visually map plausible linkages between various coded categories for each of the three phases. This more clearly conceptualised that some categories were better considered sub-categories within a category hierarchy.

- This approach both helped clarify the significant process categories, but left an uncertainty about specific links to the data. To clarify this a conceptual cluster-matrix adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to examine how each identified activity in Congregation A reflected each of the three phases, focal categories and key sub-categories associated with each phase (modified slightly from those in Table 21 through ongoing inductive analysis). This matrix indicated that, although all segments were not complete for each activity, the inferred process was repeatedly substantiated with the specific data. In particular, for the activities about which most was
known, the cells were almost fully complete, thus confirming the analysis was appropriate.

**Table 21 - Process Phases Identified in Second Dataset Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiating Phase</th>
<th>Commencement Phase</th>
<th>Modifying Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant factors associated with the initiation of a congregational community service activity:</td>
<td>Aspects evident once a community service activity commenced operation were:</td>
<td>Critical decisions that seemed to impact on the operation of an activity in more dramatic ways than simple evolution of activities were:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A congregational culture amenable to community service projects</td>
<td>• An operative goal/purpose</td>
<td>• Decisions about professionals in place of volunteer arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A key person committed to initiating a project because of experience, conviction, sense of role</td>
<td>• Key people to operate the activity</td>
<td>• Deliberate termination or change to activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An event which demanded action because of need, opportunity, or encouragement.</td>
<td>• Other personnel making particular contributions to the activity</td>
<td>• Fear of activity overtaking other congregational roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The identification of a particular target group for whom the activity was intended</td>
<td>• Clergy domination of developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A means to inform the target group of the activity</td>
<td>• Impact of Congregational conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resources to enable the activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A relationship with other community groups somehow linked with the activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Procedures for operating the activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A need for encouragement in sustaining it in congregational life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The impact of other congregational events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis was only tentative, however, as it reflected patterns in the activities of just one congregation which were only informally developed. Aspirations for further development simply had not eventuated in Congregation A.

**5.3 Framework Emerging with Congregation B**

One key difference with the third dataset, derived from interviews with respondents associated with Congregation B, was its commitment to create a formal, legally-valid structure before its main activities commenced. Superficially, this was a very different process to Congregation A. The data was therefore analysed with this in mind. The initial “issues” analysis confirmed that most issues categories were *theoretically saturated* (Glaser 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967) in that no new issues were being identified once a sixteenth category related to congregational “Ownership” was added to the “Rationale” cluster. This had not been identified in
either of the two earlier datasets, although it was subsequently found in both. It had appeared more overtly in the third dataset because this congregation was very intentional about promoting it.

The tentative process phases were then used in recoding this data but it was evident that an additional phase was needed for coding the formality that was a feature of this dataset. This fourth phase was termed a Maintenance Phase as it reflected efforts undertaken to stabilise the activity regarding access to resources, capability of personnel, organisational structure, links with the congregation, location of service, and adequacy of programs. Beyond that, coding elaborated the already identified phases, hence this analysis served to provide an overall clearer sense of process.

It also became evident that the dynamic of these activities was not linear: i.e. they could no longer be simply conceptualized as progressing from formative idea (Initiation), to commencement, to maintenance, and then to modification. The much more complex sense of interaction between these four phases was outlined in a paper presented at the ANZTSR Conference in Parramatta in December 2000, a copy of which was also forwarded to all respondents at that time.\(^{51}\) This proposed a diamond shaped relationship between four phases or stages, each of which can be affected by any of the others, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 - Model for Operation of Congregational Community Services after Third Dataset**

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\(^{51}\) This paper is included as Appendix 9 page 415.
This perception resulted from the recognition that no steady progression occurred from the initial “dreaming” phase, through a commencement characterised by “making do”, to a stable maintenance phase of “purpose specific” redevelopment, until impacted by modifications resulting from a “discontinuity”. Rather the “purpose specific” development was found to sometimes emanate from the initial “dream”, and lead to a “making do” variation on the activity, and so on. In addition, the community services of Congregation B were not all uniformly progressing through these stages, but rather were variable in the phase with which they could be associated, yet the broad phases seemed consistent with the processes being encountered.

5.4 Framework Emerging with Congregation C

Although this change to the earlier process model was more complete, Congregation B was still in the early stages of developing its overall approach. A more established and developed congregational community services was needed to better track the processes as they occurred after the formative experiences. Hence the fourth dataset from Congregation C, offering chronologically drafted documentation from 9 years of evaluations, was sought.

This fourth and last dataset was initially coded using the four process periods, with only a few documents coded against the 16 identified “issues” (due to the continuing perception that these themes were by then theoretically saturated). Nonetheless it was found that, whilst the identified process categories fitted well, the links between these identified concepts were not consistent, as the sequencing of the four periods seemed erratic. Whilst the official development of this congregational community service was built on a formal agreement with a partner agency, it was evident that the activities which emerged reflected a more mixed blend of ad hoc, “making do” approaches and planned, “purpose specific” approaches. This suggested little patterning, with many events happening in quite diverse ways which seemed incompatible with the previous framework.

Then a concept of “Cultures of Operation” was perceived running through this dataset. This concept was readily seen as consistent with the previous datasets and characterised in a dichotomous way by two of the previously identified periods – the
Flexibility Period of “making do”, and the Structuring Period of “purpose specific” development. This feature of the fourth dataset resulted from constant, but quite diverse, interaction of these two cultures throughout the various activities of this congregation’s community services.

Once this concept was identified, it became clear that, for all datasets, congregational community service activities could be understood to operate in the conceptual “space” between two extreme Cultures of Operation where they were “balanced” in a manner reflecting the overall congregational culture. It has been common to view these Cultures of Operation as dichotomous opposites, what one professional respondent termed the levels of “ordinariness” and the levels of “professional competence”. Certainly in the analysis of the first two congregational settings, it was easy to see most activities beginning at the level of ordinariness, or “making do” flexibility, as people within congregations used their innate gifts and abilities to provide the human resources needed to operate the programs they had established. However, in each case there were clear aspirations for the development of the level of professional competence, or “purpose specific” structuring, through the inclusion of various professional processes.

In Congregation A this proved little more than the Parson’s dream, whilst in Congregation B this was achieved by “blending” across the dichotomy with qualified professionals working voluntarily in the provision of this service. From the professional respondents in the first dataset it is clear that this blending across formal dichotomies was not unusual in congregationally-based community services; in part it is reflected in the “martyr” behaviour of committed professionals as well as the ambiguity and boundary blurring experienced by professionals working for the congregations where they also worshipped.

The third congregational setting, Congregation C, was packed with these “across-the-dichotomy” processes; for example with lawyers working voluntarily, unpaid clergy providing pastoral care to people with no church involvement, volunteers taking their cues from such clergy and so on. This meant that a simple dichotomous model was no longer possible. Instead it suggested a range for possible expressions of key categories linked to both the Flexibility Period and the Structuring Period of the previous analysis. Some of these features were more formal, and some more ad hoc,
whilst others reflected a “position” somewhere in-between, as if indicating a continuum of possibilities. The drafting of the analysis in the face of this perception aimed to illustrate how accurately this perception reflected the data in all datasets.

Further, concerns were often raised about the possible inevitability of congregational community service programs becoming professionalised, secularised, and then removed from congregational involvement; a process sometimes viewed as only a matter of time. Such a view seemed to perceive church congregations as places where new local services might commence, to later become independent as they matured through more reliable funding and more professional staff. However, the data from Congregational C strongly suggested that this process was not inevitable, and that trends in that direction could just as readily be balanced by other trends back toward the congregational base. This suggested that a critical implication about service development could be drawn from this framework, and that strategies were needed if evolution away from the congregation was not intended.

### 5.5 Final Framework in Outline

It is therefore through this process that a framework for understanding the development and operation of congregationally-based community service activities has emerged, grounded in the data derived from 3 congregations and 14 practitioners with diverse experience in this area. This framework is depicted in Figure 2 on page 115 and was presented in a paper at the *Australian Association of Social Workers Conference* (AASW) in Melbourne Victoria in September 2001. A copy of this paper was forwarded to the respondents from the first three datasets and the two contact people associated with the fourth dataset in October 2001 to report on the use made of their contribution and to invite feedback.

52 Such an observation is also made by Harris (1995) in her study of the “Quiet Care” provided in four English congregations.

53 This “reverse” trend has now been noted in a Uniting Church congregation, not included in this study, which intentionally relinked its community service to the congregation by reverting to using only congregational funds, placing a priority on integrating the community service and worship life of the congregation, and promoting a volunteer base built around, but not exclusive to, members of the congregation, whilst still employing a range of relevant professionals some of whom were linked directly to the congregation, but all of whom shared the faith-community service perspective sought.

54 This paper is included as Appendix 10 page 449.

55 Four feedback comments were received, two from respondents and two from others with whom the paper was shared. One response, from the Catholic sister-social worker previously mentioned, confirmed that this framework “rings absolutely true to the reality of all the issues facing church based efforts to provide social ministries” (Personal correspondence, 31 Oct 2001).
In brief, this *Framework* identified three phases.

- **An Initiating Phase**, depicted on the left of Figure 2, in which Key Personnel, Catalytic Events, and Congregational Culture coalesce to form a Vision for intentionally operating one or more congregational community service activities.

- **An Operating Phase**, depicted in the centre of Figure 2, in which six dimensions of operation are represented in dynamic movement between two extreme Cultures of Operation, a Culture of Altruistic Volunteerism and a Culture of Formalising Professionalism. These dimensions are Programming, Staffing, Resourcing, Managing, Networking and Owning. The influences within the “space” between the two extreme Operating Cultures are understood to “push” one or more of these dimensions towards one extreme or the other, sometimes with different dimensions moving in different directions under related influences.
• **A Modifying Phase**, depicted on the right of Figure 2, in which Evaluations, Crucial Decisions, and Unexpected Events encountered at any time become influences for change in how congregational community service activities operate.

These three phases and their various dimensions, drawn from the detailed analysis of the 4 datasets undertaken with **NVivo**, are elaborated in the three following chapters. The elaboration is based on the merging of conceptual ideas and text coded at those “issues” and “process” nodes which relate with the components and dimensions of this **Framework**.

The **Framework** represents a hypothesis about the workings of congregations and their community service activities. As such it suggests insights into the impact of both internal and external factors on these community activities, insights which can facilitate strategic decisions about the implications of other actions. Following the grounded theory notion of **Theoretical Sensitivity** (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990), at every stage in the emergence of this framework, sensitivity to contrary understandings were sought through informal reflections about other congregations and their activities. Discussions with people from many religious groups in Australia, the US, UK and New Zealand contributed to this informal review, which was not incorporated in the analysis yet helped sensitise its development. Despite the obvious limitation that this research is based solely on Australian data, with three of the four datasets drawn from Anglican congregations in Victoria, this informal comparison helped confirm the general potential of this framework to provide an understanding of how congregations develop and operate their diverse community service activities.
PART III – ELABORATING the FRAMEWORK

6 The Initiating Phase

The Initiating Phase of the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement, illustrated in Figure 3, focuses on the processes by which such activities are developed. It was found to have four components; the Culture of the Congregation within which the community service is developed, the Key Persons associated with the development, the Catalysts which trigger or promote the actual development, and the guiding Vision that emerges as these three coalesce. This Phase can be applied to any individual activity developing within a congregational setting as well as the overall involvement of the congregation within the community sector. This chapter explores the respective features of these components identified in the data.

Figure 3 - The Initiating Phase

6.1 Congregational Culture

That congregations were perceived as different from each other was very obvious with many respondents as they explained matter-of-factly why they didn’t stay at
particular congregations or why they experienced difficulties expressing their faith within their present congregation.

*We moved to [a new location] and I expressly didn’t want to join up with the [church of the same denomination as previously attended] there. It was...conservative; everything [that] I saw [to be] wrong with churches that were irrelevant.* (Social Worker 1, who is now an ordained clergyman in the denomination to which he swapped.)

*Our own church...isn’t really very strong on social justice or even welfare type issues. It’s much more focused on just building people up in their faith...but not really saying “Hey...this is a way we can show our faith, by not saying anything but by doing things”...So I found...it’s probably harder to marry the two than if I perhaps belonged to another church.* (Social Worker 10, when explaining why she experienced a separation between faith and social work practice. This Social Worker also maintained a voluntary involvement in the community service activity of a previously attended congregation.)

One respondent indicated that these differences may be influenced by denominational tradition:

*It ought to be about the integration of word and action, but [people of my denomination] seem to be reluctant to do that. That may have something to do with the whole notion that it’s been [considered] private religion.* (Social Worker 11, a clergyman and church agency CEO.)

These comments from respondents in the first dataset clearly indicate that congregations are not all the same, suggesting in particular that some are not open to community engagement whilst others are seen as engaged or open to being engaged.

This characteristic I have termed the **Culture** of a congregation. Culture reflects the congregation’s collective, tacit values with its collective “norms” and their expression within the congregation’s own social setting. What these cultures actually are, and how they come about, will be further explored in order to grasp the role they play in the development and operation of congregational community services.

For example, as indicated by their Parson, Congregation C has an openness to community service involvement because of the understandings and experiences of the people in the congregation.

*The parish wanted to do something in the community, and that especially applied to a few key people. These people were concerned for local need and were very spiritual in their approach. This group were young, articulate and able to speak to the congregation. People were still involved because of their past keenness. [Non Anglo-Celtic] families in the church supported it. These families were used to churches having community services as part of their church life. Therefore these families comprehended very easily what was planned. The congregation then saw the community service centre as an*
outworking of their Christian faith, seeing that the church needs to be involved with the needy and with issues in the community that the church wants to address. (Congregation C’s Parson explaining the basis of congregational support for their Community House).

Clearly culture is necessary as a context for the development of congregationally-based community service activities. However such cultures are not always found.

6.1.1 Different Cultures

The initial sense of congregational difference noted previously by Social Worker 10 on page 118 identified a culture in which faith or religion or church life, whatever it is termed, was seen to be separate from the issues of community life. Social Worker 11, an Agency CEO who had just previously been a congregational Parson, suggested that the dilemma involved many congregations who were in “survival mode”, a culture he linked with their effort to just keep the “church doors open”. This insular culture, whatever its cause, appears to be an unacceptable or unduly restrictive option for many of the professional respondents.

The significance of Congregational Culture as a concept is seen in comments about the recent history of Congregation A, a congregation recently derived from an imposed merger of three distinct congregations.

In the amalgamation with the other congregations we found that they were fairly insular and inward looking, and they were dying, whereas the first congregation had a real sense of growth and light about it. (Congregation A’s Parson.)

The church wasn’t a lot in the community in those days...The people [at one of the original congregations], and I was there all those years, couldn’t see past the front gate. I used to get rather sad; I’d get cross at times and I felt very sad about it too because you’ve really got to go outside, but a lot of them were quite happy to stay in the four walls of the church. (Congregation A’s Parishioner E, a person who solved her dilemma by becoming heavily involved in outside community care activities when her original congregation would not support community involvement.)

The culture of two of the three merging congregations forming Congregation A was described by other respondents as “closed”, “staid” and “traditional”, reflecting a strict Anglicanism with a focus on liturgical life.

In contrast the other congregation merging into Congregation A was described as “charismatic”, “fairly free thinking”, “flexible”, “keen to outreach”, “involved”, and “having a generous sense of giving” which saw it develop a number of community
activities prior to the merger; this culture significantly determined the culture of the merged Congregation A:

I think the people are slowly becoming more community minded, especially since we’ve been [in our new congregational setting]...I felt when [this other merging congregation] joined us it was like a breath of fresh air, the breath of spring. (Congregation A’s Parishioner E, explaining the new culture where she expresses her community concern through involvement with congregationally-related activities.)

Whilst these two cultures associated with Congregation A were contrasted as “inward looking and traditional” and “outward looking and open to change”, other contrasts were identified in the experiences of two respondents from Congregation B.

For Counsellor B, Congregation B exhibited a culture reflecting the “desire to help others”, to “lift the spirit of another”, to “relieve others of their oppression, pain”, the formal community service being but “an expression of that”. This contrasted to prior experience with congregations in which individuals had tried unsuccessfully to commence counselling services. These other congregations were identified as being:

lukewarm on it [because] their ministry...isn’t going in that direction [because there is] no interest...[they] don’t want to spend money on it, [are in] fear of being secularised...[and believe] counselling is taking people away from focusing on God, so “we don’t want that”. (Congregation B’s Counsellor B.)

The contrast here was clearly between an openness to caring services, including professionally based services, and a focus on people’s spiritual nurture (rather than liturgical practice, which was the contrast for Congregation A).

Congregation B’s Counsellor C identified yet another cultural contrast. This was between the theology behind Congregation B’s caring approach, which was seen as “liberal” and an approach characteristic of his previous congregational setting, seen as:

holistic care for people [which] offered information about the gospel. (Congregation B’s Counsellor C.)

This approach incorporated evangelism, i.e. “challenging about faith in Christ”, into its understanding of “holistic” care and counselling. It was a matter of concern for Counsellor C that Congregation B’s culture did not include an evangelistic theology, nor a program for nurturing Christian faith in interested participants.
Here cultural difference is more related to an understanding of the nature of contact with the community through a community service. One culture sees such contact as legitimate if it includes an active **faith sharing** and nurture. The other culture sees contact as legitimate simply because it cares for people in need. Although the spiritual is not precluded from the latter, it is not deliberately included. Rather, in the words of Congregation B’s Counsellor A when commenting on the original counselling room opening into Congregation B’s worship centre:

*I don’t actually invite them into the church...I just stand there and just before they say goodbye [some say] “It’s a lovely church”. And I simply say “The doors are open if you want to go in”. Some have said “Can I?” so I leave them alone...And they’ve gone and sat there. Now where that leads I do not know, but I do know it’s had an effect. Now that’s not me, that’s God...It really is perception of just where people are.*

Overall three cultural types were identified in the datasets: one appears closed-off to community services with its focus on spiritual activities, and two encourage community service development, but in quite different ways.56 One is broadly caring in its emphasis whilst accepting the spiritual framework of the congregation. The other actively combines a spiritual dimension with its caring activities, seeing these as a context for challenging community service users about the place of faith in their life. Whilst there are indications that all congregations encounter different cultural emphases, the data reflects a perception that one culture tends to dominate in any given congregation.

### 6.1.2 Changing Cultures

The nature of a culture is that its features dominate and therefore tend to resist change.57 Therefore, when a congregation is not open to community engagement, those who value it as an aspect of their faith expression need to adopt strategies which promote some measure of change. Data from two congregations indicate that change is indeed possible.

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56 These cultural types have identifiable similarities to three of the four mission orientations in Roozen, McKinney & Carroll (1984). The closed off type reflects their Sanctuary Congregation. The other two reflect their Civic and Evangelistic congregations. The Activist congregation is missing. Similarities also exist with two of Becker’s congregational cultures; the House of Worship and the Community cultures (1999).

57 Ammerman suggests, “Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in. It is the *predictable patterns* [emphasis added] of who does what and *habitual strategies* [emphasis added] for telling the world about the things held most dear” (in Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley & McKinney 1998, p.78).
With Congregation A, change resulted from the crisis confronting all three of its original congregations; their properties had to be sold to enable the merger of the three congregations and the construction of a new, more suitable, centrally-located church complex. Selling congregational property is potentially traumatic, and Congregation A’s respondents indicated this merger was no exception:

*We were amalgamating with a very traditional [congregation] and there was a lot of tension with the amalgamation, there was no doubt.* (Congregation A, Parishioner D.)

*It was just a lot of negativity with one [congregation] coming into another’s [church] and thinking they were going to take over...I mean there were even some people in the church who wouldn’t shake hands with you in the “peace sign” because you came from [the other congregation], so people from [the other congregation] had to get over that and we had to love them...I suppose it was a bit of a struggle in that way. And as I said, it was more that things were done a certain way and “We aren’t going to change them no matter what”.* (Congregation A, Parishioner C.)

Two features characterised the change resulting from the mergers which formed Congregation A. The first was the establishment of a meals ministry to low income families on the site of the “traditional”, “closed” congregation prior to its sale. Whilst this was instigated by people from the more open congregation, the activity promoted a new sense of outreach with others.

*As I said, it was very closed in before and just having the meals ministry too helped people, lay people within the church, to realise that they can also do something. It was good in that area.* (Congregation A, Parishioner C explaining one factor that helped bring change.)

This fitted with the Parson’s overall strategy of affirming qualities from each of the merging congregations and incorporating them into the new Congregation A.

*The challenge has been to try and marry some of the things that have been really good in the other two congregations with the sense of being outward looking and mission oriented that was enjoyed by the [third congregation].* (Congregation A’s Parson).

The second feature was the final closure of the last original church building which forced a temporary relocation of the merged congregation while a new site was purchased and a church complex constructed.

*I feel that we’ve come together quite well really. [One congregation] was rather staid whereas [another] wasn’t, a bit “whooppey-do” at times, but I feel we have come together. There’s the odd one that wasn’t too thrilled about it all. But I feel now [that] the time we spent at the [temporary centre] did us good, because it was very small. It was really togetherness down there. We had one cupboard...I think we did better by going there and being together than if we [had] moved...*
straight into [this new church building]…I feel since we’ve been here there’s been a very warm feeling. There’s an odd one [who still can’t adjust] but they’re very much in the minority…I think people are slowly becoming more community minded, especially since we’ve been [in the new worship centre]. (Congregation A, Parishioner D.)

A crisis occurs when traditional strategies no longer work and new ones have to be found, so presenting both opportunity and danger, and Congregation A took the opportunity to change in response to its crisis. Clearly there was much stress, during which some left the congregation, but the strategy of affirming and incorporating qualities from each pre-existing congregation combined with the enforced relocation to a neutral site, helped create a “new” congregational culture which apparently valued community engagement.

In contrast, Congregation B’s experience of change was more like a “massage” of what already existed. The Parson commented that when he arrived the congregation needed preparation for his conception of ministry to the community. His goal was the development of “a culture of care in this Christian community” that would remain after he left. His long term strategy meant it took six years to initiate a congregational community service organisation. He described the process in these terms:

One of my simple images of...ministry...is the game of pick-up sticks. There’s a sequence. You’ve got to take one stick before the next one is appropriate, and it keeps building one on another. And it may be that you’ll take one stick off, and three opportunities as a result open up. And there’s a sequential nature of growth. And I think that’s happened with a lot of these people. [A range of things] fed these people, and they’re looking for deeper and deeper ministries...It’s talking out the dream, and finding ways to say it that will convince people. As slowly people have the courage to support you, you support them, and build your supporters. I think you’ve got to be very patient...[In] my first years I developed a long term plan around “our story”. It was something like our personal story, our parish story, our Anglican story, our Christian story. Each [theme] had a year for us to try and give people a chance to talk out, coming to grasp a story. Now in time we grew beyond it....So there’s a bit of meandering along, fostering the life amongst different groups and types of people at different times...I’m coming to the end of my time here. I do believe it’s good for me to help the parish grasp what is “our” vision. It’s got to become what they want to have taken up of my vision...and carry on to the next [Parson] so that they are not just left...I believe they will be looking for someone who can help carry that on. Yes, it’s [been] broadening [out to others], this [sense of] ownership. (Congregation B’s Parson.)

Rather than imposing a pre-formed expectation on a congregation which sees itself differently, this strategy sensitively engages the congregation in exploring the new
understanding in light of its ongoing self-understandings thereby helping the congregation value its own “story”, merging these over time. The outcome is an integrated new self-understanding which is “owned”. For Congregation B, this resulted in caring for people both within and from outside the congregation, in addition to its worshipping life\textsuperscript{58}. A key step involved deliberately contacting those opposed to the new emphasis to address their concerns and clarify how change could support them. As the Parson in Congregation B commented:

\begin{quote}
I did bring around a number of ‘enemies’ by being able to talk to them about where I thought the church at large was going...You don’t criticise [them] because they’ve got a great vision in their own right, but it could be a better vision in some way; it’s not one that enables you to also build the parish as a community centre. I had to help them see that in fact this [approach] is helping other people. It’s not just for ourselves. (Congregation B, Parson.)
\end{quote}

Of course the longevity of this gradual change depended on its surviving the Parson’s departure; independently both Counsellor C and Parishioner C from Congregation B raised this concern.

Massaging a congregational culture is clearly different from the approach of Congregation B’s Counsellor C who sought to introduce to Congregation B’s service his emphasis on linking faith nurture with counselling. He shared his frustration when his proposal was not accepted by the management committee.

\begin{quote}
I set up a structure whereby I had a format that I [presented] to the committee of management for any activity even for counselling, supervision of the counsellors, supervision training of the first contact interviewers. Anything that I did...I set out formally and got approval so that it was not just me doing something. And I set out a proposal, my strategy being to run 3 or 4 sessions [of a course on basic Christianity]. They gave me permission to do that...But when I presented the proposal to initiate [the whole basic Christianity] course it was knocked back because they didn’t see that this was [the community service’s] responsibility...So, I guess I was frustrated in terms of my ideals and my commitments. (Congregation B Counsellor C.)
\end{quote}

Clearly this approach had two key differences to the massaging approach; it involved firstly, Counsellor C seeking acceptance of his own understanding of the faith-counselling link and, secondly, use of formal decision-making processes rather than shared exploration. This process, used previously by Counsellor C in another setting where he was both Parson and community service leader, was pursued to gain formal acceptance of change. However a degree of imposition remained because these ideals

\textsuperscript{58} The processes have similarities to the approach to congregational transformation advocated by Grierson (1984).
were not effectively shared; rather an opportunity to accept or reject them was provided. In talking of this previous experience of gaining “formal permission”, Counsellor C expressed similar frustration when his successor wound up this community service. Formal agreement as a form of imposition apparently did not modify congregational culture sufficiently to sustain the community service.

### 6.1.3 Theology as Cultural Indicator

The place of theological perspectives in Congregational Culture appears inconclusive despite some respondents seeing it as the basis of congregational community engagement. Professional respondents in the first dataset commonly mentioned the need for a theological understanding:

> I don’t think you can do any of this without a clear theological framework and I would be wanting to set that out very clearly...I think there are probably different ways [to understand community involvement] depending on your theology. (Social Worker 1, now a congregational clergyman.)

> Some of the issues for me are theological issues. For example, what is our understanding of church, and the nature of the church? And secondly, what is our understanding of mission in the church? To me they are two lynchpins. And if you get some answers to those, then some other questions, other issues, start to fall into place. But if you don’t, then you won’t even be asking some of the other questions. (Social Worker 6, a centrally sponsored church agency CEO.)

> It’s a matter of helping the whole church to come to grips with its servant ministry in a more significant way as an integral part of its existence alongside its evangelistic role and incorporated with it...It is as if we said some time back “You local churches focus on the first commandment; you worship God, engage in Christian fellowship, and do the good first commandment stuff and we, the [centrally sponsored] welfare agencies of the church, will do the second commandment stuff; we will provide the services on your behalf”. Now what parish community work is about is trying to break that nexus and rejoin the two commandments. (Social Worker 8, policy worker and consultant in a central church agency.)

> For a local church to have a sense about how it can intersect with social work, welfare [work], I think it does need to have a theological understanding...what we mean by professional social work and how that links with our theology of church, and how that connects to our understanding of ourselves. (Social Worker 9, congregational member and former congregational agency employee.)

However all comments seem to suggest a need for a theological perspective that was not actually evident, at least not explicitly.

Within the congregational datasets only Congregation C incorporated a theological statement of the type that was suggested. Yet even their statement took seven years to develop, despite being recommended after the first year.
The staff team saw the need to articulate a theology that all key contributors would feel they could own in order to move beyond [individual] motivation to good practice... The development of a shared, articulated theology had been recommended [six years earlier]. Perhaps it was simply too early to be agreed at that stage, with too much tension residing in difference... Considerable theological reflection had been occurring naturally in the practice of [the congregational community service]... The [developed statement] was to give more definition to the target group, and addresses the services provided as aimed at enabling people to build up and recognise their skills, and seek resources where they are needed... The theology paper then provides an interpretation of the Christian understanding of [God's] love, and the way forward provided by the life, compassion, challenge, and sacrifice of Christ bringing forgiveness to help people renew, and walk forward from despairing situations and explore their potential. (Document 23 Congregation C, written by the community service coordinator who was also a congregational member.)

The statement, written by a theologically trained staff person, used general theological principles to systematically develop implications for practical activity within the congregational community service setting. Although constituting the type of statement professional respondents had sought, the development process meant even this was more like a statement from agency personnel rather than Congregation C itself.

At the foundation of its service, Congregation C adopted a statement based on the Biblical verse Micah 6:8 which presents justice and kindness as God’s requirement for people of faith. Documents from the congregation confirmed that “even these motivations were not articulated with agreement and caused endless debate” (Document 23 Congregation C, written by the Coordinator). Hence it seems that, prior to the statement being accepted, Congregation C’s culture reflected a fairly general sense of compassion for others, even though its articulation was uncertain.

This pattern was reflected in the other Congregations. For Congregation A, motivation for community service involvement related to “the Great Commission to be concerned with loving our neighbour” (Congregation A’s Parson) or, as later expanded:

I tend to find that it is mainly a faith issue for the parishioners, as I suppose it is for me too, and that they... would see themselves as [having] an evangelism aspect as well. Others would pick up Matthew 25:34 “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you

59 See Appendix 11 page 495.
60 “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (New Revised Standard Version, Division of Christian Education, National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA, 1989).
welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came”. And that would be the basis of some of their thinking…Others wouldn’t know why they’re doing it. (Congregation A’s Parson.)

For Parishioner A, this was expressed more simply as:

The motivation is just to be able to help people, to put a face to the church. For lots of people [the church is] a building, but it’s not a building that makes the church, it’s the people…the church has taught me to be more caring, and it’s given me peace…But I don’t try to bring too much religion into things because a lot of people have no religious background, and that only frightens them away (Congregation A, Parishioner A.)

In contrast, Congregation B’s Parson had a well-developed rationale derived from theologians who explored mental health issues in the local church and spiritual understandings of life and counselling. For him this integrated care, worship and “healing ministries” within the congregational culture. Similarly Congregation B’s Counsellors A and B articulated clear theological understandings that informed their approach to their work. Their slightly different statements viewed faith as an affirmation of God’s gift of “Life” that was not imposed on people. Such statements were individual rather than the views of the congregation itself, or even of the community service personnel.

A more representative statement by another parishioner in Congregation B recalled that:

We [the committee of management] dug back into our faith positions [when considering the issue of charging a fee for our counselling service]…to the ministry of Christ as to how many shekels did [He] charge. And we had to work through that. (Congregation B Parishioner C explaining why the decision to not charge for counselling services was made, a decision since reversed.)

The overall impression is that the theology underpinning a congregational culture’s relationship to community services was fairly general, rather than well articulated. This contrasts with certain individuals who readily articulate their personal theological understanding, even though it clashed with that articulated by others.

Apparently theological understanding does not overtly inform a congregational culture with regard to community services. Rather, it seems the congregation develops an implicit understanding that caring and compassion are appropriate reflections of congregational faith. This understanding is then reflected in the congregation’s response, more than in what they articulate. Over time, especially where an articulate group is associated with a community service such as with
Congregation C, a collective statement is often developed. However, such a statement more typically clarifies and elaborates what has already developed rather than providing explicit guidance to its development. My sense is that the “street theology”\(^{61}\) of people within a congregation, their unarticulated beliefs born of life’s experiences and their sense of faith within those experiences, more than formal theological statements, is a better representation of congregational culture. The substance of this street theology is better identified by what people do and their “generalised” spontaneous comments than by “official” statements, despite the perceived desirability of such statements.

### 6.2 Key Persons

Although a congregational culture conducive to a community service is essential if such secondary activities are to be initiated within a church congregation, they do not spontaneously emerge. All datasets indicate that highly motivated personalities capable of enthusing others are another key requirement. Whilst such key persons do not need to originate the particular vision, they do need enthusiasm, time, and a contagious commitment to it. Typically within church congregations these key people are the clergy, but occasionally lay people\(^{62}\) grasp a vision and run with it. More likely the passion of lay people is for particular activities rather than the initial establishment of an intentional congregational base for community service where none previously existed. Both clergy and laity therefore have roles in this process.

#### 6.2.1 Clergy

Social Worker 10 from the first dataset identified the focal role of congregational clergy in establishing community service activities, a role echoed in later datasets.

*The congregation* had a guy come and, I suppose, research the need; a Baptist minister from [interstate]. There were two projects that got off the ground,

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\(^{61}\) My term, “street theology”, was adapted from a paper by Rev. Keith Rowe entitled *An Agenda for Field Theologians*. Given at a Conference for Methodist Missions and Social Services in 1978 in Christchurch NZ, Rowe emphasised the need for “doing theology” in the street by listening to ordinary people talk about their lives and the stories by which they live. Ammerman (1994, 1997) reflects a similar idea in her research on congregations and their response to their social settings. Garland (2000a) explores a similar conceptualisation of faith which her research found to develop from experiences within families, rather than explicit conceptualisations within congregations. She notes these understandings were rarely shared unless explicitly requested.

\(^{62}\) In general English, “lay” often refers to someone who is untrained, unprofessional, or amateur. Here the ecclesiastical meaning is intended i.e. someone who is not “clergy”, whether or not they have other professional qualifications.
although one has long since stopped, but this [particular activity] was really a craft activity morning…it was based at the church. And it was started off by the minister who at the time we felt was really assisting us to look at that question of ‘your role as a Christian’, and at justice issues. (Social Worker 10, explaining the origin of her 14 years volunteer involvement in a community service activity operating in her previous congregation.)

For Congregation A, the initiative for a community service came from the Parson and his family:

The emergency food service began as a result of people knocking on the [Parsonage] door or ringing up and asking for help with food. [This was] raised at [the church council] and as a result a food cupboard was set up in the church building and parishioners were encouraged to bring food to stock it. There was no money. [I] was the sole person to distribute food from this cupboard. (Congregation A’s previous Parson.)

Whilst this response was initially small and congregationally focused, other developments gradually followed, maintaining the pattern of the Parson as the key person. Congregation A’s new Parson saw such activities as crucial to his role as pastor to the whole community: “I see I have a responsibility to this community whether they’re Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal or Callithumpian, and that I’m here to be available to the wider community” Consequently he became involved with a community-based disability support service, support for people with mental and/or intellectual disabilities as they dealt with other community services, pastoral support in the nearby prison, special needs assistance for people with serious and immediate financial problems, and the brief operation of an emergency accommodation facility. According to Congregation A’s Parson, the congregation’s role involved “supporting me basically”.

Developments in Congregation B arose from the Parson’s initial vision, a vision that took over six years to be absorbed into the congregational ethos.

That was the vision that I’ve had from those formative years…I tend to be more of an ideas person and rely on others to do a lot of the nuts and bolts work. I also find that ministries develop when you find other people who share visions with you and then together you can work with them. And we soon found others who really embraced that vision. (Congregation B’s Parson, explaining his period of waiting before initiating the counselling services.)

[The Parson’s] been given a vision and I’ve been put here under his authority. I am the one who will be helping to build up the people there, helping him in any way. He’s been doing that anyway, helping to build up the counselling service…to make the service viable in the long run. (Congregation B, Counsellor B explaining his role within the services.)
[The Parson] and a lay person at church...through conversation, through sharing of experiences, [had] got the embryo of this idea that a ministry of outreach from [Congregation B] could take place whereby it could be formed by gathering like minded people together to discuss and eventually form what has become [the community service]. (Congregation B, Parishioner C.)

Yet around that core vision the other activities developed, each substantially dependent on the Parson whilst typically backed-up through the Congregational secretary or a few congregational volunteers.

In Congregation C, the move to develop the community service came after the arrival of two new clergy.

Together they have had considerable influence on the direction and present form of the [community service]. Both bring to the discussions an evangelical background with a strong sense of the way the evangelical faith impinges on the needs of the community. [One Parson] has stressed the importance of setting the vision and encouraging the participants. His vision for [community service] is closely related to his vision for the parish...[H]e has stimulated a number of parish activities...He sees one of his key tasks as holding these together and steering a course of evangelistic, caring ministry. He expresses a hope that part of the integrative approach would encourage...other parishioners to share in the voluntary work of the [community service]...[The other Parson] believe[d] that faith and action belonged together...He spent much of his energy trying to relate this project to general parish life...The existence of these two ministers, both with a high degree of charisma, has been a major factor in achieving the present momentum of the [community service]. (Congregation C, Document 2 Feb 1992.)

From that emphasis, the other events promoting the community service gained acceptance with the congregation. However, unlike the other two congregations, this community service incorporated all the congregation’s community engagements, with the Parson becoming an active board member rather than a de facto Executive Officer having formal contact with service users.

6.2.2 Laity

Data also consistently made clear that both laity and clergy effectively initiated activities from within congregational life. Social Worker 3 from the first dataset identified this through her involvement in training volunteer management committees.

One of the committees I was involved with was a youth housing committee. And that started from one worker...It started from a one worker agency...And that was really started by a committee from the church. (Social Worker 3 explaining her involvement with a church initiated youth accommodation committee.)
Likewise Social Worker 8 identified his own role in helping a congregation initiate a service for low-income people.

With [a specific congregation] I became involved in looking at how parishes become involved in their local community work and had a direct experience of that over four years...It was one of those “being at the right place at the right time” [experiences]. The time was right for the parish; the time was right for the [local] community. The needs we were meeting were the needs of people who were low-income people who required emergency food relief...but more significantly we established a community lounge. (Social Worker 8 outlining his first experience of congregationally-based community services.)

In Congregation A, after the establishment of the food pantry, a lay woman played a key role in some subsequent developments; a Clothing Exchange which became their Opportunity Shop (the congregation’s most visible community service), and a Coffee and Chat time which was partially incorporated into the earlier Clothing Exchange and which the Opportunity Shop volunteers aimed to re-commence in their new location. In initiating these activities, this woman “was responding to the pattern of sharing she was learning about in Bible Studies from Acts which she was attending at the time” (Congregation A’s former Parson), studies not involving the Parson. The significance of this woman’s role was underscored by the number of people who spontaneously mentioned it.

Another development in Congregation A initiated by lay people was the Meals Ministry to low income families, which operated for 12 months. The instigating laywoman indicated she initially set out to support another layman inspired by another parish.

The [congregational council] went to [another church] and they had a breakfast session going and one meal a week. And [the congregational council] did a study on it and they said they couldn’t do it, [couldn’t] bring the program into the church. But there was one person who had a heart to do it and so I talked to this person afterwards and I said, “Look, if you want to do it, I’ll help you.” So we started off. (Congregation A, Parishioner C.)

However the layman did not stay involved, leaving the laywoman to commence it. The Ministry only lasted 12 months because there were too few regular volunteers participating.

Within Congregation B, a Luncheon Group for home-based elderly people was developed entirely through the initiative of a lay person who was a local health professional.
[This health professional] runs a lunch once a week. It’s part of her job but it also involves the parish in that a group of women meet, decide the menu, [and] provide the food...So it offers companionship and a meal but...the parish actually provides the food and venue...And the other thing is that some of the women she has drawn together into the team actually get as much out of it as the rest because they [are] widows or whatever and have got this focus; they plan the meals, they cook the food, they talk to the people, and they have a little debrief and a prayer afterwards and so it is part of their life too, which is quite important. (Congregation B, Parishioner D.)

A second activity arranged by Congregation B’s lay people was the quarterly Meal and Concert for residents of local Aged Care Hostels. This included arranging for local schools to provide a musical program in the congregation’s premises.

Even the Counselling Service depended on the initiative of key lay people, as explained by the Parson and Parishioner C.

One chap who was involved in the parish at the time...I discovered [had] an understanding of the gospel [that being] a Christian was to be involved in service to others...He was very keen about the churches ministry of service. Sharing our ideas together we excited one another and I said "Well, why not at [Congregation B]?"...And we soon found others who really embraced the vision. (Congregation B’s Parson.)

The core driving people, the steam engine of the whole thing was [a particular] lay person and [the Parson]. [This particular lay person] became the president...he brought structural skills along to our committee of management meeting. (Congregation B, Parishioner C.)

Developments within Congregation C remained heavily dependent on lay people. These included legal assistance in formulating the partnership agreement with the central Church Agency, the laywoman who initiated the Opportunity Shop, and the role played by the present Coordinator who began as a volunteer and committee member.

The parish wanted to do something in the community, and that especially applied to a few people such as [the person who became the organiser for the Opportunity Shop]. These people were concerned about local need and were very spiritual in their approach. The group included [the lay member who became the second Coordinator, the congregational member who established the Legal Advice Service as well as provided legal advice for the partnership arrangement, and a social worker in the congregation]. This group were young, articulate and able to speak to the congregation, being already established within it. (Congregation C’s Parson.)

As with Congregation B, key lay people grasped a vision developed with the congregational clergy and took responsibility for implementing it, even though they did not initially generate it.
However, data indicated a dilemma for some lay people was the control some clergy exerted over their efforts to initiate community services.

I was doing part-time theology...and I went on to do a [pastoral care] locum at [two hospitals]...and I was continuing pastoral work in the local church on a voluntary basis...[but] with voluntary positions in a church you don’t have...the lines of accountability that you have when you are employed. We had a change of minister about that time...I finished my theological qualification, I finished my locum [pastoral care placement in a hospital and] was unsuccessful in getting a permanent position...I went to the new minister and asked for [nominal] employment doing the sort of work that I had been doing...And I was told that it wasn’t God’s will...God wasn’t telling them to employ me. I felt very hurt, very rejected...so I went back [to] social work. (Social Worker 4 explaining how she ending her involvement in her congregation’s community-oriented pastoral care activity.)

Unless there are financial resources in the parish to employ at least a coordinator then the capacity of the local church to engage pretty actively in the delivery of services is limited. And particularly that’s the case if the clergy person is not interested or unwilling to be involved in the area...Take [the community service in a particular congregation] which in our tradition was probably the first for a long time. That has had highs and lows at the whim of who the parish clergy are...I think in Anglicanism it depends very much on the initiative of the local clergy in whatever tradition they come from...No, I think it is more determined by the theological outlook of the priest or minister as the leader of the parish community. (Social Worker 11, a clergyman and church-agency CEO who had just ceased being a congregational Parson.)

In my time [the congregational council] approved of the [community service] not just overnight...yet these things were changed by clergy veto with the next clergy. So you try to structure things organisationally so that these things are part of the motivation of lay people supporting it. Yet you see a different person with different gifts, or different vision or lack of vision, closing things down without the support of the [congregational council]...[They were closed down through] just lack of support from the clergy, or a decision to close something down...[It was] just a matter of attrition...and I think mistrust of lay leaders who have strong gifts and commitments; the change of appointments that clergy have the power to make...Now this is a particular concern for Anglicans that clergy do have such power but I think, unless they enlist the active support of lay people who take ownership then these activities [are] fragile organisms subject to the priorities and gifts and self-esteem of the incoming clergy. (Congregation B, Counsellor C explaining his concern at the demise of his previous congregation’s community service.)

Clearly all respondents, all theologically trained, expressed serious concern about the ease with which some clergy terminated community service activities supported by lay people. These comments suggest that, just as clergy need lay support for their visions of community service, so lay people are dependent on clergy support for the survival of their community service activities. More significantly, it seems clergy need to be active “permission givers” for lay developments to continue, as mere
passive acceptance potentially results in service closure through “attrition”, a process sometimes identified in church circles as “benign neglect”.

6.3 Catalysts

A conducive culture and the initiative of key persons, however, don’t appear sufficient to make congregational community services actually happen. Rather, the data suggests a third factor coalescing with these two is needed to initiate a service intentionally associated with the congregation (rather than an individual within it). This third factor, a Catalyst, is not the substance of the emerging community service but something which assists to identify and implement that substance, enabling the congregation to respond “now” rather than at some other time. In effect, the catalyst triggers events which lead to the establishment of a community service within a congregation, or to the establishment of a particular community service activity within an existing service setting.

Two different types of catalysts were identified: the spontaneous intrusion of some social demand that drew the congregation into an unexpected vortex, and the identification of a resource that linked the congregation and its key people to a concrete community activity that it could then commence.

6.3.1 Evident Need

A catalyst for developing congregational community services was first identified in Congregation A through the need made evident in these comments:

*Primarily most of our activities came about...due to the [financial institution] crisis that happened in our [locality]...There were a lot of people in the [locality] that were suddenly destitute, or lost everything, lost all their income, their savings. There were lots of stories of people who, even a month before, had sold a house and put all their money into [the financial institution] and none of it was there...And as a result there were a number of meetings between the churches and [a church-related agency] to establish a food ministry for people in crisis...So as a result of that we established a very small food bank [as] we already had a food ministry running. (Congregation A’s Pastor explaining how the existing format for the emergency food program developed.)

When that happened we got a lot of people who had no idea of the welfare system. All of a sudden “Help. Where do I turn to?” (Congregation A, Parishioner A giving her version of the development of the existing form of the emergency relief from her Opportunity Shop perspective.)
Although this event was frequently identified by Congregation A’s respondents as the start of their food ministry, it emerged that this event more correctly altered the accessibility and source of food compared with their former, more limited service. Clarifying the origin of the earlier form took time but, as noted on page 129 when discussing clergy as key persons, it became evident that it began when the previous Parson experienced a domestic problem through the pressure of the demand for assistance. Whilst the Parson’s role was crucial, the catalyst was the demand confronting the Parson and his family.

Likewise, the Opportunity Shop developed in Congregation A was initiated through the spontaneous response by one congregational member who sensed a “need” to take seriously a challenge encountered in a bible discussion group.

_The Op Shop was the initiative of [a past congregational member] who was responding to the pattern of sharing she was learning about in Bible Studies from “Acts” that she was attending at the time. It was initially begun as an “in house” arrangement for recycling clothes and was seen primarily as “good stewardship”. It was not intended as a money raising activity, so prices were kept very low._ (Congregation A’s Past Parson explaining the commencement of the Opportunity Shop.)

This challenge was shared with others, and so functioned as the catalyst for this activity.

For Congregation B the process was perhaps less dramatic but was still an idiosyncratic, rather than an examined, response to social needs. The Parson expressed this process in these terms:

_It’s more an intuitive hunch and generalised knowledge of the areas that people work on....It hasn’t been researched as deeply as it could have...[it’s things] we generally pick up over the years. We know that there are people who have, for example, marriage difficulties. Yes, that comes in through the [Parsonage] door, and whether it’s that way or through our [own] struggle as parents...we all know that parenting is an issue. We all know that people have health things, precise health issues, that hasn’t been fine tuned I guess. And there’s a little bit of the specialty that people have. Like if [my wife] is working with elderly, we know there are lots of elderly [with issues]. We know there are health, elderly issues through [that] professional experience. So it’s a little bit more...experience both personal and professional but it hasn’t been documented._ (Congregation B’s Parson, explaining how the social needs were identified that their services activities sought to address.)
Indeed this dependence on personal experience and the lack of formal research as a basis for congregational community initiative is a strikingly characteristic feature of much congregational community service development.  

A common feature of all three congregations was the unplanned development of programs supporting people with intellectual disabilities and/or mental health problems. For Congregation A, this occurred when people continued to make contact with the congregation either directly at the church or through another congregational activity.

People with mental illness or people with intellectual disabilities tend to frequent the [Listening Lounge]. And you tend to feel as though you are a captive audience for four hours. And they will just sit there and tell you all day what their problems are and the injustices that have been done against them...[When] I’ve been there I’ve actually been dealing with pastoral ministry [people] that I would have been dealing with [at the church]. People, instead of finding me [at the church], they’ve just come over to the [Listening Lounge]...I have people come off the street who see the church open or my car here. People just rock in. (Congregation A’s Parson explaining how he became involved with a group of people with special needs, an involvement that also led to his formal links with a local coordinating body for services provided to people with disabilities).

We’ve had three couples here and one or two others [with psychiatric, emotional and intellectual disability problems] and it was really getting very hard because we were getting to a bit of saturation point with the problems...the minute they see [the Parson’s] car they are in the door. (Congregation A Parishioner E explaining her concerns that involvement with people with mental and intellectual difficulties consumes the Parson’s time beyond what can be realistically expected, and that the numbers coming, including to the worship service, overextend the congregation’s capacity to support).

Although this support from Congregation A was fairly unstructured, much of the load fell on the Parson, despite some congregational members responding to any contacts in a friendly and accepting way.

Congregation B also developed a support activity with people with intellectual disabilities, mainly with participants who experienced “acquired head injury”. This support was offered through an informal group which met in outside locations.

The [Support] Group developed around inviting people who “hang around looking for more from the church”. [The Parson] indicated that he led the group but was assisted by a person with a social work and Baptist background who initially had contacted him with a personal social need. He had invited her to

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63 Cameron (1998 p.319) also documented this as the process of issue recognition in her study of English congregations. She saw in it an implicit social policy critique (p.337). Wineburg (1993, 1994) also noted the ad hoc and first-hand basis for congregational responses.
assist as she was only doing casual social work at the time. [The Parson indicated] participants in this group sometimes came to worship and attended other congregational activities and that contact was sometimes initiated when people with this need came to church first. At other times the participants were first met through arriving at the church requesting money. The aim was to provide a context to build social relationships and interactions, including with church people. They visited cafes around the area. ...It was still focused on his leadership as he was the common, “strong” link with all the people involved. [The congregational secretary] occasionally helped with driving people to the cafes but otherwise there were no others from the congregation involved. (Notes from the second interview with Congregation A’s Parson, as he explained the origins of this group with intellectual disabilities.)

Congregation C likewise found themselves confronted with a need to respond to people with mental health concerns. This was exacerbated by their proximity to a large hospital which “de-institutionalised” its mental health patients. The psychiatric department at the hospital initially negotiated to run a craft activity from the congregation’s Community House but in time ceased their own program and referred their patients to Congregation C’s own craft activity. After further negotiation, staff from the hospital’s psychiatric service began to participate in the Community House’s activity, provide training to Congregation C’s staff and volunteers on work with people with mental health problems, and became consultants when needed.

This joint venture resulted from concern at the closure of the [Psychiatric] Department’s own group which had gathered at [the Community House] since July 1994. Considerable planning occurred in the ensuing months before the integrated group was launched in May, led by volunteer[s, one] an occupational therapist provided by [the hospital] who organises intake from that source. The group has proved to be very warm and interactive, and has been working on innovative new projects such as painting on glass, and ceramic work. This project has placed [the Congregational Service] at the cutting edge of the trend to introduce disability support at the community level. (Congregation C, Document 8 reporting on the initiation of a joint Craft Group which included people with mental health concerns.)

For Congregation C it would seem their Pastoral Care Support program similarly had an unplanned, spontaneous beginning. Document 5, dated July 1996, made a passing reference to Pastoral Care as a Community House activity, however Document 23, dated June 1999, indicated more fully that two different, unexpected catalysts helped initiate this activity. The original event was the recognition by Community House volunteers that people waiting for Emergency Relief sometimes wanted to talk, and that such talking was helpful. As a result volunteers adopted a listening approach reminiscent of the pastoral care activity within the church itself and, for a couple,
within the nearby hospital. This is explained by the Community House’s Executive Officer in this way:

_The other response to the emerging complexity in the lives of emergency relief participants was to engage them in a longer conversation.... As people came on repeated visits to [the Community] House they became familiar with the welcoming, informal approach that strove hard not to resemble the herding mentality of the [Government] system. Some people began to talk more plainly about the events leading to their arrival at [the Community] House. Informal listening was occurring in ad hoc nooks and crannies by well intentioned staff and volunteers, who craved to advocate for the suffering and alleviate their troubles._ (Congregation C, Document 23 summarising the development of Congregation C’s range of community services.)

Concerns raised by this unexpected development included how this activity might be developed –

_Into a more accountable, properly resourced, confidential, manageable and realistic level of service that had interface with other services of the House, other workers who might see the same person, and with management direction provided for it as a recognised and valued service_. (Congregation C, Document 23 explaining the concern about this unintended support activity.)

These concerns were left unaddressed until an example of the second type of catalyst occurred, a contribution to the development of Congregation C’s Pastoral Care Activity that will be considered further in Section 6.3.2.

These examples illustrate how unplanned activities developed when congregational members encountered evident need in their community to which they felt they should respond, despite not formally identifying that need or the ensuing service more rationally or analytically. When confronted with people demanding support, or with congregational members feeling obliged to respond, efforts were made to address these needs, however simply. In particular, the response of all three congregations in providing a service previously provided in more formal and institutionalised ways by government itself identifies that the withdrawal of such services is one potential catalyst for congregational community engagement. 64 Whilst governments may perceive changes which result in less formal supports as more “natural”, the capacity of community groups such as congregations to adequately respond is doubtful. Congregation A was clearly seeing it as more than they could handle; Congregation

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64 Wineburg (1991, 1992, 1996b, 1997, 2001a; see also Wineburg, Sparkes & Finn 1983) paid particular attention to this process as it reflected US policy shifts in Federal government funding of services. Consequently, he consistently questions the capacity of congregations to fill the ensuing gap as governments apparently expect.
B seemed to be managing with its group-based off-site approach but were concerned that the group should not get too large; Congregation C only coped because they negotiated an effective partnership with the officially responsible institution.

### 6.3.2 Available Resources

Congregation C’s Pastoral Care Activity is an interesting example because it clearly underwent two distinct developmental stages. The first, discussed above, was an unplanned response to an evident need. The second stage, equally unexpected, occurred when a particular resource became available to the Congregation.

A key opportunity arose when the [partner Central Church Agency’s] Manager phoned the [Executive Officer of the Service] in September 1994 to ask if [the Community] House would consider an addition to its team. The candidate was a recently retired [person], who was soon to be ordained by the Church as a Deacon, and had [studies] in pastoral ministry. She was in search of a "ministry" role in a community context, on an honorary basis. This was a gift valued many times over...Her experience and...study in the area of Pastoral Care was another area of expertise needed. Thirdly, she enthused others with her own quest for learning and integrating new experiences....[T]he Deacon decided to become a member of the parish community, and offer her ministry there. The extent of her role in the parish was not clearly established, or mutually understood in the early days, and the role developed with practical application more directly in the life of [the Community] House with emergency relief clients,.... (Congregation C, Document 23 explaining how a more formal approach to Pastoral Care commenced through the unexpected offer of voluntary involvement from a person with formal study in pastoral care.)

This honorary appointment, resulting in the previously ad hoc response becoming a formal and deliberate aspect of Congregation C’s Community House activity, is a good example of the second way in which congregational community services are triggered.

A similar process with a different type of resource occurred with Congregation A’s Listening Lounge ministry which developed in the nearby shopping centre. The centre management unexpectedly approached the local Parson’s group65 offering a spare room in which free coffee could be provided to older people wanting a space to relax while shopping. Apparently the management were aware another local church

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65 The local Minister’s Fraternal.
operated a small coffee shop in a shopping strip in the next locality and thought such a centre could alleviate a problem for older people from the noise of younger shoppers in the centre’s Food Hall. In conjunction with other local congregations, Congregation A accepted this offer and commenced the Listening Lounge service with its free coffee and biscuits, magazines and papers, volunteer listeners, and community information.

A similar fortuitous resource was behind the commencement of Congregation B’s Counselling program. Despite the Parson’s longstanding dream, nothing happened until he encountered a similarly minded person in the congregation with the skills to formalise the service structure. Subsequently a core group of supporters from within and beyond the congregation were attracted. The catalytic nature of this encounter is evident in this comment, partially cited on page 132:

Now when I came here there was one chap who was involved in the parish at the time [who] had, I discovered in talking to him, [an] understanding of the gospel [that] to be a Christian was to be involved in service to others. And his life had been very involved with [a particular] Citizen’s Advice Bureau...He was very keen about the church’s ministry of service. And so in sharing our ideas together we excited one another and I said “Well why not at [Congregation B]?” I tend to be more of an ideas person and rely on others to do a lot of the nuts and bolts type of work. And so I find that ministries develop when you find other people who share visions with you and then together you can work on them. And we soon found others who really embraced that vision. (Congregation B’s Pastor explaining the stimulus for their community-oriented Counselling Service.)

Similarly with Congregation C, the change of clergy and their recognition of the area’s changing demographics sent the congregation in search of a ministry into the surrounding community. The subsequent but fortuitous arrival of the Central Church Agency’s researcher seeking a congregation interested in operating a community centre in partnership then became the impetus for intentional action.

The ministry team were discussing new ways of outreaching the needs [sic] of the [local] community when the work of the welfare researcher was brought to their attention...Ideas for the two groups to work together in the area were explored over the ensuing months by the welfare agency’s researcher and the [associate Parson]. This was a harmonious beginning as [the researcher]...had a deep interest in building bridges between the generic church and the wider community. Her brief with the welfare agency had been to explore new ways the agency could work with church parishes to impact on social needs. This position dialogued particularly comfortably with the [associate Parson] whose energy and interest in practical “faith in action” was a key resource in considering such a project. (Congregation C’s Document 23 in which the Community House executive worker explains the beginning of the House as a service to the wider community).
Even though drafting the partnership agreement with the central church agency proved a challenge, this unexpected linkage was the critical third component needed to initiate action for the congregation and its key people on their goal of community engagement.

At times the existence of a catalyst seems to be a critical first step in moves for service development. Social Worker 1 recalled the development of a community service activity in a previous congregation. There the impetus was a bequest which had to be spent on establishing a community service. This money underwrote the vision that Social Worker 1 presented to the congregation for their community service.

> [W]hen money became available to the church and they were looking for ways of spending it I was determined it wasn't going to be spent on...band-aid measures, so [the Care Service] came into being. That was done with a lot of research in the community and getting together a whole lot of groups to say well what's needed. (Social Worker 1 explaining how he influenced his congregation in planning its community service.)

This process is however somewhat different to others mentioned above involving the three case study congregations because it entailed a rationally developed plan to use its available resource rather than being a response to an evident need.

A more considered response to an available resource was presented by Social Worker 10 through her experience in a congregation which commenced a craft and activities program for the community. As noted on page 128, she indicated the congregation had been challenged to engage with their community and consequently the congregation looked for ways to do that. A catalytic role undertaken by the external researcher/minister then helped identify relevant activities.

Whilst this more considered approach is less frequently identified, when it occurs it operates as a rational process. Careful planning seems the more likely approach when a congregation is already seeking its place in the community (in contrast to the community “presenting” a need to a congregation to which it either responds or, presumably, sees the opportunity dissipate). However the responses made in these two cases do not seem based on an assessment of the community’s most apparent need; rather they are based on identification of a need which fitted the congregation’s
resources. Hence the needs that drew forth congregational responses either confronted them directly, were suggested by unexpected resources, or were identified as within their capacity.

6.4 Vision

The coalescence of a supportive congregational culture, key people with time and energy to invest in community service development, and catalysts prompting action either to use an unexpected resource or to meet an evident social need, seem to generate an articulated vision for developing specific community service activities. It seems not to matter which comes first as they interact interdependently to form the vision which guides congregational responses to the issues confronting their local community. However, the vision was found to have different features which reflected differences in its articulation, either in the variety of agendas congregations have for community engagement, or in the extent to which the vision is born of the external experiences of clergy and other key people or born from within the congregation’s own developmental processes. These differences are now considered.

6.4.1 Congregational Agendas

Visions for congregationally-based community service activities reflect widespread variations in expectations for a spiritual outcome, expectations here termed congregational agendas. Whilst they in part reflect dominant congregational cultures, it seems congregational participants exhibit considerable variety in these agendas. For some there is an expectation that involvement with the service will see people make a deliberate faith commitment. This attitude, which sees congregational community activities as evangelistic in nature (i.e. as a context for overt faith-sharing and subsequent commitment), is reflected in these comments:

66 Dudley’s research (1996 & 1997) identified that congregations seemed to only perceive as community issues those concerns for which they also intuitively sensed they had the capacity to respond.

67 In much everyday use the words “evangelical” and “evangelize/evangelistic/evangelism” are incorrectly viewed as synonyms. Technically “evangelical” refers to a particular stream of Christian theology that prioritises the authority of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in matters of faith and conduct whereas “evangelise/evangelistic/evangelism” refers to activities designed to promote faith commitment in others not initially committed to that faith i.e. proselytising. Whilst historically evangelicals have tended to evangelise, such activity is not necessarily indicative of that theology. (In fact “evangelistic” is sometimes applied to the actions of anyone who actively promotes any cause to which they are committed.) My use of these words maintains this strict distinction.
I tend to find that [involvement in the Community Service activity] is primarily a faith issue for the parishioner...and that...a number of them...would see themselves [having] an evangelism aspect as well. (The Parson in Congregation A identifying the motivation for some of his congregation to be involved in a number of the community service activities of the church.)

I had sought permission to run courses that might link counselees more closely to the church...but this was rejected...because they didn’t see it was the role of [the Community Service] to provide [that]...I don’t think any of them had heard of the word “evangelism”, and that created some tension for me because of my background where evangelism in the proper way was a way of caring for people holistically. (Comment from Counsellor C concerning his tension with the committee of Congregation B over his approach to encouraging faith in people being assisted.)

In its concern for the evangelistic outreach of the parish, members of the [congregational council] see the [Community] House’s work as an opportunity to win people for Christ. They note the lack of “Christian” response and have suggested greater efforts...to that end. (Comment noted by the Consultant writing Document 2 concerning the perception that evangelism was seen by many parish members as intrinsic to Congregation C’s Community House activities.)

These comments clearly evidence some tensions, or at least divergent expectations, around this use of congregational community services within two of the congregations. In Congregation C the perception quoted raised ongoing debate (apparently involving the resignation of one board member) because the Community House was deemed evangelistically ineffective.

However evangelism is not the only spiritual outcome anticipated from community services. Eventually Congregation C came to see that it was “quite inappropriate or confusing” to attempt to evangelise within its service because:

the staff, all of whom were Christians, found justification in the position that, first and foremost before any relationship can be built, the needs of the client must be listened to, and heard. (Congregation C’s Document 23 outlining an altered perception of the link between evangelism and community service.)

A new understanding emerged which recognised that Congregation C’s Pastoral Care approach was better understood as “pre-evangelistic”; that is, the caring activity offered an experience of Christian love, acceptance and compassion which might then promote interest in the church’s message68.

That this sometimes occurred is evident from Social Worker 7’s comments about her congregational setting where it was not unusual for contact with the Community

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68 See Appendix 11, points 4.6 and 5.13 which define the formal position adopted by Congregation C and its community service.
Service staff to result in people actually “asking questions about what it all meant, and is there a God, and how’s God relevant to me”.

The beauty of it was that [when people asked these questions] we were able to invite people to come to church, and we were really able to invite them to something...known.... We weren’t trying to link them to something [where] we didn’t know what was involved. It was something that we felt would be an accepting [experience] for people...it was like trying to link people with a caring extended family. (Social Worker 7’s describing how some service users became participants in the congregation’s worshipping community.)

Similar questions resulting from the service’s visual proximity to the church building were reported by Congregation B’s Counsellor A, who shared this example.

I don’t actually invite them into the church. ... it is an inviting church [the church interior could be seen from the counselling area through a glass partition]. And sometimes I just stand there and just before they say goodbye [they comment], “It’s a lovely church” and I simply say “The doors are open if you want to go in” and leave them there. Some have said to me “Can I?”, and I will leave them alone....I think coming to be cared for and then going out and there’s the presence of the church can also awaken the seed of Jesus....And they’ve gone and sat there. Now where that leads I do not know but I do know it’s had an effect. Now that’s not me, that’s God. But that church is of God and if I was to say, “Oh you can’t go in there” just think of the damage I’d do. It really is perception of just where people are.... [Q]uite often I will hear “We don’t go to church any more; there is nothing there for us”. And basically if you listen to their words without saying anything you will find there’s a reason. And so I find with counselling [and] the church so close that it can heal some of that brokenness....For instance a lady who’s coming tomorrow, she has a little boy and...one day he looked at me and said “Can I go in”. And I took him by the hand and we walked down to the front. His mother stood up there and said to me “Could I get him baptised here?”. Now whether that bears fruit in this parish, it just opens a little doorway (Counsellor A in Congregation B explaining her perceived benefit from being located in a church setting without overtly promoting faith.)

Social Worker 5 made the same point when describing the impact of a physically linked community centre and church building.

So in fact you can now walk in the main door [of the community centre] and go to church or come around into [the community centre] through the back door [of the church]....And the interface between the people that use [the community centre] and the people that go to worship at this church occurs in the hall. It's physical, and it's quite symbolic. (Social Worker 5 identifying the implications of the context in which a particular congregation’s community service operated.)

However, even these less overt expectations that the context itself would challenge people to join the church seemed to meet with frustration.

It was constantly stressed to the church that we are not going to measure its success by how many new members we get and I think the church had to take a bit of reminding about that because we used to get comments back about...how
many people have really joined the Sunday school because of it. (Social Worker 10 indicating that some congregational members were looking for growth in membership from their community craft activity.)

I know probably the end aim’s to get the people to come to church...When it was getting built, this church being new,...I’d say, “Why don’t you come in there with us?”...I think I saw the odd one there, an old chap who comes into the Op Shop,...I don’t try to sell the church service. I might suggest it sometimes, verbally, “lovely church, lovely building...you ought to come and have a look sometime”. But we leave it at that. (Congregation A, Parishioner B explaining his largely forlorn expectation that some would join the church as a result of an invitation when contacted within the community service.)

This discrepancy between the desire and experience of congregational community services as even a stepping stone to church involvement was accepted with ambivalent resignation by many, including Congregation A’s parishioner B who reported saying to another member “I’ve got that many names and addresses there that have come for food, that surely to goodness you could get a new parishioner out of the whole lot”.

These comments reflected a more intentional, church-related outcome than others thought appropriate. Rather, the provision of an environment responsive to service users’ underlying spiritual issues was seen by some as a more appropriate goal. Social Worker 8 expressed this in these words:

One of my beliefs...is that often behind the need is another need which is deeper and relates to one’s spiritual journey...Now I think what we need to do is go beyond the superficial...to look at the deeper significance of what a person’s exterior needs are and then in the midst of that deeper need to look at God’s gifts which are hidden and ready to be released. (Social Worker 8 explaining the link they saw between people’s overt needs and the willingness of those helping to extend that to the deeper spiritual needs which contribute to people becoming helpers themselves.)

In a less explicit way, this view was behind the many references to providing pastoral care to people outside the church. The Parson of Congregation A, who saw it as his role to provide community pastoral care, stated:

I see [responding to people coming off the street] as a pastoral role. And also, within myself. I would consider I have a responsibility to people who come to me to play that sort of role. And to do it without impinging my values or beliefs on them, but providing a service.... I would see myself as being here primarily for the public and not for this congregation...Pastoral care...is a ministry that can be undertaken by anyone in the parish for others. It involves coming along side and standing with other people without value judgements....People need to have a heart for and desire to be attentive to other people's situation whether they can meet the need or not, and respond by listening, inquiring, praying, and being available....Pastoral care doesn't have to have any spiritual aspect.
Parishioner A in Congregation A expressed the goal of community services more simply as “just reaching out to people...being a focal point of the church, putting a face to the church in the community.” Likewise Parishioner A in Congregation B stated that:

Travelling overseas I noticed that churches had signs up offering counselling after hours.... So as an idea, and as something the church could be doing, I felt that’s a positive, to be able to offer counselling to people.... And also the concept of offering it to the community because that’s what churches need to be on about... It disturbs me that a lot of people have turned away from the church and what their perception of the church must be, and with my perception of what a church should be, to be there and be of value within the community. Whether it’s being a community or being able to respond to the needs of people...Before I came to work here I was conscious of the breakdown of neighbourhoods; I’m sort of a country person years back, so that’s where I’m coming from...just being aware too of the loneliness of people, mum’s, children.... But in coming to work here it was just the idea of having somewhere where people can actually go to have a cup of coffee and a chat and there’s an open door. (Congregation B’s Parishioner A explaining her purpose in being the congregational secretary and supporting the development of the Counselling and First Contact Interviewing roles and the Coffee and Chat Drop-In activities within Congregation B.)

In contrast, for Social Worker 11 congregational community involvement did not require any overt or implicit spiritual or religious agenda:

It seems to me the church’s involvement is an expression of the gospel, not the other way round. In other words, you do it because that’s what it means to be a Christian. You don’t do it because you hope to convert somebody into the faith. Now if by your actions and deeds people are converted...then that’s fine. (Social Worker 11 explaining his view that spiritually explicit agendas for congregational community services were highly questionable.)

In a similar vein, yet contrasting somewhat with their previous comments, Congregation A’s Parishioners A and B conceded that congregational community involvement also reflected their own more basic purpose:

I just wanted to do something to help people. You know the old saying, “There but for the grace of God go I.” (Congregation A’s Parishioner A.)

69 As an uncommon term outside of church settings, it is worthwhile noting Griffin’s definition of Pastoral Care as “the Church’s response, in obedience to the Gospel, to the needs of others” (1995 p.24), which seems consistent with this Parson’s understanding. Peterson comments that pastoral work “takes Dame Religion by the hand and drags her into the everyday world...[U]ntil she is dragged into the common round she is not alive with Good News nor does she have a chance to put her ideas and beliefs to use, testing them out in actual life-situations...It is the pragmatic application of religion in the present...It is ministry in mufti”( 1980 p.1).
Both these comments tacitly suggest that, ultimately, community services are as much about personal fulfilment for congregational members as about helping service users.70

In summary, it seems there is much variation in congregational perception of the agenda for community service provision. For some it is a context for faith sharing and/or promoting church involvement; for others it is a context in which people’s spiritual issues and gifts can be recognised; and for yet others the involvement itself is a sufficient spiritual activity. For some it is about a caring face to the church, and in the end for others it is also about the satisfaction gained from helping. These agendas, varyingly explicit within congregational programs, operate within any congregational community service and are unlikely to be mutually exclusive. Hence, to understand the vision behind any congregational community service, the inherent agendas concerning faith, spirituality and caring also need to be understood.

6.4.2 Imported Visions

Clergy, as key people within congregations, seem to articulate explicit visions for local churches. Indeed, Congregation B’s Parson saw the detailed vision for a congregationally-based counselling service as a specialised contribution which was his to make.

My vision of the church as a community was already well developed. And after a while I did pick up the leadership and started sharing my vision and reassured them, “Yes, there is a very clear reason for going ahead”, and so we did….It becomes a teaching role and I think if I am confident and clear about where I think the church is going, I think people are very happy to follow…While there are some informed people…you are unlikely to get many who are well formed for both a broader vision of the church and a broader vision of the local congregation. I mean we are the specialists and my life revolves around that and all my energy and thought is “How do I build it?”. So the leadership obviously does have to come [from clergy]. And it’s talking out the dream, and finding ways to say it in a way that will convince people. (Parson for Congregation B explaining why he as an ordained person needs to promote a congregational vision.)

70 This is entirely consistent with findings from general research on volunteers, e.g. Baldock (1990), Harris (1990).
This view overlooks a dilemma that such **imported visions** risk being displaced when that Parson leaves a congregation. Congregation B’s Parishioner C was genuinely concerned that the Parson’s vision for the community counselling service and associated activities might not survive his transfer unless the next Parson actively supported it.

*And certainly, when it’s time for [the Parson] to move on...the [appointments] committee would need to be mindful of conversations with prospective incoming [Parsons] that that person...would need to offer some tangible enthusiasm for the [community service]...and to reinforce the link between the congregation and this community service. (Parishioner C Congregation B explaining his uncertainty about the community service’s future.)*

Grounds for such concerns were clearly illustrated by the previous experience of Congregation B’s Counsellor C. As mentioned on pages 125 and 133, as a congregational Parson Counsellor C had developed a particular holistic community care ministry which he incorporated into that congregation’s formal structures. Yet in this lead-in to the quote on page 133, he decried the ease with which his successor closed these ministries or allowed them to atrophy, suggesting this was a more general concern.

*This is a problem that local congregations face; to what extent does...the vision of the [Parson] transfer to individuals to the extent that new initiatives can be maintained in the face of a new [Parson] who doesn’t have the same vision...I’m really thinking more of [my former congregation] now, that a lot of the initiatives which were fairly innovative within a couple of years had been closed down...I’ve become a bit cynical about...the power of the clergy to break or make...I sought to formalise [what I envisioned] at the level of [congregational council] decision making (Counsellor C Congregation B explaining his concern about the ease of demise of community centre.)*

Two further aspects therefore emerge from Counsellor C’s experience. Firstly, he promoted ownership of these activities in his former congregation through formal incorporation into the congregation’s official structures and through training members to implement this vision. Yet this didn’t alter the fact that the vision was drawn from his own outside experience, even though many were enthused by it. Secondly, Counsellor C also commented:

*The other thing about [my former congregation is that] there’s so many of the key lay people who actually went into the full-time [ordained] ministry71.*

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71 This reference to “full-time ministry” was not obviously referring to ordination when first made, however the subsequent exchange makes clear that this was the meaning intended and that it applied to all but one of the leaders concerned.
The closing of activities that these former lay people helped lead reinforced the idea that this congregation’s culture viewed leadership as clergy-derived rather than congregationally-based. Hence the move away from this congregation through ordination not only deprived the congregation of core lay leadership (which was Counsellor C’s intended point), it also reflected a culture where ordination was the appropriate leadership mode. In such a culture, clergy veto could be anticipated.

This concern is consistent with Social Worker 8’s more general observation of the “autocracy of the clergy and the passivity of the laity...those twin evils [that] feed on one another even if you have [clergy] who...want to engage the whole church in ministry”, as clearly Counsellor C in Congregation B had set out to do. It is also consistent with Social Worker 11’s observation that:

> Unless there are financial resources in the [congregation] to employ at least a coordinator then the capacity of the local church to engage pretty actively in the delivery of services is limited. And particularly that’s the case if the clergy person is not interested or unwilling to be involved in this area...[a named congregational community service] has had highs and lows at the whim of who the parish clergy are.

This all suggests that external visions brought by clergy to congregations for community engagement are viewed even by clergy as “fragile” because of excessive clergy control and/or the excessive dependence of congregations on clergy to formulate developments.

In apparent contradiction, two further insights from the data suggested that congregations don’t always fully run with clergy visions. Congregation A’s Parson sensed that the congregation was not prepared to accept his proposed formalisation of its community services into a separate legal entity.

> My principle role over the last eight years has been to share the vision...we did all sorts of things to try and pick up as many people as we could to go with the vision. And I think it’s been fairly successful. But I’ve got to this point now of having established this [worship and community] centre where a number of key leaders are saying, “OK you’ve got your dream, you’ve got your vision, that’s it!” and they’ve drawn the line in the sand and said, “You’re not going past this”. (Congregation A’s Parson.)

This makes sense if it is, firstly, understood that congregations, as well as succeeding clergy, are capable of truncating particular externally developed visions and that, secondly, this is achieved through restricting support for them, so promoting their
fragility. It would therefore seem important to consider the processes that might redress these dilemmas.

6.4.3 Emerging Visions

Congregation C offers a contrasting example of how clergy and congregation can combine in the development of an emerging vision for community engagement, in this case a Community House operating in the Parson’s former home. Whilst two new clergy, the previous Parson and his associate, played key roles in that vision, the current Parson, who supported its continuation, presented it more collectively.

[The present Parson] said she knew there was consultation with the congregation and that this was followed by a report...She said the clergy at the time strongly supported the proposal...she understood the [congregation] wanted to do something in the community, and that especially applied to a few people...These people...were involved in trying to find the [Community House] site. [The future executive officer] was born into the congregation. People, [the Parson] felt, were still involved because of their past keenness. [The Parson] said that she assumed the congregation then saw [the Community House] as an outworking of their Christian faith, seeing that the church needs to be involved with the needy and with the issues in the community that the church wants to address. (Notes from the interview with Congregation C’s Parson.)

This reflection, expanding this Parson’s comment on page 132, showed a more significant link between the developing vision and the congregation than a mere endorsement of the Parson. It recognised that key people within a congregation could contribute to the vision, and that clergy need not provide all leadership. As with Congregation C, this active congregational involvement resolves the dilemmas associated with externally-derived visions, especially those from clergy. The outcome is that the vision can then survive clergy changes.

Similarly Social Worker 9, in her 20 year association with congregationally-based community service that survived three senior clergy and many other staffing changes before its vision dissipated, noted that:

[Support for the people who have the vision] happens when you have a community of people who share a vision, and it's not just individual people, and it was one of the most enriching times of my life when I worked there because there was a community; we shared a community of people and we were surrounded by people who challenged and kept thinking...[E]ach generation of a local church community needs to be finding it's own way of being real to the community, to the local community, to community outreach, to community development. (Social Worker 9 explaining how the congregational vision for service and worship was nurtured by others in the setting.)
This process for integrating externally developed visions with the congregation’s own emerging visions has been identified on page 124 as “massaging” congregational cultures toward openness to community engagement as with Congregation B’s six-year development. Hence clergy are not the only people within congregations to develop visions, even if their role remains pivotal.

Further, congregational members themselves develop visions for community engagement when an affirming culture exists, when relevant key people exist within the congregation, and when there are overt triggering catalysts.

The development of Congregation A’s Meals Ministry is one example. As previously noted, the catalyst was a nearby congregation already involved in the provision of meals for local people. The key people were identified when Parishioner C found a congregational council member was interested, despite the council itself not responding. The culture had been developed over time as the Opportunity Shop and Emergency Food Service evolved. The vision developed was for weekly evening meals for local low-income families to be provided. Despite little direct input from the Parson, the support of other volunteers enabled this vision to operate for 12 months. Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop also developed along these lines.

In Congregation B the two Aged Person’s events had their origins with congregational members. For one member, a weekly meal provided by the congregation to nominated aged people meant an outing benefiting people she met in her professional work. This was taken up by others in the congregation without overt direction from the Parson (who initially overlooked it when listing congregational community services). Likewise the Coffee and Chat Drop-In initiative of the congregational secretary was an adjunct to her administrative role, a role she also sought to enhance through undertaking formal telephone counselling, marriage counselling, and theology.

6.5 Summary of the Initiating Phase

Visions for congregational community engagement are seen in this analysis as the product of a coalescence between an overall congregational culture, the input of key persons both clergy and lay, and with the stimulus from overt social needs or available resources as the catalyst. Those visions reflect a range of agendas.
concerning the place of the spiritual within the vision and the way the vision emerges from within the congregation or is imported by clergy. The ongoing identification of the congregation with the vision reflects how these components interact together in the initiation of any community service activity; its affirmation within the congregation’s culture, the availability of key people to promote it, and the sense of necessity derived from the particular catalysts. Clearly many variations are possible, and hence each activity develops in its own unique way in response. In summary, the analysis of this Initiating Phase is presented in Table 22.

### Table 22 - Components of the Initiating Phase of Congregational Community Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalescing Component</th>
<th>Component Characteristics</th>
<th>Resulting Component</th>
<th>Component Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Congregational Culture** | Cultural Differences  
Insular/Spiritual Focus  
Caring Spirituality  
Evangelistic Caring  
Cultural Change Approaches  
Crisis  
Massage  
Imposition  
Theology as Cultural Indicator  
Defining Statement  
Street Theology  
Personal Articulations  
Retrospective Articulation | **Emerging Vision**  
for  
Congregational Community Engagement | **Congregational Agendas**  
Evangelistic  
Pre-evangelistic  
Face of the Church  
Underlying Spiritual Need  
Gospel in Action  
Need to Help  
**Imported Visions**  
Clergy Define  
Clergy Define/Congregation Approve  
Emerging Visions  
Clergy Initiate/Congregation Adapt  
Clergy Initiate/Shared Emergence  
Congregation Initiate |
| **Key Persons** | Clergy  
Key initiator  
Lone Operator  
Permission Giver for Laity  
Benign Neglect  
Laity  
Supporter of Clergy  
Key Initiator  
Excluded by Clergy | **Available Resources**  
Fortuitous Linkage  
Rational Planning/Capacity | **Evident Needs**  
Confronting Demand  
Capacity to Respond |
| **Catalysts** | **Coalescing Component** | **Component Characteristics** | **Resulting Component** | **Component Characteristics** |
7 The Operating Phase

The *Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement* proposed in this thesis is that the operating phase is characterised by movement between two contrasting *Cultures of Operation*. One culture has been termed *Altruistic Volunteerism* as it emphasises flexible, low-cost activity based on the involvement of congregational members consistent with the congregational goals. The other has been termed *Formalising Professionalism* as it emphasises competent, uniform activity based on formal, goal-directed assessments. Data indicates that congregational community services do not actually identify with either culture but rather each service, and even each activity within each service, reflects a unique “blend” of these two cultures. This blend is then reflected in the options associated with each of six operating dimensions or aspects identified as Programming, Staffing, Resourcing, Managing, Networking and Owning.

This chapter elaborates these two extreme Cultures of Operation and the characteristics of the six operating dimensions, and considers how each affects congregational community services. These dimensions are discussed as if operating independently, even though data suggests they are better understood as interacting. Figure 4 illustrates how this relationship has been conceptualised.

Figure 4 - The Operating Phase

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*This means some data is cited more than once in association with different analytical concepts.*
7.1 The Concept “Culture of Operation”

As explained in Section 5.4 above\(^{73}\), progressive analysis suggested that congregational community services could usefully be seen to exhibit a *Culture of Operation* somewhere between the two dichotomies identified above. As will become apparent when each operating dimension is considered, there are influences which “push” properties of each dimension toward one or other cultural extreme, possibly with different dimensions “moving” in different directions under related influences. This conceptualisation recognizes the apparent complexity of all four datasets, and suggested that consequences of particular decisions about congregational community services could be anticipated. Strategies could then be developed for work in particular settings.

7.1.1 Altruistic Volunteerism

The *Altruistic Volunteerism* culture is based on congregational members’ sacrificial self-giving of time, money and/or personal abilities without any desire for reward. More subtly, it tends to be a culture of “making do” with whatever is available or can be acquired through the donations of others, be it second-hand office equipment, or even buildings from which to operate. Hence it is very creative in its responses as the capacity to operate with limited resources is highly valued.

However, as it is based entirely on people’s goodwill, this culture also tends to be *ad hoc*, and at times even chaotic, as one person’s contribution interferes with another’s. For example, in Congregation C those running the Opportunity Shop were said to be creating a mess around which those involved with voluntary Pastoral Care and Emergency Aid had to work, despite this “clutter” detracting from a supportive environment. Hence it is also characterised by notions of tolerance, lack of accountability, and ambiguity. In one dataset it was characterised as a “good enough” culture.

This Culture of Operation is reinforced within congregational life through teaching about caring for neighbours, “Good Samaritan” notions, and the challenge to not judge others whilst giving sacrificially of both finances and personal capacities. It is

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\(^{73}\) See page 112.
within this culture that the dream for congregationally-based community services is typically given birth.\(^{74}\)

### 7.1.2 Formalising Professionalism

**Formalising Professionalism** is characterised by paid professionals using professional criteria for implementing formal roles with well-structured accountability processes. It operates from locations suited for its purpose and is overseen by an executive director accountable to a board. Services are established through rational planning based on formal needs assessments and are accessed through appointments and official intake procedures. Cost and outcome effectiveness accountability are valued in this culture.

The culture is reinforced through in-service training for staff and board members and through regular supervision of its staff.\(^{75}\) With service users it is reinforced through administrative controls on staff workloads and time-management. However this culture reflects little more than legal accountability to its formal sponsors, operating rather independently of them. It is typically quite alienating for any sponsoring congregation.\(^{76}\)

### 7.1.3 Applying the Concept

Actual congregational community services develop Cultures of Operation that reflect to differing extents various characteristics of each of the two extremes. Because no congregation operates at either extreme, much variation is encountered, and the datasets within which the concept was identified exhibit this variety. Further, where changes in a congregational activity threaten to promote change from its established operating culture, congregational concern is likely. For example, if the changes are perceived as too far toward Formalising Professionalism, the likely concern is that the program risks being secularised and becoming independent from the

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\(^{74}\) Wineburg (2001) notes that in 1982 President Reagan used such an argument to set the US agenda for replacing government social services with congregational and other faith-based programs, a goal now actively pursued through President Bush’s creation of the *Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* in 2001.

\(^{75}\) These processes are fully elaborated by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) in their paper *The Iron Cage Revisited*.

\(^{76}\) An example of this is reflected in the public debate referred to on page 3 involving Melbourne’s Wesley Central Mission (see *Age* Editorial, 2000; Ellingsen, 2000 and Zeigler, 2000).
congregation. If the changes are too far towards altruistic volunteerism, the likely concern is that the program risks its credibility in the community.

To examine how this concept is applied to the datasets, the remainder of this chapter considers each of the identified operating dimensions, the properties evident in the data associated with it, and the range of relevant operating options between the two extremes.

### 7.2 Programming

A total of thirty-one types of activities were identified within the three research congregations. These have been linked together into six clusters as presented in Table 23.

**Table 23 - Activities Identified in the Research Congregations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-term support for basic needs</th>
<th>General support for ongoing needs</th>
<th>Specific support for significant need</th>
<th>Spiritual and pastoral support</th>
<th>Educational Support</th>
<th>Community Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Houses</td>
<td>Coffee Lounge</td>
<td>Professional Counselling</td>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Education Groups</td>
<td>Local Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Ministry</td>
<td>Disability Support</td>
<td>Financial Advice</td>
<td>Chaplaincy</td>
<td>English Teaching</td>
<td>and Trading Schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals Ministry</td>
<td>Social Support Groups</td>
<td>Legal Advice</td>
<td>Faith Nurture</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>(LETS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Kits</td>
<td>General Support Groups</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Support Funds</td>
<td>Support for International Seamen</td>
<td>Fitness Group</td>
<td></td>
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This delineation of community service activities may not be complete as no attempt was made to identify all possible activities. Further, some activities listed may be understood by those involved as separate rather than similar types. The data also suggests activities varied in formality, intended users, and means for connecting to spirituality and the church, each of which will now be considered.

#### 7.2.1 Formality

The degree of **formality**, meaning structure related to access times and contact arrangements, varied widely. Often programs were offered on an “open-door” basis i.e. the service was available on request if somebody was there to respond. This
particularly applied to early arrangements to provide food and other basic living supports.

People would just roll up, you know they’d roll up in the middle of the church service and say, “me mum sent me up ‘cos we’ve run out of milk...and we haven’t got any money and the baby’s crying”. (Parson, Congregation A explaining the way people typically sought access to the congregation’s Food Ministry.)

I have people come from off the street who see the church as open or my car here, people just rock in [looking for] advocacy, and financial support, and often issues of justice, with grievances against the Department of Human Services or some other institution...I see it as a pastoral role. And...I would consider I have a responsibility to people who come to me to play out that sort of role. (Parson, Congregation A explaining his accessibility to people seeking the Support and Advocacy Ministry.)

A similar pattern of accessibility to people seeking certain supports was also evident within Congregation B.

I’ve regularly got people knocking on the door looking for money and we’ve developed a program where they work for money...In other words we don’t give a hand out...they just knock on my door and they want money there and then, so I’ve got to find a job around the church. The rule is, “You either talk, or [get] money [for work].” (Parson, Congregation B explaining how people accessed the Money for Work activity.)

[The Parson’s] got a policy in practice with [financial assistance requests] and so everybody that comes looking for assistance would be referred to him. And if he’s not there then I would suggest they come back at a time when they can see him, and also they would be told that there needs to be work for money and that he would then open it up with the person that if they wanted financial help they have to work for it, rather than them turn on their heals and walk away. (Parishioner A Congregation B explaining her role as congregational secretary in linking people to the Money for Work activity when the Parson was absence.)

Whilst these examples reflect the informality of services providing immediate, practical support through brief contacts, the approach of Congregation B’s Counselling Service was somewhat more formal. It had definite opening times (11am to 2:00pm Mondays to Fridays) and used volunteer First Contact Interviewers as the primary contact to make appointments with counsellors, yet availability of these counsellors and/or the First Contact interviewers were originally somewhat ad hoc.

In February 1995 we went to the public by opening our doors...The very early days were hard on [the Parson] because he essentially became the counsellor as well as his other [congregational] duties. And there wasn’t the enthusiasm amongst the parishioners to become first contact interviewers. They were difficult days. I’d take sick days, I’d take [Rostered Days Off] and I’d go down

77 When asked to explain this, Congregation B’s Parson indicated he sought to stop people telling stories just to get money. His approach was they could get money if they worked; if they really wanted to talk, then he was available separately for that.
and man [sic] the phone for a three hour shift. (Parishioner C Congregation B explaining the initial ad hoc staffing of the Counselling Service.)

However people still accessed the service by walking in, even though telephoning for an appointment was encouraged.

[All the traumas [were] going on all at the same time [for me]. And for some reason all my usual support systems were failing me. Then one day I was driving along the street...And I saw this little sign on the street that said [Congregation B's] Counselling [Service]. So I just walked in off the street. (Parishioner B explaining his initial involvement with Congregation B through its Counselling Service.)

This approach led to a steady extra demand on both clergy and some lay people, but with a degree of “hit and miss availability” of particular services. Subsequently this informality also generated problems for the congregation and their Parsons, as indicated in comments such as those from Congregation A’s Parishioner E:

We’ve had a few [people from the community] come along here...and they just seem to think that they can take up all the [Parson’s] time. They are very demanding...[Another parishioner] said, “They need some other counsellor and they need to be assessed...someone else to look after them”. She said [to the Parson], “You can’t do it because...it’s a seven day a week job the way they expect you to be available.” And the minute they see [the Parson’s] car sometimes they are in the door. (Parishioner E Congregation A reporting a conversation which she and another parishioner had with the Parson concerning the demands made by people from the community with mental health problems.)

Whilst Congregation A didn’t address these ad hoc demands from those with mental health concerns, it did develop more formal structures for its food distribution service, arrangements not unlike those used at Congregation B for its Counselling Service. Access was fixed at 12:30pm to 3:00pm Wednesday to Friday each week but no appointment was necessary. Evidence of need was linked to possession of a Government Health Care or Pension Concession Card, and support was nominally restricted to four times a year.

Congregation B addressed its difficulties by increasing staffing formality. Initially they recruited a few volunteer professionals to take over counselling from the Parson, but eventually this led to a half-time appointment of a paid counsellor.

We had to separate [the Parson’s] role and create a director of counselling role....I...and the [Committee] president [were] concerned that unless we got a director of counselling, unless we got the professional aspect into the incorporated body in a counselling role it was all going to implode because [the Parson] was just too busy being in charge of an active parish and doing all this
Later Congregation B provided limited training for its volunteer Intake or First Contact Interviewers and, at the time of the research, was extending its formalisation by introducing fee-for-service Seminar Groups requiring prior enrolment, again using professionally qualified volunteers as facilitators.

With similar workload reductions and service professionalisation in mind, Congregation A’s Parson proposed that the congregation legally incorporate their community service to enable them to seek funding to employ a professional worker.

*This crisis came up a fortnight ago [and] brought about the idea of establishing a benevolent fund within the [Opportunity] Shop next door so that it would actually become a separate agency with [the] possibility of funding from outside sources...the way I've been talking to the people in the [congregation]...is to say, "Well, how can we establish our own...welfare and social work services because ostensibly a large proportion of my ministry is taken up in the sort of work that...we could have someone paid to do". (Parson, Congregation A explaining his move to legally incorporate the Opportunity Shop to legitimate funding submissions.)*

The Manager of the Opportunity Shop also saw this as a way to deal with the frequent demands she encountered for more professional support.

*Well the Op Shop is outreach as well as assisting people with food parcels needed. It's a drop in centre for people, [where] we find quite a few people just drop in each week for a talk...[They] just come and talk over the counter. And if they've got problems we come outside and talk there...I've even been known to use the bathroom....That's only for minor problems. Because major problems I go and say, "Well, there's this place I can send you to" which...is...where they have social workers. ...[T]here's just nowhere you can take a person to talk to them other than outside or the bathroom...[The idea of turning the men's clothing room into a counselling room would mean] we'd have to eventually hire someone or someone would have to be trained to become a counsellor...I think that would be good because even now when you say to someone they need help, you've got to send them away from the place whereas if you could say, "Look come with me" there's continuity in the whole thing, and it's keeping them in the one area, more involved with the church. (Parishioner A Congregation A explaining her plan for a social worker/counsellor to work from the Opportunity Shop with people requesting counselling.)*

However Congregation A’s Parishioner E reported being doubtful about this because "we could become a welfare church if we're not careful...you're there to help the community, but you're there for your congregation too...You need some of that, that's part of church, but I think there are other things too...I feel you can go too far down that track". The dilemma this Parishioner saw was not the extra money required but
that people might cease volunteering for the informal service they already operated, "I don't know whether it's good to employ somebody because, if you employ somebody like that, other people will say, 'Why should I do it; you're being paid to do it!'". Here Congregation A is reflecting the perceived impact of increasing the culture of formalising professionalism and undermining their own valued culture of altruistic volunteerism.

Congregation C was more formal from the start, requiring that people accessed its services through a volunteer receptionist between 9:00am and 5:00pm five days each week. However demands for change arose when reviews concluded that Emergency Relief and Pastoral Care required still more formal approaches.

Over the period 1993-1996 the staff volunteers tended to shift into a “sacrificial giving” mode in parallel with the rising volume of ER [Emergency Relief]...There was gradually seen to be a need to manage ER and allocate scarce time, goods and energies better i.e. an unlimited ER demand was pressing on limited resources...A number of strategies were adopted: rationed hours for ER, focus on potency of contract...From the almost deliberately amateur, collective beginnings over 1991-1996 [the Community House] management was also groping towards rules and policies on resource allocation, procedures for ‘processing clients’ and formal recording and reporting.

The milestones in recent development seem to have been the [External Evaluation Document 6] Review of June 1996 [and] the Board decision of November 1996 [that] the core business is Pastoral Care...In February 1997 there was a move on from Pastoral Care/Referral, to Family Counselling too after the [partner Agency’s nearby Family Counselling Service] shifted...and vacated that service. At this time there was also a shift from dependence on volunteer staff, more towards contracted professionals working to standards, under a formal Supervision/Support Structure. There was also a move from individual service delivery, more towards coordinated team delivery. (Document 16 May 1998 outlining changes to the delivery of Emergency Relief and Family Counselling/Pastoral Care at Congregation C’s Community House.)

Although these changes arose within a more formal organisation (the Pastoral Care staff were qualified for that role) and followed a crucial external review, they were still presented as a movement from a “good enough” volunteer culture towards a professionally accountable service, one which even influenced the décor of the Community House.

[The Community House] was painted, recarpeted, revinyled, and insulated. These improvements helped stakeholders move out of the mindset of “good enough” to thinking about improvements on a continuous basis. The stirrings of

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78 This seems to refer to the use of helping techniques which influence service users to adopt more effective means to address their issues than repeat requests for assistance.
heightened professionalism were felt...[T]he culture inherited by [the Community House] through its strong Christian volunteer heritage, and continuing dependence on key volunteers and staff from this culture, seemed more influenced by the [congregational] partner than the welfare [agency] partner. But now the servant culture was seen as insufficient to provide a framework for service. (Document 23, Jun 99 which records the changing culture of Congregation C’s Community House.)

Misgivings and inconsistencies surrounded these changes to a still more formalised Emergency Relief service. In fact Document 23 recorded the Community House’s continuing dependence on an honorary financial counsellor and volunteer reception arrangements subsequent to these changes. However, two other areas where external funds became available were included in these more formal developments: the English language program, and the Family Counselling work of the honorary Pastoral Care staff. Yet it seemed this change to formal counselling as the preferred intervention strategy did not always sit well with the staff involved.

The [Family Counselling approach] was not overly welcome by most of the participating staff due to the boundaries it put around time usage and the increasing pressures placed on reduced time available for the ‘core’ business - pastoral care. It is hard to say if resistance was stronger in the staff than from the clients themselves. Workers experienced stress at the idea of turning emergency relief people away on [two days each week]...It was hard to explain that one needed an appointment to be seen [on certain days]...Further stress was encountered when their “counselling” clients chose to come [on non-appointment days] and the session proceeded because the worker knew that the client found it difficult to keep appointments because of the crisis nature of their...lives. (Document 23 outlining some dilemmas experienced with the introduction of formal Family Counselling as an adjunct to the less formal Pastoral Care and Emergency Relief.)

Other dilemmas concerning record keeping and mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse were also sources of tension arising from efforts to increase the professional operating culture and reduce identification with altruistic volunteerism. This resulted in the arrangement being scaled back, the two activities being renamed Supportive Counselling instead of Pastoral Care and Ongoing Counselling instead of Family Counselling, and further training and new volunteer Support Counsellors introduced – a continuing blend of the two operating cultures.

Clearly it can be seen that the initial approach to providing congregational community services seemed ad hoc. However practical issues and/or concerns about effectiveness led to shifts that involved formalities such as appointment times, restricted access, training for volunteers, employment of qualified professionals, and
even service fees and pre-enrolment. Changes seemed to coincide with the appointment of new staff, consultations, or growing service demands. Despite the attractiveness of a more formal, professional approach for congregational community services, the ties congregational services have to their volunteer base seemed to not lose their influence. Moves away from the flexibility of the latter toward the structure of the former are therefore uneven, contentious and incomplete. None of these services seemed likely to be fully professionalised, although that tendency seemed to endure over time.

7.2.2 User Groups

The common feature of all three congregational programs was their provision of food, financial support and/or material aid to low income people. In Congregation A this was their major user group, reflecting the characteristics of their location. For Congregation B it was a fringe activity alongside their “core” work, whilst for Congregation C it was one of two significant service areas.

In addition, as noted on page 136, all congregations were drawn into support work with people with mental health difficulties although in three quite different ways, which also reflected different degrees of movement towards more professional cultures. For Congregation A the support was largely focused on the Parson, with supportive friendships from a few concerned parishioners, such as Parishioners C and E, who were observed interacting with them after church. Congregation B commenced a mutual support group facilitated by the Parson with limited assistance from a professionally qualified volunteer and Parishioner A in her role as congregational secretary. In Congregation C a more formal group emerged, operated by volunteers who had been trained by psychiatric professionals from the nearby hospital, one of whom attended each session.

Other client groups varied between the congregations. Those seeking counselling were referred on in Congregation A even though discussion about how to change that was frequent. In Congregation B people in need of counselling were seen first by a volunteer First Contact Interviewer who identified the professional counsellor

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79 This accords with the extensive US research of Cnaan, Chaves and Wineburg, and the Australian NCLS Research discussed in Chapter 2 above.
appropriate for the next appointment. One counsellor specialised in grief and loss, whilst another was experienced in suicide-related counselling. This program apparently attracted more middle class than low-income users, reflecting Congregation B’s locality. The personal development courses being promoted at the time of the research were likely to increase that feature of Congregation B’s user group as these courses addressed issues such as stress and anger management, marriage education, sports psychology, child abuse survival, personal communication, self-esteem, and problem-solving.

In Congregation C counselling was initially referred to the partner agency’s service nearby. However, when that service was relocated, counselling was incorporated into the Congregation’s own Community House after the staff, previously qualified in child care and pastoral care, underwent in-service training in Family Counselling with a specialist consultant social worker. When the consultant changed, the approach broadened to include people without children who needed Ongoing Counselling and the less intensive Pastoral Care was retained as Supportive Counselling, giving it a more professional emphasis. Congregation C was the only congregation that responded to people seeking Financial Advice and Legal Assistance. The latter service was provided by qualified volunteer lawyers whilst the former was provided through volunteer advisers trained by a financial counsellor.

Congregation C was also the only congregation with any significant contact with non-English speaking service users, thus reflecting a characteristic of its location.

Student profiles were diverse, and included retired Europeans who had emigrated to Australia some time ago, new arrivals from war-torn countries like Cambodia and Sri Lanka, as well as partners of overseas postgraduate students…. (Congregation C Document 23 explaining the background of people using its English teaching service.)

This program best epitomises the changing processes between the two operating cultures. It began with a single “unemployed teacher who had been teaching on a volunteer basis...so as to regain her confidence and sharpen her skill base” (Congregation C Document 23). Funding was then sought from relevant government bodies because “she needed the experience and would benefit from the small wage to supplement her unemployment benefits and pay for her travel costs” (Congregation C Document 23). However, this led to further developments:
Growing alignment with [the adult education body] has caused skills and personal development groups to be groomed in the culture of adult education pathways to employment/vocation. This meant a departure from the earlier welfare language and concepts of supporting individuals with other individuals with similar experiences, to a more curriculum based approach and more attention to the development of group dynamics for adult learning outcomes. (Congregation C Document 23 explaining the changed approach with groups.)

The outcome was a funding growth and the intentional promotion of Congregation C’s Community House as a base to train, support and fund other congregational groups developing this service throughout the region. Funding allowed the employment of skilled church-related tutors delivering professional, adult-based services. This meant more effective teaching “respectful of cultures and religions represented amongst the students” (Congregation C Document 23).

Overall the common characteristics were that some of society’s most at-risk groups had their financial and/or social needs addressed. These include individuals with mental health concerns, families with relationship difficulties exacerbated by financial difficulties, and people isolated through language barriers. In contrast, Congregation B’s Counselling Service de-emphasised survival issues to focus on relationships and personal development issues, a move also seen in Congregation C’s language education and family counselling services. Such differences are seen within congregations as indicative of more formal, professionalised programs whilst responses dealing with more basic, concrete needs are more indicative of altruistic volunteerism. Service user groups then seemed to vary between low-income people in need of the immediate help associated with a volunteer culture, people with social networking needs (as with the volunteer-facilitated social groups operated by Congregations B and C), people seeking professional counselling even if with volunteers, and finally people seeking the personal education and development more identified with a professional culture.

7.2.3 Bridging Processes

In seeking to implement the more spiritual aspects of their visions, all three congregations perceived their community service programs as bridges for relationships between people within the church and those outside. Just how this was to happen, and with what outcomes, seemed to vary, indicating further differences between the cultures of operation.
With its program for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), Congregation C presented the clearest bridge-building aspiration.

The people who were subsequently recruited as [professional tutors for its program] supported the Christian ethos of the [Community House], and had a personal Christian faith. They supported the close involvement of volunteers from [other congregations] in the [Community House], and appreciated their support. The learning groups encouraged the sharing of experiences, and [took] opportunities to bring Christian culture and tradition and faith into the curriculum at times in the calendar when Christianity takes a prominent place in the Australian lifestyle, like Christmas and Easter. Students of other faiths are also encouraged to speak about their religious festivals and share their culture in an open exchange. Clearly the Christian Church was hosting these classes, which often occurred in the back of worship space, or in its foyer or hall. Proximity provided an immediate context for questions to further explore Christian faith, which tutors...respond[ed] to, either personally or by referral. [The Community House] also promotes its special church celebrations to the students. Posters and brochures in the church foyer also assist in bridging this relationship. (Document 23 explaining how Congregation C sees the English Language classes as a bridge between people from congregations and those from other religious and cultural backgrounds.)

Similar but less formalised processes for bridge-building were identified for Congregation A. Parishioner A clearly saw the Food Ministry and Opportunity Shop in these terms:

Well the Op Shop is outreach as well as assisting people with food parcels needed. It’s a drop in centre for people...In the shop part it’s mainly selling and just talking, being a focal point of the church, putting a face to the church into the community...When we moved here we decided we had to have a name. And the idea of “The Bridge” is between the church and the community...We wanted something that was a link between church [and] community because that’s what we are to people...[People are] just not used to church atmosphere and they’re lost, whereas they come here and its quite relaxed at times. (Congregation A’s Parishioner A explaining her rationale for the Opportunity Shop and associated services being “The Bridge” with the Church next door.)

This bridging expectation for Congregation A was seen to apply both to people who used the various services associated with the Opportunity Shop and to the fifty percent of non-church volunteers who worked there. Parishioner C had a similar expectation for the weekly Meals Ministry.

[T]he purpose [of the Meals Ministry] was to get to know the people, which was very good, because...it was relationship building with the community. And the only thing I found with the Meals Ministry after was that it was really good doing it that way but from the church’s point of view we needed to give them a bit more...we can feed their bodies but you need also to feed their spirits... (Parishioner C indicating how she saw the Meals Ministry as a link between community and church people. She then identified “Faith Development” programs as examples of the “bit more” she wanted Congregation A to offer.)
Yet Congregation A respondents regularly noted that only a few people crossed this “bridge” to link with churches, though not necessarily with Congregation A itself.

Whilst Congregation B was less explicit about bridging as an aspect of their community service, Parishioner B was clear that his more extensive involvement with the congregation commenced with the support he received from their Counselling Service. This eventually led to a job with another congregation, as well as involvement with other activities in Congregation B.

So I walked in off the street. There was a guy there...a lay person who’s very involved in activities at that church...a very nice, down to earth, decent person...and I sat in front of him and I just broke down...it was just a sympathetic presence and it just all came out...but he said, “Oh look, I’m not really a counsellor. I’m here to direct people to counselling”. So then he registered an appointment for me and I went to see [the Parson]. [We] got on pretty well. There was...a meeting of minds and he was very supportive. And then I started attending that church, and my wife also started attending that church. (Parishioner B Congregation B explaining his change from service user to congregational member.)

Congregation B’s Parson also indicated that an aim of the Special Needs Support Group was to “build social relationships and interactions including with church people” although it was unclear how that might happen when he was the main contact between the group and the congregation. However this reflected a deeper hope that the interaction between the church and the Counselling Service would generate within the congregation a caring culture sensitive to parishioners and other neighbours:

[W]e are trying to...the care within the general life of the [congregation]. There have been various attempts to develop visiting programs in Nursing Homes etc that have risen and fallen over the years...[W]e’re trying to develop a culture of care in this community, in this Christian community. We’re trying to develop neighbourhood groups...that can really carry that care on...Hopefully that culture of care will spread. So that’s come to the fore as being a clearer goal. (The Parson, Congregation B explaining the culture of care he hoped would develop from the work of the Counselling Service which could then be shared in the wider community through congregational members.)

The Altruistic Volunteerism approach to Bridge-building is evident in this somewhat vague sense of care as an active link between Congregation B’s members and community people. It is also more explicitly evident in Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop as the “face of the church”, and in Congregation B’s First Contact Interviewers as the initial, sympathetic contact. The more deliberately structured bridge of Congregation C’s ESL program with its congregational tutors promoting
faith-related discussion as cultural exchange suggests a more formal and somewhat professionalised approach. A yet more formal and professionalised approach to using Community Service as a bridge to considering faith was advocated by Congregation B’s Counsellor C who integrated such issues into his professional counselling approach.

There were some folk, because it was a church-based centre, wanted to talk about spiritual matters. And, in that context, I was providing holistic counselling which was addressing their need for forgiveness and the gospel, [which I saw as] the most effective way of supporting them and meeting their needs. Because of the lack of knowledge of the Christian faith in our culture in particular I’m convinced that we need an educational approach as the most effective approach to introduce people to an understanding of Christian faith and to bring them to faith. I have run several courses of evangelism and I had broached the subject with a couple of my clients, “Would they be willing to come to a course that discussed these issues in some depth”, and they had agreed they would. I see that as part of holistic care for people, that they are offered information about the gospel, encouraged to reflect on that themselves. I guess what I did do was occasionally hand out a Sunday leaflet and say, “Well these are some of the other activities of this church that you might be interested in” and one or two over the three years took the step by themselves. (Counsellor C Congregation B explaining how professional counselling could be a bridge to faith and congregational involvement.)

This approach, incorporating the ‘bit more’ that Congregation A’s Parishioner C was working towards, seemed a more professional response. Indeed the Faith Development course which Parishioner C wanted was the same course promoted by Congregation B’s Counsellor C.

Bridging aspects within congregational programs apparently operate somewhere between an informal voluntary culture of caring as a face to the church, and a more formalised approach intentionally incorporating faith within service delivery. This is raised either as a component of cultural understanding or, more formally, as a direct invitation to attend formal Faith Development courses. Whilst for Congregations A and B the Faith Development program was never fully implemented at the time of this research, Congregation C operated a Bible Study group for anyone interested for a limited time.

80 “Professionalised” in the sense of incorporation into a deliberate ESL lesson plan. Some may see such a mix of religious material with the teaching of English as an abuse of that context; others could argue that it reflects the need to help people understand the Australian cultural context, and that openness to sharing another religion’s special occasions removed any discrimination.

81 This is an issue now widely explored in professional literature (e.g. Butler & Harper 1994; Canda, 1988; Consiglio, 1987; Cox, 1985; Derezotes, 1995; Griffith, 1986; Joseph, 1988; O’Neill, 1999; Prest & Keller, 1993; Rice, 2002; Rotz, Russell & Wright, 1993; Sanzenbach, 1989; Sermabeikian, 1994).
7.3 Staffing

The staffing of congregationally-based community services revealed significant discrepancies between the two extreme operating cultures. The Altruistic Volunteerism culture is based on the unpaid, usually unqualified, commitment of a pool of volunteers in diverse roles. In contrast the culture of Formalising Professionalism seeks accredited, properly paid professionals employed under legally sanctioned awards with explicit boundaries around their roles. The reality emerging from this data is however rather different, with considerable variation from these extremes. This variation will be examined within four aspects of this data on staffing congregational community services – support workers, volunteer contact staff, professional staff, and finally congregational Parsons.

7.3.1 Support Workers

The most obvious characteristic of congregational community services is their dependence on people from both the congregation and community providing basic administration and support. Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop had a team of about fourteen volunteers helping the manager, herself a volunteer receiving a small honorarium\(^{82}\), to sort and sell the donated stock. Approximately half came from the congregation with the rest drawn from the surrounding community. Discussions with two of these volunteers suggested their motivations for involvement were not entirely altruistic however.

\[\text{Volunteer 1] indicated that she became involved when she returned to Congregation A in the late 1980’s when her husband was sick. She said she was now on her own and sees volunteering as “a way of helping people”. She added that “it gets me out”.}\]

\[\text{Volunteer 2] indicated that she was not a church goer and that when her children were off her hands she was looking for something to do and knew someone from the church who helped with the Op Shop. She talked of the social interaction enjoyed by all the people who helped in the Op Shop. And she also indicated that involvement meant the volunteers knew information about the welfare system they sometimes needed for personal reasons... She added that they found it helpful to be able to chat about their own problems among themselves and that it works for them the same as those who come into the shop and ask for help. (Notes from comments by volunteers from Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop on their reasons for involvement, made at the end of an interview with Parishioner A.)}\]

\(^{82}\) Said to be $50/week, but set to ensure the manager retains her full pension entitlement.
Independently Parishioner B, paid a similar honorarium for organising the Emergency Food Service, reiterated this same perspective indicating he became involved to support his wife, the Opportunity Shop manager, with the occasional heavy lifting and security needs. For him it became “like some sort of occupation…You get up ready to go. I’m strictly on time…I’ve got a little niche.” Clearly these volunteers, who mainly sorted goods and served customers, saw their involvement as of mutual benefit, an aspect not typically associated with these roles.

Congregation B likewise used a few key congregational people for support. Parishioner A, as Congregational Administrative Secretary, was the main support with all services, contributing much more than her formal employment time. Indeed she extended her role to include the Coffee and Chat Drop-In activity and occasional transport, as well as the administrative back-up and reception for the Counselling Service when First Contact Interviewers were not available.

I did say to [the Parson], when there was [just] an office, that I would be interested in giving my time to support what he was doing in the [congregation].…It’s been a big learning curve since then…I know it stretches the imagination but I’m not an office trained person, but he’s very tolerant…and allowed me to learn in my own time…I had the time initially to work into the job…and it’s built incredibly…I don’t work Mondays but I work 9:30 to 5:30 and I’m paid $13,000 a year…I say my job description’s just whatever’s next…I’m [congregational council] secretary…I do the Sunday School and we run a program here for children Friday afternoon…[the Parson], another mum and I do that…I’m the backup person to the [the First Contact interviewers] and initially as they come on board I explain things to them…and I should be there to support them so…if they needed information they’re encouraged to put the phone on hold and come and ask me…there have been times when [counsellor’s appointments] have not really been straight forward…and managing that] has been an expectation of me and my position here…I suppose in a sense it’s just overseeing the day to day management. (Parishioner A, Congregation B explaining her crucial coordination role covering the congregation’s community service and overall administration.)

This support role was nominally a 0.8 effective full time (e.f.t.) position with a less than half time salary, more like a voluntary than paid position. Her motivation for this remained significantly altruistic, despite the acknowledged helpfulness of her limited salary and her ensuing sense of community.

[I]n coming to work here it was just the idea of having somewhere where people can actually go to have a cup of coffee and a chat and there’s an open door…There’s generally something going on here most times in the day…there’s

83 Congregation A’s Parishioner A was the main person who undertook the additional roles of assessing Emergency Food requests and providing information on other support services.
just certain things that need to be done so in a day they get done, so often I am here quite late doing them after people go. But basically people know they can just walk in… I enjoy what I do… I need a community, and here I’m comfortable with the people, … it’s like an extended family. (Congregation B’s Parishioner A explaining her commitment to her demanding “back scenes” role.)

Parishioner D was another volunteer support person who adopted a supportive role to Parishioner A.

She is actually taking on anything I ask her to do… [and] has taken on the responsibility of letting everybody know [of a meeting] instead of me needing to follow up with people. It just takes the pressure off me a bit. She’s quite good in that”. (Congregation B’s Parishioner A indicating her view of Parishioner D’s supportive role.)

Teams of volunteers were developed for other, more limited activities in Congregation B such as those organising the preparation for the Aged Persons weekly lunch and the Aged Persons concert with local youth. Likewise in Congregation A a team of volunteers supported their Support Service to International Workers.

In contrast, Congregation C’s Community House was entirely dependent on volunteers to staff its 0.8 e.f.t. reception role, a situation which continued despite moves to professionalise other areas, and despite recognising “the limitations of using volunteers for [such] a position requiring considerable skill and knowledge” (Congregation C, Document 15). The impact of this on ESL programs were also recognised:

The lack of resources dedicated to office systems and reception co-ordination again became a key point of challenge for [the Community House] to continue to operate at this level of diversity and complexity...The central reception role, filled by volunteers when available, was still not able to handle the demands...(Document 23 Jun 99 noting the lack of resources to better manage reception.)

Administrative support in all three congregations depended on volunteers either entirely or, as seen in the more formalised approaches of two congregations, to the extent that inadequately paid but deeply committed congregational people filled these roles. Moves for properly paid administrative appointments seemed lower priorities in these congregational services as their limited finances were directed to professional roles.
7.3.2 Contact Volunteers

Other than the work of Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop Manager, most initial contact was undertaken by the Parson. Other volunteers were involved in supportive roles such as chatting after church (roles Parishioners C and E actively undertook), serving and chatting at the Meals Ministry, informal support in the Listening Lounge, and serving in the Opportunity Shop. However there was little training provided to assist these volunteers with these contacts. For example, training of Opportunity Shop volunteers was only offered after incidents with some angry customers, and was provided by an occupational health and safety consultant who discussed strategies with “difficult customers”. The Listening Lounge volunteers, who daily dealt with people with mental health problems, apparently received no training for those potentially more intensive contacts.

Congregation B’s Counselling Service involved about twelve volunteers as First Contact Interviewers.

[We had a number of volunteers from the church who, originally, were called front line counsellors, who were…on a rostered basis, to take phone calls or to provide an initial interview with people who walked in off the street, …So I became responsible for supervision and support of the volunteers…and the training of them… They had already received some informal training and…I set up a better [training program]…Although we changed the name to first contact interviewers because there was some confusion with one or two who thought they could actually not only provide a first contact interview but schedule another appointment for themselves because of this term counsellor, so [I] changed the terminology into first contact interviewers. (Congregation B’s Counsellor C explaining the role of the First Contact Interviewers and the support provided.)

This highlights the risk that volunteers’ limitations might not be recognised in congregational activities when they work with people who need skilled assistance. Yet, despite intentions to the contrary, this role had apparently commenced without any meaningful training, an oversight only redressed with Counsellor C’s later appointment as the first Director of Counselling.

[Initially] there wasn’t the enthusiasm amongst the parishioners to become first contact interviewers. They were difficult times…They were tough days because, I felt totally inadequate. I’d be clinically dead for two seconds and then I’d find the strength to pick up the phone, say the appropriate words and try and help the person at the end of the line…. [The toughness was about] not being trained, and a certain fear of dealing with people and their issues and the risk of increasing their vulnerability rather than helping their situation so it wasn’t so much a fear
for myself, it was a fear...I could screw it up. (Parishioner C outlining his experience as an inadequately trained initial First Contact Interviewer.)

That’s the reason [Parishioner C] felt so stressed about [the First Contact Interviewer role] because he felt inadequate and not trained or supported to do it and therefore that feeling of, “What if someone says they’re suicidal, what will I do?” that sort of panic was there. (Congregation B’s Parishioner D corroborating Parishioner C’s comments on inadequate training as First Contact Interviewers.)

Counsellor C explained his more formal approach to training the First Contact Interviewers, an approach extended by his successor Counsellor B.

[My role included] training of the interviewers, supervision of the interviewers, in-service training. I met with the interviewers, at least I ran a monthly meeting for the first contact interviewers. It wasn’t a requirement of their involvement in the organisation that they come to that. As well as feedback from them, I wanted to present something in some area of counselling that might benefit them, sort of stress management, cognitive therapy, things that would benefit anybody…and then in my first year as director I ran a course which was really, it was a course called “People Caring for People”, but I structured it so that it was open to members of the congregation at large and also it was defined as the pre-training requirement to become a First Contact Interviewer. (Congregation B’s Counsellor C explaining how he developed First Contact Interviewer training.)

These examples suggest contact work for volunteers may well be approached with the naivety characteristic of the altruistic volunteer culture, a naivety corrected through recognising the need for more professional training. Social Worker 3 warned about such situations because she found that “volunteers within the church didn't always have a good notion of appropriate boundaries or a good notion of confidentiality issues”. She therefore saw volunteer training as very important.

I think it's something that's important to cover within a church and in fact for the church to link into good volunteer training and not just expect people to plough in and do things but really train them up... I think there's value in linking the training of church volunteers with other workers and other volunteers within the community. (Social Worker 3.)

In contrast, Social Worker 12 warned about volunteer training going too far.

I think the training issue is an important one but I think it has to be balanced so that we don't train people out of their spontaneity and their natural helping skills, and that can be a risk as well. I've seen that [happen] in a number of non-church based volunteer type programs where people have become “trained away” from [the skills for which] they were originally selected. (Social Worker 12 warning against over-professionalising volunteers.)

Even though she saw her role as “merely” a back-up to others, this need for relevant training was identified by Congregation B’s Parishioner A who, on her own initiative, undertook extensive training for direct contact work.
I took myself off and did a training course in telephone counselling before, so it was probably within the 12 months of beginning to work here. But in what I was doing I always had a sense that it was giving me skills to use within the parish rather than elsewhere [and] at the end of that time I then went on and did a training course with [a marriage guidance agency]...So I got involved with running their pre-married courses. And...after doing that for a while then I started studying theology part-time...but for some reason, it just seems to me, everything I do is just for my work here, that this is what it’s ultimately helping. (Parishioner A, Congregation B explaining her commitment to training for her “back up” work as Congregational Secretary.)

As a result of earlier experiences with the Emergency Food Service and through encouragement from Congregation A’s Parson, Parishioner C also sought formal training in Pastoral Care. This involved six months, one night per week in training, and resulted in Parishioner C being officially appointed as Congregation A’s Pastoral Care worker. However, Parishioner C eventually felt unable to cope with the competing demands for support as people struggled with the congregational amalgamation process and so she left the congregation and that role for a time. I think it was a bit of burnout. And too, we didn't have a back up [arrangement] where you could just off-load things, you were carrying them on your own shoulders. I think if there had been that off-loading or debriefing it probably wouldn't have got to that...I think you need someone outside the church, maybe from another church or something like that, that you can do that with...I had someone at church at the time, which was very good. She'd done pastoral care. She was an older lady. She left the church you see so I think it was more...when she left that added to [the stress for me]...it's probably something too that I was going through, with doing all that. I needed time out to grow myself, and the time away from the church allowed me time to take note [of] where I was going and what I was doing without having the responsibility of chasing up other people. (Parishioner C, Congregation A summarising her difficulties in voluntary pastoral care work despite training for it.)

Social Worker 3 also observed these problems with church volunteers. She mentioned one woman who had spent school holidays at a church program and concluded that between her career, her family and her church “she'd got lost somewhere ‘within all that’”.

I think the church at times needs to be aware of tapping resources [its volunteers], but not burning good resources out. And I've found that a number of times they were the same volunteers who were being utilised and would just crumple, [and] would just sometimes burn out because they hadn't been allowed to say “No!” (Social Worker 3 noting her concern about overuse of church volunteers in an altruistic culture that seeks “more”.)

These experiences illustrate the need to both adequately train volunteers and support them with effective supervision and debriefing where they are involved in direct client contacts. Such an approach sees the use of volunteer contact people change
from an altruistic view of people doing their best without training towards a more formal view about training and support being essential. Social Worker 8 argued strongly that church volunteers should be accorded the rights and responsibilities now recognised with secular volunteers.

And I think one of the things I'd like the churches to do is to create an alliance with the volunteer movement and to begin to understand what people do for the church as volunteer work. And to take a good hard look at the list of volunteer rights and responsibilities that have been devised internationally and have a good hard reflect on whether the church is up to scratch in terms of the way it treats its volunteers because I don't think it is. (Social Worker 8 arguing for non-abusive terms of involvement for church volunteers.)

Congregation C also made extensive use of congregational and outside volunteers in its Opportunity Shop and its various Community House groups. For example, the ESL tutoring work commenced with a similar informality and altruism, however its link with the Adult Education group and the growth in funding saw practices develop more like the culture of formalised professionalism, thereby encouraging formalisation to become more widespread within Congregation C. This also occurred with the volunteers working with mental health patients because of the arrangement with the hospital mental health staff. However, a later consultant to Congregation C suggested aspects of their voluntary culture were desirably unique and worth retaining.

Based on his assessment, the consultant’s opinion is that “the parish/volunteer base needs to dominate the ethos of [the Community House] and professionals (and others) should be recruited by accepting and valuing that...[The Community House] needs to keep its unique aspects of [Emergency Relief] client focus, care for care’s sake, compassion, staff humility and learning at a spiritual level, and the blend of paid professionals with volunteers. (Document 23 citing part of the consultant’s report recommending recognition and valuing of the Community House’s unique features.)

This consultant perceived the attraction of professionalism as excessive, leading him to urge that it be held in balance with key aspects of their volunteer approach, a concern similar to that mentioned by Social Worker 12. Hence, in this aspect of staffing, programs were found to operate anywhere between an altruistic notion that volunteers can just carry out roles, and a recognition by volunteers and/or associated professionals that training and supervision reflective of formalised professionalism, though without risking certain valued volunteer qualities, was necessary. This

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84 A list provided indicated about 190 people had some voluntary involvement over that 9 year period. About one third were associated with the congregation itself.
balance varied with roles and programs and required care to avoid the naivety found initially in Congregation B or the excessive formality the consultant identified in Congregation C.

### 7.3.3 Professionals

An intriguing aspect of Congregations B and C that made them different to Congregation A was their ability to elicit the voluntary involvement of qualified professionals. This was especially apparent with the pool of professional counsellors Congregation B used to provide its key service. Counsellor A described her recruitment in these terms.

> [W]ell, after I left the [the institutional chaplaincy job],...[Congregation B’s Parson] came...looking for me...And then he took me outside and he said to me “I need you to come and help me with [our new Counselling Service]”. And it was like God had opened a door. My response was almost like He said it and I didn’t, “I would love that”. So I come here to [provide] counselling. I think I’ve been here with him now about three and a half years. (Counsellor A, Congregation B recalling that when she retired, the invitation to be a volunteer counsellor was like a call from God.)

Indeed Congregation B’s Parson listed a number of “qualified, professional counsellors who are in good standing with their field of care” who were involved at some stage with the Congregational Counselling Service. Most were retired, but one was recently qualified and awaiting employment. At the time of this research two remained, whilst a further group were being invited to facilitate the planned Seminar programs. Professional links within the congregation or the wider denomination were used to find these people, with only a few actually involved with Congregation B.

Congregation C also obtained professionals as volunteers, including consultants. In promoting greater professionalism within this service, some consultants worked for reduced or no fees, an involvement exemplifying the Community House’s underlying volunteer spirit.

*Concern over the potential cost of facilitation [of a proposed strategic planning exercise] was fortuitously resolved when a guest of the 1997 Awareness Banquet suggested that a business planning Consultant may consider the job on an honorary basis.... (The 1997 Banquet was very successful in recruiting consultants for special projects on an honorary basis. An architect/Master Planner, and an Accountant were also to provide consultancy in other project areas as a result of the information sharing evening. This reflects the high level contribution of volunteers to the progress of [the Community House] at a Strategic level - both in the organisation of the event by a small group at the Church, and in the people who come forward once presented with information.*
about the project)...The business consultant, from a prosperous inner suburb, was also a member of the Anglican Church there. He offered his time and expertise as a gift, in the spirit of the pioneers. (Document 23 explaining one Consultant's participation at no cost to Congregation C’s Community House.)

As for direct service personnel, Document 23 indicates that pastoral care workers, a financial counsellor and a lawyer were all involved on an “honorary” basis. Some unpaid workers were members of Congregation C or became members as an additional aspect to their involvement, for example the first Pastoral Care worker whose honorary appointment was mentioned on page 139. With both short-term and on-going voluntary appointments, these congregational community services generated an unusual blend of the volunteer and professional cultures.

A characteristic shared with all these congregational services was an expectation of employing professionals in key roles in order to gain community recognition for the service offered.

[One lay leader] was really quite strong on making the whole ministry quite professional in the eyes of the general public...who could be supportive of us [by] giving the accreditation we needed...My memory of the knock-backs [for funding]...was because we just didn’t have the professional people...It was all just coming to this conclusion; we needed to get a Director of Counselling who was...qualified (Parishioner C, Congregation B asserting that professional staff were necessary for community recognition and funding.)

Although not succeeding up to the time of this research, some people in Congregation A were keen to obtain professional support for their service users. Initially they proposed a partnership with a church-related Agency, but when those negotiations collapsed the Parson proposed a separately incorporated body able to directly employ a professional through government funding. Congregation A’s previous Parson had made an appointment this way in his subsequent parish. He asserted that this latter service was “more professionally based” as a consequence, yet acknowledged “They had also appointed members of the congregation to the paid position, even though they had advertised more widely”.

This issue of a link between paid Community Service staff and the congregation was another aspiration. Whilst the original Coordinator for Congregation C’s program was associated with the partner Agency, as an ordained person she had some recognition with the congregation. In addition, the original Deputy Coordinator was a member of the congregation and seen as an important link. These links became more
evident with their respective resignations in the early years of the Community House. In particular, the Deputy Coordinator’s loss “weakens the link between staff and [congregation]” whilst the loss of the founding Coordinator heightened concern about accessing funds.

With the appointment of the new Coordinator, these concerns were significantly allayed because of her prior associations.

Orientation to the workings and background of [the Community House] had been reasonably painless for the new Coordinator. The appointee had been historically involved in the project as a volunteer convenor of the evening English class from 1991, and in the previous year had been appointed by the parish as one of its representatives on the Board. (Document 23 explaining the new Coordinator’s background with Congregation C’s Community House and congregation, in which she grew up.)

“In-house” professional staff were not always possible, leading to these Community Services seeking people who at least identified with their Christian ethos. Hence in Congregation B the professionals successively appointed as Directors of Counselling were both selected because of their Christian faith as well as their professional accreditation. Even though funding for these appointments was diverted from Congregation B’s own operating budget, support for this role was strong.

[We were looking for a trained psychologist to take some roles and our initial idea was to look for someone who could volunteer the time and [the Parson] with his networking and his way of talking with other people became aware that [Counsellor C, an Anglican priest] was actually looking for work in this area, because he wasn’t able to work in a [congregation] any more, and was a trained psychologist and was interested in our dream, if you like...so that was another dimension for us because we would then have to look at whether we could pay anybody to do any hours. (Parishioner D explaining Counsellor C’s employment in Congregation B’s Counselling Service, initially for 5 hours/week but eventually as the Director of Counselling for 20 hours/week.)

I was just doing a routine survey of the churches as to whether they needed counsellors [as] I decided [I] was going to be literally church-based focused this time around...[When I interviewed Congregation B’s Parson] a door opened basically...in an interview [he] said, “Well, this is opportune because...we don’t know what our Director [of Counselling] is doing.”...I didn’t do voluntary counselling. The counselling was being paid. I said to him I couldn’t take on any more voluntary counselling...He understood that at that time...and I was doing probably...two or three sessions a fortnight until...they advertised the [Director of Counselling] position...and the appointment was made...It’s because of my understanding of [Congregation B] and the way it worked that encouraged me to apply for that....The leadership was a plus for me because of the way they were going about things, their attitude, their commitment to God first and foremost, and their commitment to that ministry as a church. (Counsellor B Congregation B explaining his employment with
Congregation B, initially while Counsellor C was on Leave of Absence and then as Director of Counselling, newly appointed at the time of the research.

However the “faith link” didn’t seem to fully substitute for a stronger “in-house” appointment. For Counsellor C, frustrations arose in developing his more holistic approach because “I didn’t tap into the key personnel in the parish” and generate, for example, a stronger involvement from the congregation.

*I had fairly high expectations of the support of the congregation. So I was quite disappointed when only four people applied [for a stress management course I offered] and I wondered to what extent the congregation valued the service. Now we had a trickle of people from the congregation who’d come for counselling, [but] I wasn’t a member of that congregation so I hardly saw them at other times.* (Counsellor C, Congregation B expressing his uncertainties about the overall service due to his limited congregational contact.)

Counsellor B was clear about his limited links with the congregation and his sense that he was appointed to support the congregation and its Parson in developing the service. He in fact emphasised that his personal links were with another local congregation.

*I’m not part of that congregation, but I’m part of the body of Christ...so I’ve been placed in...a particular role...[and] I will allow whatever unique thing that God has given me to flow through into there...I’ve felt at home. I’ve felt welcomed... I haven’t been [to church services] there at all...I haven’t met the total congregation.* (Counsellor B explaining his links with Congregation B were through his role in the Counselling Service.)

Dilemmas caused by professional roles being filled from outside the congregation were raised by Social Worker 9 in the first dataset because of her experience with a congregationally-related program. That experience began when she and her family, along with other like-minded professionals, relocated to join a congregation with whom she had been invited to work. Although she later resigned from that position for family reasons, she remained involved with the congregation for two decades, continued to work professionally in the locality, and remained linked to the congregational service as a volunteer. Consequently she observed the impact of professional roles being undertaken by different people who variously joined the congregation, who related to the congregation only when the role required whilst participating in outside congregations, or who approached the role as secular professionals with no congregational links.

*What really happened was the work got too big for me...so they made a decision to appoint somebody full-time. I was unable to work full-time...We ended up employing a welfare officer who had been a nun in the Catholic Church, so she
was really strongly committed to this work as an expression of her faith, but she wasn’t going to be part of the worshipping community in the way that we [were]. She wanted to live in the area so she did that. And she developed her networks around [her own congregation]...but she lacked a strong conceptual and theoretical leadership...Well there are a couple of issues there. One was the issue around being part of the worshipping community as well as the expression of the church response to social and personal problems. The other is the capacity to link “the personal” with the broader “social” [and] with the “gospel”...It is very difficult to get people who actually provide leadership at that whole level and I think that’s what’s necessary. You get a couple of kinds of links in many people...It’s hard to get all of that in one person. You might get someone who provides good professional leadership...but not so well grounded in where that sits with justice and the gospel and how that then links to the life of the worshipping community...What we’ve had to do over the years is trade things off. And any trade-off doesn’t seem to work very well....We traded some professional leadership...and we went for someone who wasn’t going to be part of the worshipping community regularly...and then we were able to bring it back with [two later professional appointments who did join the congregation]...and what we’ve got there at the moment is back to this [trade-off] except a worse example of it...because we’ve got somebody who’s trained [professionally] who really doesn’t have understanding of the embeddedness of personal problems [in] broader social issues...[and is] not part of the worshipping community...I think the professionalisation of community development, social work, counselling, any of those aspects of the local church, creates new problems. Once we start professionalising that means paying...While the people who emerged through the life of the church still continue with [their committed involvement], it’s authentic and real, but once you start employing people from outside you get into difficulties. (Social Worker 9 discussing the limitations arising when employing professionals who do not integrate congregational involvement and leadership with their congregationally-based community services roles.)

These observations highlight an aspect of the tension between the altruism of congregational settings and the importance of professional leadership, a tension that suggests the balance between these two extreme operating cultures is both significant for integrating community services into congregational life, and yet is hard to establish, and even harder to retain, without the involvement of a person able to “straddle” the two cultures. As previously noted, Counsellor C, who brought professionalism to Congregation B’s Counselling Service, clearly found providing this integrated leadership difficult due to limited congregational contact.85

A tendency to expect professional involvement to be altruistic was identified as a downside with “in-house” appointments. Social Worker 8 noted that “everyone” in a congregational setting was “a volunteer, even those who are the paid

85 See page 178.
professionals...there is a certain aspect of their ministry which is always going to be voluntary”. Social Worker 9 apparently managed this, recognising that:

> It’s about living and working, and being part of the community you are working with. That’s the blurring of relationships and boundaries and responsibilities and motivations...people don’t like working in that situation if they have a typically professional view of their work...whereas we didn’t have that kind of boundary [defining] when we were at work and when we weren’t at work. (Social Worker 9 explaining her perspective on the inter-relationship of work and personal life when in congregational work.)

In contrast, Social Worker 2 suggested the issue required each worker to locate their own balance:

> Sometimes you limit what support you give purely because of what you’ve got to give...Sometimes what’s needed is beyond what you’re paid to give...and this is where the dilemma is of how far you can help in a situation...And your professional ethic sometimes says you should try and help as well. The level to which that “should” is interpreted is different for different people. (Social Worker 2 explaining her view that the full involvement suggested by Social Worker 9 is not possible for all, requiring each to identify their own balance.)

It was Social Worker 7 who starkly identified the cost of professionals not finding this balance when employed by the congregation they attend. Grasping the congregational vision and providing congregational leadership in order to integrate the two cultures proved rather tenuous for some in the longer term.

> It was only when things had gone past the point of no return that [the Parson] tried to help [my partner] rein it in. But by then he’d just burnt out...we had too many fingers in too many pies...but then we were going to church as well on the Sunday. And it wasn’t just like going to church as going to church...he’d be swamped by people who’d come up and couldn’t make the distinction...When growing up we sort of believed that Christians had to be martyrs really,...to self-sacrifice...and there’s spin-offs if you do that...I’ve really changed the way I view that now...I think we can get a distorted view of our own self-importance. (Social Worker 7 identifying the impact of the pressured idealistic environment of working and worshipping in the same congregational community.)

Social Worker 7 identified the need for mechanisms protecting congregational Community Service workers from these ill-defined boundaries, suggesting “a committee that offered support,...some people who really put limits”. Expanding on this, she said:

> Although we had the support of the church, I think in some ways we were linked much more with people like our peers...I think to have been anchored to people who had been longer in the church and to have a really strong connection, like through some sort of cell group as well...with people who had more life experience and were linked into the church, that would have actually helped us in being realistic about what we could achieve. But also perhaps they
could have been key people that we could have entrusted some of those clients...to, like use them as linking people into the church.

This mentoring relationship did not eventuate with sufficient timeliness for Social Worker 7 and her partner, leaving them with an emotional legacy a decade later when this research was undertaken.

In Congregation A, at least Parishioner E expressed concern for the impact of these complex demands on the Parson, while Parishioner C indicated clearly that she had withdrawn from involvement, including briefly with the congregation, because of these stresses and the lack of effective support. In Congregation B, Parishioner C was aware that their Parson also verged on this dilemma through tackling too much, and so saw the need for additional professional leadership. Parishioner D, on the other hand, provided effective support to Parishioner A that ameliorated this pressure from her extensive involvements. The dilemma was also touched on in Document 10 from Congregation C where the Coordinator explored her difficulty in addressing a particular organisational issue.

I no longer had enthusiasm or confidence for the task, and experienced my own peaking sense of dysfunction. I found myself unable to address my own work tasks...let alone record and activate steps for increasing efficiency of other roles.... This was an extremely baffling and frustrating experience.

In part, the conclusion presented was that:

In our humanity we have limits of understanding. Each of us needs to learn these as we make our individual journeys in life....The role of the Coordinator is still unclear other than it can travel around the parts..., check on its health, and encourage dialogue among the parts, both from the centre and their understanding of it, and across the perimeter in their understanding, and reflection of common practice. (Document 11 Congregation C discussing understandings of and responses to staff stress, including around the coordinator’s integrative leadership roles.)

The stress for Congregation C’s Coordinator surrounding this complex leadership role was evident during informal contact, including when the documents were first accessed at the Community House and when later contacts were curtailed. They were also recognised in Document 24:

The vulnerability of the [Community House’s] minimal resources in the face of complex social needs has also been accentuated by the prominence of a work culture...which has emphasised service above self....Times set aside for other organisational needs such as skills development...were constantly eroded by this rescuing mentality...This assumption, seemingly inherent in the [congregational] culture is that the “Christian” response to need is to do
something to alleviate the need immediately without counting personal cost...The cost of maintaining a "servant mentality culture" has certainly been experienced...Workers have been at risk of burnout on a number of occasions. (Congregation C’s Document 24 identifying one of the costs of a commitment by employed - and in this case honorary - staff to an inadequate balance between the volunteer and professional cultures.)

Hence this range of professional involvements sees some contradictory patterns emerge. Professional participation brings community recognition and needed expertise. However, if not combined with congregational involvement and leadership capacity, it can undermine congregational links with the service. Yet those links can lead to loss of “role boundaries” and problems protecting personal and developmental space. Between the cultural extremes, professionals and congregational services sought the balance needed, primarily through accessing effective support and mentoring.

7.3.4 Parsons

As with the Initial Stage of Congregational Community Services, so with the Operating Stage, clergy play extensive roles. Indeed, the availability of congregation clergy to aid development of community-directed services is one significant difference between congregationally-based activities and other community-based services. Few sponsoring groups have a paid professional with the flexibility required for such initiatives.

In Congregation A the Parson was the main contact worker, having a lead role in all but the Meals Ministry and the Faith Development Program. Whilst not involved “hands-on” with the Opportunity Shop and the Emergency Food Service, he did chair the informal committee of volunteers and congregational members who oversaw their operation. He was clear that these caring ministries to outsiders were his key role, but that view was not fully shared by others in the congregation. As Parishioner D indicated:

I’m still probably [of] the old school and think that the clergy should be out visiting [the congregation]... I think that’s an important part of [it], the clergy knowing where the parish is at too...Because we’ve got some lonely [people in the congregation], especially some of the older ones, I mean some of them

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As noted in Section 6.2.1 on page 128, clergy are key people in initiating vision development. In this section the focus is on the specific contribution of congregational clergy as personnel staffing a community service. To distinguish these roles, the term Parson, as previously explained in footnote 38 on page 84, is used.
are...fairly much left to their own devices. (Parishioner D Congregation A expressing concern that the Parson’s community focus left some congregational members isolated from the support they needed from him, despite the lay pastoral care program.)

Parishioner E agreed, sensing that “there are some in the congregation saying, ‘We do need...[to] just talk to the [Parson]’; I think some feel better when they talk to the [Parson]”, even though acknowledging the excessive demand from the outside people with whom he worked just like a case manager. Although supporting lay involvement, this Parson’s approach seemed built around the clergy, with the lay people “supporting me basically”, as Congregation A’s Parson said of their role in the Prison Ministry. This approach seemed to generate limited congregational identification with some community activities.

The Parson in Congregation B likewise played a lead role but in a more formal manner. Whilst initially having a lay person chair the incorporated Service (during which time the Parson operated as the service’s counsellor) the Parson eventually became its chair, being perceived as its de facto Executive Officer. He was also the main contact person for most other congregational activities, excluding the Aged Persons Events, the Opportunity Shop, and the Coffee and Chat Drop-In arrangement. As mentioned already, Parishioner C raised concerns about this degree of activity hindering the Parson’s capacity to maintain this level of congregational and community service involvement because “[the Parson] was just too busy being in charge of an active parish and doing all this counselling work”. Again, the role of other congregational members was more to support the Parson yet, because he actively worked with key congregational people, their sense of identification with activities seemed stronger than in Congregation A.

Two alternative approaches were identified by social workers in the first dataset. Social Worker 11, having left the role of congregational Parson just prior to the interview, concluded that clergy needed to promote work with local services rather than establish separate, congregationally-based activities.

I think there are two models...of operation...one model of church is that you build up a whole range of activities around the local parish whether it be women's groups or men's groups or kindergartens or whatever. The second model is that you really educate your people to be in community. That is, their main contribution to the life of the community's expression of their faith is in all the community activities that take place in your local school, in your local kindergarten, Rotary, meals on wheels, local youth accommodation service, etc,
etc. So rather than seeking to run services yourself you actually stand beside and work along-side others in the community of goodwill and have the same motivation to do it. ...

If it would seem to me the thing that's needed... if you were going to explore it, I think it's the community development stuff I'd be interested in exploring. But if we trained our clergy properly many of our clergy would be able to do some of that stuff. Because I mean, I got involved in the local... School. I bet you there aren't too many clergy who get involved in... [local] Schools... I didn't go down there to evangelise. I basically went down there to support the staff who at the time were going through some pretty traumatic stuff... and got to know the staff and etc, got to go down for a coffee once a week and sit and chat to them etc... So I suppose the other thing I'm saying to you is, I think there's a new and emerging role for clergy which has this community development component. (Social Worker 11 explaining his view that clergy needed to meaningfully connect with local people as the church’s contribution rather than build church-based services.)

Whilst this suggestion included congregational people becoming locally active, the illustrations were about Parsons acting as role-models “out there”, developing the local community away from the church property. Congregations A’s Parson adopted this approach at times, as did Parishioner E when her prior congregation did not support community engagement. As explained however, this community development approach seemed more like an individual approach rather than an intentionally congregational strategy.

The second alternative, raised by Social Worker 13, proposed that the church as an institution, including Parsons, facilitate community development by promoting the capacity of the congregation itself to engage with the wider community. As a faith community, lay people should be aided to develop ministry/service beyond their congregation, rather than the Parson being the primary outreach person.

I think that vision [of the central church facilitating congregational community involvement] must be recaptured as the key for the next century. But how to turn that into reality on the ground is a huge problem... I would like to think that every parish became an agent for community development... that there was a mechanism within the parish for the members of the congregation to participate in the vision... And my vision... at the parish level would be that every parish was organised to provide community development and a primary care service at the local level, but that what they did was part and parcel of a total commitment by the [overall] Church to care in the community. (Social Worker 13 explaining his vision for cooperative arrangements between the central church and congregations enabling members to serve their community more effectively.)

Social Worker 10 indicated her congregational Parson in fact exercised this facilitative role in developing the lay led community Craft Activity in which she participated.
In this sense Congregation C’s approach differs from Congregations A and B. Whilst the congregational Parsons were significant in developing the Community House, their subsequent roles were not as lead players or “staff” but as equal members of the joint management board. Consequently, subsequent Parsons supported the community engagement of around 60 congregational members and others from the surrounding community through the House’s activities. Instead of lay people supporting clergy involvement, as in Congregations A and to some extent B, the role of Parsons in Congregation C was to support lay community involvement. Here a change of Parson left the Congregation’s community service operating unabated, unlike the congregational service reported by Congregation B’s Counsellor C in which Counsellor C, then as that congregation’s Parson, was the Service’s half-time CEO. This suggests that where Parsons facilitate leadership among lay people in congregational activities then the activity’s survival after a change of Parson is greatly enhanced.

The Community Service discussed by Social Worker 9 falls somewhere between the contrasting approaches of clergy dominance and lay development. Although its first three Parsons combined their congregational role with that of Community Service Executive Officer, they provided minimal direct service, instead actively supporting the professional and volunteer team, most of whom were linked either with that congregation or one nearby. Throughout this period, an active identification was maintained between the congregation and its Community Service, aided by importing leaders who participated in both.

It therefore appears that the Parson’s role varies between being supported by the congregation as they develop their community ministry, to modelling community engagement to the congregation, and to organisationally supporting congregational development in community service. The first two options promote a professional culture requiring formal training for direct involvement, even if clergy training lacks

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87 The only clergy seen as “staff” were those appointed as Pastoral Care/Family Counselling workers.
88 The Service later “professionalised” through appointing lay CEOs and other key staff from outside the worshipping congregation who did not develop links with it. Whilst the Service survived these changes, the congregation itself has declined having lost its imported leadership and as the local demography shifted. Its present link with the congregation is nominal and tenuous, being expressed through a few volunteers who experienced first-hand its historic ties.
The facilitative role undertaken by Congregation C’s successive Parsons promotes a volunteer culture with more extensive participation of congregational members. It also suggests a greater likelihood for congregational Community Services surviving a change of Parson as it is an approach which develops the wider community engagement of the congregation itself in a manner akin to the Community Development approach articulated by Ife (1995).

7.4 Resourcing

Congregations clearly have access to resources other than personnel which enable Community Services to operate. These resources typically include buildings, as most congregations have worship centres as well as other flexible community facilities. They also have access to funds, as congregations have traditions which promote financial giving, even if primarily to faith-related activities. However, data from this research identified other available funding options. A congregation is also a community which, at its most basic, commonly provides in-kind assistance. As part of church traditions with long established church-related agencies, they are also part of a community with an intrinsic potential for developing community services. How these resources contribute to the operating culture of congregational community services is the focus of this section.

7.4.1 Funding

Funding which supports the community service activities of the three research congregations is rather varied, from Congregation A whose costs were very small and most programs run with little cost to the congregation, to Congregation C who sought substantial government funding to develop and sustain some of its activities. The variety of sources is extensive, yet no official balance sheet identifies the replacement value of these congregational contributions to the provision of

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89 This is asserted by Social Worker 11 who suggested clergy training should not just be theology but also community development. It is of interest that the Parsons of both Congregations A and B had considered social work training as an additional qualification relevant to their approach to their congregational ministry, although only one had commenced it. The other pursued clinical pastoral care.

90 See page 51 which refers to the imputed replacement value calculated by Cnaan and his associates to indicate the effective financial contribution of congregations to the community (see Cnaan, 1998; Cnaan, 2000; Cnaan & Boddie, 2001; Cnaan & Handy, 2000; and Cnaan et al 2002).
community services should their volunteer labour, accommodation, utility, and equipment costs need to be replaced by fully funded services.

Congregation A provided the lowest actual service costs. Whilst the congregation contributed nothing directly, most activities operated at no cost. Through its sales, allegedly with lower pricing than those nearby, the Opportunity Shop covered its annual operating costs of around $8,000, including its Manager’s honorarium, and contributed up to $6,000 towards the congregational budget. These funds also enabled the Emergency Food Service to purchase perishable food items from commercial outlets and pay its coordinator’s honorarium. In addition, Congregation A accessed small grants, totalling $6,000 in 1998, from two church-related trusts which were used for the Special Needs Assistance to homeless families and a new sorting shed. These low incomes and expenses reflected the low cash costs of the altruistic volunteer culture, but they also precluded developments such as the wish by some in Congregation A to employ a part-time professional worker. The congregation itself was not well off financially, having just received a $500,000 subsidy from the central church body to assist its relocation to a new worship centre on a new site. Congregation A also carried a $100,000 mortgage, which prompted Parishioner D to express concern about accepting further financial burdens to develop its community services. This concern generated significant tension between Congregation A’s Parson and Parishioner D, a long standing member of congregational council. These limited funds and the few financial supporters were not enough to cover further development of Congregation A’s community activities. This situation was significantly different to that reported by Congregation A’s former Parson whose new congregation employed a congregational member as a community service worker, funded through rental income from that congregation’s small office complex.

Congregation B established its Counselling Service as an Incorporated Association which registered with the Australian Tax Office to make donations tax deductible. However, in 1998 and 1999, only 25% to 50% of the $20,000 needed was raised

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92 Some years earlier a fire had damaged the middle section of that congregation’s substantial old church. Insurance paid for its repair and creative designing turned the entrance into a small three-storied office complex, the middle section into a contemplative garden, and the sanctuary into a flexible worship centre.
from the congregation and the wider community. Instead, the funds required to employ the Director of Counselling came from a grant of up to $10,000 from the congregational council itself, which diverted funds previously given to other central church services, with this logic:

See we don’t know of any other counselling service in the immediate area that offers services free. That was a struggle back in the early days of setting up of [the Counselling Service]. That took some working through. That brought some long protracted silences in committee of management meetings in those early days, as to whether we go with a nominal fee just to keep cash-flow happening. And we dug back into our faith positions...to the ministry of Christ as to how many shekels did Christ charge, bottom line. And we had to work through that, and now, it’s not up on the agenda but it’s just being trickled into conversations at committee of management meetings and maybe a $10 fee just to bring in [funds will be considered]. (Congregation B’s Parishioner C reviewing the original decision to provide a free service to their community)

This congregation also operated two small businesses to raise general congregational funds. Their Opportunity Shop, shared with other local congregations, made a comfortable annual profit\(^93\) as did the small publishing enterprise\(^94\), together contributing funds equal to 75% of the weekly offerings. In addition, the Counselling Service received $2,000 from a central church Trust and, eventually, a grant from local government was received, a contribution Parishioner C saw as confirming local legitimation of their Congregational Service. The Money for Work activity ($2,000) was from a discretionary fund provided to the Parson by the congregation for that purpose. As with Congregation A, other activities had little or no actual cost.

How long Congregation B could carry the costs of its Counselling Service was unclear and Counsellor B as the new Director of Counselling was mindful he needed to develop income sources that reduced or ended the need to access congregational funds. He was therefore arranging “fee-for-service” personal development seminars to be promoted within the community, with seminar leaders providing their services voluntarily so that the fees could cover the Counselling Service’s financial needs. Hence, even though there was a more professionalised approach to funding in this congregation, the service’s capacity to develop was still restricted by financial limitations.

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\(^93\) $40,000 to Congregation B in 1998/99.
\(^94\) $10,000 in 1998/99.
Funds for Congregation C’s Community House programs were obtained in more diverse ways. Initially a philanthropic grant covered the costs of establishment and the three half-time employees, but with growth of activities and workloads other means were developed. These included further philanthropic grants for administrative support ($34,000 in 1997/98), government funds for the ESL work ($40,000) with additional fees from participants, and further government grants for two other activities ($18,000).

The Community House Coordinator creatively solicited donations from other congregations, groups and individuals ($15,000 in 1997/98), both within Congregation C’s own denomination and beyond it, and from the two local Councils where they operated ($11,000). The Opportunity Shop contributed from its sales to service users ($3,000), and Congregation C’s volunteers ran a fund-raising Banquet ($6,000). However the largest contribution was the partner Agency’s guaranteed cover of the program’s budget short-fall ($38,000 in 1997/98). By these means the funds required for Congregation C’s Community Service, more substantial than for Congregations A or B, were covered despite growing to $170,000 in 1997/98. Congregation C’s own contributions were small, being part of the $3,000 received from all its denomination’s congregations).

The disconcerting drain on the partner Agency’s budget regularly led to increased efforts to gain program-specific government funding, an approach initially avoided.

On reflection it is interesting to consider that little emphasis had been given to sourcing government funding, although an important link had been established with the State Government’s Neighbourhood House Co-ordination Program in the immediate past. The funding emphasis was one driven by marketing to influential funding sources in the non-government sector. This would seem to reflect a conscious avoidance of the [partner Agency] to access traditional "social work based" service delivery contracts with the State Government Department [relevant to the Community House]. (Document 23 noting the initial avoidance of government contracts by Congregation C’s Community House.)

This avoidance of government funding was shared with Social Worker 1 who, despite being a State Government Area Manager at the time, viewed government funding as risky.

[Probably the most important thing I wanted out of [the congregational service I was helping develop] was that it not be dependant on state government money...I’d been doling the money out to voluntary agencies but I always saw the strings attached and you had to go through certain hoops and if the flavour...
of the month was child protection then you had to cast your submissions in that term. (Social Worker 1 explaining his aversion to government funding for his church’s new community service activity.)

For Congregation C changing its attitude had its price however as the Coordinator became more consumed by drafting government funding submissions.

[T]he Coordinator was busily engaged in researching and preparing State Government tenders put her way from the [Partner Agency’s Regional] Manager. Competitive Tendering for providing services to address government priorities demand huge amounts of time to prepare within an absolutely unequivocal deadline...As government looked for fewer partners to subcontract projects in the regions, the likelihood of success, despite the amount of hours spent in the process, is reduced substantially...Whilst [particular] tenders were not successful, the attempts proved that [the Community House] had the capacity to be a player in a new competitive...welfare environment, though at great cost to its own management base through the lost time in tender writing, and interview preparation.... (Document 23 presenting the dilemma Congregation C’s Community Service faced in actively seeking government funds.)

Social Worker 13 experienced a similar dilemma with his own Church-related agency’s high dependence on government funding.

We are now called "the funded sector" and that I think carries a very significant message. We are now so closely contracted to government as a result of the funds that they provide that we...cannot describe ourselves as voluntary. We don't drive the agenda. We don't select the client population. We don't establish the preferred programs. We are funded by way of a tightly prescribed contract about what we will do, where we will do it, how we will do it, and what it's all going to cost, with what results...It doesn't give you much right to claim that you are a service of the...Church because you are only nominally a service of the...Church. And that's why I raised that question...about what is our identity... (Social Worker 13 explaining that control government through contracts with church-related agencies raises questions about these services’ identity within the church.)

Further, Social Worker 13 noted that funding contracted with government was not enough to provide the required professional service. His agency had to “top-up” these funds just to implement a “credible service”.

Now what this means is that if we accepted a contractual relationship we have then put ourselves into a position where we have to use our own money, and it's virtually all of the money we have, to top up the inadequate funding from government simply to provide the service that we've contracted with government. (Social Worker 13 identifying another consequence of government funding even though it covered 75% of his Service’s budget).

Social Worker 13 also noted that identifiable contributions from denominational sources were very small, “less than half of 1% of the total expenditure of this agency” and that, despite church individuals also giving, it was just not possible for
church sources to fund services on their own. This low level of financial support from the denomination was consistent with Congregation C’s experience.

It seems the desire for professionalism undergirding Congregation C’s quest for more government funding has pitfalls. Not only are there uncertainties with the contracting process, but such funding also loses control of the service agenda and, even more disturbingly for congregationally-related services, this potentially promotes loss of identity. Finally, along with the diversion caused by drafting submission for these funds, funding associated with the contract is allegedly inadequate for the associated costs, a process of “taxation by stealth”, as Social Worker 13 called it. Rather, this enables government to reduce its costs leaving non-government bodies to cover the shortfall. Congregational services are then left in a bind, caught between the constraints of an under-financed voluntary service, directly employing professional staff with their own funds and supporting them with volunteers, and inadequately funded professional services dependent on government contracts. Yet, congregational capacity to creatively fund-raise and to draw support from philanthropic trusts cannot be overlooked, even though congregational giving itself may be small.

7.4.2 Buildings

Social Worker 3 identified that “all these [congregational] linkages [I had] before I started the groups” meant church halls were available to run parenting education groups in particular localities. She also noted finding a congregational volunteer to share leadership and that these contributions meant she could operate these groups on “very little funding”. Similarly Social Worker 10 identified that the craft activity she helped establish in her former congregation was “based at the church”. These comments highlighted a trend for congregationally-related community services to be based in buildings owned by the congregation.

Initially this base was often very make-shift. Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop with its initial Drop-In Coffee and Chat activity began in its original inadequate church complex. Congregation B’s Counselling Service began in a side room off the church foyer near its entrance, and next to a newly renovated kitchen and meeting room used by other community activities. Congregation C originally planned that its
Community House would be based away from the church complex but when a suitable house could not be found, the congregation instead relocated its Parson off-site and rented the vacated on-site Parsonage to the partner Agency for this purpose. The set-up there was very make-shift, identified later as characteristic of its “good enough” attitude to volunteer services. However, this base for these services did not remain so make-shift, undergoing significant redevelopment which integrated the worship and service facilities, as already identified by Social Worker 5 on page 144 concerning an unidentified congregation, which was in fact Congregation C.

This facility, deliberately linking worship and service physically, is not unique. The former Parson of Congregation A commented incidentally that worship and service were also physically linked at his subsequent congregation reflecting “the symbolic value of having the community service activities physically accessed through the normal church entrance...in order to maintain clarity on the link between the congregation and this community work”.

In its redevelopment, Congregation A initially planned for a partnership with a local church agency to achieve the same physical linking as Congregation C.

[W]e put a lot of energy into trying to establish their family welfare network here when we were looking at building this facility. And we had great plans. We were going to establish community development workers here...and the big dream was to provide voluntary workers for the agency and for us to have fairly strong links, but all that was knocked on the head...they felt that they weren’t going to be able to attract federal funding for that sort of activity. (Congregation A’s Parson outlining the aborted plan for a partner agency to work from their new building with its integrated worship and community centre.)

Subsequently, Congregation A’s physical arrangement saw the Opportunity Shop and Emergency Food Service operating next door to the new church complex in a congregationally-owned house. However its plans to modify this to include counselling rooms remained unfulfilled. Other activities, except for the Meals Ministry and the Listening Lounge, operated from the church complex itself with the presence of the Parson’s car often the catalyst “announcing” availability.

Congregation B also renovated to achieve a similar integration as Congregation C. As Congregation B’s Parishioner C expressed it.

We’ve now got a physical structure which, at one end of the spectrum, can offer a social context. You’ve got the middle ground where, if you look down one way there’s a spiritual office so to speak, then down the other way there’s coffee and
there’s noise and there’s activity. I think [Congregation B] may well be seen in years to come as a place to go without judgement, to be received. And part of it will be [the Counselling Service], probably with an emphasis on counselling. There’ll be a drop in centre; there’ll be a church with a quiet chapel behind the altar. It will offer a Christian ethos in its broadest context. (Congregation B’s Parishioner C explaining their newly linked buildings with the worship centre at one end and the renovated activity hall, Counselling Service, and Coffee and Chat area at the other.)

As Congregation B’s Parson explains it, this integrated building facility didn’t happen easily as existing plans required a strategic redesign to intentionally express the developing congregational ministry.

When I came there was a modest building already on the drawing board...It was just that they were wrong. They’d been given the wrong brief...we redesigned...once the building was up then people discovered [the] kind of people they could be together...and with the office, the church is open all the time now...so people just drop in here if they want to...And 10 years ago we had three buildings, all separate, all 20 metres from each other. They were just placed on the block. Now it’s all...linked buildings...it’s still a community facility, a facility that fosters community. (Congregation B’s Parson explaining the impact of linking the three previously separate buildings to reflect congregational aspirations for ministry.)

For all three Congregations, their developing community services were deliberately incorporated into site redevelopment plans, moving them from their initial make-shift facility to a dedicated community service space. The money for these redevelopments came from special bequests in two cases and from property sales, congregational mergers and central church allocations in the third case. Clearly congregations not only make community service space available, as would be expected of an altruistic operating culture, but they also manage to modify that space substantially to better suit the community purpose, as would be expected of a professional culture. As Congregation C’s Document 23 concluded about the changes there:

These improvements helped [participants] move out of the mind set of “good enough” to thinking about improvements on a continuous basis. The stirrings of heightened professionalism were felt, and an excitement emerged in the quest for continuous improvement. (Document 23 Congregation C linking the physical facilities to the general approach to service delivery.)

Yet a more professional service was not all that resulted from such redevelopments, for the designs also made the building itself a symbolic statement about integrating each congregation’s community service and worshipping life. With Congregation C the ESL work involving other congregations, and its frequent use of their church
buildings, was similarly seen to provide a “context for questions” about the Christian faith which it was hoped service users would raise.

7.4.3 Community

One clearly available resource in church congregations is a network of people who form some type of cohesive, supportive community which identifies with their congregational activities. Its potential for care in the wider community is what Social Worker 13 recognised.

We try to build up networks [with our client families] in their own community. And in some cases this will be a church group. If we know that there’s a [congregation] which has some insight into these people and their needs, where we know that they’re going to be accepted for what they are, then we feel comfortable linking them in and asking the local church to take them the next mile and give them encouragement and support, boost their confidence, be accepting of them. Again, because of the nature of many [congregations] that is very hard to do... (Social Worker 13 outlining the supportive role he sees congregational communities can provide for working in partnership with his Agency’s professional staff to support families.)

This supportive role featured in all three Congregational Community Services through their lay pastoral care activities towards congregational members and their responses to outsiders. This was evident in Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop, its Emergency Food Service, the Coffee and Chat Drop-In time, and the later efforts to care for people with mental health issues via the Listening Lounge or when they attended church services as a result of contact with the Parson. For Congregation B, this focused on the “culture of caring” incorporating the Coffee and Chat Drop-In facility, and the less formal Support Groups for the Aged and those with Special Needs. In Congregation C, this was seen in the supportive listening which became integral to their Emergency Relief work with its pastoral care adapted from hospital and church settings. The support groups for Women, the Craft Group’s incorporation of mental health patients, and the volunteers supporting the ESL tutors also expressed this capacity. Beyond direct care activities, these congregational communities also provided the labour needed elsewhere in these Community Services, such as the receptionists for Congregation C.

However, the capacity of these local supportive communities can be too easily assumed in congregational community services, as Social Worker 2 observed. Initially, she observed that requests made of congregations typically drew “resources
out of the parish community that the parish community didn’t know it had”, but then in contrast she also observed that “overall [local congregations] are often assumed to be far stronger than they are”. Analysis of the 3 Congregational datasets found that expectations of lay volunteers could be excessive. Congregation A found it did not have enough people or material resources to adequately support the Parson’s advocacy work with people with mental health concerns, or to ensure the Meals Ministry could be sustained. They also could not access professionals to offer the Counselling Service they sought. Congregation B did not have sufficient qualified personnel from within the congregation to share the initial counselling load confronting the Parson when the Service began. And Congregation C found that they had difficulty implementing their desired boundaries and standards in much of their work. Yet all three congregations managed to enhance their community service activities by accessing additional resources from links such as with the wider church and other like-minded people in their own localities. These options are briefly elaborated here.

Firstly, Congregation A extended its volunteer pool by recruiting local acquaintances of the congregational group for the Opportunity Shop. They accessed food, clothing and other goods for their Shop and Emergency Food Service from five other congregations who learned of their work. Similarly, Congregation C promoted the viability of its Emergency Relief and Opportunity Shop through seeking support from other congregations, regardless of denomination. Congregation A accessed procedural information about incorporation from a central church officer, even though action on this was left pending. Likewise all three congregations independently accessed a central church philanthropic trust to fund key service activities. Finally, Congregation A developed partnerships with other local congregations to operate the Listening Lounge, and with the church-related Agency that operated the food bank supplying most of the Emergency Food it distributed. In contrast, Congregation C was deeply enmeshed in its partnership with another Church-related Agency which helped initiate its Community House and provided management and financial support on a scale unimagined in the other two Congregations95.

95 The original partner Agency’s CEO played an active role on the joint committee overseeing the partnership between Congregation C and the Agency. Whilst involvement fell away when that Agency merged with two others, the Regional Manager’s support remained.
Congregation B used its wider church linkages to locate professional personnel to staff its Counselling Service and facilitate its Self-Development Seminars. It also accessed members from nearby congregations as volunteer First Contact Interviewers. This wider network was also crucial in locating the successive Directors of Counselling as they sought people who integrated a faith-based and professional ethos in their Counselling Service. The first appointment came through the denominational clergy network which reported that Counsellor C was seeking such work; the second came through the local church network from which Counsellor B fortuitously emerged. In addition, Congregation B developed links with local schools to resource one aspect of its Aged Persons Events, and used local professional partnerships to share the Crisis Support Group and the other Aged Person Event. Its Opportunity Shop was also a partnership with other local congregations.

Congregation C increased its capacities through strategic links with the wider church. One such link involved the regional church senior clergyman as chair of the joint management committee, an arrangement which ensured neither Congregation C nor the partner church Agency had veto power over decisions concerning the Community House, guaranteeing instead that decisions were jointly made. Although little was said about the strategic impact of this, there is good reason to believe this link has been significant in the survival of this partnership which benefits Congregation C’s Community House. A further link with government funding bodies gave Congregation C’s ESL activities the capacity to expand through linkages with a wider church network of interested congregations. As a result this activity has grown well beyond Congregation C’s own bounds so that it now provides funding and training for other congregations. Congregation C’s partnership with the nearby Hospital also enabled it to expand its Craft Group to support psychiatric patients in ways otherwise not possible.

It has become apparent that congregational activities typically begin within more restricted resources, but as these activities seek more professional features, congregations look to others for assistance. The “others” they approach are typically their own wider church network and the network of like-minded people, congregations and professionals in their own locality with whom they develop direct participation, informal partnerships and sometimes formal partnerships. Resources
accessed in this way have enabled all three congregations to reach out well beyond themselves with resources they didn’t initially have and capacities not initially evident.

7.5 Managing

The processes for decision-making and overall management of Congregational Community Services were found to have two components. The first was the formal structures created to oversee their operation, and the second was the way in which certain individuals influenced the functioning of a congregation’s various community service activities, both within and beyond those formal structures. Whilst these aspects have been mentioned already within this analysis, this section seeks to focus their key contribution to the overall operation, and the diverse ways in which that contribution is implemented.

7.5.1 Structures

Congregational Community Services exhibited a range of official management structures. The most informal and non-specific were the arrangements in Congregation A where all activities officially came under the control of the congregational council. The only activities having a directly responsible committee were the Opportunity Shop with the associated Emergency Food Service. However there was some uncertainty about how systematically the official management of activities actually operated. The Opportunity Shop Executive Committee, as it was called, officially operated under a written “Constitution”, although it was not legally Incorporated. This Constitution identified that its Chair was the Parson and that its Executive included a Manager, Assistant Manager, Secretary, Treasurer, and seven others. These were all officially appointed by the Congregational Council, with the office-bearers required to be members of the congregation. In practice this Executive Committee consisted of all the Opportunity Shop and Emergency Food Service volunteers and the designated Office-bearers. Parishioner E in Congregation A was Secretary/Treasurer of this committee. The committee operated by informal consensus and was uniformly seen as a “very harmonious crew”.

*When we have our meetings once a month...anything we think needs to be done or altered is always brought up...so that way anyone that’s there can have their [two-bob’s] worth...And everyone just agrees on it...And when we have those
meetings we’ll go around and ask everybody if there’s anything they want to bring up. (Congregation A’s Parishioner A, Manager of the Opportunity Shop, explaining how its Committee operates.)

Although the officer-bearers were recognised as a “management committee”, it was thought best for “everybody to have a say” through this structure which “just evolved”. Parishioner D was however concerned about the autonomy and effective accountability of this arrangement, fearing that it might “drive the parish or vice versa” given it was officially “under the wing of the parish”. Parishioner D assessed separate incorporation as risky, because it increased autonomy and reduced accountability. The existing arrangement, based nonetheless on personal “goodwill”, was seen as better balanced.

Other activities forming Congregation A’s community services were developed without apparent accountability to the Congregational Council. In fact one of the congregation’s concerns was that the Parson would instigate certain actions and then report to the Congregational Council that it had occurred, seeking what was perceived as “retrospective permission”. Parishioners D and E objected to this because they perceived that it effectively avoided accountability to the congregational body.

I don’t really believe it’s the [Parson’s] decision to head off in a certain direction because ultimately the [Parson’s] [going to go] and the longer they’ve been here the closer they are to going somewhere else. (Parishioner D Congregation A outlining his concern about the Parson’s alleged unilateral actions, including when developing community services.)

He wants to go off on his own...He might listen to you but he will still go off and do what he wants to do. I feel he needs to listen to some of his congregation. (Parishioner E expressing her concern about the Parson’s accountability for some actions involving certain community services.)

This was then said to deny Congregational Council members the opportunity to “understand” and be “committed to it”. Reiterating this, misgivings were found within the congregation concerning the Emergency House, Special Needs Assistance, and the various Support and Advocacy activities with people with a Disability or Mental Health problems.

This gap between official and perceived process had similarities to concerns identified by Social Worker 3 in the first dataset who commented on the committee of a congregationally-initiated youth service. She noted that, despite formal annual
general meetings complete with minutes, the executive from the congregation concerned would either “go off and change things” or “not go by [motions moved]...[but] change the decision”. Generally she perceived this group to be without “clear decision-making procedures and clear minutes” which were implemented, so creating a committee that “didn’t function very well”.

In contrast to these informal committees, Congregation B’s first act in developing its Counselling Service was to formally incorporate under the State’s Associations Incorporation Act and register as a Public Benevolent Institution under the Commonwealth’s Taxation Act so that it was legally structured for tax deductible donations. Therefore its government sanctioned Rules of Incorporation were legally binding. Those rules stated that a majority of its members had to be members of Congregation B, provided procedures for meetings, and required the appointment of a committee of management which included the Parson, the Director of Counselling, the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, and up to eight other members. This committee produced a Procedure and Policy Manual which covered various practices of the Counselling Service and re-affirmed it was “owned” by Congregation B.

This very formal arrangement was more rigid and “professional” than Congregation A’s structure yet, despite regular meetings and formal meeting procedures, Counsellor C observed that “the structure of the organisation was a little vague”. In particular he noted the Parson was effectively the Executive Director and, subsequently as President, “the de facto structure was that everybody deferred to him anyway”. This seemed consistent with Counsellor B’s comment that the Counselling Service was the Parson’s vision “and I’ve been put there under his authority” to help him build that up. Yet despite these perceptions of the actual operation, the formal Management Committee structure was keenly affirmed by Parishioner C, Vice-President at the time of this research, and who at other times had been President, Treasurer, and Secretary as well as an early volunteer. This respondent reiterated these roles were filled by “ordinary people coming to grips with this issue and we have given it our best shot”. Likewise Parishioner D saw an important role for herself as volunteer and as Treasurer. The sort of “ownership” sought by Congregation A’s Parishioner D was well expressed by these two members of Congregation B through
their enduring roles within their Congregational Service’s formal structure as well as their voluntary service.

Beyond the Counselling Service it seemed that the Congregation B’s Parson engaged in other activities on his own initiative and there was no clarity about how these related to the formal structure of the Congregational Council itself. However, unlike Congregation A, there were no evident concerns about these activities. This vague aspect to Congregation B’s Community Services also contrasted with the situation in the previous congregation where Congregation B’s Counsellor C was the Parson. To avoid this uncertainty, the Congregation’s Community Service was formally constituted within the Congregational Council’s official structures. Counsellor C also indicated the Congregation’s Council released him half-time from normal duties to “develop” this Community Service through “overseeing everything”, so suggesting his role was similar to that played by Congregation B’s Parson but with formal sanction. Despite the structured integration with that congregation being more explicit than that evident for the Services of either Congregation A or B, the effective management of the Community Service seems identical.

Congregation C presents another management arrangement through its formal linkage with its partner Agency, which was itself legally re-established under its own Legislative Act during the period of the partnership. The Community House seemed to exist by contract between Congregation C and this Agency, with the Agency centrally administering all funds. To oversee the operation of Congregation C’s Community House, the agreement provided for a Board comprising equal representation from the Congregation and the Agency, with the Regional Church senior clergyman as the Chairperson. An Executive of this Board, comprising the Congregational Parson and the Agency’s Regional Manager, supported the paid Coordinator in the Community House’s operational management. This proved to be a very formal administrative process which later was seen to leave the Coordinator with insufficient authority to manage the service.

The Coordinator’s role...seems to have been moulded by responsive action rather than a strategic leadership...As the organisation of [the Community

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96 Initially Congregation C’s Community Centre had two separate joint committees; the Joint Council monitored the development for both partners whilst a Steering Committee established the initial programs. Subsequently an Advisory Board replaced both committees, leaving operational responsibility to an Executive.
House grew in size...“coordination” as a concept became quite inadequate to handle the responsive end. This remained a source of confusion and frustration. (Congregation C’s Document 23 explaining limitations on the Coordinator’s structural role.)

Hence, despite adherence to a more professional structure, the capacity for the Community House’s Coordinator to act strategically seemed to be missing. However, the inclusion of all of Congregation C’s community services within this one structure meant better coordination of all facets of the Congregation’s Community services when compared to management styles evident in Congregations A and B. This permitted Congregation C’s successive Parsons to simply be members of the Board and a part of the small executive group, so avoiding the intensive engagements of their colleagues in the other congregations.

At the extreme end of formal, comprehensive structures was the congregationally-related Agency identified by Social Worker 1 in his provincial locality. That Agency’s Committee of Management apparently had no direct linkage with the service activities and had “little idea of what the clients could go through”. Though all were said to be “church people”, they were on the committee for their business “contacts” which provided access to funds and building expertise, rather than for service capabilities or relationship to the sponsoring congregation. Programming and management were left to the Executive Officer and the core Agency staff. Clearly a much more formalised, business-like arrangement than any encountered in the research, Social Worker 1 saw this as a “magnificently run” congregational agency.

Hence the research identified a range of structures for overseeing the operation of congregational community services. At the informal end some Parsons seem to just “do” things, which may or may not get congregational support, but which are unlikely to be formally “approved” by the congregational council. Next there are formalised structures whose processes may only be informally followed, so leaving effective control in the hands of the Parson but with some measure of structured accountability. Finally there are formal committees which maintain effective control, at least in the areas deemed their direct responsibility. This may mean that the committee either restricts the staff’s capacity to act or, conversely, relates to the core staff only through the Executive Officer. Clearly, the latter represent the more
professional cultures, whilst the informal approaches reflect the altruism of the volunteer cultures.

7.5.2 Leadership

The varied management structures of these congregational community services showed that official structures do not necessarily circumscribe the way in which congregationally-related community services actually operate. Rather, interacting with these structural variations are the qualities of leadership that particular individuals bring to these congregational settings. It is this aspect of service management that is considered here.

In Congregation A the most influential individuals were the two successive Parsons who played quite influential roles in the range of congregational community services that developed. They were crucial in nurturing these service ideas, often by modelling, and frequently by articulating their vision and finding others in the congregation who shared them. Sometimes they encountered frustration when their ideas resulted in formal decisions to act, only to be hindered by influential lay leaders who would not implement them. Congregation A’s Parson shared one such experience:

> Often there’s the tension between “Well, the [Parson] would like us to do this, we’re not so sure about it and we’ll say ‘Yes’ that we want to do it, but because we haven’t got the manpower we’ll never get it done anyway”...They’re being nice about it...and you find out very quickly [that] the things that they enjoy, that they want to see done, happen almost instantaneously. For instance, last week it was hot at the Op Shop. And the ladies said “We need some blinds on the front windows...”. Well they were up within a day. But because this white sign here is my initiative, it’s been sitting here...for 6 months. (Congregation A’s Parson explaining difficulties encountered with influential lay leadership.)

Despite endorsing the decision to merge, relocate and rebuild to form Congregation A and, as previously indicated, despite sharing in developing the new congregation’s vision for ministry into the community, concern about the development plans resulted in tension and the Parson sensed that congregational leaders such as Parishioner D were blocking further development. Because of these difficulties the Parson was looking to transfer, a move people like Parishioner E were anticipating when she reported saying to the Parson “[Parson’s] come and go but the congregation stays”.

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These processes operated outside Congregation A’s formal structures, but clearly impacted on them. Despite such tensions, Parishioners D and E provided enduring leadership in the congregation and were supportive of the Opportunity Shop. Indeed the staff there mentioned appreciatively the active support given to them by these two Parishioners.

However, leadership also came from others in Congregation A. Parishioner A, the third or fourth person to manage the Opportunity Shop, provided leadership to the volunteers involved there. One volunteer commented during an interview with Parishioner A:

[Parishioner A] is the head member [of the Opportunity Shop]. I put ideas to her and then do what she says. She’s a “friend boss” but she doesn’t tell us what to do. We don’t have disagreements; we just don’t stress about it.

This style apparently kept the Opportunity Shop functioning well, making official meetings informal and harmonious. Parishioner C likewise provided needed leadership to develop the Meals Ministry as a new service, a service suggested by her earlier involvement with the Emergency Food Service and her awareness of another congregation’s links with low income families. She combined this with her Pastoral Care role in Congregation A, a role she approached more professionally through her prior training. Congregation A’s Parson also mentioned another “emerging” congregational leader who was seeking to re-establish the Coffee and Chat drop-in activity that had ceased when the congregation relocated.

The development of “in-house” leaders is apparently crucial if activities initiated by a Parson are to be integrated into congregational life. As Social Worker 8 observed:

[U]ltimately what happens is that among some of the people who are doing the ordinary response stuff and the community link stuff, is that from some of those people there will be natural leaders who will rise up and who will end up doing [the] formal stuff in the end…they will be the people to integrate [the community service activity into congregational life]. (Social Worker 8 indicating his sense that natural leaders emerging from more basic congregational activities are the key to the absorption of community services into congregational life.)

However a concern about effective support for such leaders was touched on by Parishioner E and elaborated by Parishioner C:

I know [the Parson] is one for lay people taking on roles, which is encouraging. But, I do put a but to that,...if they're in ministry they need to be able to talk about it, they need to off-load it. So they really need to have that follow-up of off-loading things....You find most people in other areas that do community
work at least they get back and they do talk about it and they debrief themselves. Well we need the debriefing of leadership within the church as well. (Parishioner C, Congregation A suggesting leaders from within congregation don’t seem to get the support they need.)

The role played by Congregation B’s Parson has similarities with Congregation A except that, as was noted previously, this Parson seemed ready to wait for leadership to emerge from within the congregation before he sought to implement his vision for a Counselling Service. However he was not the only person to initiate congregational community activities. Parishioner A initiated the Coffee and Chat Drop-In Centre and, on her own initiative, undertook training that allowed her to fill support roles for the volunteers involved with the Counselling Service and its First Contact Interviewing. This was a very quiet but influential form of leadership. Further, Parishioner A indicated that she initiated and led other congregational activities not classed as community service activities. Her form of leadership was not formal but supportive and relational, more in keeping with the informal volunteer culture characteristic of many aspects of Congregation B’s community services.

Congregation C provided the strongest links between formally designated roles and leadership. As noted above, the Parson’s role was supportive rather than as a de facto executive officer as seen with the Parsons of Congregations A and B. Effective local leadership was especially evident with the second Coordinator of the Community House. Although taking on this role a few years after this service commenced, this person had been active in the congregational group supporting the Centre’s establishment. Her work facilitated further developments within this Community House and promoted critical questioning of the initial adherence to what she identified as a culture of “good enough” based on a voluntary approaches to most service provision. However two other aspects should be noted. Firstly, in Congregation C’s Document 23, this Coordinator commented that a feature of the operating culture was “an absence of a culture for leadership” resulting from their collective decision-making, developed to avoid alienating staff, and the lack of portfolio differentiation among Board members. These meant the Coordinator often felt unable to move forward effectively.

*The Coordinator’s role was differentiated by its direct interface with the Board, and the support functions it provides to the Board such as reports and recommendations on the overall functioning of the [Community House], agendas, minutes, observations, including the financial information and analysis*
thereof. This aspect of the Coordinator’s role gives it responsibility for providing cohesion to the whole, and in effect a leadership role, but this concept was not an easy one to grasp in the egalitarian culture of the pioneers, especially at the grassroots...It seems to have been moulded by responsive action rather than a strategic leadership. (Document 23 explaining the limits on the leadership of Congregation C’s Coordinator.)

Whilst the models of formal leadership provided by the Board and the Coordinator encouraged the strategic directiveness of corporate organisations, Congregation C’s Documents indicate the Community House continued to develop and address operational difficulties within its own approach. Clearly the Coordinator played the key leadership role in both the formal and informal functioning of Congregation C’s Community Service activities.

The Coordinator’s longstanding link with the congregation and its community service seems to have strengthened her leadership role precisely because of its grounding in the altruistic culture from which the formal aspects of the House’s activities sought to be distanced. Indeed Congregation C’s Parson mentioned that a key resource for the Community House was that the Coordinator was “born into the congregation” and in worship was able to present prayer-points, make “announcements about special needs”, and include information in the congregational bulletin relevant to the Community House. This blended quality of leadership, noted earlier by Social Worker 9, is arguably critical to the effective operation of congregationally-based, professionally oriented community services because, for key professional staff, it linked “being part of the worship[ping] community” with being “part of [church’s] response to social and personal problems”.97

It is noted that all three congregations saw “natural” leadership emerge alongside the leadership provided by clergy. In two cases this was a quiet leadership which

97 As more fully discussed on page 178, Social Worker 9 identified a third critical aspect of professional leadership for congregational community services, “the capacity to link the personal with the broader social [and] with the gospel”. Activities reflecting a concern about structural justice were not apparent in any of the three congregations studied except that Congregation C’s Parson reported some activity over the issue of gambling as a structural issue impacting on the personal concerns of many service users. In Congregation C, this remained an aim but time and key resource people had not emerged: “advocacy was not a big part of [the Community House] as the people there were too busy. It still remained a possible aim for them but [the Parson] saw that it needed someone with the relevant skills and contacts to enable it to happen” – i.e. leadership! The linking of that to the Christian message and to the worshipping community, as Social Worker 9 identified, was not reported. Congregation C’s theological statement makes no suggestion of this perspective. This third aspect would seem to require more extensive professional understanding and more strategic practice than the staff offered, just the dilemma suggested by Social Worker 9. Dudley (1996) reported a similar avoidance of justice issues until involvement with client needs triggered awareness of it.
promoted additional voluntary community services or initiated support to those involved in them. In the third case there was formal leadership that incorporated a professional approach to service delivery yet continued to nurture links with the congregation and its voluntary ethos. Rather than its progressive substitution in these congregational community services, this blending of the strengths of congregationally-based volunteer cultures with the available qualities of professional cultures enabled leadership to be creative and strategic.

### 7.6 Networking

Two aspects that indicated the relationship between congregational community services and other community services were the arrangements for referrals involving congregational activities, and the extent of organised links between congregational services and other community groups. These aspects identified the community networks which involved congregational services and which, in turn, indicated the recognition and support they received. The differences found in this research, reflecting the different operating cultures, will now be considered.

#### 7.6.1 Referrals

The Emergency Relief work of Congregation A was reportedly one of three such congregationally-based services in their area. Apparently all of them accessed food through a partnership link with the larger agency operating the food bank, and all officially participated in its meetings. However coordination between these services concerning common clients seemed minimal to non-existent. Parishioner B, the manager of Congregation A’s Emergency Food program, knew nobody in the other two services; Parishioner A, as Manager of the Opportunity Shop and the person who assessed customer requests, had apparently tried to develop a procedure to identify regular multiple service users, but that initiative was ineffective and ceased. Congregation A’s Parson talked of referrals to one of these services when money and food vouchers were required rather than food, but knowledge of that service was somewhat uncertain with no clear indication such referrals actually took place.

*We liaise in trying to establish an ecumenical feel within the community and also in providing services, if we can. [Another denomination] historically was the one that’s been able to attract funding federally and so, if it’s beyond our means particularly we would refer them to [that congregation]...We’re very reluctant, even with the [trust funds we get, to] give out cash...The [other denomination]*
hands out money vouchers and food vouchers, so they can be converted into anything...

There’s a general sense that we share that ministry... and if someone’s in a medium crisis or need there’s a possibility for them to get 8 weeks of food by dovetailing our services... [the other denomination] has someone who’s paid through federal funding, I think, to make assessment and to initiate some form of financial counselling. I think it’s fairly limited.... No, [I don’t make referrals to it], I would normally refer them to the social worker at the Community Health Centre. (Congregation A’s Parson explaining their liaison with another denomination’s nearby Emergency Aid Service.)

To clarify the coordination between these congregations from the other’s perspective, I rang their Parson, but my telephone messages identifying myself, my link to Congregation A, and my purpose in seeking contact, were not returned. Similarly, my attempted visits to this congregation’s office were ineffective as no one responded to my presence, despite people sitting around a room for long periods, apparently waiting to be interviewed. It seemed that referral of service users between these similar congregational activities was recognised “in principle” as an option, but rarely happened, and that relationships between these services were in practice limited.

Initial comments seemed more explicit about referrals to the Community Health Centre, and from Centrelink, the police and, more especially, the social worker at Community Health. However, once again, when this matter was explored for more detail, it appeared these links were tenuous, with the social worker’s name not even known. When asked about the Financial Counselling Service at the Community Health Centre, Congregation A’s Parson indicated:

I haven’t followed that through so I don’t know... my understanding is that there is [such a service there]. I have had people who have received Financial Counselling from there. But whether that’s still happening this year I’m not sure. It’d be good to find out. (Congregation A’s Parson indicating with some uncertainty that Financial Counselling, adding later Marriage Guidance and Psychiatric Support, were thought to be available from the nearby Community Health Centre.)

Once again, my efforts to clarify this through direct contact with the Community Health social worker proved ineffective with many explanatory phone messages not returned. Even ringing at the time the receptionist nominated at the social worker’s suggestion was in vain. Hence, my sense was that Congregation A was not a significant link for this worker. Parishioner A, as Opportunity Shop manager, also indicated that when people shared “major problems” with her “nine times out of ten” she would refer people to the Community Health Centre “where they have social
workers”. When asked for more details she indicated this happened “at the very least a couple” of times each of the three days per week they were open, and that referrals were for illness, grief, parenting advice, and domestic violence. However, these appeared more to promote awareness that such services existed than constitute referrals for assistance, and detailed knowledge of available services was not evident.

The procedure established in Congregation A for dealing with people seeking more than the annual maximum of four occasions of support was to require that they be assessed by a professional, either the Parson or someone such as the Community Health social worker, who could then refer them back for assistance. Yet according to the Parson this rarely happened.

*Hopefully we’re providing a step where we know they are actually seeing somebody else…to address some of the wider problems…whether it’s budgeting or crisis counselling or whatever…The main [agency involved in referrals] would just be the Community Health Centre…We get people occasionally [from Centrelink] over the road…There are very few that would come back. They take their four [occasions of assistance] and go. And they’ll find other resources…I’ve got a box full of referrals that have come from the Community Health Centre. (Congregation A’s Parson’s view of the intention and the unclear reality of referrals to and from the Community Health Centre.)*

Likewise, when asked about people referred from the Community Health Centre social worker, Parishioner B indicated this actually didn’t happen very much; “Not very many, no. I’ve had them from there, I’ve had them from [Centrelink], and I’ve had them from the police”, that such referrals occurred “two monthly I think, or three. Pretty low, at the moment”, and that “word of mouth” was the main means by which people learned of their service. It therefore seemed from this somewhat contradictory information that the people in Congregation A viewed themselves as part of the local service network but that referrals to and from these other services were rare, and relationships with their key personnel were all but non-existent.

Congregation B exhibited a similar dilemma in marrying aspiration and reality in its Counselling Service. In establishing the service they were conscious they needed professional credibility and so looked for volunteer qualified counsellors to staff it, anticipating that would be sufficient for other community agencies to refer clients to it. However initially referrals were slow and came through pre-existing links between personnel in certain agencies and people involved with the Counselling Service.
We have referrals from [a nearby Community Health Centre] because their waiting lists are longer than ours...and [Counsellor C’s] wife worked in a Centre [in another nearby area] and because they were all women they would actually refer men to us...that’s probably not happening as much now that we don’t have that link there. (Parishioner A discussing referrals to Congregation B’s Counselling Service.)

Likewise the people invited to the Aged Person’s weekly luncheon were known to a Parishioner through her work as a local community health nurse. Contacts developed from that and continued after this person transferred to another role. These personal links were significant in networking Congregation B’s community services with other local services, leading to more referrals than apparently received at Congregation A where personal links with other agencies were not as apparent.

For Congregation C, the partnership with the Central Church Agency was the basis for early referrals that was built into the initial vision. However the Documents suggest those links did not develop as first anticipated, and other more significant links emerged.

The people who visited [the Community House] discover its programs in a variety of ways. Through the network of welfare agencies and government departments the catchment area is spread wider than that planned...earlier...Significantly little referral comes through [congregational] sources. The network existing among the needy themselves provides a significant contact point...The [Hospital] and [an Educational Institution] in particular tend to refer people from outside the locality. (Document 2 explaining how early clients of Congregation C’s Community House knew of its services.)

A key link for referrals developed with the nearby hospital’s Psychiatric Section, aided by direct contact and formal agreement on a referrals process with program support.

[The] growing complexity of [Community House] clients emerges, including people with mental illness. [The Coordinator] organised on site briefings (monthly) with [the Hospital Department of] Psychiatry to become familiar with issues/appropriate responses to determine [if] mental illness is a factor in the person’s presenting issue [and], if so, how to respond, who to refer if necessary. (Document 22 identifying the cross-referral arrangement between the Community House and the Hospital Psychiatric Section.)

Another link with mental illness...was formed when [the Community House] integrated the members of a therapeutic art/craft group formerly run by [the Psychiatric Section] for ex-patients into its own group activity. (Document 24 identifying the referral arrangement between the Community House and the Hospital Psychiatric Section.)

In Congregation C formal and professional approaches to referral were built from links between the congregational community service and other local services, in
contrast to the presumed referral processes of the altruistic culture of Congregation A and the personal connections that generated referrals to Congregation B’s services. These active links, based more on mutual professional respect than a faith connection, are what Social Worker 7 saw when briefly working in another congregational setting.

There was a social worker [in that congregation’s area] who offered counselling. There was a real mutual respect between her and the [congregational Parson]. And that, I think, was a key factor. So even though they came from quite differing view-points they really respected one another, so they were able to refer people to one another’s services and see the value in what each could offer. (Social Work 7 identifying the importance of mutual professional respect when making referrals to and from congregational services.)

It seems that for Congregation A this mutual, professionally-based respect was missing or not evident as relationships between the congregational activities and other local services were more left more to chance than deliberately developed. For Congregation B referrals were more a by-product of pre-existing relationships. Congregation C in contrast appeared to actively promote effective relationships by seeking mutual exchange, interaction and cooperation to enhance referrals between services.

7.6.2 Organisational Links

When discussing links between the Counselling Service and the wider community, Congregation B’s Parson identified that few existed beyond those activities which involved partnerships (the Crisis Support Group for people encountering suicide within their family, the Opportunity Shop, and the Aged Person’s Concerts), and those which enabling access to volunteer professionals.

These relationships were expressed through mutual referrals between [the Counselling Service] and other agencies, although [the Parson] indicated there were not all that many. Otherwise the existence of [the Counselling Service] had been “merely acknowledged” by these other agencies. (Notes from interview with Congregation B’s Parson summarising the inter-organisational links in which the Counselling Service participated.)

However Parishioner C noted that increased professionalism associated with the Director’s appointment generated community acceptance which then resulted in grants from local government and inclusion in the community directory.

[The appointment of the Director of Counselling] did bring a new dimension, more professional...also he satisfied the need of those people in the immediate
Yet despite concern for professional credibility, internal links between the volunteer professionals providing Congregation B’s counselling seemed nebulous at best; rather they operated as if in separate services. Counsellor A indicated she had no knowledge of how the other counsellors undertook their work and in what way it might be different to her own approach, yet she expressed no inclination to share this. And Counsellor B, as the newly appointed Director of Counselling, said that:

we haven’t had a counsellors meeting...It will be starting again in the new year. And it will be an opportunity to share, perhaps, cases...[and] just the processes of everyday running...[Supervision] does burden them with more time so we assume those meetings are a supervision...but I know both of them...do upgrade their knowledge regularly. (Counsellor B explaining the limited collegial contact between the professionals in Congregation’s B’s Counselling Service.)

With such limited internal linkages, the limited external linkages seemed less surprising, although clearly the volunteer culture associated with these professional roles meant a limited acknowledgement that these contacts might be relevant.

A similar limited range of contact seemed to apply with Congregation A where, beyond the uncertain links that were behind an apparently small number of referrals, organisational links related mainly to those involving the foodbank partnership and the Listening Lounge partnership. There was some discussion of cooperative work involving the local Salvation Army over at least one particularly needy family, and involving denominational sources of additional food for the Emergency Food Service and clothing and household goods for the Opportunity Shop. However, according to Parishioner A, these links focused on the Parson.

We’ve got several churches that help us...They help us with food.... [For the six local congregations named] they know the problems we’re having because [the Parson] with the minister’s fraternal would be talking about it. I think they do help people in their own area too, but this is extra that they do...I’ve been to [one particular congregation], and I’ve met quite a few of the congregation...
there...But I think it was mainly through [our Parson] talking that their ministers had done it [i.e. encouraged the extra giving of goods]. (Congregation A’s Parishioner A explaining the origins of their links with six donor congregations.)

The link between the congregation and the church Agency that operated the food bank was apparently strong after the local financial institution collapsed. This involved giving that Agency their excess stock, as well as acquiring food from them and participating in a monthly meeting. However that link apparently “just dwindled” when the financial crisis was over, and “completely stopped” when the Agency restructured. A further link concerning participation in a wider-church network of Opportunity Shops from Congregation A’s denomination was briefly mentioned. Whilst this seemed quite formal, it apparently involved only an occasional meeting.

Overall, there was minimal, somewhat ad hoc, and fairly limited networking with other local organisations in Congregations A and B which significantly contrasted with Congregation C. Beginning with its partnership with the Central Church Agency, Congregation C always seemed to be cooperating with a vast range of local services. A key difference seemed to be that its staff actively promoted those links, rather than leaving them to just “happen”.

Alliances were also formed with other service organisations to establish more intentional and focused outcomes for clients seeking supports. Referral protocols were established with key service providers in the local government area, and [the Community House] was involved in a range of network meetings. Innovative projects to improve services for local clientele delivery also involved projects of a joint nature with workers from other agencies... (Document 23 identifying Congregation C’s early pursuit of inter-organisational links.)

The distinguishing role of the deputy coordinator was his developing expertise, networking in the community development culture of neighbourhood houses and with Adult Education in the Community (ACFE) providers providing an oversight to adult education groups and the coordination of volunteers... (Document 23 indicating early networking with similar types of agencies and the benefits derived for Congregation C’s Community House.)

Letters seeking support of [surrounding congregations of the same denomination] were also sent out at this time. Their involvement becomes substantial...and includes food and clothing donations, funding donations, fundraising dinners, and labour for premises alternations, as well as more mainstream volunteer roles. (Document 23 detailing the benefits of networking with other congregations for resourcing Congregation C’s work.)

Critical intensive management activities...have included:...

• Strengthening the relationship between [the Community House] and the [Hospital] Department of Social Work, through preparation of an innovative
model to enable clients to access services at a vulnerable time in their lives connected with health issues.

- The development of a network of English as A Second Language teaching sites from [denominational] sites, supported centrally in terms of training, and equipment by [the Community House], developing a volunteer-based model of provider service under the organisational framework of [the Community House].

(Document 23 summarising the later intentional activities which built networks which were integral to the activities of Congregation C’s Community House.)

This networking, noted consistently in Documents 23 and 24, is also evident in the coordinator’s participation in the Central Church Agency regional meetings, which strengthened Congregation C’s inclusion within the restructure of that Agency.

Clearly, Congregation C adopted the more formal and professional approach of strategically building linkages with other organisations in order to enhance its capacity to provide its services to the community, including the making and receiving of referrals. Congregations A and B apparently left these linkages and the referrals processes to the goodwill of the various organisations and their participants. Sometimes this provided much needed resources, but at other times uncertainty remained about this process. It was only with the appointment of a qualified half-time Director of Counselling that Congregation B began a strategy partially aimed at improving its community links through improved professional credibility. Counsellor C at Congregation B in fact noted that coinciding with that appointment “[w/e]d become better known...and we’re starting to get a constant stream of referrals”. Congregation A was still debating the change to a more professional approach. Hence development of community linkages were slower in those two settings.

### 7.7 Owning

The issue of ownership was explicitly identified in all three congregational datasets as a matter generating debate and requiring resolution. In part, the dilemma seemed born of the limited numbers of people actively associated with the commencement of these community services, and the uncertainty surrounding how a congregation could be encouraged to then take “ownership” of such programs.

Well I really want [the congregational council] to own the decision where we go [with regard to the future of the Community Service activity]. I don’t believe it’s the [Parson’s] decision to head off in a certain direction [such as separate Incorporation] because ultimately...I think the [congregational council] have to own the decision [about] which way we are going...what we’ve got to do to pay
our bills and all those sorts of things...three people shouldn’t be worrying themselves sick at night about everything. (Parishioner D, Congregation A).

In reality it is a fascinating thing, the issue of ownership...There’s a core group who believe in [the community service]. The [congregation] has, as the year progresses, more and more accepted [it] as being a ministry within the congregation, there to stay. (Parishioner C Congregation B).

I think unless [congregational community services] enlist the active support of lay people who take ownership then these activities...[are] fragile organisations, or organisms, subject to the priorities and gifts and self-esteem of the incoming clergy. (Counsellor C Congregation B).

It is important to help [the Community House] struggle with this issue [of ownership]...If [the congregation] does not “own” the program, it “disowns” the program...Within the [Congregation], ownership has two strong foci of expression - in the clergy and in the volunteers. The [congregation] and the [congregational council] have still to come to terms with its existence, and some still view the [Community House] as a “[partner Agency] intrusion” into their program. (Document 2 Congregation C).

Although what ownership meant was not especially clear or defined, somehow it was seen to be important in the process of operation, and access to the various resources the congregation has to offer, including time, space, skills and spiritual support. Hence this section firstly explores what ownership means in practical terms and then how it is promoted. It ends by considering restrictive factors within congregations.

### 7.7.1 Notion of Congregational Ownership

For Congregation A’s Parishioner D, ownership concerned the congregational council, rather than the Parson or another group of individuals, being responsible for decision-making and budgeting. Given the informal basis of Congregation A’s community service activities, this formal body was the legally accountable group, so decisions effectively made outside of that were deflecting this responsibility. For Parishioner D the proposal for separate incorporation therefore left the congregation with a responsibility outside of its formal control. In contrast, for Congregation A’s Parson, the intention was that independent incorporation would allow the Community Service to seek government funds, thus providing resources otherwise not available. For him there was no thought that such an arrangement might undermine congregational identification with the program, because the integration of congregational ministry with community ministries was intrinsic to his self-understanding. Indeed, the merger process for the three original congregations involved members in collective vision-setting which, as “a Caring Church”, included a congregational commitment to community ministries. For the Parson, achieving...
this was a key contribution to congregational life, as evident in the passage already cited on page 149.

*My principle role over the last eight years has been to share the vision. I wrote papers and talked and we had camps on it and we did all sorts of things to try and pick up as many people as we could to go with the vision. And I think it has been fairly successful.* (Congregation A’s Parson explaining how he promoted ownership of community ministry through facilitating an identified congregational vision.)

In Congregation B the perception of ownership was stated by Counsellor B as a reason the role of Director of Counselling interested him:

*I was knocked over [by] the commitment...of such a little church [to the Counselling Service] in terms of finances and bodies [people being involved]. It’s quite extraordinary. The other thing that grabbed me was that there weren’t many people; there weren’t any under 40.*

Here the idea of ownership was extended from budgetary issues to include a willingness to be involved as committee personnel and volunteer first contact interviewers. However it was later identified to also include a previously unexpressed expectation that people from the church would support the service prayerfully. These perceptions contrasted with other settings known to Counsellor B where committed people initiated Counselling Services, only to have them undermined through lack of congregational ownership.

*You might get a strong individual...who really want[s] to get something going and the church [is] a bit lukewarm on it. You know they’ll help, maybe give a bit of space in the church offices or whatever, or let the congregation know once every three months that there’s a resident psychologist. It won’t work. That person might stay there for a while but it certainly won’t be a functioning and a growing part of that church community...[the workers in the service] are usually either in opposition to the church leadership or they leave. Not a happy arrangement...I guess ministry in that church isn’t going in that direction...No interest; don’t want to spend the money; fear of being secularised; personality differences.* (Congregation B’s Counsellor B suggesting reasons for the lack of congregational inclusion of community services.)

Here the critical issues included a sense that the service fitted the faith orientation of the congregation and that people associated with the service interacted well with key congregational people.

For Congregation B’s Counsellor C the issue was more than a general transfer of the “*inspiration or the vision of the leader*” but, as previously mentioned, included a need to “*structure things organisationally so that these things are part of a [congregation], and the motivation of the lay people supporting it*” which entailed
“an attempt to involve the lay people to the extent of the legal structure of the
[congregation]” i.e. he sought a formal tie to the congregational council so that it
determined “all major changes” as the “legal decision-making body of the church”.

Formalising the legal link was in fact a feature of all three congregations, but each
handled it differently. In Congregation A, as noted already, this link existed by
default as all congregational activities were seen as the responsibility of the Council.
For Congregation B the link was through the previously mentioned Rules of
Incorporation which obliged the Counselling Service to ensure a majority of its
members came from the congregation. For Congregation C it was expressed in the
formal Heads of Agreement which tied the Community House to the Congregational
Council (as well as the partner Agency Council).

However these structural links were otherwise seen as insufficient expressions of
congregational ownership. For example, structural roles were sometimes hard to fill.
As Congregation B’s Counsellor C noted, “a significant changeover of membership
of the committee of management [suggested] there’s not a lot of long term
commitment”. Parishioner C also felt unable to resign from the Committee of
Management because “it seemed impossible to find someone to replace me...and [so
I] took on the vice-presidency...such is my personal commitment”. Further, as
mentioned on page 178, Counsellor C felt “disappointed when only four people
applied” for the stress management course he advertised in both the congregation
and the community so he “wondered to what extent the congregation valued the
service”. These comments suggest that, beyond the formal links, willingness to
participate in the decision-making structures and participate in the activities
themselves were further indicators of ownership. Parishioner D was concerned about
the meaning for congregational ownership of limited participation evident in the
small pool of people available as First Contact Interviewers:

[I want to say] something...about ownership by the whole parish. I think it
would be nice to have a big pool [of volunteers] to call on [as First Contact
Interviewers]. We’re certainly covering our times but I would like to see many
people really keen to offer a day once a month and, to me, it would be affirming
that [ownership]...[E]veryone says that we are an accepted and valued part of
[congregational] life but I would still argue that a lot of the [congregation]
don’t really own us. (Parishioner D Congregation B explaining her concern that
congregational ownership was limited.)
Parishioner C also raised direct congregational giving to the Counselling Service as an indicator, suggesting lack of it in Congregation B “more reflect[ed] apathy amongst people within the congregation”, especially within the younger members who were much less involved.

Congregation C’s sense of ownership was also linked to the Community House logo that expressly indicated the project was a joint arrangement with the partner agency. Hence an urgent correction was initiated when this acknowledgment was omitted from the restructured Agency’s new letterhead. Likewise it was expressed through the appointment of a key congregational member as the original deputy coordinator, a link that Document 2 feared was “weakened” when she resigned after a year. The subsequent appointment of the second Coordinator from within the congregation was then seen to greatly strengthen this “link”, as was the volunteer Pastoral Counsellor’s decision to join the congregation. These staffing ties were clearly key facets of congregational ownership.

Links were further reinforced when Congregation C undertook a redevelopment of its congregational facilities and physically linked the Community House to the rest of the congregational facility. This redressed a problem earlier seen as undermining congregational ownership.

The separate nature of the present building from the rest of the [Congregational] plant reinforces the view by the [Congregation] of [the Community House] as a tenant rather than an integral part of the [congregational] program...This is illustrated by the discussions within the [Congregation] regarding its own rebuilding program. The [Congregational] discussions placed emphasis on an appropriate centre for worship, rooms for Christian education, and an appropriate hall for letting. Members of [the Community House] felt there was little strong advocacy of their cause...The new building appears to have changed the dynamics of the relationship between the [Congregation] and [the Community House]. They have highlighted the importance of priorities for the Church. The discussions have given some weight to alternative priorities... (Congregation C’s Document 2 summarising the 1992 concern that raised questions about congregational ownership.)

Overall, the issues that expressed congregational ownership of community service activities were:

- the emergence of a congregational vision incorporating a community service,
- formal structures between the congregation and the community service,
- participation by congregational members in the decision-making structures of the community service,
• financial contributions to the community service with involvement in the service’s budgeting processes,
• a logo identifying congregational sponsorship of the community service,
• a pool of congregational volunteers to work within the community service,
• staff for the community service appointed from the congregation,
• general congregational participation in the activities of the service,
• congregational buildings designed to meet the community service’s need, and
• prayer support for the work of the community service.

This is a formidable list of linking features, most of which seem to express some sense of psychological identification of congregational members with the community service, rather than merely legal or “property” ownership. How many were crucial for the sense of ownership to be “strong” was not clear. Rather, in the early stages it seemed many aspects were presumed to apply and it was only when something was found lacking that questions were raised about the adequacy of the congregation’s ownership. It is concluded that a lack of ownership therefore was linked to a lack in key resources; volunteers, committee members, funds, material resources, appropriate staff, and other forms of participation. Further, this lack of ownership was sometimes identified with the development of a more significant formalising professional culture of operation, a risk explicitly identified in Congregation C. Hence, at least Congregations B and C identified a need to intentionally promote congregational ownership.

7.7.2 Promoting Congregational Ownership

These features implicitly associated with congregational ownership relate to four of the dimensions of operation already discussed – programming, staffing, resourcing, and managing. However, ownership also extends into areas more indicative of congregational life itself – especially that of prayer support and a spiritual vision that entails community care. Consequently, as a key dimension of the operation of congregational community services, congregational ownership itself reflects movement between the altruistic and formal options, to which particular attention is now given.
For Congregation A the promotion of a vision incorporating Community Care was a key means for promoting congregational ownership. Announcements at congregational worship and the regular distribution of the Pastor’s monthly summary report to the Congregational Council containing comments on the congregation’s various community ministries also encouraged congregational awareness and identification with these community activities.

Whilst the idea of Congregation B’s Counselling Service began with the Parson, Parishioner C’s strategies were concerned with extending the limited sense of ownership which resulted.

*We have a parish magazine that comes out quarterly...From time to time I’ll slip in an article. On less occasions I will stand up at the notices part of the end of the service, I will mention something about [the Counselling Service]. Something we have done of recent times, the last six months. The front page [of the church pew sheet] has been realigned so that now, sitting on the opposite side of the page from [the Parson’s] details with his phone numbers and so forth, we have got [the Counselling Service] listed with its phone number and hours of operation. So there’s this continual “in your face” reminder that [the Counselling Service] is in the [congregational] family. Whereas that wasn’t happening up until the last six months...I think also we’ve got a fairly bold statement with our signage out the front...[the Counselling Service] is listed there with service times and the name of the church. And to anybody who is passing they would have to make the link that that is a key ministry of the [congregation].* (Parishioner C Congregation B explaining how he promoted identification of the Counselling Service with congregational life.)

Indeed, Parishioner C perceived evidence of a growth in congregational identification in the willing financial support from the congregational council and “surprises” of support from some congregational members.

*There’s some people there you don’t think are really in tune with the ministry [the Counselling Service] offers and they’ll come up with a cheque or they’ll run a trading table or do something like that and they’ll give the money to [the Counselling Service]. There are little surprises which are very encouraging.* (Congregation B, Parishioner C.)

For Congregation C promoting congregational identification with the Community House came into focus during the first evaluation in 1992, as mentioned in Document 2.

*The importance of greater understanding between the [Congregation] and [the Community House] is evident. A special emphasis of this process should be directed towards [the congregation]. The reports to [the Community House] Committee and [Congregational Council] ensure that key people in [congregational] life are informed about the activities. Others should be enabled to hear, and are encouraged to respond. To this end each meeting of the*
[Community House] Committee should include the matter of communication on its agenda, so that all aspects of [congregational] life are clearly in touch with the programs. There is no doubt that the best way towards understanding is through direct involvement as volunteers in the program. Thus volunteers need to find new ways of conveying this experience to the [Congregation]... Other contact points should also be explored - information days, newsletters, parish notices, sermons, prayer requests, etc. While some of these have been attempted, a more deliberate promotional approach to the [Congregation] is required.

(Congregation C, Document 2 identifying the need for improved contact between the Community House and the congregation.)

The need to intentionally continue this was reiterated in the 1996 Document 6 which identified a need to safeguard the congregation’s contribution which emphasised values that were seen as “a moral bulwark in a world of moral decay”. The 1998 external evaluation, presented in Congregation C’s Document 16, concluded the Community House depended on the “ongoing goodwill” of the congregation for “space and facilities, volunteer cash and goods, volunteer time, and guidance and relevance to the community” and that “This goodwill seems to be rock solid, realistic and committed”. In fact, by then this identification and ownership had expanded beyond the congregation’s initial volunteer involvement to include active fund-raising and promotion of awareness, with regular mentions included in the weekly worship service.

The link between [the Community House] and the congregation is maintained through the sharing of prayer points, through communicating via the church pew slip what’s going on.... The prayer points are usually put there....the [Community House awareness and fund-raising] banquet involved the congregation in significant ways. They also had a Thanksgiving Service each year for all those associated with [the Community House]. A [Community House] report formed part of the congregation’s Annual Report and a report on what was happening at [the Community House] was made at every congregational [Council] meeting...At times [the Coordinator] made announcements about special needs within the church services...(Parson Congregation C.)

Hence, the presumption of the early years that ownership existed because the activities began within the congregation eventually gave way to a more intentional approach of promoting it within the congregation. This was achieved through a range of specific actions to increase congregational participation in other dimensions of the operation, including with spiritual aspects unique to congregational life, such as prayer. Modifications bringing the community service facility into the same building complex as the worship centre, discussed previously, seemed to be another of these crucial strategies. When these approaches were effective in the terms sought within
the particular congregational culture, then the community service was viewed as owned, and it was seen as “an integrated part of the Church's program”.

### 7.7.3 Deterrents

Ownership and participation by congregational members were clearly not to be presumed. Some of the social workers initially interviewed identified a number of deterrents that mitigated against the development of congregational community services, leading them to suggest that in the main such activities should be left to central church agencies.

> [T]here's a host of deterrents for local church involvement in this stuff:- scale, complexity, funding, continuity, continuity of service, just to name a few...It's actually much easier for [a central church agency] to tack it on here whatever it is, another counselling service, or another this or another that, rather than for a local church to go through all the stuff around getting the expertise, the skill base for supervision, management capabilities, funding, seeking sources of funding, fund-raising. You know there's a thousand and one deterrents.... (Social Worker 6, a Church Agency CEO, explaining his view that local churches were unlikely to have the expertise and resources to operate community services on their own.)

> I would be reasonably sceptical that the local church really has the capacity today to deliver more than what I would regard as fairly basic services. And what I mean by that is that they're pretty good at collecting food, they're pretty good at acting as volunteers for...services...established by other groups. But unless there are resources, financial resources in the parish to employ at least a coordinator or something, then the capacity of the local church to engage pretty actively in the delivery of services is limited....[In my own recent congregational experience, the congregation] as a whole were interested [in the youth activity two of us developed] but they didn't want to get involved. And part of the reason for that was that they were all too busy. I mean many families are into the survival mode too. (Social Worker 11, a church agency CEO and clergyman, explaining that apart from restricted skills and resources to provide services, congregational members lacked the necessary time.)

In contrast to Social Worker 11, Social Worker 6 reacted to these concerns by suggesting that such constraints challenged agencies to find creative and facilitative approaches to help congregations address them.

> There's some truth in all of that of course. But I think that's where we've got to be thinking a little more flexibly and creatively. It comes back to my thing about facilitating. How can agencies facilitate churches, through training or resourcing or whatever. (Social Worker 6)

Yet the experience of all three congregations modelled ways around these concerns whilst still acknowledging their impact. Congregation A’s Parson acknowledged that most of their volunteers were on government pensions, which had to be considered in
various arrangements, such as in determining the amount of their honorariums. Congregation A’s Parishioner C also identified that the demand on a small group of volunteers led to either over-commitment and the development of burnout-type dilemmas, or a shortage of personnel when volunteers needed time for other involvements. This resulted in the cancellation of Congregation A’s Meals Ministry after only 12 months. Lack of independent funds and/or trained personnel available to the congregation also curtailed Congregation A’s hopes to include professional counselling within their services. Further, Parishioner E was clear that without such personnel congregational volunteers had reached their capacity to informally support the people met who experienced mental health issues. However, Parishioner D attributed these dilemmas to wider social issues.

But you really need people that have got the energy, so most of them, like the younger ones that have got jobs are working flat out. It’s much harder to have spare time now...than it was 10 years ago because most people are working long hours in their job, because most people are actually doing the job of two people...I mean that’s...I believe how [society’s] gone. (Parishioner D Congregation A explaining the difficulties people face in being involved in congregational activities.)

For Parishioner E the problem of the “busy-ness” of younger congregational members was exacerbated by the tiredness of older ones like herself.

I’d like to see some of the younger ones but it’s not easy these days, is it, to get the young ones completely involved. They all seem so busy...Forty, that’s young to me...You get to my age [seventies] you’re willing to help things but you’re not always willing to start them. You’ve got to slow down. (Parishioner E Congregation A.)

Parishioner E also saw that lack of personal support from congregational leaders such as the clergy discouraged more intensive involvement. She detailed lack of support at times of illness, and a sense that, when clergy don’t take their lay people’s views seriously or act with genuine accountability to them, she had to cope alone with the ensuing congregational tensions.98

I think [the Parson] creates some of [the tensions]. He wants to go off on his own....he might listen to you but he will still go off and do what he wants to do. I feel he needs to listen to some of his congregation and his [senior congregational councillors]. And he will do things, then he'll tell the [senior councillors] or he'll pop it on you at a [congregational council] meeting and you sit there with your mouth wide open...Whereas I feel those things should be discussed and I think that's what [senior congregational councillors] are for.

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98 Mentioned on page 198.
(Congregation A’s Parishioner E discussing difficulties found in supporting the Parson’s initiatives.)

Congregation B’s Parishioner C also identified that “Some of those initiating people fell away very quickly. It wasn’t moving speedily enough for them”, a potential dilemma Social Worker 12 also noted, adding that rapid development without sufficient consideration was likewise a dilemma.

*I think that's sometimes the frustration they [congregational participants] feel. You go to that meeting now for six months, got a big pile of minutes, but we haven't actually done anything yet....Sometimes it does need someone to say, “Well, look OK. We've talked long enough, well OK, we're going to start next Monday”...So I do think there needs to be a balance there between shooting off and perhaps going against what others are doing or working contrary to initiatives that other people take and at the same time saying "OK, well, we are a church community, not a government community or an agency community so we don't have to be constrained by all the same sorts of preliminaries to actually...get on with the job. (Social Worker 12 expressing concern about the frustrations of excessive formal planning and the value of using the less formal congregational context to act as proposed.)

Congregation C’s Document 16 also implied that the unavailability of key congregational volunteers and the Parson was a deterrent for some congregational members because it impacted on other aspects of congregational life.

*[T]here are negatives too, that are faced daily:...it ties up 5-10 of the capable, energetic worker/helpers who are not then available to [Congregation C] otherwise;...the [Parson] may be seen to be not as available for [Congregational] needs;...there is an ongoing competition for facilities; and a need to clean up the mess of others. (Congregation C Document 16 identifying some negative aspects of the Community House.)

These deterrents to congregational community involvement (lack of resources and/or skills, the “busy-ness” or tiredness of congregational members, excessive dependence on a small group of volunteers, problems of the initiators maintaining “due process”, the time it takes to develop activities, and the lack of wider congregational availability of key people including the Parson) though noted, are not presented with the forcefulness of impact that seemed to be anticipated by Social Worker 11. Rather they are issues that seem to be worked around by at least these three congregations as they operate their community services, so suggesting that deterrents do not necessarily preclude or undermine congregational ownership of associated community service activities, especially when efforts are actively made to promote it.
7.8 Summary

Overall this data analysis suggests that the operation of congregational community services reflects responses in six key dimensions – programming, staffing, resourcing, managing, networking and owning. Table 24 below summarises the range of responses identified within each dimension. The “location” on each dimension of any congregational service, or any particular activity associated with it, relates to its particular “balance” between the two extreme operating cultures of altruistic volunteerism and formalising professionalism.

Table 24 - Dimensions of the Operating Phase of Congregational Community Involvement

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<th>Operating Dimension</th>
<th>Feature of Dimension</th>
<th>Characteristics of Range of Responses</th>
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<td>Open-door access, untrained, flexible eligibility</td>
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<td>Restricted access, volunteer training</td>
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<td>User Groups</td>
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<td>- prompt concrete assistance, to professional support/advice</td>
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<td>Mental health social survival</td>
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<td>- ad hoc support, to structured groups</td>
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<td>– ad hoc support, to funded professional group programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bridging Processes</td>
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<td>Staffing</td>
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<td>Volunteers gaining satisfaction from involvement</td>
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<td>Volunteers gaining an additional mutual benefit</td>
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<td>Poorly paid staff contributing significant volunteer time</td>
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<td>Properly paid Administrative staff</td>
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<td>Contact Volunteers</td>
<td>Untrained, naïve</td>
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<td>Trained on own initiative/as part of involvement</td>
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<td>Trained and supported/ supervised as part of involvement</td>
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<td>Professionals</td>
<td>Unpaid professional consultants</td>
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<td>Honorary professional staff</td>
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<td>Employed professional staff sharing faith and congregation</td>
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<td>Employed professional staff not sharing faith or congregation</td>
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<td>Main contact worker supported by congregation</td>
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<td>De facto CEO</td>
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<td>Modelling community linkage for congregation</td>
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<td>Facilitating congregational community engagement, including on boards supporting other professionals whilst taking smaller face-to-face role</td>
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<td>Operating Dimension</td>
<td>Feature of Dimension</td>
<td>Characteristics of Range of Responses</td>
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| Resourcing          | Funding              | Own Funds  
                      |                     | Funds from Partner Agency  
                      |                     | Funds from Trusts  
                      |                     | Donations  
                      |                     | Fund-raising Events  
                      |                     | Small profit-making businesses  
                      |                     | Government Grants/Contracts  
                      |                     | Fee-paying Services  |
|                     | Buildings            | Make-shift use of available church facilities  
                      |                     | Redevelopment for provision of purpose-specific facilities  
                      |                     | Linking of facilities for community service & worship  |
|                     | Community            | Active community of local support  
                      |                     | Links with wider institutional church  
                      |                     | Like-minded local people, congregations, professionals  
                      |                     | VIA  
                      |                     | Direct participation  
                      |                     | Informal partnerships  
                      |                     | Formal partnerships  |
| Managing            | Structures           | Ad hoc arrangement partially under congregational council  
                      |                     | Semi-formal committees accountable to congregational council  
                      |                     | Formal committee established under congregational council  
                      |                     | Separately incorporated committee of management  
                      |                     | Contracted partnership between congregation & agency  |
|                     | Leadership           | Clergy leadership  
                      |                     | Quietly emerging in-house leadership  
                      |                     | Identified in-house leadership  |
| Networking          | Referrals            | Chance approaches  
                      |                     | Pre-existing personal connections  
                      |                     | Actively promoted, respectful arrangements  |
|                     | Organisational Links | Mere acknowledgment  
                      |                     | Limited contact and awareness  
                      |                     | Strategic, intentional development of links  |
| Owning              | Notion               | Location in congregational facility  
                      |                     | Staff from the congregation including clergy & volunteers  
                      |                     | Prayer & financial support  
                      |                     | Participation in programs  
                      |                     | Participation in formal structures  
                      |                     | Legal links to congregation and part of its vision  |
|                     | Promoting            | Presumed congregational identification  
                      |                     | Intentionally promoted not presumed  
                      |                     | THROUGH  
                      |                     | Congregational participation in all operational aspects  
                      |                     | Multiple information sharing with congregation  
                      |                     | Congregational fund-raising  |
|                     | Deterrents           | Dependence on available women, pensioners, older folk  
                      |                     | Over-commitment & burnout, lack of support  
                      |                     | Lack of skilled personnel, lack of availability  
                      |                     | Busy-ness & tiredness, speed of development  |

Congregation A’s pattern could be identified as closer to altruistic volunteerism as, except for those linked to the Parson, every activity was dependent on committed
volunteers, mainly from within the congregation. Likewise, the activities linked to the Parson were outside his role of providing spiritual expression and nurture to the congregation. Whilst he could marshal a theological argument to support his increased emphasis on community engagement, the Parson acknowledged his lack of training through enrolling in a social work course. This move to increase the professional culture was also reflected in the Opportunity Shop manager’s wish to have a social worker available on site, and even for Opportunity Shop funds to be used to appropriately train a local person. Further, it was reflected in the Parson’s aspirations to legally incorporate the congregation’s community service activities and base everything around the Opportunity Shop and Emergency Relief activities in order to access external funding. Hence, despite the community service developments in Congregation A being closer to altruistic volunteerism, at the time of the research aspirations existed to move the culture towards formalising professionalism, even though these were not fully shared.

Right from the start, Congregation B embraced a stronger identification with the formalised professionalism culture. Hence it first incorporated its Service and then sought qualified professional counsellors. However, much of this was modified by a need to access resources in a more altruistic, voluntary manner, and despite the strong initial commitment to a professional service, this dependence on a more altruistic, volunteer approach to community involvement remained. The largely untrained volunteer First Contact Interviewers, the support of the congregational administrator, and the role of the Parson trained in pastoral care rather than counselling psychology or social work, indicated there was much about its beginning that was closer to the altruistic volunteerism culture than formalising professionalism. Subsequent developments showed movement in the direction of the latter; the more effective training of volunteer contact people, the congregational administrator’s own training, and the appointment of trained counselling psychologists as the successive directors of counselling. Nonetheless, a pattern of altruistic volunteerism survived in other activities, including those where the Parson was the main worker. Yet, Congregation B’s overall culture of operation would seem closer to formalising professionalism than that of Congregation A’s.

Congregation C began its community engagement in a much more formalised and professional way with a detailed agreement with its partner church agency, taxingly
negotiated. It had qualified paid staff and external funding sources and was able to develop a more coherently planned range of services. Yet it too depended on the altruism of volunteers for its administration and for its initial contact with service users. It accessed professional training and consultation, including for evaluation of its work. As appropriate professionals and funding became available the professionalism of its operating culture increased but still relied on the volunteers from the congregation and the community. At no time could it be seen as fully professional as were the other arms of its partner agency; yet at all times it presents as far more formalised and professional than Congregations A and B, with a more intense commitment to further changes in that direction.

It is striking that the following significant quote, found in the 1992 external evaluation, Congregation C’s Document 2, fore-shadowed a future dilemma around operating cultures.

In the absence of [the partner Agency], the [Community House] would take on a more 'voluntary' image. The driving force would be the motivations and faith of volunteers. Problems would occur through inexpertness of those involved. At its worst this could develop into a paternalism. At its best it draws out the strengths of local parish-based voluntary work. In the absence of the [Congregation], the Centre would take on a more 'professional' image. The driving force would be the ability and expertise of the staff, who would direct and assist volunteers. Problems would occur through a more 'clinical' approach to users, seeing them more as clients than as persons in need. (Document 2 Congregation C, evaluating the Community House after one year.)

This tension can be traced in later documents, especially Documents 23 and 24 which are drafts detailing the development of this Congregation-Agency partnership. Early on this tension was thought to have “potential for conflict and for creativity”, but in later years the culture of volunteerism seemed to be disparaged in favour of the culture of professionalism, particularly in the lead up to and outcome of the 1996 external review. Then it was seen as an excuse for offering a “less than professional service”.

Now the servant [altruistic] culture of [the Community House] was seen as insufficient to provide a framework for service, not only by its managing Co-ordinator but by its Board, having recognised afresh the complexity of the client

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99 See Section 8.1 on page 232.
100 As an outcome of this review Document 23 comments: “An image needed to be created for the [Community House] which would clarify whether it followed a professional or volunteer service culture, as this was yet unclear, and seen to be a point of obstacle”. Such comments clearly showed the idea had taken root early that these two cultures of operation were opposed. The quest to ensure that a professional culture was given priority is evident throughout the remainder of the document.
group and the management frameworks needed to support the people working with the client group. Strong guidance was sought from the [Agency] Regional Manager, who [by then] was the only voice of [professional] welfare expertise left on the Board. (Document 24 Congregation C.)

However, the 1998 external review, already mentioned, suggested that the strengths of the congregation’s volunteer base needed to be affirmed and retained rather than lost, and that professionals were obligated to accept this as a condition of their involvement in Congregation C’s Community House activities. Apparently these were perceived with an intrinsic contradiction as “tension” between them is often mentioned. Yet, even within Congregation C, recognition of the significance of the various congregationally-related professionals seemed incomplete, especially regarding the Coordinator. These professionals, “straddling the divide” if the issue is conceived in polarised terms, functioned simultaneously within both cultures, suggesting this polarity could be recast as degrees of blended coexistence. Indeed the sense of ownership of the Community House in Congregation C that has been linked, for example, by the Parson to congregational identification with the Coordinator which led to extensive fund-raising and volunteer input from professionals, can be understood more readily if these two cultures are viewed not as competing or contradictory, but as strategic options that are blended to maximise the potential contributions of each.

In fact the concept of ongoing congregational “ownership”, seen as crucial in all Congregational settings despite other pressures to be “more professional”, only makes sense if these two cultures of operation constructively coexist, rather than exist in opposition. Congregation A’s anxiety about incorporation, and the future employment of professionals, would be a needless concern if both aspects were considered. This the manager of Congregation A’s Opportunity Shop seemed intuitively to do when suggesting support for the professional training of someone as counsellor. Congregation B’s quest for professionals who identified with a faith perspective, and who could volunteer their expertise so blending the two cultures, helps explain the effort instinctively made by the Parson to locate people from within his church networks.101 Likewise, the strong misgivings expressed by Congregation

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101 One counselling psychologist in Congregation B was an adherent of the Baha’i faith. However her spouse was a member of Congregation B and she also occasionally attended and was apparently accepted by the congregation. Nonetheless the Parson noted that “they had found that if the persons offering as volunteer counsellors did not embrace the Christian faith then the support and bonding
C’s Pastoral Care staff as they took on formal Family Counselling roles could have been ameliorated had this idea of blending operating cultures been grasped. This tacitly happened when the second supervising social worker changed approaches to integrate their concerns.

This analysis, therefore, suggests that congregational identification, and all that this brings to a community service activity including its faith dimension, is retained when the culture of altruistic volunteerism is valued. As well, professional expertise is retained, and all that means for community credibility, when the culture of formalising professionalism is employed. The implication seems to be that it is only when one of these two operating cultures becomes dominant that concerns about “mickey mouse” congregational services or, alternatively, “secularised” professional services that excludes the congregation, come to the fore. The dimensions within the Culture of Operation potentially facilitate development of a blended strategy for constructive coexistence of the two cultures of operation. In their own way each Congregation within these three datasets was seeking that balance, but seemingly without a clear grasp of the many issues involved.

These three congregational case studies are not alone in raising this issue of two cultures of operation. Social Workers 6 and 11 implied this as well, with the latter suggesting that volunteer issues restricted congregational capacity (so implying this work be left to professional church agencies), and the former suggesting professional issues were possibly beyond congregations (suggesting instead that volunteers may be helped by professional church agencies to address some of these, rather than dissuaded from any involvement). Likewise Social Worker 8 identified two sets of “ministries”, ordinariness and professional, with the latter requiring quite different skills and being less likely to develop. In contrast, Social Workers 4 and 9 identified the blending of these two cultures within their experience of congregational community services, with Social Worker 9 articulating the importance of being intentional about the blending of these approaches and capacities, whilst suggesting that the difficulty lay in locating people with an expertise for integrating the two they offer did not get as well established. As well, the rest of those involved with [the Counselling Service] found it more difficult to ‘let all of our Christianity hang out’ in the context of this church setting just through knowing that someone on the team did not share this perspective. This included any discussion of prayer, as well as a sense of not feeling as free to share because of a concern that this might make the outsiders feel less welcome”.

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cultures of operation within a congregational setting in an informed and strategic way.
8 The Modifying Phase

Inevitably congregational community services undergo modification, and this occurred in all three congregations researched. Most changes could be termed evolutionary or continuous, i.e. they undergo gradual adjustments in response to the opportunities and challenges arising in their day-to-day activities. These changes are a normal part of community service operation and so were subsumed within the previous discussion. However some changes are “discontinuous”, i.e. they tend to disrupt operating processes rather than steadily mesh with them. This alters the overall culture of operation of the service and/or particular activities within it. Three reasons for these changes were found in the research data: firstly, they arose from formal Evaluations of the community services; secondly, they were consequences of Crucial Decisions which involved one operating dimension but generated unexpected implications for other operating dimensions; and thirdly, they resulted from Unexpected Events imposed on the community service agenda. These are the three dimensions of service modification considered in this chapter, as depicted in Figure 5102.

Figure 5 - The Modifying Phase

102 Figure 5 includes an indication that the processes by which the three modification dimensions impact on the overall culture of operation in turn impact on the overall operation of existing congregational community services. This in turn modifies the congregational vision for community involvement, and therefore may change the community service activities the congregation offers to the community. This reflects the complex inter-connectedness of all phases of the Framework.
8.1 Evaluations

Formal Evaluations were not typically associated with congregational community services. In the professional respondent dataset, only Social Worker 5 explicitly mentioned it, briefly stating that the Community House his agency developed in a congregational partnership had undertaken a number of evaluations since its inception.\(^{103}\) Within Congregation A, Parishioner C made an allusion to little more than an informal evaluation of the Meals Ministry, deducing that there were too few volunteers, so prompting its closure after only 12 months. The only other evaluation of Congregation A’s community activities were the brief annual reports to the congregation. In contrast, within Congregation B there was no suggestion of any evaluation since its Counselling Service commenced. This lack of formal evaluation suggests cultures of altruistic volunteerism do not typically include systematic reviews.

In Congregation C there was explicit commitment to evaluation in the founding Heads of Agreement concerning the establishment of the Community House.

> The evaluation of the project shall take place after the project has been in operation for three, six and twelve months. Such evaluation shall be co-ordinated by the Regional Director and shall cover the following aspects:
> 
> (a) the establishment process;
> (b) joint parish-agency relationships;
> (c) target groups;
> (d) benefits to clients;
> (e) benefits to community;
> (f) benefits to the Mission and other professional agencies; and
> (g) benefits to the Parish.
>
> ...The development of programs and services shall take into account the findings of the evaluations. (Congregation C, Document 1)

Document 24 detailed thirteen evaluations undertaken between early 1992 and middle 1998, itself an additional and substantial reflective evaluation of the overall development of this Community House. These evaluations had two forms: firstly, 9 were internal reviews by the Community House staff and/or Board and, secondly, 4 were specific purpose external reviews. The features of these two approaches are considered in light of this data.

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\(^{103}\) As noted on page 192, this congregation was later included in the research as Congregation C.
8.1.1 Internal/Regular

In Document 23, Congregation C’s Community House Coordinator noted that the document was based on “the regular evaluation reports documented on a monthly basis through the life of the project, [and] Board meeting minutes of the partners...” so confirming that monthly internal reviews were an integral part of Community House practice. Likewise annual reports, such as Documents 8 and 21, presented regular, longer-term reviews which were circulated to maintain connections with the congregation.

Particular concerns were also explored through other internal documents. Document 3 indicated that, as a result of the first specific purpose review, a re-assessment of programs confirmed a need for two new activities. Both activities were commenced, although neither became ongoing Community House activities. Likewise Document 4 reviewed the management structure for the Community House recommending change, and Documents 11 and 12 summarised discussions between Community House personnel about their programs and practices in light of the third external review. Documents 13, 14, 15 and 19, presented progressive internal evaluations of the Family Counselling and Pastoral Care work. These reviews played a significant role in further counselling changes undertaken by the Community House staff. Likewise Documents 9 and 18/20 helped the Community House staff to finally agree on an undergirding Theological Statement. This blend of regular reviews, covering given time periods, and specific reviews, focusing on particular activities, was effective in helping Congregation C make program adjustments that contributed to the overall goals. Such evaluations help ensure congregational community services, like the Community House, did not simply evolve unplanned. Evaluation helped address, for example, the identified risk of activities being more related to the particular interests of volunteers than service users.

Creating jobs for interested volunteers became a source of industry in itself, and had the potential for displacement of service goals. Problems also arose where insufficient design had been considered in a position, leaving the volunteer to fend for themselves, or waste time or lose interest, or pursue their own motivation unsupervised. (Congregation C, Document 24.)

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104 See page 234 for a brief outline of this review.
105 See page 235 for a brief summary of this review.
106 These latter two documents are substantially identical.
This commitment to regular and focused evaluation in Congregation C not only reflected its more formal and professional approach, but also represented its foundation for ongoing and intentional development, highlighting the importance of the modification component of community service.

8.1.2 Specific Purpose/External

The four specific purpose reviews likewise all played crucial roles in the ongoing development of Congregation C’s Community House, although some had more impact than others. The decision to commission these comprehensive reviews was established to ensure the Community House’s relevance.

The commitment to review the whole project was also established from this early prelaunch phase in order to responsibly determine its ongoing relevance to the community and the effectiveness of its practice. (Congregation C, Document 24.)

The first external review in 1992, undertaken less than 12 months into the project, identified its purpose:

Because of the joint nature of the project and the innovative range of its programmes the sponsoring bodies have placed importance on evaluation….Part of the evaluation is designed to monitor the use and progress of the activities of the [Community House]. The sponsoring bodies also saw it important to analyse the development of the structural relationships between [the Church Agency] and [the Congregation], and requested…this study to that end. Its purpose is:

- to study the process of formation of the project
- to propose an appropriate model for parish/agency relationship
- to propose appropriate structures for management
- to develop a theological basis for local welfare programmes.

(Congregation C, Document 2.)

By 1993 this review had influenced the organisational management structure, and left an enduring emphasis on promoting greater professionalism.

The external review undertaken in late 1993 “encouraged organisations to articulate their desired impact on the community they service, in order to provide persuasive arguments for use in networks of influence that become prospective donors and supporters”107. To achieve this, the consultancy team facilitated a stakeholders discussion concerning “Strengths..., Weaknesses..., Opportunities and Threats”, which identified seven “marketing” tasks for promoting links with potential

107 This quote and the immediately following are taken from Congregation C’s Document 23. As only a Table of Contents and a List of Participants was available from this review, Document 23’s summary was the only accessible data.
contributors. All seven tasks, concerning building a positive image and wider awareness of the work and then basing a diverse fund-raising strategy on that, were subsequently implemented as Congregation C’s Community House developed.

The third review from mid-1996 (Document 6) used the professional practice concept of “Social Role Valorisation”, valuing socially devalued people, to critically review the delivery of services to the Community House clients.

"Social Role Valorisation criteria...is especially useful in contexts where the service recipients are people who are devalued by society for various reasons. ...[It] is rigorous and challenging for human services because it establishes optimal levels of service performance rather than the minimal standards commonly required by funding bodies.... [It] seeks to identify what would be best for people - under what conditions would people thrive? (Document 6 Congregation C.)"

This review was initially characterised as “The critics arrive” (Document 23) and recast as “Advice from other trekkers” (Document 24) because it challenged the staff to adopt a more professional approach in particular areas. It questioned the implications of the Community House’s operating culture on staff, service strategies and service users. This resulted in improved physical facilities within the Community House, the use of appointments with certain service users, and the quest for more “potent” frameworks for service that were “challenging [service users] in support of change” rather than providing “passive, immediate...momentary relief”. The overall impact of this evaluation endured far beyond the 12 months it took to absorb and implement it.

The fourth external review, undertaken in early 1998 by a business planning consultant (Document 16), developed a “Strategic Plan” for the Community House. Among other concerns, this report identified a lack of feedback from service users, a need to value as its strongest asset that “the spirituality of the place and its work is tangible”, and a need to end its financial dependency on its partner Agency. Document 23 also reports the consultant’s strong affirmation of the volunteer culture as a key aspect of the Community House’s “uniqueness”, an apparent counter to the previous comprehensive promotion of a professional culture of operation as an alternative. This review identified Volunteerism’s contribution through its emphasis on acceptance of service users rather than being “another middle class counselling production line”. The value of a “blend” of volunteers and professionals was finally
articulated when Document 24 identified the learnings from the Community House, following the consultant’s review.

Overall these four external reviews addressed viability through the crucial issues of management structure, funding, approach to service users, and strategic approaches. Each review promoted a significant commitment to change which was more readily identified through an external perspective, so leading to strategically planned alterations in all dimensions of operation – Programming, Staffing, Resourcing, Managing, Networking and Owning. Whilst reviews typically contrasted the initial culture of altruistic volunteerism with the culture of formalising professionalism, it was finally recognised as a strategic issue that these cultures could and should be blended in order to guard against loss of the unique strengths of the congregational setting which characterised this spiritually-related community service. Consequently these expert reviews in Congregation C more than any other illustrate the importance of the conscious interplay between Professionalism and Volunteerism rather than their mutual exclusiveness.

### 8.2 Crucial Decisions

Inevitably there are times when any community service must make crucial decisions which impact on the on-going operation, even though they have not been anticipated or planned. The datasets mentioned a number, which had three broad emphases:

1. pending changes in leading personnel, either clergy and lay;
2. the impact of funding which placed constraints on either activities able to be provided or the use to which other resources can be put; and, less frequently,
3. the impact of the particular spiritual orientations of key personnel who sought to alter the spiritual emphasis within the community service.

These situations, explored in this section, potentially impact on decisions which affect the future of the community service.

#### 8.2.1 Leading Personnel

Discussion of staffing issues related to clergy and professionals have already outlined the impact of changes in some key personnel. In Congregation A the Parson and at least two Parishioners anticipated a clergy change because emerging mismatches

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108 See Sections commencing on page 175 and 182.
between congregational leaders and the Parson were damaging their congregational life and community service. In Congregation B there was general recognition that it would be timely for the Parson to transfer. However, the Parson, Counsellor C, and Parishioner C all noted concern for the impact of the appointed replacement on the Counselling Service as the new Parson’s willingness to actively identify with it would be crucial to its survival. Counsellor C’s concern arose from experience in his previous congregation where new clergy closed such congregational activities. These concerns contrasted with Congregation C where the new Parson actively identified with the Community House, and took over the supportive role vacated by the initiating Parson and Assistant Parson.

However, this issue was not only associated with Parsons; concerns also arose in Congregation C when the original Deputy Coordinator resigned. The constructive impact a year later of a key congregational member’s appointment as the second Coordinator reinforced the importance of this appointment in the retention and enhancement of the link between the Community House and people of Congregation C. The Parson’s comments on the significance of this link through the Coordinator it indicates that, had a less involved person been appointed, Congregation C’s commitment to its Community House would likely have developed very differently.

This issue was raised by Social Worker 9 in the light of her experience with another congregation and its community service. From her experience, and the pattern in the three congregational datasets, there appears to be a sequence in the appointment of key people. Firstly, key leaders are initially sought from within the congregation to personify the link between congregation and community service, e.g. the appointments previously mentioned by Congregation A’s former Parson. However, not all leaders need an existing link if they are willing to identify with the congregation e.g. the volunteer professional who promoted Pastoral Care within Congregation C’s Community House’s became an active member of that congregation.

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109 See page 178 for details.
110 Discussed on page 176.
When such links are not possible, i.e. there is no appropriate person within the congregation or able to join it, links to the congregation are then sacrificed by appointing a person sharing the faith-basis of the Community Service, but not necessarily the congregational connection. This occurred with Congregation B’s appointment of Counsellors B and C, its two Directors of Counselling, and most of its volunteer counsellors. In Congregation C, this occurred with other key leaders, such as the second Deputy Coordinator.

When even that link is not available, the faith connection seems to then be sacrificed in order to ensure a professional appointment i.e. a qualified person exhibiting “sympathy” with the faith-basis of the congregational community service. Such appointments, as part of Social Worker 9’s experience in her congregational setting, triggered the view that:

“While the people who have emerged through the life of the church still continue with it, it's authentic and real, but once you start employing people from outside, you get into difficulties”.

(Social Worker 9 discussing the influence of key appointments on the link between congregations and their community service.)

Each stage on this path to less integrated appointments of key leaders therefore becomes a crucial decision which impacts on the link between the congregation and the community service activities associated with it. The strength of the role undertaken by Congregation C’s Coordinator demonstrates the value of integrated appointments. The dilemmas of a limited integration are evident in Counsellor C’s frustrations with Congregation B when he sought a different faith-related agenda to the other congregational leaders. Further, Social Worker 9’s comments about situations lacking integration of leadership noted that, over time, congregational links to its community service tend to dissipate. Of course, if the intention is that the congregation and the community service separate, then this becomes an effective strategy. \(^{111}\)

\(^{111}\) Examples of the intention to “spin off” community services from their initiating congregation seem rare. Whilst none was identified in this research, one case was encountered on 26/10/99 in personal discussion with the former pastor of a congregation that had been included in Dudley’s work (see Dudley, 1991). This congregation in Chicago created a community service ministry with the deaf and, when funding became available, they deliberately appointed a coordinator who identified with the deaf community and not the congregation. Once that service separated, the congregation established another service to address the spiritual concerns of deaf people. The pastor indicated this process was intended.
Appointments can still be professional and continue to enhance the expression of ownership between a congregation and its sponsored community service when the appointed person identifies with the congregation. However, should such an appointment not be possible, then it seems that the community service risks a lessening of congregational identification and participation unless other factors seek to offset this. Such processes require further strategically crucial decisions to be made.

8.2.2 Funding Sources

Social Worker 1 clearly stated his view that it was unwise for congregational community services to be funded by government because of the loss of control of future development when government funding priorities changed. He also identified there was no government funding for the preventative activities which he believed important in congregational community services. Social Worker 13 expressed similar views saying that, because government funding involved contracts for specific agendas, this restricted what funded activities could cover. Further, he also indicated that the level of government funding was often inadequate for the service contracted, leading to a process of “taxation by stealth” as independent funds were diverted from his church agency’s own agenda to make up the shortfall. The consequence is that decisions about government funding are crucial for all community-based services as congregationally-based services are treated identically in the competitive tendering environment.

Congregation C’s documents express a further concern that the effort required to meet submission criteria for government funding becomes a significant drain on the workload of leading professionals, so risking “goal displacement” for their congregational service. Whilst such dilemmas are shared with other community services, this confirms that funding requests need to be strategically considered and

112 For the actual quote see page 189.
113 Social Worker 13 indicated that his agency considered refusing to contract for government funds unless they were adequate. However, he indicated such a move would disadvantage his Church Agency unless other key agencies did likewise. Without collective action, the decision was to accept the under-funded contracts.
114 Congregation C’s Document 23 records that tendering processes “demand huge amounts of time to prepare within an absolutely unequivocal deadline”. Hence a decision to seek government funding involved accepting that it occurred “at great cost to [the Community Centre’s] own management base through the lost time in tender writing, and interview preparation over 4 months”.
not be indiscriminate. Congregation C originally avoided government funds, but then chose to actively seek them despite the cost. In the interests of “financial sustainability”, the challenge identified was to promote “ongoing development of appropriate government contracting which doesn't skew the vision”. 115 The strategic offsetting factor for Congregation C was its development of a tradition of an annual fund-raising banquet and information sharing events. The congregation covered the associated costs, so avoiding Community House expenses and strengthening the congregation’s sense of ownership.

That governments are not the only problematic funding source was suggested by Congregation A’s Parishioner D, citing as an example the problems requiring the winding up of the Support Program for People with Disability.

Parishioner D thought it inappropriate for a congregation to develop a community program with external funds as, “if the money dried up”, the congregation would not have the resources to “still look after these people” who participated in the service. For him such decisions were crucial because, unless the organisation was “self-sufficient”, they had the potential to cause dramatic changes in the service offered as well as impact on the whole congregational life. For Parishioner D such undertakings needed to be entered into very carefully and be owned by all parties, including in his case the Congregational Council.

These concerns about the conditions imposed by external funders, the time involved in obtaining such funds, the adequacy of the funds, and the implications of funding loss, arise because all have the capacity to modify congregational community services in unintended ways, including aspects not directly linked to that funding.

115 Harrow & Vincent (1999) presented a paper entitled “If We had not had this Funding, we might still have been Thriving”: Some consequences of Public Funding in Local Voluntary Organisations in the UK. One consequence identified was that the provision of funding can lead to withdrawal of the very volunteers organisations need and, simultaneously, to unsustainable increases in service demand. In one case studied the result was the closure of a previously viable volunteer service.
8.2.3 Spiritual Orientation

Whilst congregational cultures have a dominant perspective that could be termed a *spiritual orientation*, the data indicates that the dominant orientation may not be shared by all key people associated with a particular congregational community service. The impact of such differences may impact significantly in congregational life. For example, the decision by Social Worker 1 to leave a congregation of one denomination for another at a particular stage in his church involvement reflected his choice to **leave** rather than seek to alter a spiritual orientation found to be “everything that I saw wrong with churches that were irrelevant”. As a consequence, one church lost a resource person, and another gained one.

Others choose to **challenge** spiritual orientations that are different to theirs, as did Congregation B’s Counsellor C when he found those associated with its Counselling Service were reluctant to incorporate his approach to emphasising spiritual life within the congregation’s approach. His approach valued “evangelism”, that is the promotion of personal faith commitment, as an option within counselling, but this was evidently at odds with Congregation B’s dominant spiritual orientation.

> The word evangelism was never mentioned [in a congregational mission statement]...and the word evangelism wasn’t included in any of the ministry groups that were set up, so my understanding was that they had no real understanding or desire to evangelise in general and therefore, in particular, no real awareness of the value of evangelism through counselling. (Counsellor C, Congregation B explaining his tension with others involved in Congregation B’s Counselling Service.)

Counsellor C sought to redress this difference by promoting a particular introductory course in Christianity but was denied the opportunity to continue with this, which led him to conclude that “I was frustrated in terms of my ideals and my commitments”. Whilst his decision to resign was triggered by unrelated personal circumstances, this frustration and his failed endeavour to alter the dominant spiritual ethos suggested it was inevitable. However the debate had the potential to significantly impact on the congregation and the others associated with the Counselling Service primarily because of the influential role Counsellor C filled.
Unlike Congregation B, the dominant spiritual orientation in Congregation C did involve **evangelism**. Early documents indicated a previously noted concern that the Community House was not evangelistic enough.\(^{116}\)

In its concern for the evangelistic outreach of the [congregation], members of the [Congregational Council] see the [Community House’s] work as an opportunity to win people for Christ. They note the lack of "Christian" response, and have suggested greater efforts by volunteers and by the use of publicity (e.g. in food parcels) to that end...[Congregational Council] discussions indicate that some would stress the need to train volunteers in evangelism. Some parishioners fear that [the Community House’s] existence will blunt the evangelistic edge of parish life. (Document 2 Congregation C recording concerns about the contribution of the Community House to the congregation’s evangelistic goals.)

In fact Document 4 from May 1992 commented more emphatically that the “[Congregation's] concern [is] that [the Community House] be seen as "evangelistic" and this is not negotiable”. Document 23 in fact indicates that one congregational member of the Community House Board eventually resigned, having “questioned the theology of [the Community House]” early in its life. Continuing discussion resulted in a changed emphasis within the prevailing spiritual orientation of the congregation which subsequently adopted a concept of “pre-evangelism” which was perceived as more respectful of the people with whom the Community House worked.

Document 4 first identified “pre-evangelism” as a strategy in which pastoral care, as implemented by the Community House staff, was conceived as “preparing the way so that more may be done at some later stage - by [the congregation] through other means”. This, rather than the evangelistic emphasis, is the spiritual orientation which underlies the Theological Statement finally accepted for Congregation C’s Community House.\(^{117}\) Hence Congregation C journeyed from a “non-negotiable” position on evangelism to one in which evangelism was supplementary to developing

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\(^{116}\) See discussion on page 143.

\(^{117}\) See Appendix 11 on page 495.
a caring and respectful relationship, a significant change crucial to the ongoing emphasis of Congregation C, its members and its Community House.

Another aspect of spiritual orientation is the “martyr” or “self-sacrificial” approach to self-giving discussed at length by Social Worker 7. Even though these approaches led to “burnout” for her partner, it was apparently left unaddressed at the organisational level. She concluded that changes in orientation were needed to allow Christian staff to put boundaries around their workload, and be given support from experienced Christian professionals. In grappling with the same issue, Congregation C’s staff came to the view that this culture of sacrifice itself needed to be questioned.

Priority at that stage was always given to the participant, over and above the immediate needs of the staff. This was not a planned priority, but one that was assumed, linked no doubt to the popular but erroneous concept of “Christian ministry” as continuous self-sacrifice. (Congregation C Document 23 noting a dilemma with self-sacrifice as integral to its Community House work.)

The benefits of this concept to those using the service were debated and, over time, boundaries sharply contrasting with the original perceptions were implemented, although for some, too rigidly. This struggle reflected a changing spiritual orientation to the provision of care through the Community House, a modification by which staff subsequently approach their work quite differently to original expectations. Even though the change was linked to a professional culture of operation rather than a volunteer one, its spiritual implications were never far away. Document 23 identified that:

“The struggle [for a Theological Statement] was not abandoned...Discussions always led back to the common "Christian" motivation to be compassionate for those oppressed.” (Document 23 Congregation C identifying the enduring theological basis to staff discussion about their approach to their work.)

Hence the agreed Statement recognised a need for “staff and volunteer self-care” as an essential component in their response to others.

Identified here in the datasets are two aspects of spiritual orientation which impact on congregational community services. The first is the spiritual perspective taken towards those with whom the service works, in this case evangelistic, pre-evangelistic, or undefined. The second is the spiritual undergirding of the service as understood by its staff and volunteers, in this case one of self-sacrifice versus self-

118 See page 180 for a full discussion.
care. The datasets indicate that either aspect may be contested, and the outcome of any debate is crucial to the orientation of the congregational community service. No doubt other spiritual concerns may also impact congregational community services, with similar crucial implications.

### 8.3 Unexpected Events

Whilst some changes to congregational community services are intentionally the result of planned reviews and evaluations, and some are the unforeseen consequences of other decisions that occur in the course of operation, less apparent but still potentially influential are changes that arise from unexpected, often external, events which impact on the operation of congregational community services. The datasets suggest three sources of unforeseen influences; otherwise typical events involving the congregation that distract them from the community service vision, events generating conflict within the congregation, and events concerning professional misconduct of key personnel associated with a congregation and/or its community service. These aspects of change in congregational community services are discussed here.

#### 8.3.1 Distracted Vision

Congregation A provided the clearest suggestion of the effect of a distracted vision on community service provision. Even though its community service activity commenced in the mid 1980’s well before the other two congregations, it was the least developed and structured. Its Parson and Parishioners D and E in fact suggested the congregation struggled to maintain even what it had, let alone develop it further, identifying reasons for this. There was much to deal with in the decade preceding this study:

- It experienced loss of funds ear-marked for a new church through the collapse of the local financial institution;
- It struggled through the amalgamation of three barely viable congregations;
- It encountered a redevelopment crisis when promised central church funds were cancelled;
- It faced the sale of all original properties and the consequent closure of all worship centres;
- It existed for an extended period in a temporary worship facility; and finally
- It purchased a new site and constructed a new worship centre.
This series of events led Parishioner D to comment:

I think [the congregation] went into recess then and [we] maybe lost our direction a bit with the building [funding] falling over and, we're probably realising that we had to do this parish amalgamation and...I think it wound down a bit at [the original congregation where the community service began]. That's in my memory, before we actually sold up and went down to [the second of the original congregations] I think, as far as the food cupboard and that was [concerned]...I think we probably got engulfed by all these other things...I think [the congregation] went into defensive mode. Because we were amalgamating with a very traditional [congregation], and there was a lot of tension with the amalgamation there was no doubt. Even before we even talked about selling buildings there was a fair bit of tension...I think a lot of the senior [Congregational Council] people...spent a lot of their time just trying to get the amalgamation process together and they just ran out of steam to do much else. And we did lose a few, a few of our people did drift off when we moved down [to the second congregation and then the temporary worship facility].

(Parishioner D Congregation A explaining how the focus on the community service was diverted when dealing with the other congregational changes.)

Parishioner E similarly suggested this process was destabilising for parishioners and the congregational vision, but beneficial once the congregation settled into the temporary, neutral facility.

At the time [we identified our vision in early 1994 as part of the amalgamation] it was very good [to include community services] and it was something to think about and pray about and work for, but then we seemed to go into limbo for a long time. We were trying to sell churches and of course we thought we could stay in [the second congregation’s building] and build a new church and then sell [that second congregation’s centre].... When [the central church leader] said, "No you've got to sell that before"...[W]here were we going? And I think that in some ways put us back, and then it didn't - that's Irish isn't it, because as I say, we went to the [a central church agency building as a temporary worship facility]. I feel that did us good and brought us closer together. And I think now that we are here [in the new worship centre] people are settling. (Parishioner E Congregation A explaining her sense that congregational energy was diverted through the amalgamation and rebuilding.)

These respondents clearly indicate that efforts to expand and formalise Congregation A’s community services were seriously restricted by these other congregational activities. Consequently visions promoted by the Parson and Parishioner A advocating incorporation and the appointment of a trained social worker were presented to a tired congregation. These events, external to its community service, apparently blunted but did not destroy the vision that formed in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s because of the energy diverted to them.
8.3.2 Congregational Conflict

The residual tensions generated around the amalgamations to form Congregation A were identified as a theme in Parishioner C’s pastoral care work. She found it hard to support people through that, and so finally ceased her pastoral role.

I've thought about it quite a bit actually. But, the two different congregations [were] totally different...[I]t's a bit of power playing and it didn't allow for growth and it didn't allow for a lot of things, but then that was probably the time that they had to grow. But I've found that the tradition of things blocked a lot of outreach and growth...[A]s far as I know when they wanted the congregations to join, [the second congregation] people, when they discussed it, they weren't giving up their church. And [the first congregation people], they discussed it...and they thought that God wanted them to move so they made the choice of moving to [the second congregation]. And it was just a lot of negativity with one church coming into another's and thinking that we were going to take over and all that stuff. So I suppose doing the pastoral care [I was] dealing with all this negative stuff that they were all throwing at [me]...and I mean there were even some people in the church that wouldn't even shake hands with you in the peace sign because you come from [the first congregation], so people from [the first congregation] had to get over that and we had to love them in it. So I suppose it was a bit of a struggle in that way...And we did lose a lot of people from [the first congregation] because they wouldn't take it on. (Parishioner C Congregation A outlining the tensions around the amalgamation that affected church life.)

The impact from this was twofold: firstly, people’s energy was directed to the practicalities of the congregational amalgamation; and secondly, people expressed a variety of personal hurts at the perceived outcome and so retreated. In particular, Parishioner C feared burnout as she tried to support people through it, so she took “time out” from her involvements to prevent this, thus removing herself from previous involvements including the Meals Ministry and the Emergency Food Service.

In addition, some considered that Congregation A’s Parson failed to adequately recognise the congregation’s need to restabilise before further developing the community service. This became a catalyst for tension between the Parson and certain congregational members, especially Parishioner D, which the responses made by both the Parson and Parishioner D, and recognised by Parishioner E, clearly acknowledged. The Parson considered Parishioner D was promoting unreasonable barriers toward further community service development, whilst Parishioner D considered the Parson was taking the congregation beyond its resources. Parishioner

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119 See discussion on page 173.
E concurred, considering the Parson sought his outcomes by acting first, and only then seeking congregational permission. The consequent tension from these perceptions clearly affected the whole congregation. However both the Parson and Parishioner D recognised this increasingly overt conflict was unhelpful so, at the time of the interviews, Parishioner D had left the Congregational Council for the first time in 20 years to extricate himself from this increasing conflict. Likewise Parishioner E claimed age as her reason to retire from the Congregational Council. In addition, the Parson anticipated transferring to a new congregation, a change which occurred at the end of that year.

The conflicts related to the amalgamations were effectively curtailed through the time spent in the temporary worship facility and/or by various participants removing themselves from it. Hence these events proved little more than brief interruptions to congregational life, but they did forestall efforts to develop more substantial community services in response to a growing need following the move to the new congregational centre, a need recognised by the Parson and Parishioners E and D.

At the time of the research data from the other two congregations gave no hint of conflict impacting on their community services. However, all three congregations expressed concern about their Parson’s availability for pastoral care work amongst congregational members. For Congregation A’s Parishioner D this was an additional component in the conflict mentioned above. Congregation B took remedial action by contributing funds to their Counselling Service to employ a part-time professional counsellor. Congregation C’s Parson was less directly involved in their Community House, but the congregation was more highly active, which apparently limited any conflict. Nonetheless the demands that congregational community services make on clergy clearly risk congregational conflict unless given strategic attention.

8.3.3 Professional Misconduct

The final unexpected event identified was the impact of professional misconduct by those in influential positions within congregational community services. Incidents raised in the collected data concerned spiritual and sexual abuse. The former, mentioned by Congregation B’s Counsellor B, concerned the potential for people not mature in their own faith development to be spiritually manipulated by spiritual leaders upon whom they were dependent. Counsellor B viewed this as unacceptable,
and something to guard against in spiritual nurture programs intended to help people confidently grasp a faith understanding.

The more disconcerting abuse, although not dissimilar in its manipulation, was sexual abuse. Knowing of this research, another respondent intentionally shared their first hand knowledge of a situation perpetrated on a service user by a worker in a congregational community service.\(^{120}\) As that situation had implications for the person’s conjugal partner, this respondent shared the experience believing such matters were not adequately recognised and responded to by congregational and central church leaders.

\[I \text{ would really appreciate it if you could include in some way that the reason this was told was in the interests that, ultimately though it can be very difficult, we all benefit by actually trying to go forward by embracing the truth.} \]

(Respondent’s statement of the reason for raising the issue of professional misconduct as a possibility in congregational community services.)

Whilst the respondent was clear that they were “very grateful for the help that [they] received from [the congregational community service] when [they] first went there”, they were also clear that this experience of abuse felt like a betrayal which had a profound impact on their sense of trust.

Because “it’s a very very bad situation when there’s a [community service] where something like that happens” especially in the church where “clergy are seen as higher or separate or something like that”, such occurrences risked impacting powerfully not only on the individuals involved, but on congregational community services and community trust.

Whilst central church bodies and various professions now have ethical codes in place to curb the risk of these events, together with procedures to address any complaints, this respondent’s point was that the church needs to be honest that such events have occurred, and should not occur. An acknowledgment of this is a necessary consideration in how congregational community services develop their operation. This unexpected situation is therefore a matter to be addressed, though how this might be done is not identified.

\(^{120}\) This requested the information be presented without its context so that even accidental identification of the parties involved could not occur. Gender neutral plural pronouns are used to help protect these confidences.
Table 25 - Dimensions of the Modifying Phase of Congregational Community Involvement

<table>
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8.4 Summary

Congregational community services, and the variety of activities within them, commence and then normally develop in fairly steady ways. However the data identified that significant modifications to their operation occur when a range of other factors impact on them. These factors, together with their potential features, are summarised in Table 25 above.

While each promotes change, in most cases this change is unlikely to have been anticipated. Yet the changes need to be strategically considered because they influence the operational balance and congregational ownership of the community.
service. As was evident in Congregation A with its simmering conflict, it was not enough just to let them happen. Intentional decisions about change are called for so that these unanticipated impacts can be balanced by other planned changes. The clearest example is the critical importance of the role the second coordinator played in sustaining congregational ownership of Congregation C’s Community House programs and how that sense of ownership enabled the congregation to adopt a substantial fund-raising role. These strategies appear to have offset the impact of recommendations from various evaluations which promoted professionalisation at the expense of key volunteer features. Recognising that changes come as a result of planned reviews, developments within the sponsoring congregation, or unexpected external events helps generate sensitivity to implications that need to be considered.
PART IV – THE IMPLICATIONS

9 Reflecting on the Framework

The last three chapters have explored the inductive elaboration of the proposed Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement with its various components, dimensions and range of characteristics found within the four datasets upon which it is based. In order to focus on the essential features of this Framework, this chapter initially summarises key insights revealed in this elaboration, followed by a brief critique of the methodology, to identify a rationale for anticipating the relevance of the Framework to other settings, so giving it wider value.

Particular insights drawn from this research are then presented to highlight key understandings as they appear to relate to congregations engaging in community services. This is followed by an outline of some more general implications this Framework has for the provision of community services in our society.

9.1 Essence of the Framework

The proposition resulting from this research is that any congregational community service develops, operates and adapts according to a broad pattern which is represented by this Framework. Whilst the Framework has been derived from a limited set of case-studies and recollections from informants experienced in congregation-community services relationships, it is proposed that it has a wider application, at least to other congregations of the type considered here, essentially congregations which neither struggle to survive nor are large enough to directly resource their own community services professionally.

9.1.1 Initiation

Firstly, the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement concludes that congregations initiate or develop community services in response to three coalescing influences: the presence of a culture within a congregation which endorses and legitimates the inclusion of such activities within congregational life.

121 At times, for ease of discussion, reference to the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement will be abbreviated to Framework.
and self-understanding; the availability of a person or people with time and capacity to nurture such a development; and the influence of a catalyst which triggers this development, at this time. Should such a culture not be present, then its development is likely to be facilitated through either a cultural “crisis” or, more typically, a cultural “massage”. Generally this development will not be achieved through “pummelling” the existing culture or imposition of a service, no matter how well intentioned the congregation’s leaders may be. Any service developing without this integration with the congregation is unlikely to survive the departure of the person identified with it.

The key people may be the clergy or laypeople supported by the clergy; and the catalyst may be an expressed need that simply cannot be ignored or an available resource that just has to be used. It is necessary, however, that these factors work together to formalise a specific vision with which a congregation can identify and which a significant group of members feel meets their congregational agendas, even if the vision first needs to be suggested and nurtured by the clergy or other leaders. Through implementing that vision, a community service activity, or a series of activities which might loosely be called a service, gets underway. These features, and the basis for them, were fully elaborated in Chapter 6.

9.1.2 Operation

Once operating, the activity or service is likely to find itself grappling with locating its culture of operation between two extreme cultural influences. By way of reiteration, one of these reflects ideas and understandings derived from the culture of professional community services. The other reflects inclinations and thoughts born from people’s collective life experience and good intentions expressed through a culture of volunteer service. Adopting the professional approach requires resources beyond typical religious congregations. Seeking them through arrangements outside the congregation, however, compromises the congregational vision through the related contractual obligations, and risks the congregation’s capacity to remain identified with what eventuates. If, instead, services or activities adopt a solely volunteer culture they co-opt the energy and expertise of people within and beyond the congregation, and harness it for the good of the local community. This is an example of congregations’ inherent social capital being accessed for the social needs
of the wider community. But this risks a community perception that those involved do not know what they are doing, are judgmental, more concerned with religious or moral matters than care of people, and do not have the necessary resources.

Often this appears as an “either/or” dilemma in which the early, less formal, enthusiasm for these activities is finally overwhelmed by the inclusion (perhaps intrusion might be more accurate) of professional experts. However, congregations appear more creative than this, and have the capacity to blend resources from both sets of influences in dynamic and idiosyncratic ways, creating their own particular culture of operation somewhere between the two cultures of formalising professionalism and altruistic volunteerism.

The blending of these two cultures of operation occurs along six conceptual dimensions: programming, staffing, resourcing, managing, networking and owning. In each dimension each congregation and/or activity balances these influences; for example, when considering staff they might appoint qualified and recognised professionals who are local and/or available to work as volunteers, so blending the two influences. If a balance is to be retained, then any action to increase the influence of one culture of operation needs to be countered by an openness elsewhere to influences from the other culture of operation. This then suggests a strategic process that enhances contributions from both cultures relevant to congregations as they operate their community service activities.

In each of the six dimensions two to four “features” are identified: for example, staffing examined issues related to four staffing “types” – support staff, volunteers, professionals and Parsons (congregational clergy); and owning examined 3 “aspects” – the notion of owning itself, ways to promote it, and issues which diminish or deter it. Chapter 7 extensively explored these processes and the basis for them.

9.1.3 Modification

Any existing congregational community service or activity is subject to both overt and subtle modifications. Likely changes result from intentional evaluations; crucial decisions, which directly affect the operating cultural balance such as changes in spiritual orientation, funding sources, or key staff appointments; and unexpected events, which reduce the congregation’s contribution to the service or activity such
as distractions associated with wider congregational life, internal conflict, or misconduct by key people. The ensuing changes in the community service, explored in detail in Chapter 8, potentially may also include its demise.

9.2 Critiquing the Methodology

Grounded theory methodology, used to guide this research, has its particular strengths and limitations. Those encountered during its use in this project are considered below.

9.2.1 Limitations

Firstly, grounded theory values data collection without prior exploration of the substantive area, other than that provided progressively through the successive data collection strategy and the researcher’s prior analysis of that data. However, it was in practice clearly not possible to erase understandings I had gleaned about congregational community services before engaging in this research, be that from my own experience (which, as in this case, actually contributed to my motivation for the research) or any prior study or understandings I had pursued (Haig 1996).

Secondly, as with many traditional research approaches, it is intended that the researcher’s own thoughts do not intrude into the research process. However, as with the first point, it was impossible for me to ensure, for example, that the coding processes used to link themes in the various interviews and documents were not influenced by my pre-existing ideas and concepts. More recent understandings of naturalistic enquiry (Fine 1994; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Harris 2001; Rodwell 1987; Ruckdeschel 1985) identify the researcher as a part of the process, as is clearly the case in this study. Aspects of my own experience were therefore shared with informants, however this was done more from a perspective of empathy within the interview or stimulating an elaboration of a point already made, rather than purposefully introducing new material not raised by the informant.

A third further limitation found was that the resources and analytical tools available in this study permitted the inclusion of only four datasets, involving 52 specific data sources (29 informants and 23 documents). However, the grounded theory approach argues that a workable theory or hypothesis suitable for further elaboration through
additional data can be achieved with a small number of cases. This argument is consistent with the evident relevance of the emerging Framework in this study when informally compared to other examples of congregational community service involvement encountered in the US, England, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia. Further research may modify the Framework, but its essential features would remain because they reflect the processes that make sense of these four datasets.

9.2.2 Strengths

The decision to follow a grounded theory methodology was prompted by the belief that, to accurately understand processes within congregations as they developed and operated their community services, a range of people involved had to share their own experiences freely, in their own voice. Thus, during the interview process, there was an intentional suppression of pre-conceived ideas gained from the literature. There was also a deliberate commitment to approaching some people who were not congregational clergy or current leaders, in contrast to much congregational research (e.g. Chaves, Konieczny, Beyerlein & Barman 1999). The data gained in this way was then analysed to identify the themes and patterns later leading to the Framework.

At times this process made finding patterns in congregational community services difficult, only finally achieved through the iterative process of grounded theory termed “constant comparison”. The more traditional research approach, involving prior formulation of a hypothesis to be tested through data analysis, would have tied this research to concepts and frameworks already contained in the professional literature; for example, research into volunteer activities, human service organisations, or program development. This may have made the research easier, e.g. through use of survey instruments, but it would have directed the outcome to perspectives based on these pre-existing frameworks. The approach taken allowed the real-world congregational services and activities to be understood as they existed, on their own terms. In particular, it was this approach which enabled identification of the notion that congregations actually blend professional and volunteer perspectives into their own unique operating cultures; prior constructs using known frameworks would have inhibited its recognition by leaving unchallenged the assumption that the
two approaches were mutually exclusive, or a continuum with one steadily transforming into the other.

In fact, the research goal was not to affirm a pre-established hypothesis, but to discover a useful framework for understanding congregational community service processes which could be then applied as a construct in actual congregational settings. Grounded theory offered an established guideline for undertaking such a project. This resulted in the Framework providing an expanded conception of congregational involvement in community services compared with the existing literature, in which the congregation is located in the foreground. Other literature offers many insights into aspects of that process, but tends to obscure the congregational features as other concepts become the focus.122

More widespread application of the Framework’s rationale is possible, but is yet to be established. Bell’s view on this potential is pertinent for, citing Bassey, she emphasises that, with qualitative research such as case-studies, “the relatability…is more important than its generalisability” (1987, p.7). This capacity enables others to recognize and apply insights drawn from the particular research. This potential exists for the Framework for current informal discussions suggest it is “relatable” to local community contexts, such as the operation of local community centres and neighbourhood houses, which are not congregationally-based.

9.3 Key Practical Insights

There are many insights potentially able to be drawn from this Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement. The following help make sense of actual, ongoing congregational experiences raised by people with whom this emerging Framework has been discussed. However this outline by no means suggests these are the only relevant insights derived from this project. The

122 As an illustration of this, Appendix 12 briefly views the congregational Framework through the lens of human service organisations as presented in introductory texts. Whilst this raises aspects of community services that congregational community activities may well consider, at least as a formalising professional influence, it nonetheless loses focus on the idiosyncratic nature of congregational processes, so crucial in adequately understanding congregations as a context for community services. This, I suggest, is the limitation of much of the research on congregational community services to date – congregations do not “speak” with their own voice in the analysis, but through other external voices.
helpfulness of the Framework will largely depend on the issues confronting any congregation at any particular time.

9.3.1 Congregations as Cultural Communities

Firstly, congregations have different cultures which emphasise different aspects of their self-understanding, and some cultures are more responsive to certain types of community issues and services than others. Some even seem unlikely to develop any involvement in such activities, at least without a cultural change. In others, tensions and conflicts involving congregational community services will result from congregational sub-groups valuing contrasting congregational cultures. This insight is identified in the congregational literature, but typically its implication is suppressed as preference is given to the expectations of clergy or other key professionals. The sense of culture can also be elaborated through comparison with general discussions of organisational culture, such as provided by Jones and May (1992, pp.228-259), thus further suggesting how culture might be understood and addressed in congregations. In particular, it is also recognised that professionals bring their own professional culture (cf DiMaggio & Powell 1983), whose relevance is implicitly presumed, without due consideration for its congruence with the congregational culture.

Secondly, the research made clear that, if a community service is to develop as a congregational activity rather than an activity of a particular individual within the congregation, then a congregation’s culture needs to be worked with, not ignored or over-ridden by the expectations of clergy and other key leaders. Where the leader imposes their own expectations without consideration of the existing culture, support tends to be lacking and the activity is unlikely to survive beyond their involvement. The research showed that it is more effective to develop community service activities which make sense to the congregation, and with which they generally will identify, as then they are more likely to sustain their involvement.

123 Becker 1998a, 1999 and Becker et al 1993 develop this aspect further.  
124 The importance of this is illustrated in Congregation C where the first social work consultant assisting staff develop Family Counselling skills, did not fully appreciate the context. Consequently, staff resisted scheduling interviews and objected to aspects of the adopted program theory, whilst clients resisted formal appointments. The subsequent social work consultant, sensing this incongruity, better integrated with the congregation and the existing perspectives. This led to changed terminology and relaxation of formalities, enabling her to more effectively support staff to develop a more potent intervention “technology” for use when appropriate, rather than as an expectation.
This inclusive approach is largely about respecting the knowledge, culture, resources, skills and processes of the local congregation and working to enhance that rather than exercise power over it (Ife 2002). Such an approach reflects Ife’s core principles of community development (2002, pp.201-225), a strategy which focuses on assisting communities identify issues, problems and needs as they themselves see them, in their terms of reference, and to facilitate the development of collective resolutions of these issues, problems and needs. Thus community development workers work with and for people. They do not do this from a patronising perspective as outside experts, but on the basis of mutual emancipation (Kenny 1994, p.8).

Ife’s suggestions involve key professionals, such as clergy, operating in a community development mode, resisting the use of their influence to implement their own agenda at the expense of a congregation’s agenda through being critically self-aware, recognising the implications of their dominant position, and working with people and their agenda (Ife 2002 p.225; see also Kenny 1994 & Weil 1996). It also involves viewing professional knowledge, not as exclusive to be used on behalf of people, but as knowledge to be shared, “teaching others how to use the knowledge and skills of the professional…working cooperatively (not hierarchically) with untrained people, or people with lower levels of training” (Ife 2002, p.123).

Thirdly, if a congregational culture is not sufficiently conducive to community service involvement, there may be a need to affirm the existing culture and build onto it a broader, relevant, more socially active understanding (cf Grierson 1984), a process here termed “massaging” the culture. Such a strategy is more effective than imposing something in the hope of forcing the congregation into community engagement, a process here termed “pummelling”.

Finally, it is also crucial to remember that congregational cultures are premised on congregations being voluntary organisations with spiritual worship and nurture as their primary activities. Community service is generally a secondary activity and not commonly a substitute for spiritual concerns. Hence the spiritual dimension needs always to be acknowledged as a component. It is part of the context and, for many in congregations, it is the implicit or explicit motivation for their community involvement. Surprisingly, explicit theological perspectives rarely pre-determine the nature of congregational culture or community involvement (cf Becker et al 1993; Mock 1992). Rather, theological understandings tend to be used to justify and
explain these “after the event”. People’s more subtle “street theologies”, the unarticulated faith-understandings underlying people’s actions, are more likely to provide insight into these motivations (cf Ammerman 1994; Garland 2000a).

9.3.2 Clergy Leadership

The attitude of clergy to congregational community engagement is crucial to active involvement, though not necessarily determinative of it. Little collective intentional participation will eventuate without the active support of clergy who appear to have an important permission-giving role, perhaps reflective of their historic status in congregations. Dudley (1991a, 1996) also found this in his congregational research.

9.3.3 Congregational Need Assessment

This research showed the development of congregational community involvement should consider both clergy and lay people, especially where lay members of the congregation are personally aware of or have been confronted by some issue. Such issues are likely to be actively taken up if the congregation recognises it has the capacity to do so. For instance, starting an emergency food pantry would seem more achievable than starting a drug rehabilitation program. Therefore, congregations may benefit from assistance to collectively share personal perceptions of community concerns and to explore how these relate to their congregational culture. This process may be facilitated by clergy or other key leaders who respect the congregational culture, and the spiritual basis for both the culture and any proposed service activity. From such explorations a vision for community involvement may well be identified.

This process is consistent with the needs assessment approach advocated by Ife (2002, p.211) who emphasised communities identifying their own need rather than experts doing it for them. This is developed in Ife’s earlier discussion of the importance of considering who makes need statements (1980); whether people who directly experience the need first- or second-hand, or people who infer the need from demographic or other research data. Because congregations tend not to engage in formal social assessments to ascertain the most needed community services in any objective sense, their practice contrasts with the more traditional need assessment approach discussed in Kettner, Moroney and Martin (1990), based on Bradshaw’s four need types: normative, felt, expressed and comparative (1980). These more
formal studies, advocated in some congregational literature (Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley & McKinney 1998; Burke 1992, Carroll et al 1986; Dudley 1991a), cannot be excluded, but they are not indicative of congregational approaches, as Cameron (1998) and Wineburg (1993) also found. The approach taken by congregations is based more on their implicit knowledge of expressed and felt needs rather than on a professional approach aimed at ascertaining as objectively as possible the level of particular need types within a community. This approach is also reflected in the limited response of congregations to social justice issues, at least until these are linked to the needs confronting them.

9.3.4 Strategic Management of Cultural Balances

Firstly, perhaps the most helpful insight from the research is the significance of the particular culture of operation associated with each congregation’s blend of the professional and volunteer influences. This asserts that the two “pure” cultures are not intrinsically in conflict, as is often supposed, or that congregational community services inevitably progress with maturity from well-meaning, religiously motivated volunteer activities to secularised, professional operations. Instead, it highlights their potential to creatively respect and work within the current culture of operation that is valued by that congregation. For example, one congregation, encountered outside of the formal research, intentionally withdrew from government funded programs and reduced its services to reverse an over-identification with a formal, professional culture. It replaced this with an operational blend based on the congregation’s own resources and available professional and volunteer staff so that, once again, the community service could be seen as an activity of the congregation, rather than of the government or external professionals.

A second helpful insight concerns the intention to retain an active and meaningful congregational link with a community service which, at times, requires a strategic decision if a suitable blend of the professional and volunteer cultures is to be retained. For example, if a decision is made to accept government funding to enable

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125 It seems the community development literature also provides an example of this, when it seeks to dissociate professional social work from community development (e.g. Kenny 1994). It was only when it was obvious from the congregations themselves that they had blended the two operating cultures that it was recognised the issue was more about strategically blending the qualities and availability of both (see also Ife, 2002, who draws a more integrating conclusion than Kenny).
a professional to be appointed, then a counter-influence needs to be incorporated to retain the operational balance. This can be achieved through either appointing an appropriate person from the congregation itself, or someone who is willing to become actively associated with the congregation. Alternatively, the job description may include a requirement to actively develop the skills of congregational volunteers.

This observation shows that, depending on the congregation’s vision for its service, the six dimensions identified within the culture of operation need to be strategically monitored for their overall balance and potential impact for implementing the vision. Without this the complex dynamics of congregations may lead to unwanted and problematic outcomes, or may presume a service capacity inconsistent with the congregation’s resources. In this setting it is unlikely that either contrasting culture will be sacrificed in order to simplify the implementation of the other as both reflect valued aspects and both have intrinsic limitations. It also appears that, in congregational settings, both cultures of operation are reinforced; the volunteer culture through teachings about compassion and justice as spiritual responsibilities, and the professional culture through the models of management and service provision encountered in the wider community.

9.3.5 Congregations as Program Developers

This research concludes that congregations develop particular community service activities, often without conscious thought to the logic underlying the link between what they seek to address and how they seek to address it. A program logic or hypothesis of the type discussed in the literature (see Kettner, Moroney and Martin 1990; Smith 1989) nonetheless implicitly undergirds this understanding, and it may well be helpful for congregations to review this logic rather than presume it, which Congregation C did in implementing its Family Counselling service as a replacement for its Pastoral Care activity.

The particular “technological” contributions of congregations to interventions were associated with their more informal approach and openness to a relationship

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126 Hasenfeld (1983) defines “human service technology” as the procedures used in human services to influence people. See Appendix 12, Section A12.4 on page 501 for a brief discussion.
based on friendship, their access to the supportive resources of the community forming the congregation, and their inclusion of spiritual support, such as prayer, within their response to the issues they sought to address.

Further, a necessary part of the planning process is that programs, once developed, need to be “marketed” to relevant members of the wider community. However, congregations seemed at times to overlook this focus. Of assistance to congregations in addressing this would be the program marketing models that systematically identify the Publics (Input, Throughput, Output, Partners), Product, Price, Place and Promotion required in program implementation (see Genkins 1985 & Lauffer 1986). As the congregation itself is a key Public too often overlooked, the Framework provides a tool to ensure it remains in focus while congregational community services are developed and implemented.

### 9.3.6 Congregations as Owners of Community Services

Another key insight of this research is the crucial importance of congregational ownership of the community service. It became clear that this psychological identification with the congregational community service has to be promoted, not presumed, to ensure it is not overlooked. Congregations contribute not only financially, but also voluntary time, professional expertise, management capacity, and facilities within which services operate. None of these could be easily replaced if the congregation was alienated from the service.

The research analysis considered promotion of ownership with strategies related to the processes implicit within the Framework. Specifically identified strategies included announcements about the community service in the worship time, inclusion in the prayers within worship, and provision of notices about the service in pewsheets and on display boards. Others included congregational participation on relevant committees; congregational members appointed to positions within the service, either voluntary or paid; congregational members’ participation in the activities offered by the service; and physical linking of the service to the worship centre.

The importance of ownership can be linked with the recognition that social capital emphasises the accessing of resources through relationships rather than formal
structures, as argued by Schneider (1998, 2001). Relationships with, and within, congregations are therefore crucial in the operation of congregational community services and a sense of ownership. Ownership, other than of property, is in fact rarely discussed in community service literature, with Ife (2002) being one of the few who mention its importance, though without defining it. More often it is an aside which alludes to something missing rather than something present (e.g. Cnaan et al 2002).

9.3.7 Changes in Congregational Community Services

The research also showed, firstly, that like any community service, congregational activities are also influenced by factors generating unexpected change. These factors relate to other events within congregational life, more often associated with a congregation’s primary reason for existence, e.g. the decision to rebuild a worship centre. These factors reduce the capacity of congregations for community involvement. Within that setting these are not seen as distractions from their community participation; rather their community participation is more likely to be seen as a distraction from conventional congregational activities. Hence all activities need to be considered when assessing the resources a congregation has available for community service involvement, especially when it is congregationally-based.

Secondly, from time to time congregational community services will inevitably be faced with crucial decisions about staffing, funding options, and facilities. Such decisions are crucial because they affect the balance between the two operating cultures, in particular the congregation’s sense of ownership, and so the impact on altering dimensions within the operating culture towards either extreme must be taken into account.

9.4 Potential Relevance

Having established a framework for understanding the community engagement of moderately-sized religious congregations, there are a number of contexts in which this is likely to be relevant. Some suggestions follow on the possible relevance for congregations, social workers, central church agencies, and social policy.
9.4.1 Congregations

Congregations have a long history of developing a variety of community services. These most typically relate to the provision of food and financial assistance to people in need (Chaves 2001; Cnaan 1998, 2000; Kaldor et al 1995; Wineburg 1993, 2001a) and, more recently in Australia, have included support for people with mental health issues (e.g. Barringham & Barringham 1997). However, there is an extensive variety, which extends from simple support services operated through the clergy to large and extensive community service agencies with substantial budgets. Without a systematically researched framework for guiding the processes by which these services develop and operate, most have developed their activities on a trial and error basis, with guidance from other related experiences or other corporate settings. The Framework presented here is expected to offer people in congregations, both clergy and lay leaders, a basis for the strategic development and operation of congregational community services to enable them to better achieve their goals and more effectively identify and address the multiple issues they may encounter. The indications are that, despite the relatively low level of religious involvement in Australia, effectively guided local congregations make constructive contributions to their surrounding community through congregational community services. Further, other research identifies that some members then take these skills into other community settings (Ammerman 1997b; Bacon & Milofsky 2003), so extending the congregation’s contribution to the wider community.

The Parson of one congregation developing a new community service program has reported using insights from this Framework, first shared informally, to guide strategic decisions and avoid problems encountered in similar developments in an earlier congregation.127 This Parson believes his approach has been effective in facilitating early congregational ownership and program effectiveness. He perceives, however, that the service is “too” identified with the congregation and therefore needs to be balanced with involvement from the wider community, possibly through the appointment of outside professionals to reference committees. The challenge confronting his congregation is to identify suitable outside professionals to invite into this congregational context. The Framework would assist this process through

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127 This information is derived from regular personal communication with the Parson concerned over the period of this research, the latest being 5 January 2004.
consideration of the features of the Networking operational dimension, and the need to work with the congregational culture.

9.4.2 Social Workers

The role of social work has taken a back-seat in this research as few social workers were found to be directly involved in most congregational community services. However, like other community professionals, social workers need to recognise the place of congregational community service activities and consider their professional relationship with them. This Framework can assist in the following ways.

1. Regardless of their work setting, social workers should not just assume congregations offer services to which certain referrals may be made (e.g. for emergency aid). Instead they should actively network with them so as to better understand and respect the work they are doing. As a tool, the Framework can assist social workers by helping identify the place of spirituality within their services, the particular goals as they reflect the congregational culture, the skills and capacities congregations bring, their relationship with other community services, and their particular blend of volunteer and professional cultures.

2. Social workers who develop an understanding of and respect for the community service work of congregations can act as consultants who support this development by sharing their professional knowledge. Further, social workers in social planning and community development roles need to incorporate congregations into new policy developments, seeing them as equal partners with other relevant community groups. Again the Framework is a tool to aid this understanding of congregations.

3. Social workers (and similar community professionals) associated with congregations often function as internal consultants, committee members and even as staff in the development and operation of congregational community services. The Framework is a tool which can aid them with these roles, including to recognise the limitations of purely formal, professional approaches. Likewise the Framework highlights both the potential and the risks for professional practitioners working in these services, encouraging them to adopt facilitative rather than controlling roles.
4. The involvement of congregations in community services reminds social workers that a spiritual dimension can be a crucial motivating factor in some people’s lives, even motivating them to initiate and participate in community services. Whilst this position is not always shared, its influence on those associated with congregational community services needs to be respected, for it is within this context that a wide range of local community services have had and, seemingly will continue to have, their genesis. This relevance of spirituality for some people may extend beyond the congregational service, whether as volunteers, service users, or professionals.

9.4.3 Church Agencies

Church agencies are sometimes said to represent the involvement of the church in the world. Unlike congregations, community service is undoubtedly their main role. However their operation is often dependent on contracts with government to provide certain services and meet certain performance criteria, whilst excluding any overtly religious input. By this means they have access to resources typically beyond a congregation’s community services capacity, but face restrictions less likely to apply in congregations. Partnerships of varying forms with congregations may well offer benefits for both, but these are rare. Indeed, central church-sponsored agencies defining statements at times fail to consider partnerships with even their own denominational congregations. Others have begun to grasp the potential of this link and are developing resources to promote these partnerships, although what this may normally constitute is far from clear.

It is crucial, however, that any partnerships developed genuinely recognise and respect the intrinsic attributes of congregations, among which are their potential for less formal and more flexible involvement, their access to supportive community with its various resources, and their stronger connection to the spirituality valued by

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128 The *Faith Foundations* statement of UnitingCare Australia, the combined community service of the Uniting Church of Australia, makes no mention of engagement with congregations.

129 Congregations are mentioned three times in the 2002 *Strategic Directions 2001-2005* statement of Anglicare Victoria, the Anglican Church of Australia’s community service agency in two Victorian dioceses. The first is under a goal concerning “Partners in care”; the second is under a recommendation concerning recruitment, training and monitoring of volunteers for “Parish Support”; and the third is under key activities addressing “parish based and community initiatives”. Another document outlines a small number of congregational community activities, although the nature of the implied partnership is not evident.
some workers and service users. Whilst help and support with administrative issues may well be relevant, the implications of any such arrangement for the congregation’s sense of ownership must be monitored. One implication of the Framework is that centralised control of congregational community involvement by church bodies may well be detrimental to congregational ownership (cf Best 2003), especially if this control is not strategically countered in a way which retains the congregation’s sense of ownership.

9.4.4 Social Policy

A recent British Home Office Report on community self-help indicated that perceptions of the suitability of congregations for government funding are now changing.

In many [disadvantaged communities] faith groups…will be the strongest around and yet their potential may be overlooked by funders and others engaged in programmes of community development. There can be a tendency not to see beyond the ‘faith’ label to the community role of these groups. There is also a tendency not to recognise the diversity of faith groups, many of which have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity (Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help 1999 p.21).

Such comments have encouraged governments to cultivate congregations as sources of community services. In Australia this has been more subtle than overt (though it hasn’t gone unnoticed, as the quotes on page 3 indicate; see also Carter 2000; Community Care Division 2000; Department of Family and Community Services 1999, 2000a; Radio National 2000c, 2000d; SBS Television 2000). In the US this has been more evident. The process began under the Reagan administration in 1983 (Wineburg 2001), and was formalised under the Clinton administration with the inclusion of the Charitable Choice provisions in the 1996 welfare reform legislation (Center for Public Justice 1996). It has now been extended by the present Bush administration through its creation of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives and the extension of Charitable Choice options to policy areas other than welfare reform (Bush 2001; Woodwell 2003). It is also being actively promoted by people within the faith community (e.g. Carlson-Thies 1999; Sider 1999; Sherman 1997b).

However warnings of the associated pitfalls with this policy are being raised by researchers such as Wineburg (2001), who concludes:
[T]he religious community can play an important part in local service provisions, but the expectations put on them are out of proportion to what they can actually deliver (p.2)…congregations should be considered precious community resources in a pool of caring public and nonprofit organisations but not the sole [emphasis in original] source…when one stops to think that religious congregations first provide a gathering spot for communal worship, it is amazing how such congregations muster the energy and spirit not only to help their own members but also to offer their facilities to their community…and reach out with money and service (p.169)…

The issue is not to see community service as something beyond the purview of religious congregations, but to be realistic about what they have and can offer, and the resources they need to offer it. This leads Wineburg to further suggests that “If localities want successful partnerships that include the faith community, it is crucial to find ways to learn how that community operates” (2001, p.140). The Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement can assist all stakeholders to better understand how the congregation operates as a community service provider.
10 Reviewing Potential Practice Pitfalls

Having closely examined the community involvement of the three research congregations, its extent appeared truly striking. Although no congregation was numerically large, with 13 to 21 identifiable activities each was clearly “reaching out beyond itself” however uncertainly, to local people with little or no overt association with its faith or spiritual life. The resources of each varied, but obviously much was being attempted on “shoe-string” budgets, with limited personnel. And clearly they contributed much to the overall well-being of their community.

As models of what church congregations across society contribute, they indicate a grassroots commitment among church-going people and the others in these services to improving the quality of life of various marginalised people within society. They may have various religiously-oriented agendas, but their achievements relate less to formal religious practice than it does to meeting the material, personal and social needs of those who seek their services. It seems these basic services, whose specific form seems instinctively to reflect needs within their surrounding community, are what congregations primarily adopt. Yet in doing so, they seem naturally to attempt to do so much with so little. Consequently, at the end of this research, my fascination with the involvement of congregations in community service provision as an aspect of society that remains too little recognised, has strengthened.

As this research began, the puzzle to understand concerned “why congregations get involved” in community service activities, “why they select the activities they do, how they operate these activities, and why they operate them as they do”\(^{130}\). The research therefore sought “to identify critical processes and decision points” which impacted on them, “the options for responding, and the dynamics of selecting and implementing particular ongoing responses”. The Framework which has emerged from the analysis provides a detailed model for grasping each of these.

However, undertaking this research also provided an opportunity to closely examine and extend my ongoing musing about the actual practice of congregational community involvement. This has highlighted other issues and potential pitfalls

\(^{130}\) See Chapter 3 on page 69.
suggesting recommendations concerning congregational community services which are worth noting. This chapter outlines these concerns.

10.1 Impacts on Congregations

Congregational community services are often pursued with enthusiasm by those committed to them. However, one pitfall is to overlook the potential impact of these on other aspects of congregational life. These impacts may change the pastoral availability of the Parson to congregational members because of the time they spend supporting the congregational community service. Likewise, a number of key lay leaders also redirect time and skills to the congregational service, and away from their previous congregational activities such as worship and spiritual nurture, a feature noted in all three research congregations.

Other impacts on congregational life include permanent allocation of parts of the congregation’s facility to the community service, additional utility costs and financial contributions to the community service from an otherwise tight budget, and a need for the congregation’s council to monitor the community service’s development. Finally, the existence of the community service not only sees people from outside the congregation regularly visit the congregation’s property, but also sees some join in other congregational activities. Whilst typically this is an aspiration of congregations when developing community services, comments in the research revealed that congregations too often have difficulty absorbing outsiders into their worshipping and community life, e.g. the influx of people with mental health issues that troubled members of Congregation A.

It is recommended that the congregation be advised of these potential impacts as they anticipate their sponsorship of community service activities. Some impacts may be absorbed because people share a conviction about the value of social ministries, some when the leaders mentor new leaders into roles they vacate for the new challenge. However, some impacts may require congregational training in responses such as developing relationships with people experiencing mental health problems. These various impacts may be readily addressed, but only if likely dilemmas are anticipated.


10.2 When Clergy Seek Too Much

The clergy role seems paramount, and this feature of congregations can lead to a pitfall in which clergy seek too much from congregations. Clergy can be either the instigators of community service developments, drawing in groups of people from their congregations, or the legitimisers of efforts by lay people to likewise develop services for their community. However, the experiences shared in this research suggest too few clergy understand their facilitative role and risk taking too much responsibility, as well as being too directive. When that occurs, natural leaders within congregations may conclude their clergy are asking too much, and then the influence of these same clergy can be curtailed quite suddenly.

Congregational cultures are seemingly quite resilient. They absorb much of the change that clergy seek when arriving as congregational outsiders for, in-built into most congregational cultures, is a high regard for the authority of clergy. But this adaptability exhibits a quite restricted range; should its boundaries be reached, and yet more be called forth than the congregation are prepared to give or believe they have the resources to give, they apparently revert to a self-protective strategy. Through reduced levels of cooperation, failure to implement agreed actions, and reduced levels of congregational availability, it is tacitly communicated to the clergy that the congregation will not support their request. Should compromise not resolve this difficulty, a period of clergy-lay leader conflict is likely to result.

It is recommended therefore that clergy adopt a facilitative, rather than controlling or directing role, for then these dilemmas are less likely to arise. Congregations may still be challenged to achieve goals they never anticipated, but at a pace the congregation and its natural leaders can grasp. The benefits of this approach are still to be grasped by many clergy, a task made more difficult because many lay people readily acquiesce to their leadership and, indeed, expect the clergy to provide it. Finding the balance between these two contrary expectations of congregations toward clergy and their role is, perhaps, a skill that clergy, as outsiders to the congregations they lead, need to acquire. The emphasis, however, concerns working with, rather than against, the congregational culture.
10.3 Worker Overload

Because congregational community services operate with restricted financial resources, and with significant dependence on volunteers, including volunteer clergy and other professionals, it appears that excessive pressure is experienced by many committed to the vision, whether paid or not. This dilemma was reported in all three research congregations, as well as by a number of professional respondents. The pitfall in allowing such excessive workloads to remain is clearly that keen and committed people risk burnout, and therefore risk being lost to the community services that the congregation offer, and even to the life of the congregation itself. In addition, overwork and burnout impact on the psychological and physical health of the workers concerned, and has serious implications for their family and other commitments.131

Whilst it seemed from this research that little attention was formally given to preventing burnout, respondents nonetheless suggested ways of preventing this degree of overload. Recommendations adapted from their suggestions include:

1. Roles within congregational community services, whether voluntary or paid, should be clearly defined, with identifiable boundaries to each person’s responsibilities. Whilst there needs to be some flexibility, people should have a clear grasp of what they are taking on, and where their agreed responsibility ends. Variations should be negotiated, but not presumed, as the service adjusts to the various influences on it (adapted from Social Workers 2, 3 and 8).

2. People commencing work in a congregational community service, whether paid or voluntary and particularly when in their own congregation, should be paired with a more experienced person as a mentor. Such an arrangement enables the experienced worker to share their practice wisdom as they offer support, and the new worker to gain professional support from someone who understands the context. This can include debriefing after particularly stressful experiences (adapted from Social Workers 4 and 7).

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131 These aspects are discussed more fully within the context of the data on pages 173f & 180f in relation to both volunteers and professional staff (including clergy).
3. The culture within the congregation and the community service should be respectfully modified to legitimate people’s prerogative to maintain boundaries to their involvement, rather than be left feeling they must respond to every request or concern that arises (adapted from Social Workers 2 and 3, and Congregation C Document 24).

4. All workers should receive regular supervision from an appropriate person of their choice within the organisation, so that any issues of concern about how the community service operates can be voiced confidentially before being considered for inclusion on a staff meeting agenda. When job satisfaction is at risk, role variations to resolve this difficulty should be negotiable with an administrative supervisor (adapted from Congregation A’s Parishioner C).

5. Training and/or staff development relevant to workers roles, whether voluntary or paid, should be included in workplace conditions so that workers can seek input which ensures they maintain a sense of competence, and that they receive support and are not just ‘giving out’ (adapted from Social Worker 3, Congregation B Counsellor C, and Congregation C Document 24).

6. People involved with the community service should receive the affirmation of the congregation through acknowledgment in annual commissioning services, and spiritual support consistent with the spirituality of that congregation, e.g. prayer support (adapted from Social Worker 8).

These recommendations may move the Culture of Operation a little towards a more professional approach, but given the purpose is to retain the enthusiasm of workers, and that it is developed in agreement with them and meets the congregation’s duty of care to its voluntary and paid staff, there is potential for the voluntary culture to be enhanced rather than diminished. Loss of workers through burnout leads to loss of valuable voluntary resources (as Congregation A and Social Worker 7 clearly experienced) and personnel who risk becoming disillusioned with all congregational activities (as noted by Social Worker 7).
10.4 Owning the Service and its Staff

Developing community services within a congregation, and gaining formal approval for these developments, readily leads committed participants into the pitfall of presuming the whole congregation concurs with and is behind the effort. What is clear, especially with Congregation B, is that this is not so. People do not always see these sorts of activities as relevant to their spiritual life, even if a dominant group within the congregation views it that way. Others simply don’t have the time to participate or take in what is happening with the community service development.

It is, therefore, recommended that ownership be actively promoted within the congregation from the earliest possible opportunity. Whilst excessive promotion would risk people feeling the service might be taking over their congregational life, it should be undertaken in ways which keep the congregation’s association with its community service activities to the fore. The research clearly noted approaches such as pewsheet notices, occasional announcements, posters on noticeboards, and invitations to participate were of value. Other options included Thanksgiving Services for the community service and staff, inclusion in congregational prayers, congregationally-sponsored community awareness-raising events, as well as the affirmation of links to the congregation through the appointment of suitable congregational members to key roles. It may also include locating the service on the congregational property so that the link is evident.

Ownership, as meant here, is not essentially about legal sponsorship, but about identification with the community service activities. It does not necessarily involve financial contributions, though it may, but rather an intrinsic sense that these community activities are an integral part of what it means for the congregation to be a people of faith in their locality and which therefore deserve support as opportunity arises. Without this sense of ownership congregational support with its associated spiritual connections may well be unintentionally lost.

10.5 Isolated Services

Unless community service development occurs because of influence from a partner agency, the enthusiasm for developing a congregational service seems to presume it has the capacity to essentially “stand alone”. However, this pitfall involves little
thought being given to the service’s relationship with other community agencies, thus risking its isolation from other local community service agencies. This was especially obvious in Congregation A where links seemed tenuous at best, and in Congregation B where links depended more on fortuitous personal connections.

Because all community services have limitations in what they can offer service users, and because the many agencies in the same locality encounter related issues with often the same service users, it is strongly recommended that the risk of community isolation be avoided by intentionally building relationships with the staff of other relevant community services. Without this, effective referral of service users between services can be difficult, for successful referrals often require good knowledge of what other agencies offer, who offers it, and how it is provided. Such information is only available when a relationship exists between workers in the various community agencies leading to a level of trust in and respect for each other, and the work of the agencies.

It is further recommended, therefore, that workers from congregational community services adopt two strategies to facilitate inter-agency links:

1. Relevant workers from the congregational community service should actively visit other agencies to introduce themselves to the relevant staff, enquire about the services offered and the processes by which they are accessed, and begin to form a less formal, personal contact with the agency staff; and

2. Staff from the congregational community service should actively participate in various inter-agency meetings covering the types of services within the locality that they offer, or with which they need to liaise. Whilst at times these meetings may seem fruitless, their fundamental benefit is not the information formally exchanged, but the quality of relationships and informal exchange that is developed.

Both these responses need to be integrated into the processes by which activities are provided within congregational community service, rather than being seen as optional extras to address if time permits. Once developed, these linkages can enable many cooperative efforts addressing more complex issues, such as the support needs of people with mental health problems. Congregation C’s modelling of this through its active links with the nearby hospital illustrate the effectiveness of these
approaches. Such links then facilitate effective information exchange related to consenting service users, should that need arise.

### 10.6 Key Person Replacement

It is evident that at least some key people who initiate congregational community services are linked to the congregation. While this connection exists, these people tend to “embody” the identification of the congregation with the community service. However, as identified in the research, when any key person who incorporates that link departs, the congregational community service is confronted with a potential pitfall. It is often presumed that the vacant role need only be filled by a person with the relevant expertise. However, the research considered reasons this was not so. Essentially, any appointee who simply identifies with their role in the community service is unlikely to effectively link with either the congregation sponsoring it, or with its spiritual foundation. Such an appointment may then risk the active identification of the congregation with the service, an identification which could easily dissipate if a reduced link develops.

It is therefore recommended that when certain key positions need new appointees, the importance of that position for the links between the congregation and the community service be considered. Ideally, a congregation will mentor people who may then be appointed to certain roles (e.g. community service committee treasurer or secretary), or even challenge and support appropriate congregational members to obtain relevant professional qualifications, to ensure their availability at a later time. However, a compromise would be to appoint a person who understands the congregational link and is willing to facilitate it, either by joining the congregation, as some Pastoral Care staff in Congregation C did, or at least is willing to actively engage with members of the congregation. For any appointee to view the congregational community service as independent of the congregation, whether it legally is or not, is to prompt a drift of the service away from the congregation. If a suitable appointee cannot be found, then the wider church network so effectively

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132 In the course of this research I was informed about a congregational member who personally undertook marriage counsellor training so that she would be qualified to apply for the marriage counselling position within her congregation’s community service. Early in the establishment of that service, its links with the congregation became tenuous, but when this person applied for and was appointed to the position, these links were quickly re-established.
used by Congregation B to obtain its volunteer professional counsellors, should be activated to locate a suitable person.

Whilst this requirement should only apply to certain positions, it is a crucial issue as the active link between congregation and community service depends on these key appointments, as illustrated with the appointment of Congregation C’s second Coordinator. They are not simply professional appointments, for the integrity of the congregation-community service link is tied to these.

Such appointments also need to be considered when outside funding provides for the appointment of new staff in the service. With such funds it may seem any qualified and experienced professional could meet the position requirements. However, this would be a pitfall as the link with the congregation is a strategic matter, and should not be overlooked. Again, it is recommended that where it is necessary to appoint an outsider, the job description include a role which actively links the position to both the congregation and its spiritual orientation, in order to strategically support congregational involvement. Without that, new appointees may well implement a vision that contrasts with the congregation’s and which takes the service further from the links and resources the congregation seeks to provide. Such was the experience noted by Social Worker 9.

### 10.7 The Dilemma of Funding

Given the limited financial resources of typically-sized congregations forming the focus of this research, it is not surprising that, as demands for services grow and as opportunities arise, congregational community services would seek to enhance their financial base through funding agreements with government. In Australia, with limited funding from philanthropic trusts, untied grants from other external sources are scarce, likely to be small when compared with funding needs, and therefore an inadequate income source.

Obtaining grants from government, and similar funding sources, may seem like a boon to most congregational community services but, unfortunately, there are a number of pitfalls touched on in the research which are associated with these arrangements.
1. The submission process, typically very competitive in this era, involves considerable time for preparation and meeting all eligibility requirements, as was reported by Congregation C.

2. The more substantial grants, especially from government, typically incorporate restrictions and substantial accountability obligations. These may involve considerable effort, including the need to learn new computer software. They may also require information from service users that is unrelated to actual involvement with them, so interfering with the worker’s relationship with the service user, and way of working together.

3. The funding provided rarely is adequate for covering the costs of the services to be offered through that agreement, so leaving the congregational service facing a funding shortfall. In addition, it is rare for the basic administrative costs to be covered by the funding contract, hence the administration cost would be borne by the congregational service.

4. These grants are not reliable for governments tend to provide funds for one to three years and, as priorities change, or the preferred services alter, funds may abruptly terminate. Congregational community services are then confronted with either changing their focus to meet new funding guidelines, as Social Worker 1 noted, or struggling along without funding to maintain the service on behalf of its service users.

Whilst it would be easy to recommend, as Social Worker 1 did, that these funding sources should be avoided, it is likely that, as Congregation C found, such a view would need to be reconsidered to develop certain aspects of the vision for the community service. It therefore seems wiser to recommend that congregational community services approach such funding sources “with their eyes open” to what it entails. With access to appropriately skilled people to help with submissions and keep the records, the practical difficulties may be overcome. However, the conditions attached to funding grants need to be constantly monitored for, should they change in ways not consistent with the community service’s goals, then funding should not be accepted, regardless of the apparent consequences. Congregational community services must always be prepared to reject funding which imposes unacceptable conditions or requires services to be provided in way inconsistent with its own goals and values.
Another pitfall associated with the limited funding base of most congregational community services is a tendency to ration services so that all potential service users are able to access a little, as was particularly evident with Congregation A’s emergency relief activity. The question has to be asked if this is actually beneficial to the service user, or whether an inadequate support may risk generating responses that are not in anyone’s best interests. Clearly, a more complete service is better, and in offering services to the community, congregations need to consider how they offer it in an adequate and effective way. It is recommended that partnership arrangements with other relevant services be examined in order to overcome shortfalls in service provision which may be detrimental to service users. For example, in my experience, emergency relief offered in isolation is rarely adequate. Unless a process that enables people to access more dignified and effective services able to address the cause of the financial dilemma are at hand, e.g. financial counselling, then emergency relief risks generating a dependency on emergency relief, for which service users are then often criticised. An alternative would be to provide a more adequate service until the relevant resources were fully utilised, and then cease to offer that service. That then has the advantage of providing a basis for arguing that there is a need for more adequate resourcing of such services. This at least promotes awareness of all the issues involved, instead of hiding the real dilemma.

10.8 Defaulting to Secular

When the promoters of congregational services presume that the spirituality of the congregation will be inherent in their community service, it seems they risk the pitfall of eventually seeing their community service “default to secular”. This risk occurs because, until the 1990’s, spirituality had been excluded from most professional models of practice. Hence, if a congregational community service is not clear about the implications of being sponsored by a faith community, the spirituality which is presumed to undergird it may well just simply dissipate.

Although the theological statement from Congregation C (included as Appendix 11) offers one way to address this risk, such statements only have value if they are genuinely the product of the group associated with the service, and used by them as a guide. Whilst I would recommend such statements be created for congregational community services that value them, I would consider more effective
recommendations are to encourage prayer support from the congregation, seek volunteer and professional support from congregational members and people from the wider church, and actively promote congregational ownership in the ways already noted. Unless there is an intention to facilitate the community service’s transition to a stand-alone secular service, albeit a potentially legitimate aim, then its spiritual undergirding needs to be affirmed and nurtured. In this era in which spirituality is once again finding public affirmation, to let a congregationally-sponsored community service become secular by default seems to overlook the likely aspiration of the people associated with it for an identifiably spiritual context.

This cannot, however, be taken to imply that a particular religious position should be required of those who participate in the service. Whilst this may be the fear of some, what is recommended here involves respect for whatever spiritual understanding the person brings. Whilst spirituality may well be an aspect of discussion, the response sought is for people from the congregation to be affirmed in their spiritual undergirding of the community service through, for example, prayer support for staff and those who seek their assistance. Some may want to see the services used for evangelism, although the process Congregation C went through to review that goal is indicative of the contradiction such an approach entails. Here what is sought is validation of the congregation’s spiritual identity and practice, and not imposition on anyone of any particular form of spirituality.

### 10.9 Openness to Outsiders

Whilst the importance of the involvement of congregationally-related people in community service activities of congregations has been affirmed in this discussion, this is not to suggest that others should not be involved. Indeed the experience of all three research congregations is that their staffing team of professionals and volunteers incorporated a mix of people from the congregation, from other religious backgrounds, and with no overt religious affiliation.

Clearly, such people bring needed resources to such programs and share many of the same values of social acceptance, care and justice as people from congregations. In addition, it would be a pitfall to view congregational community service provision as the exclusive prerogative of those identifying with the sponsoring congregation. It is
therefore recommended that anyone available be able to participate in whatever roles within a congregation’s community service for which they are suitable.

An issue arises, however, when the participation of such people undercuts the public affirmation of the congregational link to the extent that its spiritual undergirding ceases to be affirmed, recognised or even seen as important. At such a time, the community service can hardly be reflective of the involvement of that faith community in its locality, for the service would appear to have metamorphosed into a secular local service with a few religiously-affiliated people participating. Should this occur, then either the congregation needs to review its links with the service and the meaning of its sponsorship, or it needs to reactivate the ownership strategies outlined elsewhere. To retain and/or regain a meaningful sense of ownership, certain key positions may need to be re-linked with the congregation, e.g. the CEO, especially in this era when clergy no longer typically fill such positions.

The issue is a matter of balance between wider community participants and those embodying the link with the congregation. To obtain a creative and respectful balance requires strategic decision-making; to ignore the issue is likely to support a secularisation of the community service by default.

10.10 Summary

The nine concerns discussed here were presented because, in the analysis from which the Framework emerged, these were matters that clearly troubled many of the informants. As such, they provided clear examples of how the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement helped focus complex issues and influences that impact on the development and operation of these community services. Each concern can be located within the Framework, and influences which promote movement of the operating culture towards one extreme in preference to the other in any given dimension can be readily identified. That assists with then strategically identifying the influences needed to balance out any undesired movement. It is on this basis that recommendations can be derived for situations such as those considered. In this way the Framework offers a practical guide for addressing the concerns that arise with the development of community services in local church congregations.
Conclusion

This research project began in 1995 with a recognition that local church congregations were involved in providing community services, but the scant knowledge then available tended to be too anecdotal, theoretical, ideological and incomplete. The early international literature identified little that directly, systematically or adequately examined what it was that congregations were doing in the community or how they went about doing it. What was available in Australia was even more limited and incomplete.

However, unexpectedly, this study commenced at the same time as a burst of congregationally-related research in the US and, to a lesser extent, in the UK. Hence, from 1995 onwards, the literature became steadily more prolific, and related significantly to the social policy debates about government funding of congregational community services in the US and, with less intensity, the UK. The emerging understanding presented a more wide-ranging and consistent view of the extent of congregational involvement in community services, their contribution to the social capital of their localities, and some factors which impacted on their involvement.

What was not clearly emerging, however, was a comprehensive framework derived from congregations themselves for understanding their process of involvement, the issues they had to address to stay involved, and what led to their involvement changing. Instead, what did exist was derived from other nonprofit studies, studies of congregations which had been offered funds and procedures to develop community services, or descriptions of individual cases, rather than any quest for common trends. In Australia in particular, no literature was found that identified any process for directly understanding congregational community service involvement.

This research sought to fill that gap in understanding by using a grounded theory methodology to identify a framework which clarified how congregations initiate, operate and modify their community service involvement. It sought data from four sets of informants – professionals with experience at the interface of church and community service provision; stakeholders in the services offered by two different congregations; and documents progressively drafted as records of the development of a third congregational community service program. Thematic analysis of this data led
to the elaboration of the *Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement* as an integrated way of understanding this process.

Insights drawn from this *Framework* highlight certain aspects of congregational community service involvement including the place of congregational culture in their development and operation, the way in which professional and voluntary ideals are blended idiosyncratically as the basis for their operation, and the importance of ownership by the congregation when crucial decisions and other changes impact on the way they work. These implications are then seen as applying not only to congregations, but also to social workers who relate to congregations professionally and/or personally, central church agencies which have tended to overlook the potential of partnerships with congregations, and wider social policy which currently risks unrealistic expectations of congregations whilst reversing a previous tendency to entirely overlook their contribution. Finally, the practical value of analysing concerns related to congregational community services are illustrated through particular pitfalls clearly evident within that analysis, and offering recommendations which seek to strategically balance the respective influences.

No doubt there is much more to learn about congregations and their community service involvements, and much more that could be elicited from the *Framework* which has been derived. However, having reached the end of this nine-year journey into discovering how congregational community services operate, the more urgent challenge is now to apply the insights gained.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: SOME KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

This is a brief summary of insights identified in a detailed literature review presented in Chapter 2. An earlier version, here updated, formed the conclusion to a presentation of the literature related to congregational community services given at a seminar in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Melbourne University in Jul 1998.

1. Congregations ARE involved in Community Service Activities, even though their prevalence and diversity seems uncertain.
2. Community involvements are undertaken either within the congregation, through partnerships of congregations, or via coalitions with other community or church organisations.
3. These activities are often unrecognised within both the wider community and even the congregation, undertaken quietly, and not well understood.
4. Different congregations have different approaches in their orientation to community involvement, reflecting different understandings of their spiritual purposes and relationship to the community.
5. The processes for initiating and operating programs are not well understood, beyond identifying that clergy play pivotal but otherwise ambiguous roles in their initiation and operation.
6. Clergy and congregations can at times be in conflict over these involvement.
7. Congregational community activities may sometimes clash with the surrounding local culture.
8. Different congregations will respond in different ways to social changes in their surrounding community.
9. There is a high dependence on volunteers but in some programs professional helpers have key roles.
10. The roles volunteers undertake, and the intensity of those roles, vary.
11. Professional social work staff working with congregations may experience role confusion and role strain due to contested role expectations.
12. Outside professionals can work with congregations but need to be respectful of the ethos and understanding within them.
13. Promoting congregational community engagement can lead to internal congregational conflict.

14. Theological orientation does not play a definitive role, but a willingness to understand the activity within the dominant theological framework is crucial to its development.

15. When facilitated appropriately, congregations are capable of developing more community service involvement than clergy typically anticipate.

16. Experience with supportive community roles may sensitise congregational volunteers to issues requiring structural change.

17. Congregational programs are embedded into and affected by the nature and changes of their local communities.

18. Congregations determine the focus of their community engagement from their own direct or indirect experience of social issues.

19. Congregations incorporate their religious or spiritual dimensions into their community services in a range of ways.

20. Governance patterns of congregational community services tend to change over an organisational lifecycle, which may include loss of the congregational link.

21. Congregations provide the outside community with resources otherwise not available, but within their own cultural frame via bridging personnel.

22. Congregations develop leadership which can then be expressed within engagement with the wider community.
Appendix 2: INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS STAGE 1

Ian Bedford
3 Briar St.
BORONIA VIC 3155
(03)9761 3554

27 June, 1995

Dear

As you may already be aware, either from a recent contact we have had or through “leakage” on the “grape vine”, I am presently beginning a research project with the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne on “Social Work and Welfare Practice in Local Church Settings”. This is being undertaken as I was granted an Australian Post-Graduate Award in order to study for a Ph.D. I have chosen this area of research for a number of reasons:-

1. Prior to taking up an academic position with La Trobe University, local church settings have been the context of my 11 years of direct practice. These settings have therefore been ones in which I have perceived both a great potential from a social work and a faith community perspective, and experienced considerable frustration in realising this potential, so leaving me at times wondering about its realism;

2. As has been confirmed during my attendance at the recent National Anglican Caring Organisations Network Conference, there is a widely held belief among both those seeking to promote lay ministry and community involvement in congregations, and those within central-church sponsored agencies and programs seeking to promote greater links to their church “roots”, that congregational participation in welfare services and community development activities can be facilitated with mutual benefits; and

3. In this era of privatisation of government services with its program funding processes being increasingly channelled into competitive tendering by and contracting of community-based agencies, the long history of church participation in welfare services is likely to see more initiative from church bodies in applying for these highly constrained funds, including from local church groups which identify particular concerns within their own local situation.

For me, these reasons and their broadly related corollaries (community development, empowerment, social justice, volunteer, informal support networks, community-based management, program development and evaluation, pastoral care, and class, age and gender issues) make this project one of particular relevance to the practice of social work and related caring professions within local churches where the essence of what it might mean to be an “incarnational faith community” needs to be considered in practical ways. I therefore do not see this as a project to be undertaken “merely” in order to obtain a Ph.D.

At the end of the research I would expect to identify a broad understanding of the issues likely to arise as this process of welfare practice within a local church is pursued by those concerned with it. From this, I anticipate deriving a set of practice guidelines relating to the dilemmas and opportunities facing these groups of people:-

- local churches wishing to develop various community ministries,
- social workers and other caring professionals considering employment or already employed in local church programs,
- executive and service delivery personnel of more centralised church agencies wishing to develop facilitative and/or supportive links with local church activity, and
personnel in local community-based and government agencies finding a need to liaise with local church-based activities.

However, in order to ensure the project remains grounded in the realities of the practice settings and relevant to these groups of people I would like to invite you to consider being involved with me in either or both of TWO initial steps in this project:

a) in a brief, open-ended interview in which we explore together the focus you see this research question needing in order for its outcomes to be of use to you as a social worker with a church linkage; and/or

b) as a “Critical Reference Group” member who, from time to time, assists the on-going research process through reviewing the progressive research analysis and interpretation and through feedback on the literature discussions which form part of the research process (these “discussions” may occur through individual feedback on drafts and other progressively written output with, perhaps, an occasional meeting for discussion with others able to make that additional time available).

It is my hope that around 8 to 10 interested colleagues would make themselves available to participate with me and “hold me accountable” in this way. I would also anticipate that involvement would mean that I am able to provide you with input on a range of recent “thinking” and discussion about a number of current practice issues which have bearing on this broad topic - eg. current social policy implications, volunteerism, organisational behaviours, program design and evaluation, gender issues in organisations and practice settings, management of non-government organisations, pastoral care and community development models for current practice, and the spiritual component of social work, to name a few.

Please understand that this is an invitation only. In order to ensure that you fully understand what I am asking of you, I propose that I ring you or meet with you in the next few weeks to discuss the project and this request. If you should be interested in accepting my invitation, it is a requirement of the Ethics Committee Approval given to this stage of the project that you confirm your voluntary and informed participation by signing a consent form, a copy of which is enclosed and includes a more complete statement of this phase of the project. However we can discuss this further when I ring.

If, even at this stage, you find my request either inappropriate or impractical for whatever reason, I trust you will readily let me know and we will take the matter no further.

Trusting all is well for you at this time and looking forward to being in touch in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Bedford

NOTE: Yoland Wadsworth in her book *Do It Yourself Social Research* [VCOSS & Melbourne Family Care, 1984:8] defines a “Critical Reference Group” as “those the research is for (to help meet their interests, solve their problems etc)” and suggests the researcher meets with members of that group in order to discover whether “people see things the same way” or “want to modify the idea” (p 14).
Appendix 3: CONSENT FORM FOR PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN STAGE 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Name of participant: ___________________________________________________

Project Title: Social Work and Welfare Practice in Local Church Settings - First Phase

Name of Investigators: Dr Elizabeth Ozanne (Supervisor) and Mr Ian Bedford (Graduate Student)

1. I consent to participating in the above project, the particulars of which have been explained to me as outlined in the following attachment which I acknowledge having read.

2. I agree to the researcher interviewing me in the manner indicated on the attachment and to then use the content of that interview as information upon which a thematic analysis is undertaken.

3. I acknowledge that:
   a) The project is for the purposes of identifying the focus of a later phase in the overall research project and will only be used within that context.
   b) I understand all specific information will be confidential and anonymous as a matter of normal procedure but that, if the minimally necessary contextual information is thought likely to undermine this anonymity and confidentiality, I will be given the right to have that data deleted from any publication arising from this research.
   c) I am fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from involvement at any time for any reason whatsoever and that any information I have provided which can reasonably be deleted from the then existing stage of analysis will be removed if I so request.
   d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of all tape recordings and transcripts will be safeguarded by ensuring that they will only be available to the investigators and their research assistants.

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
(Participant)

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
(Witness to consent)
ATTACHMENT to CONSENT FORM

Project Title

The role of Social Work in developing and supporting community service involvement in local church congregations - First Phase

Project Statement

1. Aim and Significance:-

Following on from the researcher’s own social work practice context, the overall aim of this research is to identify the various issues which may be encountered by social workers who become involved with the development of local church community service activities or who seek to support and help maintain those activities. It is thereby hoped to be able to also identify some guidelines by which church people and social workers in various work settings (local church based, central church agency based, other local agency based) might be best able to extend the strengths of those activities whilst minimising their problems. With recent government moves to privatise services, growing interest in some churches for community involvement, and a greater concern in central church agency for realistic links with their local church support networks, this research is considered timely and relevant.

In order to ensure the research question construction is actually relevant to those for whom the research is intended, the first phase of the project aims to identify the particular focus that the project needs to have in order for the final outcomes to address the concerns of social workers and others concerned with the development and support of local church community service activities. This phase is important in ensuring that the specific research topic, its methodology and the issues it thereby explores are actually relevant as intended. The later second phase of the project, for which a separate ethics committee approval will be sought, will then consider in more detail the overall project aims and methods.

2. Methodology:-

The overall approach to this research project will be to use a “grounded theory” qualitative research methodology with a broad spectrum of interviewees who have a various experiences with local church community service programs. In addition data would also be gathered from a small number of programs currently in operation and might include document studies, participant observation as well as interviews.

In preparation for this intensive phase of the project, this first phase will seek information from a group of about 10 key informants, mainly social worker trained people, who have had a range of associations with church-based community service activities. Some are parish clergy; some have been social workers and executive officers within church-based programs, including centralised church agencies; some have been workers in local agencies which link in with church programs; some have been executive officers within government bodies which oversee and fund community activities, including church based community activities; some are adherents to local churches; some have worked as coordinators and/or service deliverers in local church programs (my own former roles); and most have experience in a combination of these roles.
This information will then be examined for themes in its content using basic qualitative data analysis techniques (see Taylor and Bogdan, 1984 *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: The Search for Meanings* (Second edition), New York, Wiley for a brief summary) so that the focus of information collection from a wider group of people may be considered for the more extensive, second phase of the project (which will be the subject of a later, separate application for ethics committee approval).

3. Requirements of participants:

On the basis of their experience participants will be asked to discuss the questions which they consider need answers and the issues which they think need to be explored in the second phase of this project for the research outcome to offer practical assistance for them in their work with and/or in church settings. This approach is both consistent with “Grounded Theory” qualitative methodology and with an approach to social research which seeks to empower those whose concerns the research seeks to examine (see Yoland Wadsworth *Do It Yourself Social Research* VCOSS & Melbourne Family Care, 1984).

These participants will also be invited to form a critical reference group who can provide feedback on the overall research process and the practice relevance of the developing analysis, interpretation and literature review. This will not involve any expectation of responsibility for the research, and is merely a means for ensuring the researcher remains grounded in the practice issues of the research concern.

4. Procedure:

Participants will be invited to engage in an unstructured interview which will be tape recorded in order to provide the information for the content analysis. This initial interview with its limited focus is not expected to take more than half an hour. Notes taken during this interview, the tape recording and any transcript or notes subsequently made of this interview will only be available to the researchers and their research assistants unless specific permission otherwise is sought and given by the participant concerned. Likewise the content will not be used in any potentially identifiable way, unless permission is sought and given.

Further discussion and involvement in the research project will be by subsequent arrangement and no obligation is given or expected. This may include group discussions with others involved in this first phase if time and circumstances permit.
Appendix 4: INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS STAGE 2

Ian Bedford
3 Briar St.
BORONIA VIC 3155
(03)9761 3554

29 April 1996

Dear {Prospective Informant’s Name}

As you now know from {If relevant, Name of Linking Third Person}, I am a social worker who is presently undertaking research with the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. My study is on “Social Work and Welfare Practice in Local Church Settings”. I am undertaking this study as a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy qualification. I have chosen this area of research because I have worked for 11 years as a social worker in local church family support programs. I want to know more about the best way to work in the services local churches often want to provide to their communities and how social workers might best contribute to these activities.

I understand from {If relevant, Name of Linking Third Person} that you have had some experience with a local church agency or service and that your insights into that might be useful in my study.

Consequently, I write to invite you to participate with me in a brief, open-ended interview {OR a small group discussion with others with whom you are connected in this experience} in which we discuss together aspects of your particular experience. Should you agree, I would like to tape record the information you give me so that, later on, I can more accurately use its themes and ideas to learn more about the ways these local church helping programs work and the issues they need to take into account. I will do this by comparing your information with what others give me and look for common ideas and concerns. I will also eventually compare it with what’s been written elsewhere by other social workers, clergy and researchers and again look for common concerns and ideas. Your name or other personal details will not be needed for the actual writing involved with this study, however I will return to you a copy of any notes I make from any interview I do with you so that you know what information from you I might use.

If you are willing I would like to make direct contact with you in the next couple of days to explain my invitation and answer any questions you might have about my project. If you are then willing to participate in this way I need you to fill in the attached Consent Form before we start as I am required by the Ethics Committee from the University to confirm that your participation is both voluntary and informed.

Even if, at this stage, you are not interested or are unavailable for whatever reason I ask that you let me know when I contact you and I will trouble you no further.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Bedford
Appendix 5: CONSENT FORM FOR PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN STAGE 2

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Name of informant: ____________________________________________________

Project Title: Social Work and Welfare Practice in Local Church Settings

Name of Investigators: Dr Elizabeth Ozanne (Supervisor) and Mr Ian Bedford (Graduate Student)

1. I consent to participating in the above project, the particulars of which have been explained to me as outlined in the letter of invitation which I acknowledge having read.

2. I agree to the researcher interviewing me in the manner indicated in the letter and to then use the content of that interview as information upon which a thematic analysis is undertaken.

3. I acknowledge that:
   a) The project is for researching the above topic only and the information I give will be used solely in relation to that.
   b) I understand all specific information will be confidential and anonymous as a matter of normal procedure but that, should any necessary summary description be thought likely to undermine this anonymity and confidentiality, I will be given the right to have that data deleted from any publication arising from this research.
   c) I am fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from involvement at any time for any reason whatsoever and that any information I have provided which can reasonably be deleted from the then existing stage of analysis will be removed if I so request.
   d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of all tape recordings and transcripts will be safeguarded by ensuring that they will only be available to the investigators, authorised School of Social Work staff and any research assistants.

Signature __________________________________________ Date ____________
(Informant)

Signature __________________________________________ Date ____________
(Witness to consent)

Where informant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of ___________________________ in the above project

Signature of Parent or Guardian _________________________ Date ____________
(If informant under 18 years of age)
Appendix 6: FIRST STAGE DATA ANALYSIS DEC 1998

Stage 1 Data

Broad thematic or Open Coding (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of the data transcribed from the 13 Stage 1 interviews identified 14 issues of concern to the respondents in the light of their experience of and reflection on the interface between congregations and their community service involvements. In further examining each of the issues, following the Grounded Theory approach to Axial Coding (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), these 14 issues were then re-coded separately to identify the properties and dimensions of these issues. This approach gave an understanding of the range of options that might be associated with each of the issues in any given setting. What follows examines each issue and its dimensions separately.

1. Congregational Approach to their Community

Congregational approach to their community was defined as a congregation’s view of its focus for linking with the wider community. As a major issue with respondents, 4 possible broad views were identified: an insular view in which the focus of the congregation was its own spiritual life and nurture devoid of any intentional link with its local community; a locality view in which a congregation focused primarily on ways to respond to issues within its local community; a justice view which saw congregations focus on certain social concerns in their community and, also, on structural factors generating those social concerns; and a formal service provider view in which a congregation focuses on their capacity to provide a formally organised, professional service under contract with funding bodies (usually government). The focus evident within a congregation influenced the involvement a particular congregation had in its local community. However respondents did not suggest congregations would necessarily exhibit unanimity of views on choice of focus, and did not suggest only one option was possible.

One respondent, a social worker who by the time of interview had become a parish clergyman, identified the insular view as “everything that I saw wrong with churches that are irrelevant”, whilst another, a social worker involved in voluntary community work with a local church, saw these as churches more focused on “building up people in their faith” whilst not seeing that process in any way linked to caring activities within the local community. Yet another respondent, a social worker who had also become a clergyman but who, at the time of interview, was working as the executive officer of a faith-based agency, identified a trend towards “private religion” that divorced “word and action” and a trend towards congregations being in “survival mode”. He also noted that “they’re not into
anything else but keeping the doors open”. All respondents who identified this view did so with a measure of ambivalence if not outright consternation, not surprising given the basis for their selection.

The justice view was, surprisingly, directly noted on only one occasion by a respondent who, as a community agency social worker based in a locality where they did not reside, commented that they found that some local congregations, were willing to become involved in issues of social justice. However it was also recognised that this involvement was mainly through the congregational clergy.

The service provider view was identified by a social worker who, as the executive officer of a central church-sponsored agency, commented that congregations faced “a host of deterents” when considering service delivery contracts with funding bodies. These contracts, it was stated, required congregations entering into complex funding, employment and supervision arrangements. As a consequence this respondent considered it reasonable that congregations would then “leave it to the agencies” which could more easily “tack it on” rather than facing the need to address all these aspects of formal service provision themselves. Nonetheless four respondents discussed their experience of being involved as employees and/or as committee members in congregationally-based formal service delivery programs. However the relationship of these experiences to the overall focus of the congregations concerned was not identified.

The locality view however dominated the data collected. This view clearly identified that congregations were making a wide variety of responses to issues encountered within their local community. The analysis indicated these were focused on by congregations in 4 ways.

- **Informal networks** within congregations which were “semi-official” and more about neighbourliness or being “like an extended family” and which, in many settings, are “driven by the individual”, a person with a particular vision. One respondent, a social worker who had been a denominational consultant in parish-based community work, saw these congregational visionaries much in need of encouragement including through being linked to other congregational visionaries.

- **Outreach programs** that involve members of congregations organising activities designed to reach out into the local community with a response to a particular need. These activities may be intended as evangelistic at least in part (i.e. providing an opportunity for the particular beliefs of the congregations to be shared overtly with others from outside that congregation), or they may be seen as an opportunity for church people to act with care and compassion to those in need in the wider community.

- It was noted by one respondent that some congregations saw this caring response as the church becoming “more like a social club”. However another respondent, an agency executive officer,
commented that the location of a community house on congregational property alongside and physically attached to the church meant that, even without overt statements about spiritual issues, there was an implicit link made for any who participated in the house program. This respondent also noted this link became explicit when participants asked about it. This response was also echoed by another social worker who worked in a congregationally-based family support agency and who was an active member of that same congregation. However, in this setting, clients of the program who wished to explore the link were said to view the congregation a “caring extended family” offering a wider set of relationships than the initial professional relationship offered. This respondent also noted that in these settings the congregation needed “strong support...from the agency” to sustain that experience. Another respondent linked that concern for support to the volunteer basis for this congregational involvement.

- A further feature identified by yet another respondent was that many church people wanting to be involved in outreach activities were “not used to working in any of those fields” and brought to that involvement “baggage...of background, attitudes, values” that made coping with some outreach activities hard (the example given was the lack of gratefulness expressed by many participants of a homeless persons’ meal program).

- Warnings were also raised by a respondent who noted from their consultative work that congregations adopted two levels of programs responses; “the level of ordinariness” evident in volunteer-based activities and “the level of professional competence”. They added that the former had the capacity to be very fluid, that is activities would die off when the level of congregational concern no longer engendered sufficient energy. This, they said, was better than the activities continuing to “limp along” as many more formal church programs tend to do.

- A respondent, with experience as both an employed worker and a voluntary consultant in a congregationally-based family support agency, raised another warning that “each generation of a local church community needs to be finding its own way of being real to the local community”.

- Partnership with other community services also provide an avenue for congregations to be involved. A social worker working locally with a community-based agency reported effective cooperation with a local church to which they did not belong. The jointly offered program at the church involved congregational volunteers as support workers. This cooperative arrangement meant little funding was needed to provide this particular local service. It also meant that congregations could join the available support networks for people being assisted through other local community agencies. However, as another respondent noted, acceptance by church people of people “who may have some very anti-social behaviours” was sometimes an issue. Yet another respondent identified that, rather than a process of self-selection, cooperative programs, through a process of volunteer referral, allowed better matching of available congregational people and
program roles. This was seen as a way around concerns about church members not coping with the behaviours of some service users and depended for its effectiveness on cooperation between agency staff and congregational leaders. As the respondent commented, “if you really want to recruit people for this kind of work and build relationships with a worshipping congregation you need to go to the parish priest and talk about what your needs are and see if he can identify people that you might approach”, such people often not having the “confidence to put themselves forward” anyway.

One respondent, a social worker and clergyman who at the time of the interview had just left congregational ministry, preferred this partnership approach to one based on congregational outreach activities as this way “you really educate your people to be in community”, to be “part of the local community and not a little religious club”. Another respondent however noted congregations could play a role by actually initiating partnerships which involved arranging for community relevant activities to be offered from their premises with relevant local agencies and professionals working with them.

- **Representatives** of the congregation sitting on the boards and committees of local community services is the fourth approach to community involvement. One respondent observed that, as a community social worker on local “task groups”, they found it useful to “have a sense of what happens in churches” when church representatives participated as they inevitably brought that background to their involvement.

In summary, this issue raises options for congregational community focus and relates some ways in which a local focus may be able to be implemented. What factors influence these choices becomes a question about how this and other issues are linked in the dynamics of decision-making about congregational community service involvement.

### 2. Theological Issues

More than half of the respondents commented in their interviews that some aspect of theology was relevant to congregational community service involvement. Such comments ranged from brief efforts to articulate the relevant aspects to asserting strongly that building “bridges” between church people and the wider community required “a clear theological framework” as “there are probably different ways [of doing this] depending on your theology”. One respondent noted however that the specific theological orientation of a congregation was itself not a factor in determining if that congregation would engage in community services in some way. It was their view that the theology of the congregational clergy was more likely to determine this.
The aspects of theology identified as critically important by a number of respondents reflected the need for a clear “understanding of church” and a clear “understanding of mission in the church”. One respondent indicated a causal relationship was involved as it was only through clarification of theological issues that “other questions, other issues, start to fall into place”. Reference was made to the need to theologically understand the tensions some perceived between outreach with the specific spiritual or religious message of the church (evangelism) and outreach through caring service. In particular, theology was crucial to the debate about their being “rejoined” instead of being viewed as separate activities as some currently saw it. For another respondent this also meant challenging views that assigned the role of worship (“first commandment stuff”) to the local church and the role of service (“second commandment stuff”) to separate church agencies. Related to this for some was a need to explore “the Christian dimension of…social services” and its understanding among staff of faith-based services. Another respondent noted that, for them, a theological understanding of congregational worship also meant “wherever possible mission is undertaken in and through the local congregation”.

Another “fundamental” theological aspect which one respondent nominated was a theology of the person. This emphasised the need for an understanding of human wholeness, of human nature, in a theological way. Another respondent saw that this incorporated a “theology of disability” which was seen as a means of awareness raising within church congregations able to assist “bring those who are on the margins of the church and society into the centre”.

Yet another major area of theological reflection was the theology of lay ministry, which contrasted with the frequently noted perception that clergy dominated congregational life. One lay executive officer of a church-sponsored agency saw themselves as “a second class citizen” despite over 20 years of employment as a church agency executive. For another this involved a theology of “diakonia” (Greek for “service”) which identified a “human vocation” for all Christians, instead of only the clergy. Such a theology was seen to challenge a view that the clergy were “there to do it for us rather than with us”, a problem perceived as besetting both clergy (who were seen as having an “autocracy”) and laity (who were seen as exhibiting “passivity”). Another respondent also identified a need for a theology of human resource use, in this instance not from the perspective of validating lay ministry but of valuing the potential congregations offer whilst recognising necessary limitations that promoted balanced participation and prevented burnout.

For three respondents it was also crucial to explore the intersection between professional welfare theory/ideology/practice and theology. This seemed to relate to overlapping understandings about community, social justice, liberation, charity, love and engagement with the local community and was contrasted to the building of “a separate little religious club”.
3. Bridge-Building

The issue of how congregations find “points of entry” with people alienated from church and even society was recognised by more than half the respondents. However two respondents expressed concern about use of these entry points primarily for overt or covert evangelism.

A number of entry points were commented on by respondents.

- **Life-Experience** in situations familiar to non-church people was suggested as one point of contact because of the sensitivity engendered by this common experience. One respondent named situations such as places of work (eg a factory) and suburbs of residence. It was noted that, while these experiences were not typical of church people, congregations usually had at least some people with such backgrounds or experiences who could be effective in building links.

- **Agencies** open to involvement with congregational people offered another point of entry as their programs placed such volunteers in contact with marginalised people. This option, it was suggested, currently had more scope with most government funding goes to these larger central agencies. One respondent noted that initial service user contacts built relationships with the agency’s professional staff but, through activities involving volunteers, transferral of relationship to others could occur. However support from the agency staff was said to be essential for this to occur. It was stated by another respondent that congregational people needed to accept others “for what they are”, including aspects such as “dress”, so that these links became a process of “building up networks in their own local community”.

- **Activities** for which congregations had resources and which are not otherwise available were also noted as “points of entry” or relationship building. An example was a lone parents camp annually arranged by a group of concerned church people. Another was a neighbourhood house offering a range of social and material supports, whilst a third was a craft group. Referrals of interested people to such activities were made by community and church agencies. These activities were characterised by one respondent as operating at the “level of ordinariness”, meaning that they are being offered by lay people “who are ordinary people in the community and who basically want to do something to build a social infrastructure which is sustainable for people”. This respondent also recognised the need for professional back up as deeper issues readily arise in these activities. They also recognised the need for professional support in sustaining their links with referring agencies.

- **Committee membership** roles for service users was also noted as an option, however the sole respondent mentioning this saw it as “tokenistic” and as “being a bit boring to them”. They suggested a better response was “small user groups” that could present advice to committees and workers based on their closer experience of the issues concerned.
Community Engagement through participation by congregational members in other community-based activities was seen by one respondent as a key approach because it is the “building up of community; supporting, encouraging, standing alongside, being identified with, etc”. This respondent, a clergyman and agency executive officer, saw a crucial need for clergy to be trained in community development practice for their congregational work.

4. Resource Availability

Congregations have access to a range of resources that are crucial to community service delivery. Whilst only two respondents specifically identified it, implicit in comments from other respondents’ was the availability of buildings used for a range of community-related activities. However the existence within a congregation of a community network was commonly identified as the major asset a congregation had to offer. One respondent, a clergyman who was an agency executive officer, indicated the importance of this in the following terms:

I believe strongly that church congregations ought to be the primary line of defence for family life in the community; that it’s at the local, neighbourhood, local parish level where support for families should be most obvious.

This respondent also noted that congregations were indeed a source of a “significant number of people of great goodwill and faith that work for us” without which the agency programs such as foster care could not survive. Some of these volunteers were thought to “come up through the parish care group network”. Another respondent also observed that some congregations had resources that were “untapped within parishes that ...in many cases [people] are wanting to use”, that were waiting to be “developed and garnered and harnessed in particular directions”. Yet another respondent added that congregations varied in the strength of their sense of community and that, where such a sense had developed, this was what kept them going in the face of strain so enabling them to provide an important base for a range of formal and informal activities. At the same time, this respondent noted that requests of even seemingly limited congregations were found at times to “draw resources out of the parish community the parish community didn’t know it had”. Yet another respondent told of a situation where a social worker who did not share a congregation’s faith perspective could still recognise the “social dimension, a dimension of support” that it gave which was a crucial resource for their own work.

An additional aspect noted by one respondent was the need for congregations to “look at the make up of its congregation and to compare the make up of its congregation with census data”. This would enable the congregation to incorporate into their community service activities an understanding of the similarities and differences between their community networks and their local neighbourhood.
Nonetheless respondents also noted some of the limitations facing congregational community networks. For three respondents this related to congregations being too small to adequately sustain the types of programs that were often envisaged. Whilst two respondents noted a tendency to import Christians (usually professionals) from other areas to assist with these congregational activities, it was also noted that this could lead to contradictory expectations of what such a person could realistically undertake. One respondent was clear that any such person joining a congregation to share in that congregation’s community service involvements needed to discuss the nature of their involvement and its limitations quite explicitly:

...dialogue has to go on between the professional who wants to have a serious involvement in the local community and the local community [in context, understood as the local congregation] itself.

Whilst coming from an experience of working as a social worker in a church-sponsored agency, a similar concern was raised by a respondent who noted that there existed “an underlying expectation of giving a lot more because it was a church-based agency”. Churches were experienced by this respondent as having a culture which promoted burnout and which was not being tackled by the church: “it’s an issue the church doesn’t tackle a lot though, about maintaining your sanity, your Christianity, at the same time as having a life apart from the job”. Some respondents also expressed this concern in relation to congregational volunteers and to the expectations held for clergy. One respondent also noted the need for these congregational community networks to actually be nurtured:

Nurturing informal networks takes time. It only succeeds if you’re there, you put in time, you’re available. And that I think is the real problem, that people are too stressed in terms of the time available.

This lack of time from the more normal aspects of personal, work and congregational life was hence seen to place real limits of the practical resources congregational community networks could actually provide. Also seen as lacking was a confidence that congregational community networks could realistically have the “insight into these people and their needs” such that acceptance of needy outsiders could be confidently anticipated. Indeed, these concerns meant this respondent’s idealised vision of the resources congregations could provide was seen as seriously restricted: “the truth is we know most parishes are struggling to survive. They haven’t got the energy”. Another warned that congregations are “often assumed to be stronger than they are”.

Another resource potentially available to congregations for developing community service involvements was the network of church-sponsored agencies. Two respondents, both agency executive officers, discussed at length the way they had been able to use their agency resources in community development work with congregations. For one this led to a couple of community service projects being jointly developed between the agency and some congregations. For the other it meant that congregationally-based care groups were established and supported for a time. Yet another respondent noted that one regional church agency had used its knowledge of wider community
resources and its parish community workers to provide each congregation with an information booklet on local community services. Clergy and other congregational carers were then able to refer people for whom the agency itself was not appropriate to other appropriate services. Yet another role was reported by a respondent who had liaised with congregational clergy to find people suitable for employment as cottage parents in a previously existing children’s home. Through this the agency offered an external context for congregational community involvement. Another respondent identified that one church agency instigated another type of support by providing congregations with researched information on social issues relevant to the wider community.

However a few respondents also saw serious **pitfalls** in expectations about the benefits of links between parishes and church-sponsored agencies. These became evident when congregational personnel sought support from the church agency for congregational families needing more professional and formal assistance than the less formal congregational services were able to offer. In turn the agencies were unable to accept these referrals as they had contracted with the government to work with different, typically not church related, client groups and had no spare capacity for work with congregationally referred clients. Such problems were found to be confusing for both agency staff and congregational people and were seen by the respondents as beyond the resources of both. To deal with these problems one respondent recommended “**clear defined discussions about joint projects...[and] a lot of tolerance**”. Another respondent provided an example of this in the development of a joint church agency-congregation project operating out of the congregational centre, staffed mainly by congregational volunteers, funded by external sources including government grants obtained for it by the agency, and jointly managed through an intricate, shared management structure. Nonetheless there seemed to be a consensus that, as one respondent termed it, there was a “**divorce**” between congregations and church-sponsored agencies. The reasons were variously suggested as:

- a desire by the agencies to be in control of any nominally joint activity;
- the limitations of funding contracts with the government which precluded liaison with congregations and were such that even the agency’s own funds were fully utilised in meeting the government’s contract thereby precluding funds for any facilitation or support work with congregations;
- the imposition by agencies of programs operating out of congregational premises which fail to “**develop that sense of ownership and investment from the ground up**”; and
- an understanding of Christian mission which separated its aspects into a congregationally related “**Word**” and a church agency related “**Deed**”.

Another dilemma was identified by a respondent concerned that they were unable to discover how service users could legitimately see Christian welfare activities as “**different**”. This allegedly left the identity of church-sponsored agencies and the programs they offered (even out of congregational
buildings) lacking clarity: “But it just worries me that there’s not something which said, ‘Well, OK. This is not just any old agency’.”

Funding for congregational community services was commented on frequently as a concern. One respondent was very clear that government funding meant that even long established, large agencies were no longer in control of their own agendas and not even in control of the funds they raised separately from government. A further complication for this respondent was the low levels of funds identifiably derived from church sources; “less than the pocket money I pay to the kids in our care” as this respondent put it. For another respondent, formerly a senior government social worker, funding was of such a concern that, as a member of a congregation with a bequest for the establishment of a congregational community service, they were determined to ensure that the resultant program was not dependent on government funds. In particular they maintained that preventive services were what was needed and that government funding, with “strings attached” and a tendency to “flavour of the month” allocations, could not ensure such a program emphasis would remain. Nonetheless, as one respondent summarised it, the problem was that “the...church simply does not have the funds to finance welfare as we know it today, professional welfare. It is unrealistic to expect the [church] and its parishes to meet the cost of professional welfare”.

Hence then it is apparent that the resources available within congregations are not without their limitations, that church-agency support may well have limitations that congregations will experience as difficult, and that program funding through government channels may have complications that are not desired.

5. Agendas for Involvement

Respondents identified the issue of the motivation for congregational members’ involvement in community services in two distinctly different ways. The first related to the basic motivation being “distinctly Christian” which, in the context of the services being discussed, related to a desire to promote participation in the life of the congregation. One respondent raised questions about the appropriateness of such a motivation being the explicit “mission” identified for the program because of its risk of “ostracising certain kinds of players that you want to come” and of giving contradictory messages to participants such as “a group of people who are clearly Muslim” if the mission statement of the service were to “impose Christian words on them”. The solution advocated by this respondent was to identify a more general and inclusive mission statement such as “to provide a holistic service to people in the surrounding community” and to have “back-up documents” to clarify the detailed motivation and the principles upon which the service was to operate. It was here that the respondent saw that the Christian motivation should be articulated. This respondent also saw it as appropriate for
the congregation itself to provide more overtly religious activities to which interested participants of the community service activity could (and did) choose to go if their needs led them in that direction. Another respondent saw this motivation as promoting a suspicion that participation in the community service activity came with “strings attached” and that this fear had to be allayed before people were comfortable to be involved.

A third respondent expressed strong reservations about the legitimacy of establishing any sort of community service activity “because you hope to convert somebody into the faith”. In their view the provision of the service by the congregation was itself an “expression of the gospel” and that it did not benefit from the additional expectation. Nonetheless this respondent suggested that if being “converted or whatever” did occur as a result of this exposure to the congregation’s actions and deeds, “then that’s fine”. Whilst sharing these doubts, yet another respondent also expressed concern that Christians shouldn’t establish community service activities and then “pretend you don’t want to change something”. This respondent saw all such activities as seeking change (or, perhaps sarcastically, seeking to “keep a job”).

Another identified aspect of this issue is the view that sees all people as having, behind an identified need, “another need which is deeper and relates to one’s spiritual journey”. To relate to that deeper need in whatever way that was understood was seen as the significant motive. Whilst the respondent themselves saw this in the context of “the gift of God”, how “distinctly Christian” that recognition of the spiritual as a common component of all people’s lives was left open. In discussing it, the respondent took the view that people could be enabled to move from being helped to themselves becoming helpers. Hence this respondent most explicitly saw the response as one that received people into a mutual community.

The second view of motivation, seen as legitimate for congregational members, related to what they obtained for themselves by being involved. In noting this one respondent identified that such a motivation had not been typically valued in the past. Another respondent saw a version of this motivation in people whose desire was to express “in practical ways some outworking of their understanding of their faith”, though it was acknowledged that people still did become involved “out of goodwill”.

6. Volunteers

As previously noted, a key resource for congregational community involvement is a pool of volunteers. Without their availability most congregational services likely to be developed could not function. The respondents’ views on issues affecting the availability of people as volunteers are
therefore insightful. One respondent, citing her own situation, noted that, with women working, the
traditional pool of volunteers used by churches was significantly depleted:

> I do very little volunteer [work]. No, that’s not true. I volunteer in reading at school and I run
>a playgroup voluntarily. I don’t do very much volunteer church work any more because there
isn’t the time. You know, I can’t prepare work every night and do everything my family needs
and maintain some sanity.

This changed situation meant that the main groups of people potentially available as volunteers were
elderly, retired people and the unemployed.

Another respondent noted that congregational people tended to be reluctant to put themselves forward
as volunteers for community services, even with church-sponsored agencies, as many church people
“see themselves as untrained lay people [who] don’t believe they’ve got the skills and probably
haven’t got the confidence to put themselves forward”. However this respondent also reported their
experience that using congregational clergy as referral agents could more effectively access
appropriate people.

Other respondents’ lists of the people potentially available as volunteers included:

- professionally qualified women who see congregational programs as an appropriate outlet for
  their formal training at particular periods of their lives (usually while their careers are temporarily
  on hold),
- clients of services who take on volunteer roles within the same program (so blurring the
  boundaries between service users and volunteers),
- employed staff who choose to perform extra duties not normally part of their roles and/or beyond
  their normal period of employment (it was noted this included congregational clergy who
  consistently worked longer than normal hours),
- outside people with particular skills who choose to share them with people through community
  programs rather than in formal, fee paying settings, and
- Christians who wished to have practical avenues within which to express their faith, especially
  within their own congregation if an option for community service involvement is available.

A number of respondents noted that training was a necessary component of volunteer work. A couple
also recommended that this training be provided through links with other local volunteer training
programs rather than in specialised congregational training programs as that approach links
congregational volunteers and activities more effectively with the wider community. It was also noted
that churches should not “just [expect] people to plough in and do things”. Even though “traditionally
churches don’t do, buy any training” it was said that this left volunteers lacking in confidence and
without adequate knowledge or skills to act appropriately or respond to unexpected behaviours from
participants in the community services operating. Another respondent also noted that “modelling” by
trained personnel was another helpful training process with certain volunteer roles such as offering emotional support to people needing that whilst involved in another activity.

One respondent however warned that volunteers could be subjected to too much training, thus risking loss of “their spontaneity and their natural helping skills”. Hence this respondent concluded that training needed to be balanced, recognising the particular contributions that “levels of ordinariness” brought to community service involvements which are different to those operating at the “level of professional competence”, to use the terms of another respondent.

A particular aspect of training which one respondent identified as a necessary concern was “confidentiality”. This respondent observed that some volunteers naturally seemed to have difficulty appreciating this boundary to their involvement with other people.

Respondents only briefly examined the roles that volunteers took on. The clearest options noted related to informal support networks, especially those supporting effective family functioning. Whilst one issue involved was uncertainty about how these support roles might themselves be supported within congregational community service activities, it was nonetheless stated that it was by such means that “[the church has a real role in being an access point for community for people]”. A more formal role identified for volunteers was as foster parents with church-sponsored agencies. A third respondent suggested that a volunteer “career path” was also an important feature.

One respondent raised concerns about leadership as an issue with volunteers, noting that “so much work goes on in the church context that is ad hoc, that is…driven by the individual”. Another respondent also saw this as an issue of concern: “[I think that [congregational members] in many ways are very actively working in the community but they do it as individuals and I wish we could find some way to overcome that]”. A particular aspect one respondent identified was the need for lay volunteers to have more ready access with one another through an organised structure. This would then allow them to learn from and support each other in their congregational activities. It was also suggested there was a need for church leadership that appreciated this group process aspect of congregational life. The issue of leadership was also touched on by others as an aspect of the clergy-lay relationship, especially by those who saw that some volunteers need to be affirmed as “natural leaders” capable of an “integrating” role within more formal activities. Yet another respondent saw that there was a clear need for volunteers to be actively supported or “looked after” if they are to remain in involved. Perhaps related to this, another respondent raised the need to formally commission volunteers so that all understood their involvement as part of a formally “authorised” congregational program. Without this, as another respondent noted, their efforts often go unrecognised and even “unaccountable”.
A particular concern was raised about the potential for volunteers to be overused or even abused within their congregational work. For one respondent this related to a need for a biblical concept of limits, without which the church would continue its practice of burning out “good resources”. In illustrating this point, the respondent mentioned a conversation with a female teacher who had attended a seminar on balancing career and motherhood that the respondent was running (as a volunteer professional) in conjunction with a local congregation.

One of [these women who were in a career] was talking about how on the holidays she spent most of the first week of the holidays at church. And she said, “Where did my holiday go”. And [church] was obviously something she was committed to and really enjoyed but she had a career that she was working hard in as a Christian, and she had the church, and she had her family, and she’d got lost somewhere within all that.

This respondent, as a social worker in a community agency that liaised with congregational volunteers, found that many “didn’t know how to say no” and that no one in the church had suggested they could or should. In fact, in this respondent’s experience, in a number of instances the same volunteers were being utilised and that eventually they “would just crumple, would just sometimes burn out” through this sense of not being “allowed to…say no”. At least one other respondent also raised concern about the overuse and burnout of volunteers. They stated that, to “maintain long term viability in the whole area of social justice and social action and community work at the parish level then it’s got to be resourced: and you can’t do all that by volunteers all the time”. For another respondent, addressing this involved recognising that “what people do for the church is volunteer work” and that congregations and churches should therefore look at the approach to volunteer rights and responsibilities that were being espoused by the wider, international volunteer movement.

7. Professionals

A major theme with respondents was the involvement of professionals within congregationally-based community service activities. These comments related to spirituality within professional practice and employment of professionals within their own congregation’s community service activities. They also noted complications which arose such as the availability for employment of professionals who shared the guiding vision, the impact of a work context which blurred normal professional boundaries, and the dilemmas some congregations were seen to have in following appropriate management processes. In addition, roles for professionals as internal or external consultants were also mentioned.

The main issue identified was the relationship between a worker’s professional identity and practice and spirituality. A number of respondents made it clear that, in the words of one, “my faith is central; it’s foundational to my self-image and my world view so that it is actually directly relevant to my practice here”. Despite this foundational link, a number also observed that early professional training occurred within a context in which spirituality was “pushed to the edges of psychology, social work,
sociology, regarded as anonymous, freakish, unprofessional, part of the emotional arena, of fantasy and so on”. Hence respondents, as professionals, identified two aspects of this issue; the way in which their identity and practice related to their own spirituality, and the way in which their practice and their work context allowed them to relate to the spiritual dimension of the lives of service users.

Within the context of practice as a professional within congregations, several respondents indicated that they chose to work (either paid or unpaid) within a congregational or church setting because that reflected their own commitments and spiritual life. However respondents identified a range of ways in which this motivation was expressed. For most, when issues of spirituality arose with colleagues or with clients, most indicated they were comfortable to say, “I happen to belong to a particular church denomination and that’s what I believe”, and “I’ve been working on that…to state my own experience, my own belief, my own stand without, I suppose, demanding or requiring that they share that”. One respondent’s practice was clearly informed by their own spirituality when responding to an unanticipated request by a service user of a different religious faith for a fee to be charged. Recognising this as a matter of personal dignity, as payment the respondent requested that the service user teach the respondent about their own religious faith.

However respondents noted some colleagues were not comfortable saying anything about their own spiritual life, apparently preferring to “compartmentalise it off”, even having it “hidden…out of fear”, and “[feeling] they couldn’t bring spirituality into their work…that that was even unethical”. At the other extreme one respondent expressed concerns about professional colleagues who seemed to be “fairly fundamentalist” and “a bit too hard line for the profession”, without apparently linking their responses to appropriate professional practice. A couple of respondents added that there were ethical issues around power and tolerance involved. This latter was recognised by a respondent who, as a church agency director, saw that agency responsibility included nurturing the spirituality of its non-Christian staff.

However a few respondents noted that professional norms about spirituality had changed of late and that spirituality was now seen as legitimate for welfare professionals to include in their work with their clients. One respondent commented that “people...are using the words spiritual and spirituality, only they’re using them in a more broad, general way”. A second respondent concluded that “I have seen a greater openness for people to be able to look at that spiritual aspect of their life as well as their physical and social and…I think there is now a more legitimate acceptance of that”. This worker also added the rider that “You are still obviously not allowed to put your own views on people or influence them”.
Another respondent, who previously worked as a social worker within a congregational setting, observed in that particular setting, that service users themselves would actually raise issues about their own relationship to the church (or lack of it), or about the worker’s motives for practicing in such a setting. This respondent stated:

*It wasn’t something I ever felt was forced, but often people were questioning that, and often just out of their own...struggles would start talking about it in terms of their personal counselling, their own feeling of isolation, and feeling of being cut off from the church.*

A feature of this respondent’s experience was clearly that the congregationally-based service provided a context which gave workers and service users “permission to talk about your faith...because people naturally saw that the church and the agency were linked. So I think you felt more of a freedom to talk about it but also...[people] initiated it more often”.

Whilst aspect concerning the contribution of volunteer professionals within congregations have been previously mentioned, the issues related to their employment within congregational community services were seen as more complex. For one respondent, the ideal situation was for a paid employee to have relevant professional training and expertise, be an active member of the congregation itself, and be able to provide “conceptual leadership” to the congregation and its community service activity by assisting their awareness of the links between the personal issues addressed by the service, issues of social justice in the wider community, and the worshipping and community life of the congregation. This respondent was clear that it was not enough to have “people with a good heart...who respond warmly, and sympathetically to people who have individual struggles but fail to see the connection of those personal struggles to the broader issues that need social change”. This led to two dilemmas for this respondent, dilemmas which they claimed had detrimentally affected the congregational community service with which they had previously been involved. These dilemmas were:

- How to locate a suitably capable person able to provide the professional skills required, participate in the community life of the congregation, and provide the leadership sought; and
- If compromise is necessary by appointing professionals who cannot provide the desired participation and/or leadership, how then is the vision for the congregational community service to be maintained?

However respondents who had experience as professional workers within their own congregation’s community service programs were also aware of a wider range of complications which arose. For one, this was linked to a retrospective characterisation of their initial involvement as:

*Christians had to be martyrs really, you know you have to self-sacrifice and of course you do that because that’s what Christians do...I think we were very young in our own working lives and so we were really idealistic [thinking] we could just do everything.*

This idealism eventually led this respondent to observe that congregational staff effectively burnt out. What in hindsight they said was needed was not only support from like-minded peers but “to have
been anchored to people who had been longer in the church and to have a really strong connection”.
For this respondent, without that mentor support from those with “more life experience” they sensed they had “a bit of a distorted view of our own self-importance”.

Another respondent in a similar situation recognised that the decision to be “living and working and being part of the community you are working with” resulted in the “whole blurring of relationships and boundaries and responsibilities and motivations” which is not acceptable to people “if they have a typically professional view of their work” in which distance from service users is maintained outside work hours. The implications for this second respondent were that there were some “tensions in it for my family”, “sometimes I would find that tiring”, and “I always had the sense that my life was really on show, and that it’s public property in a sense”. This respondent was clear that they and their family had benefited from this experience and the sharing of it with other people who held to the same guiding vision. For another similarly involved worker, this experience brought a clear realisation that boundaries had to be negotiated with the congregation if such comprehensive involvement was to be realistic. They also added “Your professional ethics sometimes tells you that you ‘should’ try and help [beyond what you might be paid to give] as well. The level to which that ‘should’ is interpreted is different for different people”.

Another respondent noted that sometimes congregations, in establishing community service programs, lacked an understanding of or a commitment to “correct way” of managing program when they employed staff. Altering or ignoring Management Committee minutes, for example, was seen as inappropriate and led to the program having “lost good workers”.

A more limited contribution for professionals not formally employed in their congregational community service activities was identified by one respondent who discussed their particular input as a social awareness raiser and as an internal consultant to and/or a facilitator for those developing congregational services. This meant that they brought insights and capacities from their external professional practice and shared it with congregational members in order to support those programs. A similar contribution was also identified by another respondent for non-congregational professionals who nonetheless understood the dynamics of congregational life and aspirations and who, as local professionals, were able to act as external consultants to community service developments within the congregation.

8. Clergy Roles

Most respondents mentioned, usually briefly, the role of the clergy as the official religious functionaries in congregations. It was presented however as a confused and often worrying role, but
nonetheless seen as a crucial for the success of any community service activity. The dilemma is presented in relation to the clergy adopting (or being expected by the congregation to adopt) a controlling role in contrast to an alternative role as facilitator of community development.

One respondent, a parish clergyman at the time of the interview, saw themselves as being somewhat trapped into the role of maintaining the congregation, especially its religious activities, rather than promoting additional involvements. This comment was presented as a contrast to another clergyman known to the respondent who allowed their congregation to depend on them to “do everything”, so leading to the congregation’s eventual demise. This issue was expressed by another respondent as “the autocracy of the clergy and the passivity of the laity…those two evils [that] feed on one another even if you have [clergy who]…want to engage the whole church in ministry”. Hence respondents talked of clergy exhibiting a controlling influence on processes aimed at establishing congregational community services such that their support or otherwise was the key factor within the congregation upon which an outcome depended. As one respondent, a clergyman themselves, commented about a particular community activity: “I mean that has had highs and lows at the whims of who the parish clergy are”. Another respondent noted that this situation sometimes led to power struggles as the arrangements for community involvements were negotiated with other necessary participants (in that case a cooperative arrangement between a congregation and a church-sponsored agency).

The alternative that a number of respondents identified as a necessary perspective for which clergy needed training was “community development”. What respondents each meant by this term appeared to vary somewhat however. One respondent saw the congregational clergyman as a linking person who facilitated other people developing leadership and service roles. Another saw the clergyman as the leader who ensured an effective link between the congregation as a whole and the community service activity through chairing the respective committees, thereby giving “direction” to both. Another saw the clergy as the people able to bring fresh ideas and new challenges, including for community service involvement, to the congregation for others to then take up. For another respondent this meant clergy “engagement in the local community” supporting people in difficult community roles irrespective of any overt link to religious activities or membership of the congregation. However it also meant finding ways to enable lay people in the congregation to also engage with the wider local community in these ways.

On this issue, a number of respondents saw as urgent the training of clergy to both understand and practice community development because most clergy “are not exposed to the sorts of things that I think impact on the lives of people”. Overall it seems that respondents agreed the clergy role is a vital but widely confusing role in the development and operation of any congregational community service and that clarifying it is crucial for effective action.
9. Central Church Involvement

Whilst not discussed at length, in some way most respondents commented on the crucial role that central church bodies were expected to have in relation to congregational community services. This seemed largely to be one of facilitation in a range of ways:

- The development of policy and theology statements and awareness-raising programs which placed community services clearly within a Christian framework as understood within the dominant theology of each congregation;
- The employment of consultants able to assist congregations to develop community programs;
- The endorsement and promotion of a suitable working environment for congregational community services;
- The distribution of information about what services are being developed by various congregations and what is being learnt through those already operating;
- The distribution of information on various social issues congregations may encounter;
- The facilitation of conferences and support activities which enable congregational members to share their community service activities with each other for mutual support, increased awareness, and future development;
- Research into aspects of congregational provision of community services; and
- Access to resources able to assist develop and sustain congregational community services.

For some there was a sense that much of this should come from the central church community service agencies but, as one respondent noted from experience:

\[
I \text{ became very aware of...how far removed the caring arm of the church, through its various institutions, was from the other elements of what I would describe as a Christian way of life. It was as if you [the church institutions] were put out there, over there, to do this good work on behalf of the church, but never the twain shall meet.}
\]

This respondent also observed that where church agencies, in conjunction with central structures, sought to provide joint community services with parishes, the central agency seemed to take the view that “we must retain the control and power”. This was observed to then lead to community service programs being “imposed on the people [congregations]” that “were not related to the parishes at all”. The stated consequence of this, in the respondent’s direct judgement, was that the community services became independent activities controlled by powerful, external professionals and whose actual functioning was “in awful chaos”.

This of course was not what was intended. However some respondents did note more effective interaction between church agencies and parishes when their executive officers, in the cases cited both senior clergy, used their independent agency resources to provide information about social issues requested by parishes. Due to the profile of these clergy, this was seen as a more effective period of
church social concern. Later, when these clergy changed roles, the respective agencies no longer provided this material, and this cooperation reduced. However this approach was not seen to redress the alleged separation of church agencies and congregations.

For another respondent the church agency was unapologetically “providing the evidence that the love of God is still at work in His church” despite concurrence with the view that church agencies and congregations were insufficiently linked. For this respondent, this relationship therefore had potential and needed to be redeveloped within a shared vision of the whole churches’ involvement, agency and congregation, in different but integrated projects of community service provision.

One respondent expressed significant concern about the capacity of some denominational central structures to actually engage with this necessary facilitation role. The concern reflected a belief that community service involvement had moved to the “periphery in the present climate when survival is the mode and we have an ecclesiology which basically is relatively uncomfortable about the implications of being involved”. Other denominations were noted to be grappling with statements about how such involvements were integrated into that church’s theology and practice, so also implying at least some measure of uncertainty in their congregations and/or agencies.

Two additional influential factors in the supportive and consultative role needing to be played by the central church structures related to:

- Whether or not the denominations and/or central bodies were prepared to employ personnel such as social policy officers to assist the denomination and its congregations to focus on social issues; and

- The extent to which the church “tends to think of mission, ministry only in terms of the ordained ministry”. Where other professionals were employed they were seen to become “expert”, like clergy, and as such “ultimately responsible”. Hence they tended to be treated by congregations as “pseudo-clergy”. In addition, the church was not seen to be addressing issues around their recruitment and training.

Overall, despite an apparent concurrence among respondents that the central church bodies had a crucial role in facilitation of congregational community services, there seemed considerable confusion about how this might be undertaken and whether the churches have the resources and/or the will to undertake this role effectively.
10. **Management Structures**

Whilst two respondents had substantial comments to make about community service management issues in congregations, most had little or nothing to add. The particular concerns raised by the main two respondents however present key issues for consideration.

In one situation, the respondent was exploring the role of formal management structures as the means of ensuring the intended *balance in partnership* between the congregation and the church agency with which the program was to be linked. For this respondent, having seen partnerships in other settings undermined with no real ownership of and involvement in the community service by the congregation, a formal structure was sought as a guarantee of the intended arrangement. This was to be achieved through membership of the community service management committee consisting of equal numbers from the congregation and from the church agency, with a central denominational leader as a neutral chairperson. The executive of this committee was formally defined as the church agency regional manager and the senior congregational cleric. It was to this executive that the service manager would be accountable. In addition, an advisory group consisting of all stakeholders in the service - staff, volunteers, service users and congregation - was to meet regularly to present suggestions through the service manager. Such a defined structure, the respondent explained, was part of the formal agreement between the agency and the congregation. Without it, the respondent, as the agency executive officer, was fearful that later changes in personnel within the agency or the congregation would undermine the intended partnership, however the process was still being tested at the time of the interview.

The other main respondent on this issue was more concerned to recognise that *people appointed* to community service committees were so because of some external expertise that they brought which was relevant to aspects of the committee’s role. In the respondent’s case they saw they had welfare expertise to offer whereas most of their committee colleagues offered business expertise and useful “contacts”. However, contact with staff of the community service was not seen as a committee role.

From these two reflections, the *purpose of a committee of management* presents as a matter of important consideration determining the types of people approached to be members. In the cases cited, it seemed committees existed to oversee the financial aspects of a service and its need for capital expenditure such as buildings. Only one respondent, previously an employed professional, saw the committee also having responsibility for monitoring the workloads of staff and addressing the problems identified. Also a role as a link with service users was not affirmed, and indeed was seen as inappropriate in one respondent’s experience because it was “tokenistic” and most likely “a bit boring”. As mentioned in a previous section (see p.338), for this respondent the issue of input from
service users was better addressed through an informal advisory group passing suggestions to staff who could report to the committee, an approach rather similar to the stakeholders meeting incorporated in the formal agreement referred to above.

That committees play an influential role in congregational community services was underlined by another respondent who reported that a committee’s failure to adhere to its own decisions through not acting as decided and through altering meeting records led to the resignations of “good workers”.

In summary, respondents’ comments seem to indicate that two aspects of management are crucial to congregational community services:

- Management arrangements have a significant impact on congregational community service operations especially those that involve partnerships; and
- Management structures are sometimes not adequately understood by those involved with congregational community services leading to expectations that are not shared and, perhaps, are not even realistic.

11. Lifecycle and Evaluation

Another issue only marginally identified by a few respondents related to the lifecycle of congregational community service involvement. Most of the responses reflected respondents concerns about how congregational community services are initiated. One respondent reflected on how they are changed in focus whilst another raised a crucial issue of how a particular vision is passed on to succeeding generations of participants in the program.

Congregational community services were presented as having small beginnings, perhaps with a vision shared by a key congregational member. Alternatively, they began as the result of a “project development process” which identified community needs, congregational gifts and a structure for linking those needs and gifts in a “ministry” of the congregation. Another respondent however warned that such groups could either move too quickly and without adequate understanding to commence a service or become trapped in a process of examining an issue and the options for responding but without any action. This respondent noted the need for a balance between these two tendencies. Other respondents noted that services were seen to change when they enlarged their management committee to include people from outside the congregation as partners in the project; when they began to employ staff; and when, through community links, they gained funds from new sources. Further, a service was seen to develop when a volunteer emerged as a “natural leader” who moved the service area from “the ordinary” to a more formal or “professional” response. These seem fairly natural processes although the issues likely to be encountered need exploring.
One respondent however suggested congregations needed to establish a “church community committee...which regards itself as a permanent element of the life of the parish rather than just something which is formed for a particular project”. This arrangement was expected to provide a forum for the congregation to discuss its role in issues affecting the local community and, as issues change, to enable the congregation to review their approach to the “church community interface”. As a result projects that no longer generated their earlier results would experience, as appropriate, “killing…off” instead of being left “limping along” and be replaced with new projects that generated new congregational energy. This flexibility was identified as one of the attributes of the “ordinariness response” and reinforced the need to consider lifecycle issues within congregational responses.

The process of evaluation∗ as a part of lifecycle changes implicit in this respondent’s comments identified the least discussed issue for congregational community service involvement. The one respondent who did explicitly identify this as an issue indicated they saw it as crucial because “you need to extract fundamental principles from it and test them out and see whether they work and see if there are other examples where things have worked because the principles are in common”. The aim of such processes for this respondent was to identify “elements of best practice” relevant to serious efforts at congregational community involvement.

The final comment on lifecycle was from a respondent who expressed concern about the processes for transferring the vision of a formal, professionally based congregational program to new participants in the program. This respondent noted that “While the...people who emerged through the life of the church still continue with [the vision] it is authentic and real, but once you start employing people from outside you get into difficulties”. However for this respondent even this concern was moderated by the realisation that “each generation of a local church community needs to be finding its own way of being real to the community, to the local community, to community outreach, to community development”. In the context, this issue was a deep concern for this respondent, a foundation professional in a congregational program, who had seen three “generations” take up and develop the vision of congregational community involvement before the service evolved a structure and a staff largely independent of the initiating congregation.

12. Programs

Identifying which programs are appropriate for congregational participation did not seem to be a well thought through issue. However respondents made comments which implied certain issues were

∗ Evaluation was identified during analysis as a separate issue. It is included with “lifecycle” in this discussion as that is the context in which it arose and as it was identified explicitly by only one respondent. However it will still be considered as one of the 14 issues identified in the Stage 1 research.
thought important in various settings, to various people: relevance to the wider community, promotion of social linkage, prevention of social problems, provision of basic needs, capacity to address, a flexibility to address a wide range of issues.

At the most general level, a holistic response flexibly addressing social and personal needs was identified. As one respondent put it, the advantage of such a program option was:

being able to deal with a whole range of people’s needs...and then, if they felt that there was somebody that they could trust and who was able to assist them in that point of crisis then they came back and wanted to explore other issues...and so they would open up about [really hurting]. ...[And] as people were asking those questions about what it all meant, and is there a God, and how is God relevant to me...we were able to really invite people to participate in Bible Study groups, we were able to invite people to come along to church, we were able to invite them to...a known quantity. We weren’t trying to link them with something that we didn’t know what it involved. It was something that we felt confident would be an accepting opportunity for people.

The service to which this respondent referred provided emergency food relief, financial counselling, individual and family counselling, a girls club, a youth group, a craft group, a women’s group, regular and occasional child care, and an advocacy service - a wider range of services than most congregationally-based service programs mentioned by respondents. As another respondent noted, this particular program developed when the leaders of the congregation began “thinking about responding in a more systematic and comprehensive way to the needs of the community the church was in”.

The closest to this collection of programs within a congregational setting was a neighbourhood house program noted by another respondent. In this less extensive setting a volunteer clinical pastoral counsellor provided personal counselling and pastoral care within the context of a less formal, more interactive program than would normally occur in a family centre providing counselling, family therapy and directional groups. This respondent also noted that some participants became interested in the congregation’s Bible Study groups. Another respondent identified a sense of need for more holistic responses than normal community and government programs offered but gave no clarity on how such programs might be incorporated. Yet another mentioned a long established craft group which allowed congregational and outside people to interact in an informal way and which saw some participants develop spontaneous spiritual links as a result of these social links. (One participant was found to have identified the craft program itself as their religious affiliation when asked during a hospital admission.) A similar emphasis was given to a sole parents camping program offered by members of local congregations in a particular location.

As a more basic and limited response of congregations, a number of respondents mentioned emergency relief programs, meals for the homeless programs, housing for homeless youth programs, and a community lounge for homeless and/or mentally disturbed people. These more limited
programs were seen to meet an often ignored community need whilst also giving participants and congregational members a context for mutual interaction.

Within these program examples it is possible to identify the two levels of congregational response to community needs which have previously been discussed: the level “ordinariness” which are limited programs able to be operated by untrained congregational volunteers and be an “access point for community for people”, and the level of “professional competence” which require more formal structures and staffing. In moving from the former to the latter, one respondent warned that programs adopted should have “some relevance to the community of which it [is] in” and be “directed outwardly”. This respondent also recommended that programs should not be “band-aid measures”, but should adopt a “preventive role” and “not be dependent on state government money”.

When “ordinary” and “professional” programs can be combined the respondent who made this distinction emphasised a need for “transparency”, which they simply defined as “sometimes you can’t tell who are the professionals and who are the volunteers”. Yet another respondent warned of congregations getting into areas of “professional competence”, especially personal and relationship counselling programs, and “perhaps get involved at a level beyond what they’re qualified to do”. Another respondent emphasised that there were “some areas of practice that I think [congregations] ought to steer right out of” referring, as an example, to overseas adoptions.

A particular program aspect that was commented on by a few respondents was pastoral care. One respondent reported an experience of competition and mutual suspicion between pastoral workers and social workers in a shared professional setting, another experienced pastoral workers as less formal in their approach to work with clients and having less responsibility for statutory issues such as suspected child abuse. Another saw pastoral workers as more appropriate to issues of explicit theology and spiritual practice as it was less related to issues of social justice. Yet another respondent seemed comfortable with a program where a worker with pastoral care training was providing counselling to any participants seeking it and implied this was not inappropriate in a neighbourhood house. The impression is that, while there was a strong overlap between these two, they were not seen as identical skills although there seemed some uncertainty about how and when that difference might become evident or relevant in congregation community service activities.

13. Deterrents

The final issue to be considered is the deterrents to congregational involvement in community services. Three broad categories were noted: limitations of congregations themselves, the structural
complexity of formal community services, and the lack of models to guide congregations seeking to become involved in their communities.

The main deterrent raised by respondents related to limitations faced by congregations. As one respondent noted it:

*People are busy, people are old, people are tired, people don’t have the motivation...people are being pushed back...to the privacy of their own home where it’s safe. And the prospect of getting into missions [is] all a bit scary, a bit time consuming...to say nothing of the actual decline of congregational life...I mean when you talk about it like that, there’s a good reason for giving up.*

Another respondent, when discussing congregational involvement with people with psychiatric disabilities, noted the difficulty for congregational members to “*confront our fears [as] they might do something strange, they might interrupt the decency and order of our worship and those issues need to be faced*” in order to get involved. There is also the recognition by one respondent that community services don’t necessarily “*numerically grow the church*” and therefore some congregations are not prepared to take that risk. Yet another respondent noted that most congregations could not finance anybody to coordinate community service activities beyond very simple involvements such as food collections and encouraging community volunteering. There was also the concerns raised about burnout and the negative perception of that, especially for clergy, in church circles.

One respondent also noted that “*parishes are in survival mode. They’re not into anything else but keeping the doors open...many families are into survival mode too*”. Comments were also made that the lifestyle of many middle and upper class church families, such as work patterns and a trend to go to holiday houses every second weekend, means it is hard for them just to get to church. Overall the perception seemed to be that, with increased pressure from paid work and reduced numbers attending congregations, there is less willingness to participate in community service involvements.

As also discussed earlier, another aspect raised related to the structural complexity of formal community service involvements. As one respondent explained, “*It’s actually much easier for the [church agency] to tack [a service] on...than for a local church to go through all the stuff around getting the expertise, the skill base for supervision, management capabilities, funding*”.

A third aspect was said to be a lack of understanding by congregations at a number of levels. These were suggested to be Christian understandings of poverty, sexuality, social conscience, political action, and the legitimate role of congregational members in social issues confronting their local community.

A final aspect identified was the perceived lack of any models for community service built around congregations rather than church agencies. The models that exist were seen to reflect government
funding of agencies rather than anything more applicable to congregational bases. Such models and their constraints, it was stated, needed to be identified if time was not to be wasted on “dead ends”. It is this deterrent that it is intended this research should in part help addressed.

**Conclusions from Stage 1 Data Analysis**

These 14 issues appear to identify fairly comprehensively what the key informants consider to affect congregations planning to develop or actually operate community service activities. However further consideration of these identified issues suggests they can be viewed in three clusters: issues which relate to the rationale for or contextually related thinking affecting congregational community service; issues that relate to the role and availability of various personnel for congregational community service work; and issues that affect the organisational structures and arrangements necessary to enable congregational community services to actually operate. Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 following summarise the dimensions and range of options for responding to each issue as discussed above.

Drawn from the perceptions of the 13 key informants interviewed, these 14 issues provide a framework or map as a broad guide to the respondents sampled in Stage 2 of the research project and the focus of the interviews with them. The purpose of Stage 2 is to explore the actual ways these issues are dealt with in a small sample of operating congregational community services so that a collective model of key decision points and the associated response options can be developed. In addition the relationships between the identified issues can be examined and any apparent causal linkages between them noted. Through this analysis the process dynamics which influence the formation and operation of congregational community services can then be more effectively mapped.

In addition, it seems highly likely that this exploration of issues affecting congregational community services, and the tables that summarise them, form a useful map that could assist those directly involved in developing or operating such services as they consider their service plan. By reflecting on how these issues are explicitly or implicitly addressed, program planners and evaluators can identify the chosen response options. With this information intentional decisions can then be made about the service. To assist this process, these tables therefore also include a question that, when asked about each issue, can help map the responses made or considered.

In conclusion, this initial stage of data collection has therefore generated a practice-based framework that can have two creative uses:

1. To guide the sample selection and interviews for collecting data from people associated with functioning congregational community service activities, and
2. To provide those involved with congregational community services with a framework or map to review, monitor and plan intentionally about the future operation and emphases of those services. Hence, as well as facilitating the next stage in data collection for this research project, even at this preliminary stage, this analysis has therefore produced a potentially practical framework applicable to congregations as a specialised context for human services.
Table 1 - Issues Related to the Rationale for Congregational Community Service Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
<th>RESPONSE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus of Congregational Community Involvement</td>
<td>In what ways does a congregation view their relationship to their local community and its issues?</td>
<td>Insular&lt;br&gt;Survival&lt;br&gt;Private Religion&lt;br&gt;Building Faith&lt;br&gt;Locality Response&lt;br&gt;Informal Networks&lt;br&gt;Outreach Activities&lt;br&gt;Evangelistic (Overt)&lt;br&gt;Caring (Implicit)&lt;br&gt;Ordinary&lt;br&gt;Professional&lt;br&gt;Partnership&lt;br&gt;Join&lt;br&gt;Initiate&lt;br&gt;Representative&lt;br&gt;Justice Response&lt;br&gt;Clergy Action&lt;br&gt;Congregation Action&lt;br&gt;Formal Provider&lt;br&gt;Funding Contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Theology affecting Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>What Theological views influence how a congregation engages in community services?</td>
<td>Theology of Church&lt;br&gt;Theology of Mission&lt;br&gt;Caring or Evangelism&lt;br&gt;Caring and Evangelism&lt;br&gt;Faith Dimension of Service&lt;br&gt;Theology of The Person&lt;br&gt;Theology of Lay Ministry&lt;br&gt;Congregational Limits&lt;br&gt;Theology and Welfare Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bridge Building between Congregation and Service Users</td>
<td>What Entry Points exist for congregational members to engage with marginalised groups in the wider community who are outside church networks?</td>
<td>Life Experience of Congregation&lt;br&gt;Agency Linkages&lt;br&gt;Congregational Outsider Activities&lt;br&gt;Service User Committee Roles&lt;br&gt;Community Activity Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Congregational Resources for Community Service</td>
<td>What assets is a congregation able to offer which may be of value to those outside the congregation in the local community?</td>
<td>Buildings&lt;br&gt;Network within the Community&lt;br&gt;Volunteers&lt;br&gt;Imported professionals&lt;br&gt;Church-sponsored Agencies&lt;br&gt;Facilitation&lt;br&gt;Support&lt;br&gt;Service Information&lt;br&gt;Referrals for Involvement&lt;br&gt;Social Issues Awareness&lt;br&gt;Non-Government Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Congregational Agendas in Operating Community Services</td>
<td>What does a congregation hope to achieve by getting involved in Community Services?</td>
<td>Spiritual Motivations&lt;br&gt;Gain Participants&lt;br&gt;Provide Holistic Services&lt;br&gt;Provide a Service&lt;br&gt;Address Deeper Needs&lt;br&gt;Helped to Helper&lt;br&gt;Personal Motivations&lt;br&gt;Be a helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</td>
<td>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</td>
<td>RESPONSE RANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **6.  The Congregation as Volunteers in Community Service Provision**          | What factors affect the contribution of congregational insiders to the provision of Congregational Community Services | People Available  
Retired  
Unemployed  
Professional Women at Home  
Outsiders  
Paid Staff  
Service Users  
Practical Faith Expression  
Training Offered  
Community-based  
Congregationally-based  
Modelling  
Roles Involved  
Informal Support  
Formal  
Career Path  
Leadership Required  
Ad Hoc Individual Activity  
Mutual Support  
Appreciating Group Process  
Affirming Natural Leaders  
Abuse  
Permission to Say “No”  
Concept of Limits  
Rights & Responsibilities |
| **7.  Professionals in Congregational Community Services**                     | What factors affect the contribution of professionals to the provision of congregational community services? | Spirituality  
Own Identity and Practice  
Hard Lined  
Acknowledged  
Nurtured  
Hidden  
Service Users  
Included  
If Raised  
Context  
Not Included  
Employment of Insiders  
Ideal  
Professional Expertise  
Faith Community  
Linking facets  
Personal  
Social Justice  
Worship  
Compromise  
Import  
Maintain Vision  
Complications  
Support Needs  
Burnout/Martyr  
Peer  
Mentor  
Professional Boundary  
Negotiated  
Blurred  
Management approach  
Due process  
Ad hoc  
Consultant Insider  
Awareness Raiser  
Program Facilitator  
External Consultant  
Program Facilitator |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
<th>RESPONSE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Clergy Roles in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>What is the contribution of congregational clergy to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
<td>Role Congregational Maintenance Doing Everything Controlling Service Community Development Engaging Community Visionary Linking Facilitating Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Central Church Roles in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>What is the contribution of central church organisations to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
<td>Facilitation Policy/Theology Statements Awareness Raising Programs Program Consultations Promoting Suitable Settings Information Clearing House Support Activities Research Accessing Resources Responding Structures Church Agencies Retain Control Imposition Independent Share Information Share Control Central/Regional Church Legitimate Issue Policy Officers Pseudo-clergy Peripheral Issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 - Issues Relating to Structural Issues Affecting Congregational Community Service Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
<th>RESPONSE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10. Management Structures for Congregational Community Services | What structures are needed to oversee congregational community services? | Formal Committee  
Formal Agreement  
Membership  
Executive Structure  
Advisory Groups  
Role of Appointees  
External Expertise  
External Contacts  
Staff Contacting  
Financial Oversight  
Monitoring Workloads  
Link with Service Users |
| 11. Life-Cycles of Congregational Community Services | What are the implications of the life-cycle stages that can be expected with congregational community services? | Initiation  
Individual  
Project Development Process  
Community Needs  
Congregational Gifts  
Ministry Project  
Premature  
Trapped  
Balanced  
Changing the Focus  
Outside Committee Members  
Employing Staff  
External Funding  
Developing Natural Leaders  
Church Community Planning  
Passing on the Vision  
Emerging from church  
Outside staff  
New Generation  
Independent of congregation |
| 12. Evaluation of Congregational Community Services | What evaluation procedures are useful in assisting to change congregational community services? | Undone  
Implicit  
Explicit |
| 13. Programs Operating as Congregational Community Services | What programs can congregational community services develop and operate? | Formality  
Holistic  
Formal/Informal linked  
Informal Program  
Interactive Emphasis  
Basic Needs  
Response Level  
Ordinariness  
Untrained  
Professional Competence  
Trained Staff  
Goal  
Band-Aid  
Preventive  
Funding  
Government  
Independent  
Special Case  
Pastoral Care  
Less formal  
More theological  
Less Justice  
Less statutory |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
<th>RESPONSE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 14. Deterrents to Congregational Community Services | What gets in the road of developing and sustaining congregational community services | Limitations of Congregations
Busy-ness
Privacy
Fear
Numbers
Money
Lifestyle
Structural Complexity
Being Employer
Funding
Managing
Lack of Understanding
Poverty
Sexuality
Social Conscience
Political Action
No Guiding Models |
Appendix 7: PAPER PRESENTED AT ARNOVA CONFERENCE WASHINGTON DC 1999

TITLE

Congregational Community Service Involvement – Views from the Church-Welfare Interface in Australia

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at the
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of the
Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action
Washington D.C.

November 1999
1. Introduction

In this era of government retreat from the Welfare State, a pattern noted in the US (Wineburg & Wineburg, 1986, 1987) and the UK (Harris, 1998b) has also been found in Australia (Linossier, 1994). This pattern hints, however tenuously, at a recent trend to congregational involvement in local community service provision. In the US, this growth has clearly led to increased expectations of these services by those framing the social policy development that became the Charitable Choice provisions of the 1996 Welfare Reform legislation (Center for Public Justice, 1996). In view of this type of policy development, it is imperative that the actual operation of congregationally-based community services be better understood. It is as an initial contribution to that understanding that this analysis is presented.

The link between the development of community welfare services and the Christian churches and their adherents is as much a feature of Australian welfare history (Community Services Victoria, 1992; Dickey, 1987; Horsburgh, 1988; Kennedy, 1985; Lyons, 1990; Swain, 1996, 1997) as it is of welfare history in the United States (Chambers, 1986; Leiby, 1985, 1987; Marty, 1980) and the United Kingdom (Jordan, 1984; Munday, 1986). This link remains a dominant feature of service delivery more than a century later as church-sponsored agencies represent the largest provider of services after the commonwealth, state and local government themselves, albeit with the assistance of substantial government funding (Kaldor et al, 1995, 1999). Consequently they dominate any listing of major charitable organisations (Industries Commission, 1995).

With exceptions such as the former Methodist and Anglican Missions originally associated with particular local churches (see Swain, 1997), what is generally overlooked in this history is the role of local church congregations in the direct provision of community welfare services to the wider community either separately from or cooperatively with these centrally organised church-sponsored bodies. Evidence for this congregational involvement in Australia was largely idiosyncratic (eg Browning, 1986) or imputed (eg Bryson & Thompson, 1972; Burke, 1992; McCaughey, 1987; Shaver, 1977) until the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) reported data indicating that 35% of congregations surveyed in 1991 claimed to directly provide welfare services to their local community (Kaldor et al, 1995). It is noteworthy that the 1996 NCLS survey, using structured instead of open questions, suggests instead that in excess of 60% of congregations now make this claim (Kaldor et al, 1999).

The Uniting Church of Australia, Victorian Synod (UCA) also provides evidence for this in a 1993 survey of its parishes (Linossier, 1994). Those results indicate that 65% of UCA parishes had their own welfare programs which, in the 215 parishes that responded (73% of UCA parishes in Victoria), employed 61 effective full-time paid staff and 202 effective full-time volunteer staff. The programs
reportedly received only 10% of their funds from government, with 80% of the programs having
begun since 1980 and 45% since 1990. These programs did not include 21 community service
agencies which were officially sponsored by congregations, in contrast to a central church body, or 9
UCA Parish Missions (formerly Methodist Mission Circuits) which had transferred their sponsorship
away from their historical congregational links to a central UCA church body.

Researchers in the US (Cnaan & Milofsky, 1997; Cormode, 1994; Hall, 1997; Jeavons & Cnaan,
1997; Stone & Wood, 1997 & Wineburg, 1993), the UK (Harris, 1995b) and Australia (Lyons, 1996b)
have all noted that until recently congregationally-based community service programs and similar
small religious nonprofits have not been seen as a legitimate focus for social research; indeed any
focus on researching local church congregational life barely predates this decade (eg in Australia see
Roozen et al, 1984) when religious sociologists turned their attention to the study of congregations
instead of denominations or the religious behaviours of cultures (Ammerman, 1994; Warner, 1993,
1994). Hence the dynamics of these congregationally-related community services have not been
understood.

A number of significant studies of congregational community service involvement have now become
available in the US which survey and enumerate various aspects of congregational community service
involvement (Chaves, 1999; Cnaan, 1998; Farnsley, 1998b; Grettenberger, 1997; Hodgkinson et al,
1997), with some reference to Canada also (Cnaan & Handy, 1998). Although the sampling processes
used remain a contested issue (Chaves, 1999, Farnsley, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a), among many other
features these studies identify the extent of congregational community service involvements at
between 57% (Chaves, 1999) and 93% (Cnaan, 1998 cf 92% Hodgkinson et al, 1992) of
congregations. In addition related research has been published on the implications for management
when the goals of religiously-based nonprofit organisations include religious as well as community

However, only a few studies to date move beyond enumeration to some sort of exploration of the
dynamics associated with how congregational community service involvement occurs. Ammerman
(1997a, 1997b) indicates the importance of congregational community services for an effective
response by congregations exposed to significant community change in 9 different US regions;
Cameron (1998) examines the implications for congregational relationships of social involvement
programs in five English congregations by researching intra-organisational links, decision-making
processes and factors promoting change; Harris (1995b, 1998b, 1998d) explores the features of the
“Quiet Care” found to occur within the overall organisational processes of four English

Whilst all these studies were undertaken within unique contexts and undoubtedly have implications beyond those contexts, none sets out to specifically explore the processes which participants perceive to be involved as typical congregations initiate and sustain congregational community service involvements within their wider community. How the various participants perceive questions such as, ‘what initiates congregational social involvement, why it occurs, how it develops, how it is sustained, what becomes of it, what are its critical decision points, and what feasible response options are available?’ are at best incompletely considered in these studies. In addition, whilst Kaldor and Kaldor (1988) offer an Australian collation of congregationally-related activities and motivations, no substantial study of the experience of congregational community service involvement within the religious and welfare culture of Australia has been identified.

It is therefore as a first step to a better understanding of the features involved in this congregational process as encountered in an Australian state that the research discussed here was undertaken. Focusing on the analysis of the initial data obtained, this paper seeks only to report on the first stage of a two stage research project. Hence it does not seek to directly link that analysis to any of the earlier studies cited, although implications of the analysis for an understanding of congregational community services and for the second stage of the research will be noted.

2. Research Methodology

The overall research project set out to discover a theory about the development and operation of congregationally related community service activities by allowing the various participants in that process to speak in their own words about their perception of that experience, to record those words, and to then explore that record with an “eye” for emerging patterns within those “stories”. This exploration was undertaken by comparing the transcribed text for similarities and difference in concepts and features raised, giving due recognition of the text’s original context. The data was
collected through cycles of in-depth interviews (Minichiello et al, 1995) with participants followed by data exploration by this comparison process, with the next cycle of interviews with relevant participants and data exploration elaborating and refining the concepts and features that had already emerged. As is consistent with this conversational mode of data collection, the interviews were open-ended to ensure respondents could raise issues and comment as they chose. However this approach also meant my own experiences at times formed part of the discussion with respondent and material raised by earlier respondents sometimes were related to later ones within this process of issues identification and exploration.

Nonetheless, as time and research resource limitations inevitably curtailed this process, it was assumed around three or four cycles of data collection and analysis would be enough to surface both a range of relevant concepts and features as seen by participants in the process of congregational community involvement, as well as a framework for theorising how these concepts might be linked to or influence one another.

This approach was developed to ensure that any model or framework derived would be grounded in the experience of the participants, a process of theory generation by induction, in contrast to the more traditional research methodology of hypothesis deduction and testing. As such this is a research approach similar to the various Grounded Theory approaches formulated jointly and individually by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1992). However, despite the attempt at “theoretical sampling” incorporated, resource limitations preclude certainty in working to a point of “theoretical saturation” in which no new categories or concepts could be expected. In addition, the “constant comparison” process used was computer aided via Q.S.R. NUD*IST Rev 4 qualitative data analysis software (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1997), an approach which neither Glaser nor Strauss used (Richards & Richards, 1999).

To commence this process, the first sample chosen for the initial stage of this research was a convenience sample of 13 professional welfare personnel known to be experienced in diverse ways with the Australian church-welfare interface. The characteristics of this sample are summarised in Table 1 below. It is noted that respondents from Catholic, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Jewish, Islamic or Buddhist groups were not included in this convenience sample. However this pilot or first stage study was not initially intended to be representative, only to provided a wider base for facilitating research sensitivity to likely issues (theoretical sensitivity in the Grounded Theory approach) and as a first effort at analysis using the constant comparison method of the grounded theory approach to this type of data. However, once the data was collected and analysed, its richness in identified issues was thought to justify its use within this qualitative methodology.
Interviews conducted with these respondents invited them to discuss their experiences of congregationally-related community welfare services and the issues that experience raised about congregational community service involvement. The transcribed interviews were then coded for emerging issues and then re-coded more finely for the properties and dimensions that were associated with each of the issues that emerged. This approach was adopted as it provided an emerging framework as a reference for the second or main stage interviews with participants involved with operational congregational community services. Also, by providing an initial data set derived from a more diverse range of professional and personal experiences with congregational community services than my own, this initial stage also helped moderate for me as the researcher the influence of my own past experiences and reflections on subsequent in-depth interviews.

Interviews for this stage were conducted over 15 days in December 1995 and, in another break from a strict Grounded Theory approach, these were not progressively analysed as the interviews occurred, but were gradually transcribed, and then coded and analysed, over the following three years. This paper therefore summarizes the characteristics and/or options associated with the issues identified in this first stage analysis, and in so doing identifies an initial framework for discussing congregational community service activities. Main stage data collection and analysis is currently underway but outcomes from this are not considered in this paper. This paper therefore only reports the first stage of work in progress.

3. Discussion

Emerging from the data analysis process were three clusters of issues. These related to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Denominational Affiliation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organisational Context</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Congregational Pastor</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Network Coordinator</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Teaching/Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Ecumenical Agency Policy Officer</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Social Work/Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. The Uniting Church is a 1977 merger of the Methodist Church of Australia with some Presbyterian and Congregational Churches.
The rationale for and contextual thinking about congregational community services;
- The roles and availability of personnel for congregational community services; and
- The structural aspects of congregational community services.

Each of these clusters of emerging issues will therefore be discussed in turn in order to explore how each was seen by the respondents as affecting the involvement of congregations in community service activities. In particular the options raised by the identified dimensions of each issue will be summarised.

3.1 The Rationale

Five issues emerged reflecting five keys areas in which different ways of thinking about congregational community services were experienced. These are briefly summarised in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Congregational Approach to Community Connection</td>
<td>Insular congregation, Justice response congregation, Formal provider congregation, Local issues response congregation via: Representatives in the community, Partnership arrangements, Informal support networks, Outreach activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Theology Informing Congregational Community Involvement</td>
<td>Theology of Church, Theology of the Person, Theology of Mission, Faith as a Dimension of Service, Theology of Lay Ministry, Theology and Social Welfare Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Bridge-Building between Congregation Members and Service Users</td>
<td>Linkages via Life Experiences within Congregation, Linkages via Congregational Involvement with Agencies, Linkages via Congregational Activities for Outsiders, Linkages via Service Users on program Committees, Linkages via Congregational Participation in the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Congregational Resources for Community Service Involvement</td>
<td>Buildings, Non-Government Funds, Networks of Available Social Support, Relationships with Church-Sponsored Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Congregational Agendas for Community Service Involvement</td>
<td>Needs of Service Providers, Spiritual Motivations, Conversion/Gaining congregational participants, Providing Holistic Services, Providing service as an expression of faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i. Congregational Approaches to Community Connection

This issue reflects ways in which congregations go about relating to their geographic locality. Respondents identified that some congregations remained effectively *insulated* from their surrounding community life as they adopted a privatised religion which focused on their own member’s spiritual life and faith development, but which was largely irrelevant to the wider community. However others
noted this stance also reflected congregations that saw themselves retreating as they confronted their own struggle to merely survive.

Other congregations were seen to respond at another extremity by adopting a more comprehensive and structurally aware view with a desire to contribute to change and social justice at whatever level. However not many were seen to be focused this way, and those that were evidenced this mainly through the inclinations of their clergy.

Some congregations were seen to seek to develop formal service provision facilities; however the main discussion of this came from a respondent who, as a church agency executive officer, saw many deterrents to congregations seeking such a formal response to its locality. Rather he saw that congregations would tend instead to presume the church-agencies could and would provide these formal services better.

The most discussed approach was that of a congregation responding flexibly to issues they identified as arising within their locality. These responses were seen to be pursued in any of four ways:

- they could appoint congregational representatives to participate in community committees established to address issues;
- they could form partnerships with other local community groups to jointly respond to particular issues, an approach seen to help ensure congregational people become better matched to services and linked to their locality;
- they could seek to use informal support links with available congregational members or networks; or
- they could develop specific outreach activities themselves.

In contrast to the first three ways, outreach activities were seen to more systematically seek out people with needs. They were also seen to present options which raised dilemmas for congregational community services and their expected outcomes. One option was for the congregation to act with care and compassion for those in need, with no overt link to the spiritual life of the congregation intended, though some respondents allowed for the possibility of implicit links. However another was for the caring act to be intentionally a means for initiating a religious encounter of a form reflecting that congregation’s practice, which might include evangelism or proselytisation. A middle path was suggested by some respondents who saw the mere linking of people to congregational members as a sufficient response as it was more natural, holistic and offered a wider set of relationships. In yet another dimension, some relevant response options were seen to be based on the commitment and flexibility of volunteers while others involved programs that required the services of various professionals.
These are all options around which congregations choose to focus their community engagement. Whilst some options raise concerns, those relate to other issues beyond the approach itself which congregations adopt. In addition there is no suggestion only one approach can or would be adopted.

ii. Theological Perspectives Informing Congregational Community Services

Over half of the respondents identified aspects of theological understanding as important in thinking through congregational community services because “bridge-building” with the wider community was seen to require “a clear theological framework” able to guide the approach taken, even though a specific theology was not seen as deterministic of the existence of these community involvements. These understandings were seen to relate to theologies of church, of mission, of the person (including of persons with disabilities), and of lay ministry (including a theology of limited expectations). However respondents made little exploration of what these theological understandings might be.

One exception to this limited elaboration was in the area of mission where a challenge was made to a theology which relegated the mission of service to the realm of central church agencies, and the mission of worship and faith-development to the realm of congregations. Rather it was argued that in principle these were “joined” and the perceived tension between an outreach with a specific spiritual message (evangelism) and an outreach with a caring service needed to be theologically reinterpreted in that light. A consequence of this was to see faith as a dimension of practice in social services which needed to be better understood.

A second exception was the theology of lay ministry which saw ministry as a call to service for all congregational members. This was contrasted to a church pattern which saw lay people as passive and as second class citizens in the church, and clergy as a dominant autocracy solely responsible for ministry, a perspective so entrenched in church life that it was seen to often capture even those who did not endorse it.

A final theological dimension identified was the relationship between the insights of theology and the humanistic theories of practice that were traditionally dominant in professional literature. These were seen to relate to an integrated understanding of community, social justice, personhood, charity, liberation, human engagement and love – areas in which understandings were seen to overlap in a way that needed recognition if congregations were not to approach their community involvement as “a separate little holy club”.
iii. Bridge-Building with Communities in Need

It was well recognised by respondents that the people in the wider community to whom congregations targeted the services they developed were not typically related to churches, so leaving congregations seeking to develop programs which challenge them to identify effective “points of entry” or “bridges”. Options identified as dimensions of this issue included recognising that some people in congregations were likely to have life experiences that would assist them to be link people with the target group.

A second option was for congregational people to become involved with outsider and marginalised people by being volunteers with agencies already working with such groups. This approach also required support from agency staff if this linking process is to facilitate the development of appropriate relationships, and is to ensure the necessary acceptance of marginalised people by church people who were thought likely to find some relationships difficult.

Another option related to congregations being supported to develop and offer specific activities not otherwise available and to which people with particular needs could be referred by existing services. Examples of these were running lone parent camps, craft groups and neighbourhood houses with one respondent making particular reference to the care with which a referral would need to be made and the support for the developing service offered. By such means effective linkages between the two social groups, congregations developing services and service user groups, were found to be facilitated.

Including service users on program committees was recognised as a bridging option, but one seen to suffer from problems of tokenism and “boredom” in, typically, an alien environment. The suggested alternatives by a couple of respondents were for “user groups” to meet informally with program workers to formulate advice to send to the relevant committee. Another option was for congregational members to engage in wider community activities more familiar to target groups. Such approaches were seen by respondents to promote the development of community and the “standing alongside” others, an approach seen to need incorporation into the training of congregational clergy.

iv. Congregational Resources able to be used in Community Services

Congregational buildings were noted by three respondents as an extensive component of congregational involvement in particular community service activities, and are clearly a flexible resource available to most. Congregations were also seen as a source of non-government funds for supporting community service activities. However with regard to the latter, a number of respondents noted most congregations were said to be facing their own survival struggles and so efforts to divert funds from their normal congregational budget to community services were seen as questionable.
Another respondent saw the issue quite differently in that they warned against congregations seeking to access government funds because of their “strings”, their short-term basis, and their capacity to distort service agendas. This issue of funding therefore seems likely to risk some form of “double jeopardy” in that the costs of community services are unlikely to be able to be met directly by congregations, and could be unduly constraining should congregations seek them from government.

Two other resources associated with congregations were identified as dimensions of this issue. The most apparent was the access congregationally-related community services had to existing community networks. These networks have a pattern of promoting involvement in various types of care activities and of even being able to access “untapped” resources the “parish community didn’t know it had”; although one respondent also warned that congregations can easily be assumed to be “stronger than they really are”. Note was also made that congregations engaging in community services would be assisted by understanding the comparison between their own demographics and the demographics of their surrounding community, a comparison the NCLS publications were seen as available to assist.

However limitations identified in using these networks included wrong assumptions about the acceptance by church people of needy outsiders, their lack of capacity to sustain larger programs, the lack of professionals included within them in the localities with most social need, the contradictory and excessive expectations that were experienced by professionals who were available or who relocated to join congregationally-based services, and the failure of church culture to recognise the necessary limitations to congregational people’s capacity to endlessly contribute.

A final resource assumed to be associated with congregations was their denominational relationship with a network of church-sponsored agencies. These were seen to have the potential to jointly develop community service programs with congregations; to support congregations through consultancies and training to develop basic care groups for their community; to assist congregations with information on their local community service resources through distribution of community service directories; to provide information that raises congregational awareness of social issues; and to support a cooperative matching process for involving congregational people in suitable community service roles.

However such an effective cooperation between agencies and congregations was seen to be so rare that one respondent perceived that “divorce” was an instinctive way to characterise it. The pitfalls that were seen to characterise this were:

- the limited to non-existent capacity of church agencies to accept referrals from congregations because of workloads and because the services they provided were funded by governments for a typically different target population normally generated by referrals from the government’s own departments;
- a typical failure by church agency personnel to activate genuine mutual responsibility when developing joint programs due to their sense of ultimate responsibility for and control of the finances involved;
- a lack of effective congregational ownership of programs located in their facilities by church agencies;
- a lack of any identifiable “difference” in the operation of church agency programs; and
- an understanding of mission which has separated the “Deed” related to church agency services from the “Word” related to congregational religious activities.

In the face of such difficulties it is understandable that this resource of congregations is seen by respondents as at best problematic and at worst unachievable.

v. Congregational Agendas for Community Service involvement

The final issue for thinking about congregational community services relates to the agendas that give rise to them. At the most basic, these were seen to be simply a desire by church people to have somewhere to express their faith in “practical” ways, a desire to be involved out of “goodwill”. As such it more intentionally met the members’ needs rather than anybody else’s, a still legitimate agenda in one respondent’s view.

More typically there was some sort of spiritual motivation. This varied from a desire to use the service to promote involvement in the congregation’s religious life either through seeing the congregation itself grow or through seeing people make faith commitments; to a desire to respond to and nurture as a holistic component of caring for the deeper spiritual life of service users however recognised; to expressing the Christian message simply by the establishment of caring services. Some adopting the latter view expressed strong concern about the inappropriateness of establishing any service “to convert somebody” or gain church participation, though they accepted that involvement may nonetheless occur as a result of contact with congregational services.

Others saw the need to express the agenda in ways that did not alienate intended service users, but which still had their distinctively Christian motivation documented for any who wished to know. The opportunity for an integrated physical arrangement which both reinforced the link between faith and service but which meant the community service left the religious aspects to other congregational activities made available to those who inquired, was seen by one respondent as an effective balance for these concerns.
3.2 The Personnel

Four issues emerged from the analysis which related to the roles of particular personnel involved with or likely to be involved with the provision of congregational community services. These are summarised in Table 3 below.

i. Congregational Volunteers in Community Services

Congregational community services were generally understood to be largely dependent on volunteer availability. There was however a general sense that this pool of people had been depleted due to reduced participation in congregational life, women’s increased work involvement, and increased work demands generally. However the most available groups of people were thought to be the elderly, the retired and the unemployed. Other groups identified as contributing volunteer time were professional women offering their skills at a time their careers were on hold, service users wanting to also contribute, employed staff including clergy undertaking duties beyond their normal roles and/or outside their paid work time, outside professionals who offer their services without charge, and congregational members with a particular desire to express their faith in a practical service.

Table 3: Issues Related to the Personnel with Roles in Congregational Community Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Congregational Volunteers in Provision of Community Services</td>
<td>People who are Available, Training, Roles, Commissioning, Leadership, Rights and Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Professionals involved in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>External Consultants, Insider Consultants, Employees, Insiders, Outsiders, Spirituality in Professional Practice, Practitioner’s, Service User’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Clergy Roles in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Congregational Maintenance, Control, Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Central Church Officers Roles in Congregational Community Service</td>
<td>Facilitation, Central Church Roles, Church Agency Roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training for volunteers was seen as an essential program component in contrast to a perceived traditional expectation that church volunteers just “plough in”, a process said to leave many without confidence, knowledge or skills for their roles. Some respondents suggested that this training should incorporate the training offered volunteers by other local services in order to more effectively link congregational volunteers into their wider community. Some also saw “modelling” as an appropriate
means for training particular volunteers. One respondent warned, however, that the spontaneous and natural helping skills of volunteers should be seen as a particular asset and that training needed to affirm rather than undermine that. Such was seen likely if services confused levels of “ordinariness” with levels of “professional competence”. Confidentiality was also seen as a particular facet necessary in any volunteer training program.

Apart from informal support roles, the particular ways volunteers might participate were rarely explored. However note was made that volunteering needed to have its own “career path” and that roles undertaken needed to be supported by congregational program arrangements. The leadership of volunteer individuals within congregations who independently undertook community action was also seen as an issue. Their initiative was seen to need nurturing by either intentionally linking such volunteers to similar volunteers in a structured way so they could learn from and support each other, or by active support being offered by others in wider congregational leadership roles. An affirming process of commissioning volunteers for their respective roles was advocated by one respondent as a supportive structural arrangement.

Finally, the risk of volunteer abuse through failure to affirm the limits on volunteer time and availability was seen as a traditional church problem that should be addressed. Volunteer burnout was seen as a particular concern for people who felt they didn’t have the right to say “No”. Consequently one respondent suggested that codes for volunteers rights and responsibilities needed to be adopted in congregational settings.

ii. Professionals in Congregational Community Services

Professionals were seen to have a key role in the development and operation of congregational community services. Local professionals could be used as external consultants to such programs, whilst professionals within the congregation could be seen to play key insider consultancy roles to those within the congregation developing and operating community services. Both groups would be able to support the facilitation of these programs, the former through sharing relevant local understandings, and the latter through their knowledge of the faith-related grid within which their congregation’s community services develop.

However the most significant dimension of this issue was the dilemmas seen to be associated with the employment of professionals within congregational programs. For at least one respondent the ideal was for key professionals to be, or to at least become, insiders to the congregation, to be or become members who share the faith commitment of the congregation, are able to provide leadership to the congregation as it grapples with the links between its faith and its service activities, and who possess relevant professional skills and reputations. Where such people are available, or imported, it was
noted that, again, considerable risk of burnout occurred unless suitable boundaries between
the person’s personal and congregational life and their professionally-related activities could be
negotiated and supported. Many respondents suggested however that church culture tended to
courage professionals with these commitments to be “martyrs” who knew no limits, a view
experienced by some as too idealistic, unhelpful personally, unhelpful to service users, and in need of
review through suitable mentor support, support not typically provided to these professionals.

Where appropriate insider employees could not be found, respondents noted that some program
commitments necessitated the appointment of “outsider” professionals to carry out the essential roles.
These appointments were seen to require compromises with the ideal through the appointment of
personnel who did not actively participate in the sponsoring congregation’s life and/or who could not
provide the conceptual leadership to the congregation as it grappled with the faith/service integration
of its community service program. Such compromises were seen to have inevitable implications for
change in how congregational community service was then undertaken.

Another key dimension of this issue was the perceived relationship between professional practice and
spiritual life, a relationship made more apparent through the congregational context in which the
community service is based. Two aspects of this were identified:

- The practitioner’s own spirituality and its relationship to their professional knowledge and
  skills was seen by some respondents to be integral to their self-understanding as a
  professional as well as problematic for others because of past traditions of professional
  practice which were said to oblige practitioners to segregate these aspects of their lives.
Congregational community services were seen as a practice setting where integration could be
legitimately explored and appropriately expressed, with due recognition of the ethical issues
of power and tolerance that were said to be involved.
- The spirituality of service users was seen to often naturally arise within congregational
  community services and yet, within the experience of a number of respondents, was not seen
to be a legitimate dimension of professional practice until more recent years. Hence ways of
responding were still being explored, especially when current usage gave the term a fairly
broad meaning.

iii. Clergy Roles in Congregational Community Services

The role of clergy within congregations was typically seen by respondents as confused and worrying,
yet there was general recognition that their involvement was critical to success with congregational
community services. However three aspects came to the fore:
Contrary to their own intentions, clergy were at times seen to get trapped in a role of congregate maintenance, often taking on overall responsibility for their congregation and thereby limiting the extent to which congregateal life and mission could effectively develop beyond basic maintenance activities. This was seen to have the implication that much congregateal community service activity was then actually the activity of the clergy more than the congregate itself.

A reverse problem with similar consequences was the frequently noted concern that some clergy adopted fairly controlling stances within congregateal life. Such congregations were seen to develop and sustain community service involvements only to the extent that the clergy of the time saw these as legitimate, actively supported them and, typically, led them. Power struggles with clergy about how such programs operated were also readily noted.

Consequently there seemed a general consensus among respondents, including clergy social workers, that community development was an approach to developing congregateal community services that clergy needed to adopt but for which they normally had no training. Even though the use of the term varied between clergy being facilitators of others’ leadership and service, clergy being the link between the congregation and the community service by chairing the relevant committees, clergy being the active links to the wider community, and clergy being the visionaries who encouraged others to link with the wider community, there was agreement that this approach was more desirable.

iv. Roles of Central Church Officers in Congregational Community Services

Respondents also saw the issue of central church officers as crucial to the development of congregateal community services. Dimensions seen generally related to a range of ways in which these central officers could facilitate such congregateal activities. These included the circulation of policy and theology statements, and circulation of social issues information sheets, which raised congregateal awareness of social issues and Christian responses; the employment of community service consultants available to congregations; the promotion of supportive working environments for volunteer and paid staff in community service activities; the sharing of information on the community service activities of other congregations; the facilitation of conferences and other support activities which promoted mutual support among those involved in congregateal community services; research into issues impacting on congregateal service provision; and access to additional resources to support service development and operation.

These supports were seen as potentially able to come from either the central church body itself or from the church-sponsored agencies. In the case of the former, the capacity of these church bodies to do this were actively questioned in the case of one denomination, and contrasted with perceived
support in others, because it was believed the denominational hierarchy in their quest for survival had moved community services to the periphery of church life and therefore no longer allocated the necessary funds. Concern also revolved around the extent to which traditional ordination actually undermined the development of congregational community service by reinforcing traditional notions that ministry is to be undertaken by clergy or, as a second best, professionals whom congregations treated as “pseudo-clergy”. In the case of church-sponsored agencies, concern about their tendency to presume to impose programs and to then control any community service developed in association with a congregation was seen as the major obstacle. The establishment of a vision for community ministry being shared between agency and congregation was seen as an urgent need if the gulf between them was to be overcome.

3.3 The Structures

Five issues emerged which related to the structural aspects of congregational community services. These are briefly outlined in Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. <strong>Management</strong> Structures for Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Formal Agreements&lt;br&gt;Role of Committee Appointees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. <strong>Life-Cycles</strong> of Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Initiation&lt;br&gt;Vision&lt;br&gt;Rational Planning&lt;br&gt;Changing Focus&lt;br&gt;Passing on the Vision&lt;br&gt;Independence of Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. <strong>Evaluation</strong> of Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Congregational Review Committee&lt;br&gt;Seeking Best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. <strong>Programs</strong> Operated as Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Goals&lt;br&gt;Formality&lt;br&gt;Response Level&lt;br&gt;The Case of Pastoral Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. <strong>Deterrents</strong> to Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Limitations of Congregations&lt;br&gt;Structural Complexity&lt;br&gt;Lack of Understanding&lt;br&gt;Lack of Guiding Models</td>
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</table>

i. **Management Structures for Congregational Services**

Respondents’ main comments about the issue of management structures identified two dimensions. The first concerned the need for a detailed *formal agreement* to be developed and implemented in relation to any arrangement for a congregational community service activity to be developed and operated jointly with another body such as a church agency. It was seen that this agreement needed to cover the organisational structure and decision making processes of the joint activity to ensure that there was a genuine balance of partnership with no right of veto for one party. In one respondent’s experience such an agreement was found hard to work out and remained of uncertain effectiveness.
The issue of appointments to program committees was also seen as critical and needing to reflect the purposes for which the committee existed. It was noted that, in some situations, committees were intended to oversee building and finances rather than programs and personnel and so people with specialist knowledge on property development and fundraising, and/or with useful corporate links, were seen as more appropriate. If personnel issues such as workloads, or service user issues such as programs, were to be included then people with other expertise and skills were needing to be included and appropriate communication channels identified. Without these arrangements, respondents suggested differences of expectations about management structures were inevitable.

**ii. The Life-cycle of Congregational Community Services**

Congregational Community Services were typically seen to have small beginnings, usually linked to the vision of a key congregational member. Sometimes a process of rational planning (needs assessment, resource identification and program design) was found to be relevant, typically in congregations that wished to develop a community service but had no sense of “capture” by any particular issue. Warnings were raised by another respondent about each process – the first, re-acting without adequately understanding the issues or the process was dangerous; the second that becoming trapped in the process of issue examination and feasibility assessment dissipated energy. A balance between these two tendencies was urged.

Change in congregational community services were seen to be most likely when outsider people were appointed to enlarge committees or fill staff vacancies, when professional staff were appointed, and when new funding sources were gained. Each event was seen as a likely precursor to a change of emphasis within the service.

The passing on of a congregational vision for service was seen as affected by two contrasting trends. One was that each new generation in a congregation’s life needed to identify, own and be free to implement it’s own vision of how to be “real” to its own surrounding community. Hence programs developed by congregations needed to be free to change. On the other hand, when key staff involved emerged from the life of the congregation then the vision that undergirded the program remained “authentic and real”. However when that ceased, then the vision was seen as likely to develop an independence from the congregation that left the initiating congregational members confused and deeply concerned. Whilst this was noted to have frequently occurred, it’s inevitability was questioned.

**iii. The Evaluation of Congregational Community Services**

Some recognition was given to the need for programs to be reviewed and evaluated. One respondent saw this achievable through the establishment within a congregation of a permanent church
community committee. This review committee was to have a watching brief to discuss and revise the congregation’s “church community interface”. As a result of its deliberations it was to be able to “kill off” programs that were no longer achieving the goals the congregation had for them, and to initiate new programs more in keeping with the new congregational energies. This was seen as a better option than allowing programs to “limp along” simply because they had once been started.

Another respondent saw evaluation as a necessary aspect of identifying the “elements of best practice” associated with congregational community services in the quest for fundamental practice principles. These were seen as necessary to ensure congregational community services were serious efforts at community involvement.

iv. The Programs Offered through Congregational Community Services

Congregational service programs discussed by respondents varied from those with basic goals, such as the delivery of a simple service like emergency relief, a meals program for the homeless, a youth housing program, or a community lounge for the homeless and/or mentally disturbed, to those with more integrated and holistic goals. These latter included one service with a diverse range of more cost intensive programs such as those which, in a single setting, incorporated family counselling, financial counselling, emergency relief, financial aid, youth services, day care and occasional care services, pre-school education, craft groups, women’s groups and advocacy services.

Likewise some services were developed with a definite sense of facilitating access to the less formal social networks of the congregation. This was achieved by offering services in a setting which was shared with the congregation and in which information about congregational study groups and social activities was available to any who inquired. This approach was less formal and only indirectly raised service user awareness of the spiritual dimensions of congregational life.

These programs also illustrate the distinction made between programs operating at the level of ordinariness and those operating at the level of professional competence, the latter clearly requiring more funding, being more formal, and offering more comprehensive responses to need.

A particular mention was made by a number of respondents of pastoral care. Whilst perceptions of what this was were not especially clear it could be seen to be a program response which clearly bridged the divide between spiritual and the social concerns. It is seen generally as less formal and more open to spiritual issues than the more traditional welfare programs. As such it seems accepted as having a place in congregational community services that it would not have in many traditional welfare settings (institutions such as hospitals seemed to be notable exceptions where social workers and pastoral workers were seen at times to be in competition).
v. The Deterrents to Developing Congregational Community Services

Finally the issue of factors deterring the development and operation of congregational community services was frequently raised. These related to four dimensions:

- The *limitations* faced by congregational members themselves. People were seen to have a shortage of time, a concern to protect their privacy, and a need to give priority to their own issues. In addition, many congregations were viewed as lacking the capacity to emotionally or otherwise accept the behaviours of many potential service users. Typical congregations were also seen to lack the financial resources necessary to establish more than simple programs. And lastly, congregations were believed to have fewer numbers of active members than in the past so restricting their capacity to develop services.

- The *structural complexity* of the welfare system was seen as a deterrent to congregational service development who were not seen to have the resources necessary to administer these complex requirements.

- It was suggested by respondents that people in congregations *lacked understanding* of the factors linked with chronic poverty or other experiences of social marginalisation that were a part of many service users lives. This therefore limited their capacity to address issues of poverty, discrimination, political advocacy and social change.

- And finally it was suggested that there was a lack of relevant *models* of how congregations might effectively respond to many social issues. The models that were available tended to reflect an agency rather than a congregational setting.

4. Conclusion

These fourteen issues have been identified from the reflections made by thirteen welfare professionals about their diverse experiences of the church-welfare interface. As a result, this analysis offers a way of mapping issues that are associated with congregational community service activity. The analysis process used saw most of these issues emerge from the earlier interviews and be reinforced and developed with the later interviews. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that a significant “saturation” (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of emerging issues has in fact been achieved by this research methodology and that this framework is likely to be readily “relatable” (Bell, 1987) to a wider experience of congregational community service activities. Indeed, in response to a draft analysis being shared with, among others, a similarly experienced, provincially-based Catholic social worker and religious sister from interstate, the comment was offered that “although none of your data was collected from Catholic Church organisations, the issues are familiar”. This analysis is therefore ready to be used as a reference for undertaking the next or Main stage interviews in this research when the link between the issues and their influence on each other (and any additional emerging
issues then identified) in currently functioning community service activities of sample congregations will be further researched.

However it is also proposed that these fourteen issues and their identified dimensions and features are already useful, even though the research is not yet complete. By considering how each issue is explicitly or implicitly addressed in any given congregational community service program it is suggested that a map can be created which is useful for evaluating, monitoring, and planning congregational community services or for exploring the similarities and differences between services in different congregational settings. To assist with this, Table 5 below offers a Characteristic Question intended to facilitate the elaboration of each issue.

**Table 5: Characteristic Questions for each Congregational Community Service Issue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Approaches</td>
<td>In what ways does a congregation approach their relationship to their local community and its issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Theology</td>
<td>What Theological views influence how a congregation engages in community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Bridge Building</td>
<td>What Entry Points exist for congregational members to engage with marginalised groups in the wider community who are outside church networks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Resources</td>
<td>What assets is a congregation able to offer which may be of value to those outside the congregation in the local community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Agendas</td>
<td>What does a congregation hope to achieve by getting involved in Community Services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personnel</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Volunteers</td>
<td>What factors affect the contribution of congregational insiders to the provision of Congregational Community Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Professionals</td>
<td>What factors affect the contribution of professionals to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Clergy</td>
<td>What is the contribution of congregational clergy to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Central Church</td>
<td>What is the contribution of central church organisations to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Management</td>
<td>What structures are needed to oversee congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Life-Cycles</td>
<td>What are the implications of the life-cycle stages that can be expected with congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Evaluation</td>
<td>What evaluation procedures are useful in assessing congregational community services and their possible need to change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Programs</td>
<td>What programs can congregational community services develop and operate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Deterrents</td>
<td>What gets in the road of developing and sustaining congregational community services</td>
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</table>

Hence it is concluded that as well as identifying fourteen issues impacting on the functioning of congregational community services, this preliminary research has resulted in a potentially practical framework applicable to congregations as a specialised context for the provision of human services.
Further refinements of this framework, as well as a model which links these concepts in more dynamic ways, are the expected outcomes of this ongoing research project.

Finally, it is suggested that this understanding is relevant in this era of government funding reduction and increasing expectations for congregationally developed services, especially given that the impetus for these changes seems to be ideologically and theologically driven (Boston, 1998; Carlson-Thies & Skillen, 1996; Carlson-Thies & Rogers, 1998; Center for Public Justice, 1996; Sherman, 1997, 1998; Sider & Unruh, 1999). In order to fully address the policy implications, there is now also an urgent need to find out not only how many congregations operate which kinds of services (Chaves, 1999; Cnaan, 1998; Farnsley, 1998a, 1998b; Hodgkinson et al, 1992; Printz, 1998) and what they have actually achieved (Call to Renewal, 1999; Moore & Williams, 1999; Sherman et al, 1998) but also how these congregationally-based services actually operate (Harris, 1998; Farnsley, 1997a, 1997b; Wineburg, 1998a, 1998b). It is hoped that this descriptive framework and the further research will assist this understanding.
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Appendix 8: PAPER PRESENTED AT NACSW CONFERENCE ST LOUIS MO 1999

TITLE

Congregational Community Services in an Australian Practice Setting

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North American Association of Christians in Social Work
St Louis, Missouri

October 1999
1. Introduction

The history of welfare in Australia, like the US, includes a strong involvement of church-related organisations (Dickey, 1987; Leiby, 1987). Whilst these at times had their origin in local church congregations, mainly they arose from central church programs established outside of the dynamics of congregational life, though often through the enthusiasm of individuals from those congregations (Swain, 1997). Direct congregational involvement in welfare has been rarely studied by either welfare or church historians, despite the fact that in Australia it is now known more than 60% of congregations claim to provide such services (Kaldor et al, 1999).

My interest in congregational community services began in 1975 during my initial social work training at the University of Melbourne. It was encouraged through a group of Christian social work students who met regularly for mutual support and who spent time discussing David Sheppard’s then new book *Built as a City: God and the Urban World Today* (Hodder, 1974). This book, the reflections of a former leading British sportsman and evangelical Anglican clergyman, told of the work of his congregation’s Mayflower Centre in the dock areas of London. It inspired in me a sense that Christian congregations could be a base for practical service and an expression in word and deed of the gospel of the kingdom of God among the socially and spiritually marginalised. In particular he outlined a mutual interaction process between church and non-church people of “meeting, friendship, sharing and discovery” as an effective way for congregations to express God’s compassion, justice and hope. Hence, as my final assignment on Community Development, I set out to organisationally think through a proposal then raised within my own local church for a collective of local congregations to establish a general community information and counselling service.

Whilst to my knowledge that proposal never came to fruition, I found myself with a strong sense of call to accept as my first social work job, an appointment to “Care” Welfare Agency of the then Broadmeadows Methodist Mission congregation in Victoria’s largest public housing development located on the north western outskirts of Melbourne. For me this was the first of two formal social work positions in local church-related community service programs. My second position was as the founding coordinator of a family support program for the Anglican [Episcopalian] Church in a provincial town of Queensland, a position created by the central church body when their children’s home was defunded. That new service mainly related to five Anglican congregations in the provincial town of 56,000. Subsequently I also served on the management committee of another congregationally developed agency in
a Uniting Church [a merger of the Methodist Church with many Presbyterian Churches and most Congregational Churches of Australia] in a New South Wales provincial town. Most recently, back in my home state of Victoria, I set out to facilitate a congregational community care group in an outer eastern Melbourne Anglican Church.

Though I gained much of value, all these experiences had difficulties for me and, in an effort to better understand what happens in programs such as these, I focused my PhD research on the dynamics of congregational community service involvements. In 1993, when I first considered this theme, I was unaware of any research anywhere on this issue, although I had found some reflections on the topic by Diana Garland and her colleagues (Garland & Bailey, 1990; Garland, 1992). However, after beginning my PhD study in 1995, I eventually discovered that a number of researchers in the US and two in the UK had also begun to research aspects of congregational community services. Consequently a literature on it has steadily grown (e.g., Cameron, 1998; Cnaan, 1998; Dudley, 1991, 1996; Dudley & Johnson, 1993; Harris, 1995; Hodgkinson et al., 1992; Jeavons & Cnaan, 1997; Wineburg & Wineburg, 1986, 1987; Wineburg, 1990, 1996). However my particular emphasis, both from an Australian perspective and from a process perspective, still appears unique.

My initial research involved interviewing 13 social workers who had diverse experiences of the church-welfare interface in Victoria inviting them to share their experience of congregational community service involvement and the issues they found there (see Table 1 for summary characteristics of these respondents). These interviews were thematically

Table 1: Characteristics of the Initial Stage Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Denominational Affiliation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organisational Context</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uniting*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Congregational Pastor</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Network Coordinator</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uniting*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Teaching/Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Uniting*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Uniting*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Direct Service Worker</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Eccumenical Agency Policy Officer</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Parish Volunteer</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Professional Educator</td>
<td>Social Work/Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Anglican (Episcopalian)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Church Agency Executive</td>
<td>Social Work/Theology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Uniting Church of Australia is a 1977 merging of all Methodist with some Presbyterian and most Congregational Churches.
analysed with 14 issues being identified, the details of which are elaborated elsewhere (Bedford, 1999). These issues and their dimensions are summarised in Tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Whilst this analysis is only an initial research stage, it is suggested that these issues and their dimensions provide a useful framework for reviewing and comparing congregational community involvements. Therefore one purpose of this paper is to illustrate this by reviewing my own initial involvement as a social worker in a congregationally-based program. A second purpose is to thereby share an overview of social work practice in one Australian congregational setting.

2. Discussion

2.1 The Congregational Setting

In the late 1950’s the small outlying Broadmeadows community at the end of the suburban rail line next to a Migrant Hostel and Army base gradually found itself being engulfed by a growing public housing estate being developed without any planned community facilities on the edge of what became Victoria’s largest local government area. By the early 1970’s the young clergyman newly appointed to the Broadmeadows Methodist Circuit, with a small congregation in Broadmeadows and a larger one in its adjoining middle-income suburb of Glenroy, found that a steady stream of people seeking help with food, personal support and child care were knocking on the manse door. After prayer, discussion with the circuit stewards, investigation of options, and a fundraising drive among local industry where many residents worked (including a Ford Motor Company plant), a Methodist Mission program was established in 1971.

Quickly this Mission came to incorporate a Children’s Day Care Centre, a Bargain Store, a part-time social worker as family counsellor, and a youth program. The program was staffed largely by members of the congregation and some young professional couples who had sensed a call from God to move to Broadmeadows to live and worship and to serve as volunteers in the Mission programs. By late 1977 the Methodist church became one of the three constituent denominations in the new Uniting Church of Australia and the Broadmeadows Methodist Mission “Care” program became known as the Broadmeadows Uniting Church Parish Mission “Care” Centre. This name it retained until the late 1990’s when ties with the congregation ceased and it became a program of a central Uniting Church division.
My own time at “Care”, as it was locally known, began in Jan 1977 when I was appointed as the fourth in a succession of social workers in the Family Counselling Section. At the time I replaced a Federal Government funded Migrant Social Worker, and an internally funded Welfare Worker. I was initially appointed for 12 months on internal funds and remained until Mar 1983, 6¼ years later, when I accepted a new position with the Anglican church in Queensland. The support committee for this Section was chaired by the original “Care” social worker who had left the position, but not the congregation, for family reasons.

Over the time of my involvement the public housing estate grew to in excess of 50,000 people in a local government area of 120,000 people in a city of 2,000,000. It was one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Melbourne with a large Italian, Maltese, Greek, German, Lebanese, Turkish, British, Sri Lankan and South American population. The locality was initially without a central shopping centre, a coordinated bus service, a hospital, secondary schools in the newer estates, and the normal range of social security and welfare service provisions. However many of these services, except the hospital, were gradually developed by the time I left. Because of the low incomes and special circumstances necessary to obtain public housing and because of the lack of social facilities in the area, family dysfunction was not an uncommon experience. Typically these reflected financial problems, health-related problems and/or family relationship problems and when any two of these occurred together the third often soon developed. Broadly, these formed the focus of my social work role - personal, parenting and marriage counselling; financial counselling; social security, immigration and housing advocacy; legal and welfare information provision; emergency aid; and general crisis and personal support.

2.2 The Rationale for “Care”

Derived from my research, five issues emerged which linked to the Rationale behind congregational community services. These are approach, theology, bridge-building, agenda, and resources and, with their dimensions, are summarised in Table 2. How these were understood at “Care” Broadmeadows in my era there is the focus of this section.

Table 2: Issues Related to the Rationale for Congregational Community Service Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Congregational Approach to Community Connection</td>
<td>Insular congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice response congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal provider congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Issues response congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>via:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representatives in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnership arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal support networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outreach activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Emerging Issue | Dimensions of Issue

| ii. Theology Involving Congregational Community | Theology of Church  
Theology of the Person  
Theology of Mission  
Faith as a Dimension of Service  
Theology of Lay Ministry  
Theology and Social Welfare Theory |
| iii. Bridge-Building between Congregation Members and Service Users | Linkages via Life Experiences within Congregation  
Linkages via Congregational Involvement with Agencies  
Linkages via Congregational Activities for Outsiders  
Linkages via Service Users on program Committees  
Linkages via Congregational Participation in the Community |
| iv. Congregational Resources for Community Service Involvement | Buildings  
Non-Government Funds  
Networks of Available Social Support  
Relationships with Church-Sponsored Agencies |
| v. Congregational Agendas for Community Service Involvement | Needs of Service Providers  
Spiritual Motivations  
Conversion/Gaining congregational participants  
Providing Holistic Services  
Providing service as an expression of faith |

#### 2.2.1 Approach

The Broadmeadows Mission understood its role as faithfully relating “the Gospel in all its aspects to the people of the community”. Hence it was clear that it could not be an insular congregation. Indeed, many of the congregational members, though Australian, British or Sri Lankan in origin, had arrived in Broadmeadows with similar personal and family issues as those who used the Mission’s services. As they could not isolate themselves from their similarly struggling neighbours they set out to relate to the local issues. Most of this was focused on providing a professionally based service, although on local issues of social justice, partnerships were formed with others, mainly through the Broadmeadows Welfare Advisory Council (BWAC), to lobby for change such as improved transport services, improved access to hospitals and increased medical services.

#### 2.2.2 Theology

A tradition of social awareness as part of the history of Methodism clearly had its impact on the theological understanding of those active within the Broadmeadows Mission congregation. In particular the biblical basis for encouraging personal faith commitment as well as social engagement was the theology that undergirded all its activities. In a document provided at the time of my appointment, this position was briefly summarised as:

> According to the gifts, resources and power the Spirit gives [the Broadmeadows Methodist Mission] seeks:
> (a) to pastorally care for and nurture its congregations  
(b) to challenge others to Christian commitment and discipleship  
(c) to exercise love in practical and altruistic ways and without strings  
(d) to be a prophet in relation to issues of justice, community need and development.
Various superintendents to the Mission reflected this position in statements articulating a theology which integrated “personal relationship with Jesus”, “church as faith community” and “service” with “gospel motives” such as forgiveness, love, dignity, grace, genuine care, advocacy, real need, skills, simplicity, use of helpers and social action. Within this an “incarnational theology” based on God being in Jesus Christ among the socially marginalised seeking their liberation and healing was articulated as a legitimate Christian and biblical basis for welfare.

Whilst this understanding was shared by the Mission leaders not all appointed staff, or even all staff in leadership roles, consciously identified with these theologies. However it was this theology that helped affirm my sense of call to the social work position. Within my own theological statements of the time, I initially took a propositional approach reflecting the influence of Francis Schaeffer. As I grappled with the practicalities of this setting I was influenced more by the writing of the Christian community thinkers like Jean Vanier, Jim Wallis, Ron Sider and, within the Australian scene, Athol Gill. The common thread was a commitment to biblical faith, a personal conversion as Jesus’ disciples, a commitment to the marginalised as a response to that faith, and a dependence on the empowerment of God’s Spirit in prayer and through community as we collectively engaged in service. These understandings were explored, debated and practiced by many, including the professional couples such as myself and my wife, who moved into this locality in response to a sense of Christian “vocation”.

It is important however to indicate that through sharing with people within the congregation and among the service users, I was to discover that articulated theologies are not part of most people’s lives. Rather for most the “simple faith of a child” as Jesus suggested, or a sense of God as an actor in ones life, was more crucial to people’s faith journey, an understanding which I learned to call “Street Theology” which was lived rather than debated, a theology that needed to be watched and respected to be understood. I believe I am still learning this simple lesson, a lesson that my intellectual mind found contradictory to my evangelical tradition, but not the bible. It was this theology that influenced some people’s understanding of and work within “Care”.

2.2.3 Bridge-Building

Prior to my commencement at “Care” a number of effective bridges to people outside traditional church networks had been established. Within the Family Counselling Section the provision of emergency relief, information and advocacy were well-established links to
people in need whether English speaking or non-English speaking people. And despite operating out of a church building with a cross, this included the Islamic community in the area. The Bargain Shops were another contact point that provided assistance with cheap clothing and a listening ear without the sense of “begging” that sometimes sapped the dignity of people when requesting emergency aid, despite efforts to the contrary. Similarly the Children’s Day Care program provided dignified links to more intensive help via referral to the counselling staff. Over time through these links people were offered more natural friendships within group activities such as craft groups, after-school children’s groups, youth groups and, for those expressing interest, church services, Sunday school, bible study groups and congregational camps.

The common life experiences between some congregational members and some service users also build links (eg through congregational members involved in AA or Al-Anon) whilst, in other situations, particular roles of imported professionals were key contact points (teachers, social workers and lawyers especially). Efforts to include service users, and even “indigenous” Broadmeadows people, on “Care” committees were made at times but were initially ineffective as most committees were dominated by members of the adjoining congregation with management expertise and a formalised approach which made their participation difficult.

2.2.4 Resources

The property of the Broadmeadows congregation provided an operating base for the “Care” programs, however purpose related extensions to the buildings were added very early. This included the relocation of an inner suburban building as the Children’s Day Care Centre. By the time I began at “Care” in 1977, in addition to the Day Care Centre, the on-site complex consisted of a Youth Centre, Counselling and administration rooms, a most inadequate “waiting” area, a hall which had gradually been taken over by “Care” for food storage and additional offices, and the multi-purpose church centre which doubled as a community meeting and small groups centre. The Bargain Store and a Kindergarten were the only facilities located elsewhere.

Probably the major resource its church base made available to “Care” was the support provided by other Uniting Churches. These were the major source of the food distributed as emergency relief, the clothing and second-hand goods sold or given out from the Bargain Stores, as well as the funds raised independently of any fees or government grants. There were also grants from the Central Church body to assist with meeting clergy stipends. The
central church organisation also provided the legal identity for “Care” through the Act of Parliament which established the Uniting Church and, without formal incorporation as a voluntary charity, the legal basis for the tax deductibility of donations to this “charitable organisation”. However the central Uniting Church rarely interfered as legal responsibility for administration of “Care” was delegated to the Parish Council which, in turn, delegated the responsibility to a Committee of Management.

Finally, the congregation’s social networks from time to time proved to be the source of informal support as some service users were linked in through volunteer workers and, occasionally, professional staff employed within “Care”. It was these links, not typically available in secular welfare agencies, which helped integrate the welfare program into the congregation’s life.

2.2.5 Agendas

It is clear from “Care’s” approach and undergirding theology that its key agenda was to express and extend the congregation’s commitment to the “kingdom of God” by acting with compassion and justice on behalf of the poor, the immigrant and the damaged in the Broadmeadows community. In expressing God’s love and concern that way, there was nevertheless some hope that people would be drawn into the life of the congregation and the faith which motivated it. However there was never any view that “Care’s” work was merely to draw outsiders into the life of the church and be “evangelised”. The work of care and justice were seen as legitimate ends for a Christian mission in their own right.

Nonetheless, though not an overt motive, this approach also gave congregational members, both those indigenous to Broadmeadows and those who felt called of God to move to Broadmeadows, an opportunity to live out their Christian convictions by participating within the “Care” programs, programs which responded to local needs in ways reflecting biblical values. Included therefore was an acceptance of all, in contrast to only specialised services; flexibility of response to issues raised, and tacit recognition that the spiritual was potentially at least one dimension of any holistic response. Hence discussions about God and faith were at times accepted as responsible practices, whilst at the same time respect for the interest or disinterest of service users was highly valued.

2.3 The Personnel for “Care”

Derived from the research, four issues related to Personnel were identified. These are the place of volunteers, the involvement of professionals, the role of the clergy, and the links to
central church personnel and centrally sponsored church agencies. These and their options are summarised in Table 3, and the way they applied at “Care” is discussed in the following sections.

Table 3: Issues Related to the Personnel with Roles in Congregational Community Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Congregational Volunteers in Provision of Community Services</td>
<td>People who are Available Training Roles Commissioning Leadership Rights and Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Professionals involved in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>External Consultants Insider Consultants Employees Insiders Outsiders Spirituality in Professional Practice Practitioner’s Service User’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Clergy Roles in Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Congregational Maintenance Control Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Central Church Officers Roles in Congregional Community Service</td>
<td>Facilitation Central Church Roles Church Agency Roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.1 Volunteers

Many volunteers were involved with “Care”, the Bargain Stores and the Youth program with its Friday evening Coffee Shop being the main areas. However some volunteer administrative support, mainly fill-in for the paid staff, and some volunteer support workers with the Family Counselling section, also occurred. In the latter case, people facilitating craft group for women, after school programs for children, family camping programs and administration of the financial counselling program’s trust account were all volunteers. Such programs involved a reasonable level of contact between service users and the congregational members who, in the main, became volunteers.

Committee roles, both the management committee and support committees for the various “Care” sections were also volunteer-based, although normally without direct contact with service users. Committee volunteers came from the Mission’s two congregations, with Management Committee members typically being business people from the Glenroy congregation. Another group of typically unnoticed volunteers were in fact the paid staff who were not fully paid for the hours worked. Apart from the unpaid overtime of professionals, there were congregational people who were only nominally paid. For some this payment was to ensure their pensions were supplemented but without risking their full pension entitlement.
Whilst some “in house” volunteer training was supported in the early 1980’s, most volunteers were not specifically trained. However it was normal to match volunteers to roles which made use of their particular professional skills or prior life experiences and so training was not seen as necessary. Whilst an informal approach to support and supervision was provided, in retrospect, neither the training nor support offered were what would today be seen as necessary. It would be true to suggest that the general approach to volunteer involvement was less developed than it needed to be with no policies about their responsibilities or rights formulated and no processes for publicly endorsing such appointments. The exception was the support “Care” gave for the Home Tutor Scheme to train and support volunteers, many from the congregations, as English language tutors.

2.3.2 Professionals

A commitment to employ professionals as key staff was adopted from the start of “Care”. Hence the Children’s Day Care Centre quickly became the largest employer within “Care” with qualified nurses and child care workers required in most positions. Typically staff who had no involvement with the congregation or the faith motivation undergirding “Care” filled many of these although a qualified Director for the Day Care Centre was usually found from within the congregations. The Youth Worker and the Manager of the Bargain Stores were also always part of the congregations, although the two social workers appointed between the original worker and myself, and none of the welfare workers, participated in the Mission’s congregations.

This link between the congregations and the staff of the Family Counselling Section was an important issue for it significantly affected the congregation’s sense of integration with the “Care” programs. Initially, and again through my time with the Mission, this integration seemed to grow. However in the intervening period, when the social workers did not identify with the congregation or the faith basis of “Care”, it appears that the link waned. At times there was a sense that the link was best represented by the Superintendent’s involvement as the congregational pastor and the Executive Officer of “Care”. However, since 1988 when these became separate roles, this link also disappeared, with some now suggesting this decision significantly contributed to the issues which resulted in the organisational ties between the congregation and “Care” being severed. Hence the broader role of professionals in these settings can become a vexed issue.

Having “insider” professionals as employees can however also have its problems. Recognising that resources were limited, my own experience was that my identification with
the faith basis of “Care” and with its sponsoring congregation meant that I normally
endeavoured to give maximum possible effort. Working ten or more hours a week of unpaid
overtime therefore became normal. Blurring the boundaries between friendships within the
life of the congregation and community and professional relationships with service users was
normal. And finding this workload physically, emotionally and spiritually unmanageable
around every six months, but with no relief possible, also became normal. Consequently on
more than one occasion I had experiences which, as I termed it in one report, were “the
closest I ever wish to come to burnout”. These were the costs some encountered in working in
this way. For some the scars of burnout remain many years later, affecting people’s spiritual
life as well as their family and marital relationships. One superintendent minister said to me at
one time “Ian, don’t waste a good death!”, a challenge which, in my idealism, took many
years to comprehend. For me I realised that there is a sense in which Christians, in responding
to God’s call to serve the socially marginalised, are to make sacrifices, however the ultimate
sacrifice (a fatal heart attack or the like) can only be made once, and it would be a pity to
waste such commitment through a naïve spiritual and professional idealism that fails to
understand some costs aren’t worth it. I also realised mine was an idealism which failed to
recognise the importance of a like-minded community in such atypical professional ventures,
tending instead to act as if this work could be done alone.

A key aspect of professional practice for a number of the professional staff was the link
between the faith-based context in which they worked at “Care”, the spiritual dimension of
personal life, and their professional practice and values. For me this meant that, whilst I saw
no place to impose faith-related questions or expectations on service users, I nonetheless also
saw that faith-related issues did arise. I therefore considered it professionally appropriate to
respond and not treat these as outside my boundaries. This meant occasionally I did pray with
clients. It more often meant I prayed for clients, even when they were not known to be
praying people. It also meant that I intentionally sought spiritual insight and wisdom as I
carried out my day-to-day role. As well it meant respecting the spiritual experiences and
commitments of others, however different that may be. This was especially significant with
Islamic clients who, on occasions, were eager to discuss their faith in a mutually respectful
way. One such Lebanese man, a hand-crafted furniture maker, expressed his appreciation of
the ongoing support of “Care” by making a sculptured chair for the Broadmeadows church
sanctuary. On another occasion a Muslim man, having spent some money given to him for
food by buying a rose for his garden, told the Superintendent minister of this during a
subsequent home visit. The minister, instead of being judgemental, affirmed the spiritual
importance of this unexpected action by commenting in response “That’s alright: food for the body, food for the soul!”; a spontaneous comment not unrelated to some attributed to Jesus.

In effect my faith informed not only why I worked in this setting, but also how I worked in it. Hence I also sought to build up “Care’s” spiritual foundation by encouraging a wider prayerful support. To do this I instigated an annual request to “Care” supporters for committed prayer support. Those making this commitment undertook to use monthly prayer notes to pray daily for staff, programs and unidentified service users facing particular concerns. This request was especially targeted at that small band of older Christians who had a long standing commitment to pray for missionaries, clergy and others in Christian service. Although the response was small, the support offered in this way was appreciated.

The continuing participation within the congregation of the original “Care” social worker was not experienced as a threat. Rather the availability of an “insider consultant” was beneficial. This role intensified when this social worker returned to practice in a government agency that had established locally. Roles were perhaps blurred, but the result was a creative relationship of professional, personal and spiritual support as we assisted each other to implement our “vocation” in Broadmeadows.

2.3.3 Clergy

Clearly clergy played a dominant role throughout “Care’s” history. The impetus for it was the community demand faced in the early 1970’s by the then minister. It was through his leadership that the Circuit Stewards explored responses and the vision of “Care” evolved. It was his vision for “Care” as an integrated aspect of the congregation’s life and outreach within its own community that was still evident when I arrived in 1977. Indeed in my view the second superintendent minister, originally a carpenter, was the consolidator of the vision drafted by his predecessor. The third Superintendent minister, who commenced his appointment in 1980, became significant in establishing new visions and new programs after this initial founding period.

All three clergymen were from the Methodist tradition; all had a clear theology that social involvement and faith commitment were integral aspects of congregation life; all expressed this integration in biblical terms. Likewise all were the senior pastors to the Broadmeadows congregation, executive officers of “Care” and chairpersons of the Committee of Management. In addition all represented “Care” in the life of the wider community and played significant community development roles within the Broadmeadows Welfare Advisory Committee and its advocacy work. They also all acted as relief counsellors within the Family
Counselling Section when work loads were high. A consequence of this heavy involvement was that some congregational members were concerned that pastoral care for the congregation was undermined.

The third superintendent minister initiated an interesting change in his pastoral approach by introducing us to the contemplative tradition of Christian prayer, a tradition not part of the dominant evangelical heritage. Some staff and congregational members found this understanding of prayer and the related writings of Henri Nouwen and Anthony de Mello to be beneficial in their own spiritual life and ministry within “Care”. For me I found this spiritual perspective a resource for surviving the professional stresses that had challenged me in the earlier years. Through this practice I encountered a more dynamic sense of God’s presence and activity in my personal life and professional practice, and a sense of creative rather than intellectual “inspiration”. Nonetheless I also found this spiritual discipline hard to sustain without an active faith community with whom to share it.

Despite these positives, the dilemma of clergy control was never far away. Whilst the strong dependence on non-clergy professionals necessitated an acceptance of lay ministry as a local “norm”, at times the sense of team-work with clergy did become strained. Such times for me were when I experienced excessive work related stress as it was entirely the compassion of the superintendent minister that meant I was not dismissed as a result of my incapacity to manage the load. Although discussions with the original social worker as chair of the Family Counselling Support Committee did occur, the issues that led to these situations were not addressed within the management committee or the professional team and any restructuring to reduce the stressful workload was rarely effective.

After I left Broadmeadows I understand that this issue of clergy as against congregational control became more pronounced, finally leading to a significant pastoral breakdown. This resulted in a central church decision to move the minister elsewhere and to restructure “Care” to ensure the congregational minister was no longer the Executive Officer. The processes are of course complex and I was not a participant at the time, however it is clear that this decision was critical in the eventual separation of “Care” from the life of the congregation and critical to a number of people’s decision to withdraw from involvement in faith-based community services.

2.3.4 Central Church Personnel

Central church personnel had little direct involvement within the operations of “Care” or the life of the congregation, at least until the time when the pastoral breakdown occurred. In my
own experience, the only encounters I had with these central bodies or centrally sponsored church agencies were the Uniting Church Community Service conferences I attended. However, whilst I and the other staff were typically insulated from these central structures, from time to time the Superintendent Ministers reported on their involvement at that level.

One issue which did involve these central personnel was the financial support provided to assist with the stipends of the Broadmeadows Parish clergy. It is understood that a decision to reduce this central support, and to expect “Care” and the congregation to become financially self-sufficient, were contributing factors to the eventual separation of “Care” and the congregation.

2.4 Structural Issues Affecting “Care”

The framework identified five structural issues in congregational community services. These five, management structures, life-cycles, evaluation, programs and deterrents to service, are summarised in Table 4 below. This section discusses their relevance to “Care”.

2.4.1 Management

The management of “Care” was vested in a Committee of Management delegated this role and appointed by the Broadmeadows Parish Council. The parish council was delegated this responsibility by the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria in 1977 under the provisions of the Uniting Church of Australia Act. Essentially the committee of management operated without interference from any other body. However many of the people on this committee were also members of the parish council, including the Superintendent minister, so the link was informally maintained. At times staff were also represented on this committee as observers.

Table 4: Issues Related to Structures Affecting Congregational Community Service Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Issue</th>
<th>Dimensions of Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Management Structures for Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Formal Agreements&lt;br/&gt;Role of Committee Appointees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Life-Cycles of Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Initiation&lt;br/&gt;Vision&lt;br/&gt;Rational Planning&lt;br/&gt;Changing Focus&lt;br/&gt;Passing on the Vision&lt;br/&gt;Independence of Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Evaluation of Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Congregational Review Committee&lt;br/&gt;Seeking Best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Programs Operated as Congregational Community Services</td>
<td>Goals&lt;br/&gt;Formality&lt;br/&gt;Response Level&lt;br/&gt;The Case of Pastoral Care</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Emerging Issue Dimensions of Issue

<table>
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<tr>
<th>v. Deterrents to Congregational Community Services</th>
<th>Limitations of Congregations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural Complexity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Understanding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of Guiding Models</td>
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</table>

Despite serving as a staff representative, I generally experienced the committee as a “hands-off” body who merely provided a formal reference point for the Superintendent in exercising his role as chairperson and executive officer. For me it was frustrating to rarely have committee members inquire how the service I provided was going, to have no response to my annual reports, and to have little direct input to the decisions they made. As a result my expectations of them moved from expectation of a more “hands-on” and interested approach, through being angry that this did not occur, to treating them as an irrelevant but legal requirement. Late in 1982 however, the committee adopted a new consultative approach by separately inviting key staff to their meetings to outline and discuss the work of each section of “Care”. On one such occasion committee members challenging me about a new development I was working up. As a result of this discussion I realised that I was so excessively immersed in the proposal that I was unable to effectively evaluate its practicality. That experience led to me noting in my final report to “Care” that I had discovered I did need the management committee as a body able to review developments more “objectively” and able to accept responsibility for key decisions made as a result.

#### 2.4.2 Life-Cycles

It is apparent that “Care” went through a number of life-cycle stages in its development. In the founding period it quickly established its program areas and found the resources to sustain these responses to community need from the government, local industry and the wider church. It then went through a consolidation period when these program areas were stabilised and staffing patterns established. This stage saw some staff appointed from outside the church networks to meet the needs of programs in operation. However many of these appointments were brief and staff, like myself, from outside the congregation but from within church networks were sought. It can be argued that in all three generations of clergy and three generations of more involved social workers and youth workers were imported from outside and became part of “Care” and the Broadmeadows congregation. It was these that identified with the vision of a local Christian community committed to expressing the Christian message by combining professional skills and recognition with a biblical commitment to compassion and justice which aimed to ensure “excellence” in all activities undertaken.
My family and I saw ourselves as part of the second generation of imported professionals. Those who followed us were likewise committed to the vision, but experienced stresses in it that I did not. I also suspect it cost the congregation to have a succession of young professionals move into their community and take leadership roles, only to have most of them move on after 5 or so years. This way of resourcing “Care” and the congregation in hindsight was not as effective in building up its “indigenous” capacities in the way hoped. In addition, by the time the third generation of imported personnel had begun to move on, it was the 1990’s and young professional couples did not seem to adopt the challenges of community development and social ministry in lower income localities which had been a feature of the 1970’s when visions of Christian community with society’s marginalised were strong. Hence it seems the next cycle, instead of promoting a renewed and energising vision, became one of decline in holistic professional responses leading to a gradual separation of “Care” and the congregation.

This pattern of congregational community services evolving out of the congregation’s sphere of ministry is known to have occurred elsewhere. The question this raises for me relates to the inevitability of this life-cycle process. If it is inevitable then congregations like Broadmeadows need to understand it when they commence these types of community service involvements and build that into their vision. If it is not inevitable, then the processes involved and the critical decision points need to be better understood and the advantages and disadvantages of each approach recognised and assessed. That is the purpose behind the wider research project from which the framework used in this paper is derived.

2.4.3 Evaluation

Beyond regular program reports that both outlined what happened within each arm of “Care” and explored where new challenges and social issues were becoming evident, formal evaluation did occur at times. Prior to my appointment documents indicate a fairly intense review of the social worker’s role in the light of changing demographics in the public housing development and the establishment of other welfare programs by both government and central-church sponsored bodies. While I was there in 1979 consultants from a large church welfare service undertook another comprehensive review. Apart from noting a lack of cooperation between the sections of “Care” and a tendency for key staff to individually follow their own visions, this evaluation also affirmed the uniqueness of the then existing relationship “Care” had with the Broadmeadows congregation.
In retrospect what came from this review is unclear to me. Its coincidence with a change of Superintendent minister probably contributed to a life-cycle change from consolidation of the original vision to freeing up for new visions that were gradually explored. Certainly my reports from the time note my appreciation of a new degree of cooperation between the program areas of “Care” which was directly attributed to the implementation of this external review. The more recent decision to organisationally separate “Care” from the congregation was nonetheless the result of yet another extensive review made in the light of later circumstances.

2.4.4 Programs

Programs at “Care” when I began involved children’s day care, family counselling, migrant support, youth work, emergency aid and bargain stores. During my 6¼ years financial counselling, after-school children’s groups, craft groups, family camps for service users, a job creation venture aimed at the long-term unemployed, an ethnic support group for Spanish-speaking immigrants and cooperative ventures with the Turkish Women’s Association and with the Home Tutor Scheme were all commenced. Cooperation with other local community groups also resulted in a network of emergency housing for families, a number of neighbourhood centres, an emergency accommodation hostel for youth, and an ongoing challenge to the public housing authority to review the policies which made Broadmeadows a suburb with large numbers of low-income, damaged families unable to access even the normal services of doctors and schools. “Care” staff played key roles in all these developments.

Government policies which created this area of special need did gradually change with both increased support services being established and an end to the public housing authority’s policy which resulted in ghetto communities. By these means “Care” had a social impact far beyond its size and limited resources.

2.4.5 Deterrents

The vision that developed and created “Care” has certainly achieved amazing results over its 28 year history. However it was always handicapped by the lack of “social mix” within the Broadmeadows area which left the community, and hence the congregation, without a local professionals or business class and the particular capacities they had to offer. Being essentially a working class and pensioner area also meant finances available to the congregation were limited. At the time it appeared importing professionals with relevant skills and a commitment to participate in the congregation was the solution but not only did these
imports cease after about 15 years, it now also seems to some that this approach restricted the
development of the local congregation itself. If such a view is correct then this response
became a deterrent to the ongoing relationship between “Care” and the congregation in ways
which weren’t anticipated. The volunteer business people from the Glenroy congregation
were also initially a great advantage and supplemented those available from the
Broadmeadows church. However it is noteworthy that their numbers on the committees
exceeded those from Broadmeadows, so again potentially deterring the development of
management capacities among the “indigenous” Broadmeadows members.

Nonetheless, the main deterrent to maintaining the historic link between the Broadmeadows
congregation and “Care” is more likely to be the demographic change of Broadmeadows itself
and the change in religious participation within the overall community. Reports are clear that
both the Broadmeadows congregation and the Glenroy congregation have significantly
declined as the incoming population is either mainly non-church-going or non-Christian. The
sadness recently shared with me by one of the remaining original members of the
congregation was that the collective effort put into “Care” had not resulted in a congregation
able to sustain either that ministry or its own community life. For this truly faithful person this
seemed like a defeat, but then the challenge of Christian faith was always faithfulness to the
gospel’s values and message and not numerical success.

3. Conclusion

This outline of my experience in and understanding of “Care” in Broadmeadows is not
presented as an historical narrative. Rather it uses a framework of issues derived from
research to highlight key features of this experience. This approach provides a structure by
which experiences of congregational community services can be compared, contrasted,
evaluated and reviewed to focus how different emphases are used by church congregations to
respond to the social needs and issues of their community. The review of my experience at
“Care” hopefully demonstrates value in using this framework in this way. If space had
permitted me to do the same with my second social work role, a different pattern of issues
would have resulted and the contrasts been clearer.

Whilst the details of this framework have not been discussed in this paper, Table 5 below,
listing the 14 Identified Issues with a Characteristic Question, is offered as a simple way to
apply this framework to a review of other congregational community service involvements.
The Characteristic Question is framed to help surface relevant dimensions of each issue in
any setting. In later research it is expected that a framework will be identified which explores
how these issues and dimensions impact on each other in the dynamic processes of congregational community service involvement.

Hopefully what I have presented also provides a meaningful overview of social work practice in this Australian setting. This may then help others to better grasp what Diana Garland (1992) has rightly termed Church Social Work, a practice setting of growing importance in both the US and Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Approaches</td>
<td>In what ways does a congregation approach their relationship to their local community and its issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Theology</td>
<td>What Theological views influence how a congregation engages in community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Bridge Building</td>
<td>What Entry Points exist for congregational members to engage with marginalised groups in the wider community who are outside church networks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Resources</td>
<td>What assets is a congregation able to offer which may be of value to those outside the congregation in the local community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Agendas</td>
<td>What does a congregation hope to achieve by getting involved in Community Services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personnel</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Volunteers</td>
<td>What factors affect the contribution of congregational insiders to the provision of Congregational Community Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Professionals</td>
<td>What factors affect the contribution of professionals to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Clergy</td>
<td>What is the contribution of congregational clergy to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Central Church</td>
<td>What is the contribution of central church organisations to the provision of congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Management</td>
<td>What structures are needed to oversee congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Life-Cycles</td>
<td>What are the implications of the life-cycle stages that can be expected with congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Evaluation</td>
<td>What evaluation procedures are useful in assisting to change congregational community services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Programs</td>
<td>What programs can congregational community services develop and operate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Deterrents</td>
<td>What gets in the road of developing and sustaining congregational community services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Appendix 9: PAPER PRESENTED AT ANZTSR CONFERENCE PARRAMATTA
NSW DEC 2000

TITLE

Local Religious Congregations and the Provision of Community Services:
A Model for Understanding its Development and Functioning

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of
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December 2000
Abstract

Though little recognised in most communities, local religious congregations often have been providing a variety of community services for many years. As governments restrict welfare budgets and seek cheaper service provision through other sectors, the traditional involvement of local church congregations is now becoming recognised because of what it does, and because its involvement is little understood. Based on data from two Australian congregations, this paper proposes a model for the processes by which these activities, secondary to the primary purpose of religious congregations, are developed, sustained, and changed. It thus provides a beginning insight into the involvement of local church congregations with the provision of social services to their general community.

The paper begins by noting that previously this aspect of community support has been either overlooked or undervalued in social research in Australia, despite some recent, basic data confirming its existence. The paper then notes that, whilst recognition of congregational community service provision was also overlooked until recently in the US and UK, there now exists a growing literature examining this form of community-based support. A summary of some key insights gained from the main studies undertaken to date is included. The paper then presents a more detailed “four period” inter-connective model for the processes involved with congregational community engagement, illustrating its features with data from the 2 study cases. Each of the periods, Initiating, Flexibility, Structuring and Modifying, is also examined more fully through the elaboration of a small number of features or dimensions. The paper concludes by identifying four implications of this study relevant to those involved or interacting with these types of community services as well as to those developing policies for addressing the provision of social services in any locality. It also concludes that this local religious aspect of community service provision is a matter about which much more needs to be known.
1. Introduction: Why Congregational community involvement needs to be studied.

In 1982-83 the Australian Institute of Family Studies undertook a survey of 3 localities in Australia as part of its “Family Support Networks Project”. This study aimed to “examine the conditions under which certain types of families did or did not use formal support services provided in the community” (Edgar in d’Abbs, 1991, p.xi) focusing particularly on the “informal networks of kin, friends, neighbours, colleagues and other people” (d’Abbs, 1991, p.1). Two reports from this project are the substantially quantitative analysis by d’Abbs (1991), which is described as the last and most comprehensive of the reports, and the qualitative study by McCaughey (1987), which presents case studies of 64 families from the first of these locations. In his excellent study of the role played in support provision by kin, friends and neighbours, d’Abbs includes an intriguing parenthesis:

‘Fellow churchgoers’ are classed as part of the household’s informal network on the grounds that it is not the church as an institution that is involved, but rather the ties of mutual concern that link individuals in the congregation by virtue of their shared participation in that congregation (p.76 c/f p.42).

A close reading of the report confirms little mention is made of any support from church congregations, with no discussion of religious support beyond this parenthetical quote. The only other explicit mention of church-related support appears to be one instance where it notes a person was referred to a “church-run family support service” (p.55) and another where a priest’s support is identified as “quite unhelpful” (p.53). McCaughey’s report, which insightfully explores how families of different social circumstances use their informal networks, is somewhat more explicit about the support of church congregations and church-related services although it rarely discusses this as a specific form of formal or informal support. A careful reading however identifies that, whilst approximately one third of its 64 families (a sub-sample from the d’Abbs report) in fact did acknowledge some type of support from church-related sources, little about these is said other than to express concern about the implications of this in two cases:

[Alice’s] family’s isolation was transformed when they were visited by a member of a Pentecostal Church…Alice and her husband became members of the church and from then on drew [their] social and personal support almost entirely from their church (p.55)...[Sylvie] had a visit from a member of a sect-type church which she said began a process that changed her life. After instruction she became a member and drew most of her support from them. As well as spiritual and emotional security they gave her practical support in many ways, including $200 to pay bills and buy essentials, and she also helped other members of the church (p.62)...Alice and Sylvie, who had been lonely and had few supports in Geelong, had become members of sect-type churches. Belonging to these churches transformed the lives of these families, providing them with a community in which they felt accepted and became wholly involved. For both these women, all their friends and social supports were centred on their
church and, if they ever lost their faith in that church, they would also lose their entire support network (McCaughey, 1987, p.72).

Within these two reports it seems therefore that, whether viewed as formal or informal or potentially both, congregationally-related support is either largely overlooked, merged into categories which obscure it as a phenomenon in its own right, or downplayed as being of perhaps questionable value in ways not suggested for other supports rather than identified on its own terms. Whilst it is rightly arguable that congregational supports were not the purpose of this study, I find it intriguing because the study nonetheless substantiates the existence and role of congregational and church-related support services, albeit in an indirect way.

This aspect of support is more significantly omitted from the 1978 to 1983 study of a suburban residential development published as Nobody’s Home (Richards, 1990). Despite passing references to religion as a demographic characteristic, no consideration is given to church-life or its contribution to the “dreams and realities” of that new suburb, even in the chapter on neighbours and social support systems. Rather, this seems to be another example of “Missing Data”, a potential feature of qualitative studies later recognised by its author (Singh & Richards, 1999). This study contrasts to an earlier urban study, An Australian Newtown (Bryson & Thompson, 1972), in which at least the contribution of the local clergy was extensively explored (and challenged), even if the congregations themselves did not receive much attention. Another key researcher, Dempsey (1977, 1983a, 1983b, 1991), in his ground-breaking exploration of congregations in rural communities, also raises deep concern about the value of congregational life to their communities. However it would appear that little community service beyond any the clergy themselves chose to undertake, was identified as directly linked to Dempsey’s congregations.

I cite these examples because they characterise a tendency within literature on social support systems that fails to recognise the social engagement of church congregations, omitting it entirely, viewing it in some other category, or else discussing it with a measure of concern about its value to the community. As a result very little is known about the community service activity of church congregations, despite the historical fact that our country’s welfare system was significantly developed from the concerns and actions of church people and church structures (eg Dickey, 1987; Swain, 1996, 1997) and despite the fact that church-sponsored agencies remain the dominant institutions through which community services are delivered, whether government funded or not (see Ellingsen 2000b; Saltau 2000).

In the 1996 National Church Life Survey, Kaldor, Dixon and Powell (1999) report that in excess of 64% of church congregations claim to provide one or more of a range of community
services to people other than their congregational members (the cumulative proportion is not
given; this is the figure for the largest service type claimed). Whilst the meaning given to the
services listed is in some cases uncertain, this result is entirely consistent with a survey of
Uniting Church congregations undertaken by its Victorian Synod (Linossier, 1994). Assuming
this is correct, there then seems to be a critical gap in our understanding of the provision of
community services in our society because church congregations, as one of the significant
sources through which these services are provided, are being ignored, filtered out or even
deprecated by social researchers rather than identified as a component of service provision
that needs to be better understood and valued.

The importance of a better understanding of the influence and processes of religious
congregational life in the wider Australian community was underscored in a recent analysis
by Evans and Kelley (2000) who identified that, despite the gradual falling off of church
attendance within Australian society (Evans & Kelley, 1998), a key indicator of people’s
propensity to volunteer within the community was their frequency of attendance at religious
worship services.

2. International Research: What we now know about Congregational community involvement

This oversight is not unique to Australia, although Australian researchers still seem loath to
respond to it, despite the National Church Life Surveys of 1991 and 1996 being the most
comprehensive national studies of church congregations anywhere (see Kaldor et al 1992,
1994, 1995, 1999). In both the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) social
researchers have also begun to discover that church congregations are engaging in community
services in a variety of ways that are not understood or recognised. Indeed, especially in the
United States, this has recently become a key research area for religious sociologists and non-
profit and voluntary sector researchers. It is the contention of this paper that a similar interest
in this aspect of community service provision is overdue in Australia.

Whilst there are now many research projects addressing various aspects of congregational
community involvement, the ones cited below give an overview of the type of research that
has developed over the last decade. They also note a number of the issues found to be
associated with this type of congregational activity. These issues have become even more
significant in the US because of its welfare reform legislation of 1996 (*The Personal
Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996*) and in particular its so-called
Charitable Choice clause (Section 104 “Services Provided by Charitable, Religious, Or
Private Organizations”) which explicitly permits government funding of community services
provided by “pervasively sectarian” organisations in a manner previously thought prohibited by the US Supreme Court’s interpretation of the US Constitution (see Center for Public Justice, 1996; Carlson-Thies, 1999; Radio National 2000a). The acceptance of this view on promoting congregational community service provision by both major US political parties, irrespective of the capacity concerns identified in the available research, underlines the need to consider these issues in social policy debate as well as congregational and community life. A similar debate is also said to be underway in the UK (see Bacon 2000; Policy Action Team 9 1999; Radio National 2000b) and in Australia similar sentiments were expressed in media reports of a debate over the funding of church-sponsored agencies as part of the Commonwealth Government’s Job Network program (Gregg 2000; Radio National 2000c).

2.1 Joseph, Conrad and Garland – Congregations as a context for Social Work practice

It appears that the first exploration of a link between church congregations and their community involvement was written up in *Social Casework* in 1980 by Joseph and Conrad, two Catholic religious sisters and social workers associated with the US Faith-Based agency, *Catholic Charities*. They reported a developing arrangement for enabling congregational members to become part of the “natural helping networks” accessed by the professional agency when seeking to support service users within their own communities. This type of practice was subsequently identified as an example of *Church Social Work* by Diana Garland (1986), a social work educator and practitioner from the only School of Social Work based in a US theological seminary (the former Carver School of Social Work at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kentucky). This specialised context for professional practice Garland continued to explore with colleagues, asserting that congregations could be community resources for any social worker who understood the context, and could function as an integrated component of the work of church and other community agencies (Garland & Bailey 1990; Garland & Conrad 1990; Bailey 1992; Ferguson 1992; Garland 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1998; Spressart 1992; Watkins 1992). Whilst the focus was clearly on professional linkages, this early recognition of congregations as contributors to community services saw beyond the so-called Faith-based agencies (what I would prefer to term “Church-sponsored agencies”) to the ways in which congregational participants were active within their communities along side the involvement of the more institutional agencies of the church and the community.
2.2 Wineburg – Congregational capacity to respond to community need and its limitations

This recognition was independently extended by Bob Wineburg, a social work academic from the University of North Carolina Greensboro, who recognised that, when consulting with community organisations about responses to the Reagan government’s welfare budget cuts beginning in late 1981, he was spending a lot of time talking with congregations and church-related groups. He then began to focus his research more specifically on what congregations were doing separately and collectively, in particular through the collaborative Greensboro Urban Ministry, irrespective of any professional linkage (see Cnaan, Kasternakis & Wineburg 1993; Cnaan & Wineburg 1996; Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Wineburg et al 1983, 1986, 1987, 1999; Wineburg 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998a). Wineburg recorded the steady development of congregational community involvement from the original “welfare to work” mentor program that began within the Greensboro Urban Ministry, to the initiation of a wide range of congregational partnerships within that Ministry, through to programs based in single congregations seeking to provide services within the framework of the welfare reform legislation (Wineburg & Cleveland 1999).

Based on this research, Wineburg has consistently argued that the capacity of congregations to deliver the broad range of community services, despite enthusiasm and commitment, has severe resource limitations that are being ignored by the proponents within the US of an emphasis on congregational community service provision that began with President Reagan in 1981 and which became a key component of welfare reform (see Wineburg 1998b which reviews a collection of such writings edited by Carlson-Thies & Skillen, 1996; see also Wineburg 2000, forthcoming).

2.3 Dudley – Factors impacting on Congregational responses to their community

Carl Dudley, a theologian and religious sociologist then from McCormack Seminary in Chicago, also recognised that church congregations were responding to Reagan budget withdrawal of funds for community service provision. He therefore initiated a research program during 1989 to 1992, the Church and Community Project, to explore how congregations developed their response (Dudley 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1996, 1997; Dudley & Johnson 1993; Dudley & Van Eck 1992). This action research project funded around 30 mid-west US congregations for 3 years to develop community programs either on their own or in partnership with other congregations or community groups. In so doing it was able to identify the different ways congregations went about developing different types of community services, discovering that these differences did not necessarily reflect the different traditional
theologies that characterised congregations. Rather it was found to reflect different ways of conceptualising the motivations behind a congregation’s mission in the community (Dudley & Johnson 1993). In promoting involvement, the project also placed a strong emphasis on lay leadership and on recognising the benefits to the congregational members as well as to the community of the services that were developed.

2.4 Harris – Congregations as a catalyst for community-based care

Whilst researching the organisational behaviour of 4 different church congregations in the UK, Margaret Harris, then from the London School of Economics Centre for Voluntary Organisations, found that one aspect of congregational life in all the congregations she was studying was their involvement within their respective communities in ways beyond the provision of worship (Harris 1995a, 1996, 1998a). She noted that these activities were invariably informal, volunteer-based and subject to being eventually recognised and taken over by the local county professional welfare systems. Initially this was through the provision of funding but gradually included the appointment of professionals to manage the services or to provide the needed expertise (Harris 1995b, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d). These activities Harris labelled the “Quiet Care” of church congregations and synagogues, noting also the likelihood that this setting was more suitable for some types of community care than others.

2.5 Cnaan, Yancey & Boddie – The pervasiveness of Congregational community involvement

The first systematic effort to ascertain the extent of the involvement of a sample of congregations within a major metropolis was undertaken in 1995 by Ram Cnaan, a social work professor from the University of Pennsylvania, and two of his research students, Gaynor Yancey and Stephanie Boddie. The initial focus was a survey of 196 Philadelphia congregations but this approach was subsequently extended to 111 congregations based in historic properties in 6 US cities and then to a further 46 congregations in 3 cities of Ontario, Canada (Cnaan, 1998; Cnaan & Wineburg, 1996; Cnaan & Fermida 1998; Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie 1999; Jeavons & Cnaan 1997; Yancey, 1998). These studies identified that 93% of congregations offered one or more community services; that the annual cash equivalent value of these services (labour, utilities, space, ancillary supports) was estimated at $US144,000 per congregation; that the services provided were four times more likely to be to people outside the congregations whilst the providers of the services were likely to be equal numbers of congregational members and outsiders; and that the types of services were mainly concrete supports such as food and clothing, cultural activities such as music performances and choral groups, and neighbourhood associations. The study also noted high levels of visitation of the
sick, recreational programs for children, and tutoring programs. About 76% of activities were solely in-house, i.e. operated by the congregation on its own, and they were heavily dependent on volunteers.

This data suggested that congregations were already working to capacity within the community in this secondary role and that they had little spare to take on the additional roles suggested by those seeking to incorporate congregations into the welfare reform process. Cnaan and his team are currently extending this study into a census of Philadelphia’s congregations, estimated to number in excess of 2000, in order to get a more accurate understanding of this behaviour of congregations (Cnaan 2000).

2.6 Cameron – Congregational community care as a response to experiential need

Another UK researcher, Helen Cameron, also from the Centre for Voluntary Organisations at the London School of Economics, explored congregational community involvement from a social policy and intra-organisational perspective (Cameron 1998). She identified that the issues congregational activities set out to address were not determined by any social needs analysis but by needs that the participants personally encountered. She then identified that these typically reflected gaps in the broader social service provision and therefore constituted an implicit social policy critique. In addition Cameron identified that the activities operated in an informal way with a lose association with the more formal structures of the congregation, whatever they may be, and that the congregational volunteers saw their involvement as reflecting the overall mission of their congregation, i.e. that there was a link between the congregation’s main purpose and its support for its community service activities.

2.7 Chaves – Doubts about the extensiveness of Congregational community involvement

The last research project considered was undertaken by Mark Chaves, a sociologist of religion from the University of Arizona, through his 1998 National Congregations Study (Chaves 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Chaves et al 1999). By a process termed hypernetwork sampling, this study accessed a more accurately representative sample of 1236 congregations in order to gain a better indication of the spread of congregational community service involvement. In contrast to Cnaan (and other studies by the Independent Sector [Hodgkinson et al 1992] not discussed here), Chaves’s study assessed that only 57% of congregations were involved, with only 12% running the activities on their own. However the survey instrument required that respondents suggest the types of community services their congregation provided rather than identify these from a comprehensive list such as Cnaan used. As a result Chaves’s analysis arguably under records congregational involvement whereas Cnaan’s results are thought to
overestimate it. Chaves also identified that only 36% of congregations were interested in taking government money to support their community involvement, a result which seriously challenged the willingness of congregations to respond as the policy debate presumes, regardless of their capacity. He also noted that there were different levels of interest in government funding among the different types of churches, Catholic, African-American, liberal Protestant, and conservative.

3. Process Model: Understanding how congregational involvement in the community occurs

Clearly this literature consistently identifies that congregations are involved in their community and in a variety of ways. Yet little attention has been paid to how this involvement comes about or the issues the development and maintenance of this involvement raises. Therefore the focus of the research presented in this paper is the development of a theoretical framework to assist with understanding how this process might work. My interest in such a focus developed from my own 11 years experience as a social worker in two congregationally-related community service settings in two Australian states. That experience in the late 1970’s and the 1980’s led me to the realisation that there existed little intuitive understanding of this process and no explicit models.

This paper seeks to present a model derived from a preliminary analysis of the processes associated with the community involvement of 2 Anglican congregations in the Diocese of Melbourne. These congregations were selected and approached after discussions with the diocesan officer then responsible for promoting community engagement in congregations. The basis for selection was that they presented as “typical” congregations, in that they were not in serious financial difficulty nor were they large and financially well-endowed; they were also known to be actively engaging with the community around them.

Congregation A is located in the working class public housing area of a provincial town in Victoria. Its congregation at a typical Sunday worship service consists of about 50 people, these being made up of people from 3 pre-existing congregations which merged through the 1990’s despite considerable stress. Congregation B is located in an upper middle class suburb of metropolitan Melbourne where it has a typical Sunday attendance at two worship services of about 70 people. It however is much better off financially than Congregation A, not so much because its attenders necessarily give more but because it operates two major income producing projects which contribute significant amounts each year to the congregational

*Private communication with Bob Wineburg; comments by Ram Cnaan to Mark Chaves in a presentation at the Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, New Orleans, Nov 2000.
finances. One of these projects, an opportunity shop, is a cooperative enterprise with other local congregations.

Once permission had been gained from the congregational council, in-depth interviews with key personnel, including with the congregational minister, were undertaken in 1999 in order to ascertain the involvements of each congregation, the means by which it came about, and the processes promoting development and change in these involvements. These interviews were then transcribed and analysed using the NVivo computer software package for assisting in the analysis of qualitative data (Richards 1999). Some data was also obtained from documents provided by each congregation as well as through personal observation during a number of visits, including for worship services. In all, 19 interviews with 16 informants were undertaken in this stage of the research project. A Grounded Theory type approach was used in the data analysis and interpretation as this was considered the most effective way to inductively surface a useful model or framework for understanding this process of congregational community involvement (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1994). This analysis led to the identification and elaboration of four main process “periods” as key features of the ways in which community involvement develops.

These “periods” were seen as times within the development and operation of community service activities, either collectively and/or separately, when certain features were evident. Whilst these “periods” are probably not unrelated to nonprofit organisational lifecycles as discussed in, for example, Barnett (1988), Hasenfeld & Schmid (1989) or Kramer (1994), it is not the purpose of this paper to explore any similarities or differences. Rather, consistent with the logic of Grounded Theory methodology, the purpose is to articulate a process that reflects the development of these congregationally-based community services as social entities within their own right. Subsequent comparisons of this process or “framework” with either the more traditional literature on nonprofit organisations or the more recent literature on congregational life itself, will be a matter for consideration elsewhere.

The broad periods identified, together with a key defining characteristic of each, are:

1. Initiating Period - *Dreaming*
2. Flexibility Period - *Making Do*
3. Structuring Period - *Purpose Specific*
4. Modifying Period – *Discontinuity*

In referring to each of these as a “period” rather than a stage or even a phase, I am trying to avoid any inference that these “periods” are necessarily sequential in nature. Whilst the
community service activities of these two congregations, at their macro-level, showed a sequential progression through them, both are in relatively early stages of development and therefore have not had time to process in more complex ways. A third congregation with a more complex development is presently being incorporated into this analysis. Nonetheless, for these two congregations at their more micro-level, individual activities within them seem to have more complex and variable progressions, including with some activities winding up. This suggests that, once commenced, these features of community service activities can move consequentially between any of the four “periods”. In other words, it seems that at times a discontinuity can lead to a re-worked dream that sees a purpose specific response quickly developed so by-passing any making do period, whilst at other times a discontinuity could see a new making do period begun as the congregation grapples with another aspect of the original dream despite purpose specific resources not being available. It would seem therefore that a more accurate conceptual relationship between these phases is that of a diamond which is open to a variety of ways for linking them, as in the following diagram:

This paper will explore this provisional model for congregational community involvement by summarising each congregation’s way of dealing with these four “periods” of operation and then articulating features of the period identified in the detailed analysis.

3.1 “Dreaming” – Initiating Period

In analysing the stories of community engagement as told by the various respondents, an initial period in which ideas and visions were forming was identified. As this was the beginning of the process of community engagement for the congregation, it was labelled the
“Initiating Period”. However it is typical for the formative ideas to precede any commencement of an intentional service, focusing largely on the development of the “dream” for such a service.

Congregation A began its community involvement in the mid 1980’s with a small food cupboard operated by the then minister of one of the original congregations. This initial response was preceded by the increasing concern of the minister and his family with the intrusion into family life of a regular stream of people coming to their home seeking assistance with food. The cupboard, located in the church building, was initially completely under the control of the minister. Soon after, and as a result of the impact of a bible study discussion, one of the lay people within the congregation also initiated the idea of a clothing exchange and a coffee and chat time with the primary goal of building support between people within the congregation who were finding family life materially and emotionally tough. However, once this was begun, they found that these open church times soon became an avenue of connection with others within their public housing area. When that minister left it was then only natural that the lay people, at least one of whom had undertaken additional pastoral care training, added the task of food distribution to their clothing exchange and coffee and chat ministries.

Though reinforcing the value of community engagement, these activities were not undertaken on a large scale until the early 1990’s. At that time the collapse of a large local financial institution not only saw the congregation lose money put aside for a new building program, but also saw a large number within the congregation and the wider community seek help for financial hardship due to the loss of their savings and even their jobs. The congregation’s effort to respond was immediately assisted by a large, local church-related agency which established a food bank in the wake of this wide-spread community crisis and invited local groups, including Congregation A, to participate. With this assistance Congregation A, then in the early stages of its own merger process, developed a more explicit community orientation with its food distribution, clothing and household goods Opportunity Shop, and its friendly listening approach to these services.

As the 3 original congregations merged, there was some degree of tension because of a perception that one of the merging congregations saw this community involvement as their focus while the other two generally did not seek this community engagement. Nonetheless, with the active involvement of their new minister, various additional efforts at community engagement were explored during this merger period such as an emergency house, a weekly meals program, and a coffee lounge in a local shopping centre shared with other local
congregations. In all 13 activities were identified, 10 directly relating to people normally outside the congregational members and 3 bridging the congregation-wider community boundary. Some of these occurred within the building of another of the merging congregations and participants of those congregations were invited to share in these activities. It was noted that a few did, but generally it was people from the initiating congregation who maintained their involvement. However, with his concept of the community as part of the parish of which Congregation A was a part, some of these activities were developed by and remained totally dependent on the minister. When all buildings of the former congregations had to be vacated so that the properties could be sold and a new, more centrally located site purchased and built on, the 3 congregations began to meet in a neutral setting, a church agency community centre. This period of 15 months reportedly did much to bring some cohesion to the newly forming merged congregation so allowing activities to consolidate within other periods of development.

Congregation B, despite its long and stable history, appears not to have had a focus on involvement within its own community. However when the present minister arrived in the late 1980’s he brought a keen desire to develop a community counselling and support service as part of the congregation’s outreach ministry. This vision had arisen as a result of early frustrations in his congregational experience, frustrations which led him to seek more specialised training in pastoral work. It was through that training that he identified a model for engaging the whole congregation in caring involvements both within and beyond the congregation. Recognising that this model did not relate well to Congregation B the minister engaged in a gradual process of discussion and teaching in order to progressively build a sense of identification with this purpose. Over time he was able to identify a core group of people who shared his vision or who responded to it. The minister compared this process to playing the parlour game “pick-up sticks” in which much patience is needed while each move is considered for the optional succeeding moves it opens up. Out of that process a core group of people coalesced, albeit not all remaining involved, which set about developing a program to define and implement a vision for a community counselling and care service.

Along the way a number of community engagements also developed, for example a meals and social program for isolated aged people, an entertainment activity for the aged run in conjunction with local schools, a work for money activity for those seeking financial aid, a food trolley to support material relief, a support group for people with an intellectual or emotional disability, and an effort to promote more engagement between congregational members in their own neighbourhoods with an openness to other neighbours in order to give
and receive informal friendship support. Again 13 activities were identified, 11 clearly focused on service to the wider community, with 2 potentially bridging the boundary between the congregation and outsiders. As all these activities were not explicitly identified by those interviewed, it was at times unclear how exactly they were seen by the congregation. The decision to list them as separate activities related mainly to their actual or potential involvement with people outside the congregation around issues not specifically religious in nature.

For planned community activity to take hold and the process move on to a new period, four necessary features of this Initiating Period were identified.

1. The congregation needed to have a **culture** that legitimated the existence of a community activity within its life. Without that such activities would only ever be the responsibility of one or two people and not the congregation as a whole. Where this culture did not clearly exist then an extended period of engaging with, affirming, and gradually extending the existing culture was crucial to effecting change, a process I have labelled “massaging” the congregational culture.

2. A specific **vision** needed to be articulated in a way that resonated with a significant group of people within the congregation. Such a vision could only resonate if the culture within which the vision was to be “embedded” was already open to embracing it. Where an activity was imposed on a congregation, perhaps by “pummelling”, it did not have much chance of surviving without this gentler strategy. Rather the congregation was likely to react to it as if the proposal was crossing a “line” beyond which it was not prepared to go.

3. Thirdly, there was always need for a **key person** who could keep the activity moving along. This person was often but not always the articulator of the vision but, where the “massaging” process had worked well, other people were ready to take on that responsibility.

4. And finally, there was a need for some event to actually **trigger** an activity into action. This may be the discovery of a need in the community that fitted what the congregation felt able to do, it may be being presented with resources that need to be used (eg a grant, a bequest or a vacant building), or it may be identifying a core of people within the congregation and wider community who resonate with a particular vision. This awareness is the necessary stimulus to make a congregation say “Well, why can’t we do that here” and decide to move on to pursuing a vision.
3.2 “Making Do” – Flexibility Period

Detailed analysis identified uncertainty and creative adaption as features of this period, hence it was labelled the “Flexibility Period” of the congregational community service process. It is a period in which the congregation finds it does not have the resources to act as it intended but has to “make do” with whatever resources it can muster.

The initial clothing exchange, food cupboard and coffee and chat that Congregation A developed had no formal organisational structure at all; a group of people simply formed to support it and they carried out these activities within the temporary building they had been using for around 30 years as a worship centre. When the food service grew with the help of the food bank, a garage was placed on site as a storage shed. When that church property was sold the clothing exchange, by then termed an Opportunity Shop, was moved into one of the vacated houses on the newly purchased property, a house that was to later be demolished requiring these activities consequently to move to yet another house on the new site. The coffee and chat activity closed down due to lack of space, although the desire to recommence it remained. Nonetheless, the listening attitude that characterised this was carefully maintained in the way customers at the Opportunity Shop were treated. The emergency house that was commenced made use of another of the houses on the newly purchased site prior to its demolition whilst the weekly meals program was commenced in a building that belonged to another of the merging congregations prior to that also being sold.

The leaders of the various activities were members of Congregation A; the Opportunity Shop and Emergency food service experiencing a turnover of key volunteer workers from time to time. In time a token remuneration was made to the volunteers coordinating the Opportunity Shop and the Emergency Food Service in recognition of the significant time each gave to those roles. Other activities were primarily the domain of the congregational minister eg cash grants to needy families using grant money obtained from a church-related trust; support and advocacy for people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities. Though the income from the Opportunity Shop was relatively small, in a typical year a few thousand dollars was passed through to the congregational finances. In order to maintain some coordination of the Opportunity Shop and Emergency food service at some stage a committee, operating as an informal subcommittee of the congregational council, was established. It comprised all volunteers in these two services as well as a treasurer and secretary appointed by the congregational council. The fairly limited amount of training provided to the volunteers occurred within the context of these meetings.
The people using the services offered by Congregation A seem to have come into contact with these services through word of mouth or through referral from another local service such as the community health centre, the Centrelink office or the local police although formal links with these services seemed at best vague and undeveloped. Once the new worship centre was opened it was found that many seeking support simply walked into “the church” and asked for it. This was especially so for a group of people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities who, although supported primarily by the minister, were seen by some respondents as collectively requiring more from the congregation than it had to offer. The goods for the Opportunity Shop were largely obtained from other Anglican congregations in the regional group with which Congregation A was formally linked. The congregation minister was seen as the main link to these other congregations although some of the other volunteers also met with these congregations. The volunteer group comprised about 50% from the congregation and about 50% from the supportive general community who valued the sense of belonging and concern they found within this volunteer group.

Congregation B began its preparation for its community counselling service by undertaking a formal incorporation process and registering their proposed service as a charitable organisation whose donors were entitled to tax deductions. This 18 month process kept the core group well occupied even before any service was commenced. However the “delay” not only resulted in some participants withdrawing, but was later seen to have contributed to a haste in actually commencing operation 6 months after incorporation. The congregational minister began providing the counselling service himself, although he was supported by volunteer intake persons from the congregation. Soon after, using the networks involving his wider church contacts, the minister successfully developed a team of accredited professionals, psychologists and pastoral counsellors, to provide this service free of charge. The service began in a side room of one of the church halls, with the congregational secretary, a person who independently undertook training in crisis and marriage counselling as well as theology, as the back-up person to both the intake volunteers and volunteer professionals.

Apparently the people using the service were referred by congregational members, walked in off the street in response to the sign at the front of the church, or were referred as a result of Congregation B’s personal links with other local services. Whilst some were apparently experiencing poverty, consistent with the locality, most issues were more of a personal and emotional nature. Funding for the service was primarily provided by donations of supportive congregational members and, after about 18 months when a clergyman/psychologist commenced paid work one day per week, directly by the congregational council. Other
activities were largely the domain of the congregational minister, albeit with support from the
congregational secretary who was a part-time paid employee and key congregational member.
The intake volunteers were experienced as supportive and caring even though some
interviewers expressed concern about their capacity to undertake the role given their lack of
adequate training. The congregational secretary also expressed concern that their role was
often not involving enough to satisfy some as there was not normally a steady influx of
potential service users during the 3 hours these volunteers were typically there.

The formal committee, elected by members of the incorporated association and who were
mainly interested congregational members, operated as the Management Committee for the
organisation but one associated professional suggested that the congregational minister was
effectively the executive director of the service and made most of the day to day decisions.
Nonetheless the commitment of the congregation was evidenced in talk of taking sick days
from work in order to fill gaps in the volunteer rosters and in the undertaking of related
training in order to better support the development of this ministry. Another volunteer
indicated a willingness to spend time beyond their roster to assist with the administration of
the service. Alongside this development, members of the congregation were developing an
informal coffee and chat environment that was accepting of all people entering the church
building, by then regularly open during normal working hours. This was possible because of
the increased general activity around the congregation and the general support for this type of
receptive atmosphere. Other activities also developed a core supportive group of
congregational volunteers, especially the group who regularly undertake the aged support
activities. Yet others, such as the support group for people with intellectual disabilities and the
work for money activity, remain primarily the responsibility of the congregational minister.

Five dimensions that each developed in fairly makeshift ways were identified as features of
this Flexibility Period.

1. Whether formal processes were in place or not. Decision making occurred mostly as need
arose and involved the core participants, especially the congregational minister. This was
sometimes seen to generate disagreement among others who saw the situation differently
and perhaps felt that due process had not been followed. At other times policy decisions
were made within the more official committee structure and then implemented
accordingly.

2. Personnel were largely volunteers, with some being minimally remunerated for their
specific role where that role was seen as larger or more responsible than was appropriate
for a volunteer. In both settings the congregational minister played a dominant role, including being almost solely responsible for some activities.

3. The **resources** used in both instances were very uncertain. Buildings were those that happened to be available on church property, even if barely suitable for the purpose, and much use was made of the in-kind assistance of willing volunteers. The fairly minimal financial support initially needed was provided either from the congregation’s own resources or from grants obtained on a one-off basis from central church-related trusts that the congregational minister just happened to know about. Despite some effort, there was no ongoing or substantial funding for any of the services provided. Links to other community agencies existed and, although they generally appeared to be fairly underdeveloped, were strongest when there was some personal connection, eg via the spouse of a key person. Only one activity in Congregation A and two in Congregation B were operating as partnerships (the food bank arrangement in one case and a family suicide support group and the aged persons entertainment activity in the other).

4. The **service users** found the service through informal networks, referrals from other local services, or simply by walking in off the street. In both cases the location (the final location in the case of Congregation A) facilitated community awareness of at least some of the service activities the congregations provided. Also the openness to outsiders of the likely initial contact people (the Opportunity Shop volunteers for Congregation A and the Intake volunteers or congregational secretary for Congregation B) assisted in building working relationships with those not used to being around church settings.

5. Finally, the **activities** developed reflected the likely needs for the communities within which they were located ie basic survival and support needs for Congregation A in its public housing setting, and personal relationship and emotional support needs for Congregation B in its Upper Middle Class setting. Both congregations provided some basic supports and both also provided support for people with mental health difficulties. All activities except the counselling service in Congregation B had fairly informal and unplanned beginnings.

Overall these five dimensions, and the rather ad hoc ways in which each of necessity was addressed, characterised this period of the congregational community service process. It was clear from the analysis however that all five are involved in enabling an activity to develop; none can be overlooked even though decisions about them may well be made implicitly or on the run. This is clearly not a rational programming period; rather it is a pragmatic period of
“doing what you can with what you’ve got”. As such it seems to depend fairly heavily on the involvement of, commitment from, and resources accessed by the congregational minister, even though others may be key people for particular activities and may also exhibit the needed creativity.

3.3 “Purpose Specific” – Structuring Period

Detailed analysis identified a period in which more coherent and intentional development was able to occur. Hence this was labelled the “Structuring Period”. Throughout this period there was a gradual but continuing development of the capacity to resource the community service activity so that “specific purposes” could be achieved.

Congregation A never quite seemed to enter its period of more structured operations, though there was no shortage of effort by the congregational minister to do so. During the worship centre reconstruction an approach was made to the central church-related agency that operated the food bank to negotiate a more extensive and formal partnership of community engagement. The suggestion was that the new church complex could house a small team of professionals appointed by that agency for family support and community development work in the congregation’s area. This vision, developed in part as a result of the personal needs being shared with the volunteers in the Opportunity Shop, also involved the congregation maintaining its existing services and developing its volunteer pastoral support activities into a resource that the agency professionals could use. Unfortunately the church-related agency underwent a major restructure and staff change before any such arrangement was negotiated and the new staff were not willing to consider the matter further.

Once the rebuilding of the worship centre was complete Congregation A’s minister reworked his idea into a plan to formally incorporate the existing activities as a benevolent association. It was envisaged that this association would then seek funds from the government to directly employ its own professional social worker, basing them in a renovated Opportunity Shop where a room would be set aside for counselling and support. Such a vision did not receive widespread support from the congregation, largely because it was believed that the congregation had by then incurred a significant debt through its own rebuilding program. Also the pool of volunteers was believed to have already reached its capacity for community involvement. At this point the congregational minister perceived that the congregation was saying his vision of extending the congregation’s community presence had gone as far as they would support. Hence it was no surprise that within 6 months of these interviews the minister
announced his plans to move on, a move that some congregational members were anticipating.

In contrast Congregation B, with its formal incorporation and its development of a “Procedures and Policy Manual” for all its workers, began its community engagement as if it was immediately going into a structured operation. However this proved not to be so due to the lack of resources to support such an immediate development. Nonetheless, when the demand for the counselling service built up over the first 12 months, the move to implement a more structured and purposeful service was again underway. Initially the sessional clergyman/psychologist was appointed on a half-time basis as the “director of counselling” with responsibility to coordinate the team of volunteer professionals and support the intake volunteers in their role.

This salaried appointment removed much of the backup responsibility from the congregational secretary and reduced the level of direct involvement of the congregational minister who nonetheless remained in charge overall. This arrangement led to the introduction of a formal training process for the intake volunteers, a program which was also deliberately aimed at training congregational members for involvement in a “community of care” within the congregation and towards others in members’ neighbourhoods. This appointment also resulted in a few seminar programs aimed at particular personal, relationship and faith issues. This development continued with the appointment of a replacement half-time director of counselling some 18 months later, an appointment which led to the extension of the seminar series into a major program component intended to raise needed funds as the service’s first fee-for-service activity. This more “professional” approach proved to be the basis for recognition by the local council as a community service organisation and as an organisation the local council was prepared to fund.

In tandem with these developments, Congregation B found itself able to use bequest monies to renovate another hall on the church property. Included in this redesign was a suite of rooms designed as a counselling area with a warm and welcoming reception lobby. It was also designed as a coffee and chat facility to be operated by intake volunteers and other congregational members. This facility was opened just as the interviews were being completed.

Within this Structuring Period five dimensions that seemed to be progressively addressed as activities became more systematically organised were recognised.
1. Firstly, this period included a **broadening** of the activities being offered from the congregational setting. New program areas developed because the original activities raised awareness of other needs, or new personnel brought new options that previously did not exist. In broadening the program focus it was also evident that some new activities went through their own “making do” period despite their initiation via this more rationally planned period of the original activities.

2. Another feature of this period was an intentional effort to build a variety of **links** with other organisations. These were aimed at addressing purposes such as accessing regular support grants from government, developing joint activities with other services, and building networks of support and cooperation with other church personnel and professional workers. This intentionality was in contrast to the “making do” period.

3. The most obvious change in this period was the move to employ professional **staff** so reducing reliance on volunteers or inadequately trained personnel. These professionals, more so than with volunteers, were often recruited from outside the congregation although their capacity to fit into the congregation’s ethos for its community engagement and operation was an issue given careful consideration. These appointments led to more effective support for and supervision of the volunteers that were involved, and included recognition of a need for ongoing interaction with them as part of the program infrastructure.

4. A fourth feature is that **resources** began to be acquired that were designed for the specific purpose for which the program was going to use them. Buildings were either designed or renovated with a specific purpose in mind, staff were recruited for specific roles, finances were sought from specific sources for specific program activities, and even specific endeavours to integrate the community service activities with the spiritual activities of the congregation were pursued eg by more intentionally promoting the community service work during congregational worship. This sense of purpose-related resourcing evidenced a more rationally planned approach than was possible in the “making do”, flexible operation period.

5. Finally, this rational approach to planning and development meant that efforts were made to **stabilise** the community service in its many aspects. These were seen to include its leadership and management processes, its particular type of community activities, its intended user groups, and its source of finances and budget. Undergirding all this was a commitment to stabilising the community service activity’s links with the congregation.
by promoting a stronger sense of ownership than was evidenced through the involvement of the congregational minister and the core congregational volunteers and committee members. This was promoted through notices about the service activities and needs (volunteers, in-kind contributions, funds) in the congregation’s Sunday bulletin and in its worship service’s prayer times and announcements. The use of display posters and signs within and outside the church building was also recognised as a way of keeping this part of church life before the wider congregation. Within the formal structures, incorporation was undertaken with a formalised link between the community service and the congregation that tied them together for the future.

The overriding feature in all aspects of this period was one of rational planning based on continuity with what had already developed. It was also evident that a clear goal was to find the right balance between the provision of a professional service and the retention of its grounding in the community care and concern of the congregation.

3.4 “Discontinuity” – Modifying Period

Whilst significant changes have been rare within the congregational community services studied, the analysis did identify that modifications still occurred. Hence a period labelled the “Modifying Period” was identified. Changes in this period were “discontinuous” with former ways of doing things because unexpected influences would arise and inevitably necessitate modifications.

In Congregation A the clearest modifying event was the collapse of the local financial institution which confronted the small congregation emergency cupboard with a new group of people facing financial hardship. It was able to respond because a larger local agency sought a partnership with it to distribute aid to those in need. With the enthusiasm of the then new minister, a new approach to the emergency food service began. Another change was the relocation of the worship centre to a more public site. This exposed the congregation to the support needs of the people with mental health concerns who simply walked in off the street. Whilst much of the support offered was provided by the congregational minister, the participation of some in Sunday worship exposed the congregation as a whole to mental health issues. Whilst generating awareness within the congregation of the significant demands this group was making on the congregational minister, this also reinforced to them their own overall limited capacity to respond. Another critically significant event was the desire of the congregational minister to extend their community service into a formally incorporated and professionally staffed program. This proved to be more than key people within the
congregation could support at that time, so creating tension not previously encountered. And a final determinative event was the realisation that the volunteers operating the weekly meals program had become overcommitted. With no new people joining them, a decision was taken after 12 months to close down the activity.

Similarly in Congregation B, changes were introduced by events that had not been planned. An early one was the appointment of a paid director of counselling. This was instigated after certain congregational members recognised that the congregational minister was carrying too much of the load to be able to do his congregational work well whilst also fulfil his family roles appropriately. And later, subsequent to that appointment, when family tragedy forced the first director of counselling to suddenly take leave of absence, an abrupt pause occurred in a number of the developments then being pursued. Yet a few months later a psychologist seeking work in association with local churches happened to contact the congregational minister and was soon employed as a replacement counsellor. When the original director of counselling resigned because of his changed personal circumstances, this new psychologist was soon offered the position, bringing to it a vision for a more extensive seminar program.

A number of respondents also identified that the increasingly imminent departure of the congregational minister would be another critical time for their community service activity as the ownership of the whole program by the congregation would be tested. Some sensed that they had developed the commitment to maintain it, some were concerned that commitment was still to be developed, whilst another doubted that congregational commitment could extend beyond supporting their minister’s vision. From all views there was concern that the service might not survive a leadership change. One respondent openly based their views on prior experience of a significant community service program that, though officially endorsed and actively supported by a congregation, was wound up soon after the succeeding minister arrived.

A particular modifying concern was raised by a person with whom I spoke elsewhere about my research. Based on a known incident in a church community service, they expressed concern about the potential impact on individuals and congregational service activities of professionals who abuse service users. Reinforced by media attention to professional abuse by medical practitioners, psychologists, clergy, teachers, police and youth group leaders, reference was made to the sense of trust in a pastor, counsellor or friend that was “betrayed” in such incidents. It was noted that this damaged services overall, even when the abuse was not disclosed or officially acknowledged. Whilst most churches now have formal procedures to address these issues, the warning remains that within programs such as those explored in
this paper, due diligence in supervision and procedure is needed to ensure that all professionals and volunteers maintain the highest standards of ethical practice thereby ensuring that allegations of impropriety do not intrude into these congregational community services.

Three types of key events were identified, any of which could necessitate modifications to established congregational community programs.

1. **Critical decisions** that relate to new leadership appointments and new sources of funding tend to initiate changes in a program’s directions to reflect the new leader’s perspective or the constraints associated with the new funding source. A little of this is seen in both congregations: in congregation A when there was a change in minister prior to the further development of the community service activities; and in Congregation B when each of the directors of counselling were appointed (in fact, one of these appointments appeared to evolve some tension around the clergyman/psychologist’s agenda for a more overt “evangelistic” component to the counselling service’s development, an agenda not shared by the congregational minister or the lay committee people).

Whilst clearly there are reasons for such decisions to be made expeditiously, if data gained in the earlier stage of this research is correct, these decisions may well initiate tension among personnel when, for example, a decision is made to appoint professionals, including clergy, who do not understand the link between the congregation and its community service activities or who are not committed to nurturing that link. Such decisions may well then lead by default to either the closure of the service or its professionalisation and secularisation. Either way the service ceases to be a part of the congregation’s community engagement. Whilst such modifications may well be responsible, it is the unplanned change by default which seems questionable.

2. **Intrusions** into these programs occur because of excessive workloads faced by personnel, changes in the articulated vision, and problems of a personal or professional nature for key staff. These intrusions all require those involved in congregational community activities to review the situation and address unexpected issues.

3. Neither of these congregations had developed any sort of formal **evaluation** procedure to systematically review or monitor their program. However a third congregation whose data is yet to be analysed has undertaken extensive and frequent reviews and evaluations of their congregational community engagement and this feature will therefore be explored in a later writing.
4. Conclusions: Understanding Congregational community engagement

4.1 Summary – Features of each period in Congregational community engagement

This exploration of two congregations and their community service activities, together with the analysis upon which this paper is based, has surfaced a model for understanding the likely processes that congregational community involvement takes. This model presents four interactive periods between which there are no neat boundaries. Each period has a number of dimensions or features that assist to identify how this process might work as summarised in the table following.

Table 1: Summary features of the Periods through which congregational community service activities develop and operate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating Period</th>
<th>Characterising Motif</th>
<th>Features/Dimensions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating Period</td>
<td>Dreaming</td>
<td>Congregational Culture</td>
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<td>Articulated Vision</td>
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<td>Key Person</td>
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<td>Trigger Events</td>
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<td>Flexibility Period</td>
<td>Making Do</td>
<td>Decision Making Process</td>
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<td>Personnel</td>
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<td>Service Users</td>
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<td>Service Activities</td>
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<td>Structuring Period</td>
<td>Purpose Specific</td>
<td>Broadened Services</td>
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<td>Inter-organisational Links</td>
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<td>Formal Staffing</td>
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<td>Designer Resources</td>
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<td>Stabilised Features</td>
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<td>Modifying Period</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td>Critical Decisions</td>
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<td>Intrusions</td>
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<td>Formal Evaluations</td>
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Cross-cutting these process periods are a series of issues related to congregational community service activities that were identified in an earlier stage of this research (Bedford 1999a; see Appendix for a summary table). Later writings will explore in more detail the interrelationship of these two different analytical frameworks concerning congregational community service involvement.

4.2 Implications – the importance of understanding congregational community engagement

The implications of this exploration of congregational community service involvements are seen to be:
1. **Congregations DO provide services to their community.** Whilst the extent of these services in Australia is not known, the data available is consistent with US data suggesting that in excess of 50% of congregations provide some type of community service. Although the actual service types are also unclear, what is clear is that congregations are forming a significant component of the community’s overall welfare system. Hence they cannot be ignored, filtered out as other categories, or deprecated simply because they are a secondary activity in a host setting i.e. offered by a church congregation primarily established for religious worship and nurture. More needs to be known about what it is these congregations offer the community, how they go about doing this, and what that means for the overall provision of community services. More also needs to be known about how these activities change congregations and their faith expressions, and change communities and the role of faith communities within them.

2. **Congregational insiders,** i.e. clergy, community service professionals who are congregational members and other congregational members involved with or seeking to develop a congregational community service, need to have a better understanding of how these services work and the issues they are likely to encounter. This model, developed inductively from data as discussed here, offers a framework to assist in that understanding. As more research is undertaken with these congregational activities this model can be refined.

3. Likewise, **congregational outsiders,** i.e. community service personnel in government departments or other community services liaising or consulting with congregational community programs, need some understanding of how these activities work, including how they are similar to and uniquely different from other community groups. They also need to understand the impact of these activities on congregational and community life. This model offers some basis for both understanding this and comparing them with other community service providers so that the particular features of interest can be identified and addressed.

4. **Policy discussions** about the role of congregations in their wider community engagements need to have an accurate model of how these community services operate so that these aspects can be evaluated when considering policies related to congregational community involvement. In particular, policy developers must realise that not all congregations will relate to social issues in similar ways. This model provides a basis for identifying those that are open to particular developments and those that are not. This knowledge is needed in the face of a potential influence in Australia of the now substantial US, and recently
developing UK, policy debates specifically relating to the use of church congregations in the provision of government funded community services.

Only this year Australian media have given attention to problems that have engulfed some well-known congregationally-based community service agencies (Ellingsen 2000a 2000b; The Age Editorial 14/7/2000; SBS Television 2000). Whilst these better known agencies are considerably different from those developed by the congregations considered here, to the extent that this model offers some understanding of process and issues, it is useful for understanding the underlying influences to these public concerns. In Melbourne’s most recent case, Wesley Central Mission, it seems that the management team developed such a sense of independence from the congregation that they no longer understood that they remained a component of the congregation’s life and culture and that the values undergirding their work needed to continue to reflect that culture and the understandings behind it rather than the values of either the secular non-profit sector or the corporate sector. Once the management processes were publicly seen to be excessively removed from those congregational positions, conflict ensued. A model for better understanding the dynamics of congregations like Wesley in Melbourne as settings for community service provision would arguably help ensure this public breakdown in confidence did not occur.

This paper offers a preliminary model of the dynamics of congregational community engagement for use in reviewing activities of other congregations and as a basis for further research. However it is but a first step in a better understanding of the links between Australian social policy, social service provision emanating from local Australian religious congregations, and how these come about.
Appendix

The issues previously presented elsewhere (Bedford 1999a) have also been applied to an actual congregationally-based service agency as a means for exploring and reviewing its operation (Bedford 1999b). These issues as identified in that earlier research stage were:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>IDENTIFIED ISSUE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<td>2. Theology</td>
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<td>3. Bridge Building</td>
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<td>6. Ownership</td>
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<td>Personnel</td>
<td>7. Volunteers</td>
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<td>9. Clergy</td>
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<td>10. Central Church</td>
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<td>11. Community Linkages</td>
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<td>Structures</td>
<td>12. Management</td>
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<td>13. Life-Cycles</td>
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<td>14. Evaluation</td>
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<td>15. Programs</td>
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<td>16. Deterrents</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The two issues in *italics* were actually identified through a subsequent analysis of the data upon which this paper was based and were not included in the earlier papers.


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Appendix 10: PAPER PRESENTED AT AASW CONFERENCE MELBOURNE VIC 2001

The Involvement of Local Church Congregations in Community Service Delivery

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Australian Association of Social Workers
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25 September 2001
Abstract

Recent U.S. policy shifts have included a significant emphasis on government support for the participation of "pervasively sectarian" organisations in welfare service delivery. This is seen to particularly include local religious congregations. Research has however identified that up to 90% of congregations have been providing services within their community in varying ways prior to this policy change. Within the Australian setting much less is known about the contribution of local religious congregations to the provision of local community services although limited data from the 1996 National Church Life Survey indicates in excess of 65% of congregations claim some local community involvement.

Recognising the policy context and the present lack of knowledge of congregational community activity in Australia, this paper seeks to explore the nature of local congregational community involvement through qualitative research on the experience of a small number of congregations and a small group of social welfare practitioners. From this the paper outlines a series of issues that are likely to impact on the provision of services from this type of religious setting as well as a model for how such services are developed, sustained and changed. It argues that these services need to be better recognised as a part of local welfare and community service delivery, and better understood with regard to how they work, the capacity they have to deliver services, and the limitations they face.

The paper concludes that, in particular, social workers need to be more aware of local religious groups as sites of community organising and community action, despite these being secondary to their religious core activities. The paper aims to be a useful contribution to that awareness. This research is based on the author's Ph.D. thesis.
1. Introduction:

Earlier in 2001 two articles appeared in *The Age* in Melbourne; the first in late April talked about local churches needing to secure their clergy from attack by people seeking various types of assistance (Birnbauer & Murphy 2001), and the second in early June discussed the increase in demand for emergency assistance from a church in the “comfortable” suburb of Glen Waverley (Wroe 2001). These two articles stood out because of the following comments made in them:

[One clergyman] has noticed a big increase recently in the number of people seeking help. “A lot of people tell us they’re being referred here by CentreLink, and they think they have a right to demand money,” he said. “The [central church leader] is considering writing to CentreLink asking them to stop referring people to churches” (Birnbauer & Murphy 2001).

[A clergyman] also attributes the rise in demand for emergency relief to increasing drug dependence among young people and the lack of government support for refugees on temporary visas. “The government actually has a policy not to support them,” he says. “But that doesn’t remove the need. There is still the need. They are relying on churches and other agencies to pick that up.” (Wroe 2001).

Included in the articles was acknowledgment that the relief assistance came from the “generosity” of these local congregations and that people also sought help because of psychiatric and gambling problems. It was clear from the articles that the extent of demand, said to be 30 to 70 people weekly (Birnbauer & Murphy 2001) and amounting to a demand on a congregation of $6000 a year (Wroe 2001), was severely taxing both church resources as well as staff. As well they noted that people were turned away and that church staff were becoming less accessible even though, as another clergyman is quoted as saying, “The church…is supposed to be a place of hospitality” (Birnbauer 2001).

It is significant that these news articles are giving rare public acknowledgment that local church congregations are, by default, an integral part of our country’s welfare system, despite their being primarily established for religious purposes and despite the people they help already being clearly involved with the formal welfare system. However, so little is known about the welfare services of local church congregations that social workers and others working in the formal system are unlikely to have any precise awareness of who is involved, how they operate, or why they are doing this work. It is the purpose of this paper to provide a preliminary overview on some recent research into this phenomenon, and some policy debates that are now arising around the involvement of religious congregations in welfare service delivery.

2. Policy Developments in the United States:

Although churches have historically always had a role in our welfare system, it has usually been the larger, centrally linked church agencies that have been recognised in this way.
However, in the US, beginning with the Reagan Administration’s reductions in funding to welfare services, it is now recognised that church congregations have, in part, been stepping in to fill the gap (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Dudley & Van Eck, 1992; Wineburg, Sparkes & Finn, 1983, Wineburg & Wineburg, 1987; Wineburg, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996a, 1996b 2000 2001).

More recent research has documented the extent of this involvement as variously between 57% and 92% of the 300,000 or more congregations within American society, providing programs with an estimated replacement value of around $US100,000 per congregation (Chaves, 1999b; Cnaan, 1998; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Kirsch, Noga & Gorski, 1992). Nonetheless this involvement was largely overlooked until political and religious conservatives began promoting church congregations as the solution to the perceived crisis in American welfare (Carlson-Thies & Skillen, 1996; Grann, no date; Wineburg, 1998). This led ultimately to the inclusion of what is termed the “Charitable Choice” clause (Clause 104) within the US *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996*, its welfare reform legislation, which deliberately set out to turn around a long standing practice of denying government funding to “pervasively sectarian” organisations such as faith-based organisations like church congregations (Carlson-Thies, 1999; Center for Public Justice, 1996; Wineburg, 1998a; Wineburg & Cleveland, 1999).

Whilst the response of government and churches to this funding opportunity has been ambivalent and slow (Chaves, 1999a, 1999c 2001; Elsasser 2000; Farnsley, 1999; Sherman, 1997, 1998; Wuthnow 2000), one of the first moves of the new Bush Administration has been to create an *Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* within the *White House*, and related centres within five government departments. These centres were charged with extending the reach of this “Charitable Choice” approach to returning the operation of government funded community services to local community groups, especially congregations and faith-based organisations (Bush 2001; Wallis 2001). Whilst some commentators are doubtful that churches have the capacity to increase their involvement in this way (Cnaan & Wineburg, 1996; Cnaan with Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Wineburg & Cleveland, 1999; Wineburg 2000 2001; Wuthnow 2000), others argue that this is now starting to happen (Sherman 2000).

Within the US, government funding of religious congregations and faith-based groups is a contested issue that reflects Constitutional restrictions requiring church-state separation, the history of involvement of the more liberal mainline and the African-American congregations within local community services, and the promotion of the Charitable Choice approach by
religiously and politically conservative politicians and policy personnel. It also reflects the greater involvement of the US people with religious activity which ensures there are more congregations with a larger resource base. [Involvement is 40% per week according to Saxon-Harrold, Weiner, McCormack & Weber (2001); more than double the Australian level identified by Evans & Kelley (1998) and Mackay (1999)].

3. The Australian Context:
Nonetheless, we in Australia are not unaffected by this gradual awareness that churches and church-sponsored groups are an avenue for promoting community participation in government sponsored welfare policy. The Commonwealth government’s Welfare Reform Interim Report (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000) tacitly assumes that church congregations are part of the community networks that they see as being in partnership with government in addressing “work-aged” unemployment. This tacit assumption is also reflected occasionally in publications of the Prime Minister’s Business and Community Partnership initiative (Department of Family and Community Services, 1999). Likewise that government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (Department of Family and Community Services 2000a) fostering local responses to local needs explicitly expects churches to contribute to the policy’s implementation. And, within the State of Victoria, a similar policy development, Stronger Citizens, Stronger Families, Stronger Communities, aimed at promoting better partnerships in community-based care, also identifies local religious groups as having a role (Carter 2000; Community Care Division 2000).

Whilst these reference are vague, and place nowhere near the expectations and role on the faith community that the US policy development seems to, as with the US, there is little evidence that the policy makers have any formal understanding of just how church congregations are involved already and what their capacity for further involvement may be. There is also no recognition of why these groups would even want to be involved: indeed, as with other community-based groups, they are just assumed to “be there”.

Research on congregational community involvement in Australia is sparse to say the least. The most comprehensive results are from two National Church Life Survey reports of 1991 and 1996 (Kaldor, Bellamy & Moore, 1995; Kaldor, Dixon & Powell, 1999). These variously report levels of congregational involvement in caring activities directed toward their wider community at 35% in 1991 and in excess of 64% in 1996\(^\text{133}\). In addition they report that 45%

\(^{133}\) In part the discrepancy relates to a different data collection instrument. The 1991 survey asked a respondent from each congregation to list the activities the congregation undertook in the community, whereas the 1996 survey provided a checklist of activities that could be designated. There is reason to
of congregations have representatives on community committees and 27% of congregational members are involved in wider community activities.

A less comprehensive survey has been provided by the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church (Linossier, 1994). This reports the claimed community service involvement of 75% of the Victorian Uniting Church congregations. In all 66% claimed some sort of community engagement through operating programs costing, cumulatively, approximately $2m, with only 16% of this derived from government funding. These congregations also claimed a collective contribution of $700,000 per year to other community service organisations.

And finally, at a less formal level of community involvement, recent research by Evan and Kelly (2000) has identified that the best indicator of a person’s probability for volunteering within the community is their church attendance. They note that 57% of those who attend church weekly volunteer, and that church goers generally volunteer at greater rates than the non-church-going people in the community (the overall proportion volunteering was placed at 33% each week, 41% at some stage in a year).

Hence it is reasonable to conclude that church congregations in Australia, and those who make them up, are likely to be significant participants in the community services offered in any given locality. Whilst we can identify some aspects of what they do, current knowledge tells us little about why they do it or how they develop and sustain their more formal involvements in it. Indeed, even the US research gives little insight into that process (the closest is Dudley, 1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1997 and Dudley & Johnson, 1993). The research outlined in the remainder of this paper seeks to provide a beginning model for understanding this dynamic.

4. Methodology of this Research Project:
This research was undertaken following a Grounded Theory methodology approximating that presented by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992 & 1998; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). This approach involved the collection of qualitative data and the successive analysis of each data set to inductively identify conceptual themes with their dimensions and properties. The data sets were obtained through the process of “theoretical sampling” by which data is successively sought from people and settings.
expected to provide information to elaborate some aspect of any emerging theory. The identified themes, dimensions and properties were then coded with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis computer software *Q.S.R. NVivo* (Richards, 1998) and the relationships between them explored both within the software package and in various less technical ways (such as scraps of paper, drafts of work-in-progress papers, and informal discussion). Emerging from this process was a series of issues that were seen to impact on congregational community service involvements and, later, a model for the development, operation and modification of congregational community service engagement. The articulation of this theoretical model, based on the identified themes grounded in the data sets, is the purpose of the grounded theory methodology.

Four data sets were obtained for this research project, each being extensively analysed prior to the next data set being obtained using the methodology’s “constant comparison” approach i.e. considering each data statement and comparing it to the themes already identified to see if it relates to the concepts already involved or represents some sort of new feature. The first data set consisted of the transcripts of in-depth, unstructured interviews with 13 social workers who were experienced at the interface of churches and welfare programs. In these interviews they were asked to describe the nature of their congregationally related welfare involvement and to reflect on the issues raised for them through that experience. Many of these interviewees were clergy additionally qualified as social workers, a number were executive officers of church-sponsored welfare agencies, and many had a diverse range of experiences as congregational members, congregational employees as well as social workers employed in church agencies.

The second data set was made up of transcripts of 10 similar interviews with 8 people associated with a congregation and its involvements in a working class, public housing area of a regional city. In addition access was available to a number of documents related to this congregation and its communal life in this area. A similar set of transcripts and documents made up the third data set from an upper middle class suburb of Melbourne. This involved 9 interviews with 7 people involved with this congregation and its community activities as well as a number of internal reports and documents. In these two data sets interviewees were asked to describe their involvement in the congregational community service activities of their particular congregation and to comment on how these activities came about and how they developed and changed. For the second data set a cluster of 13 fairly informal activities directed outside or bridging with the congregation were identified. For the third data set a similar set of 13 activities was again identified, however some of these were linked with a
formally incorporated benevolent organisation established by that congregation for this purpose. In all three of these predominantly interview-based data sets the purpose of the in-depth and unstructured interviewing approach was to ensure that interviewees were free to share their own experiences rather than have those experiences filtered through a predetermined “grid” derived from my own mind-set.

The fourth data set consisted primarily of 24 documents and one interview transcript with one person involved with a congregation that had developed and sustained a community service agency in a multicultural working class suburb of Melbourne. These documents covered a period of 8 years during which this congregational activity, operated in formal coalition with a central church-sponsored agency, was developed and underwent various changes, often in response to one of a series of formal evaluations undertaken during this period. Within this highly structured setting 20 activities were identified. The use of this data set was especially advantageous for two reasons; firstly, these documents allowed for an insight into the progressive changes in this agency as perceived at the time by those involved and, secondly, the documents showed the impact of intentional reviews and evaluations of the community service throughout its development. This provided a contrast to the individual recollections and reflections upon which the first 3 data sets were based.

The types of activities found to be provided across these 3 congregational settings ranged from emergency food assistance, through informal support activities, to professional counselling and language assistance programs. Most were undertaken with no external funding, although some funding from a range of sources was associated with the more professionally based activities. This pattern of activities was also consistent with the types of involvements mentioned in the original data set of the professional welfare personnel interviewed.

5. The Core Concept “Culture of Operation”:
What emerged from the progressive analysis of these data sets (see Appendix for an overview of this analytical process) was an hypothesis that congregational community services actually operate in the “space between” two dichotomous Cultures of Operation, neither of which is ever likely to be found in its “pure” form. These operating cultures I have labelled Altruistic Volunteerism and Formalising Professionalism. Influences operating at various times within the “space” between them are then understood to “push” any one or more of six dimensions of a congregational community service toward one extreme or the other, sometimes with different dimensions moving in different directions under related influences.
As derived from this research, this hypothesis is also seen as identifying the unique characteristic of congregationally-based community engagement. Such a conceptualisation readily explains the often complex dynamics of congregational community services. Failure to understand this results in varying degrees of frustrations in the face of seemingly contradictory responses. Understanding this assists those associated with congregationally-based community services to be more effective in their work with them and gives the capacity to predict likely consequences of a range of decisions impacting on any such community service. Strategy development when working in and with this setting is therefore aided.

The defining characteristics of these two extreme cultural types, their norms and dominant patterns, are conceptualised in terms of some of their most obvious, but for this purpose somewhat caricatured, features.

\textit{a. The Culture of Altruistic Volunteerism}

Altruistic volunteerism operates totally on the basis of congregational members’ sacrificial self-giving of time, money and/or personal abilities without any expectation of or desire for reward. At more subtle levels it also tends to be a culture of “making do” with whatever is available or can be acquired through the donations of others, be it second hand office equipment, or even buildings from which to operate. Hence it is also a very creative culture as the capacity to do things with limited resources is highly valued.

However, as it is based entirely on people’s goodwill, this culture also tends to be ad hoc in its arrangements, and is at times even somewhat chaotic as one person’s contribution interferes with another’s (for example, in the third congregational setting the efforts of those operating the Opportunity Shop was said to be creating a mess around which those operating the voluntary pastoral care support and emergency aid activity had to work, despite this “clutter” detracting from a congenial supportive environment). Hence it is also characterised by notions of tolerance, of lack of accountability, and of ambiguity. In one data set it was in fact characterised as a culture of “good enough”.

It is this culture of operation which is readily reinforced within the life of the congregation through teaching about caring for neighbours, “Good Samaritan” notions, and the challenge of not judging others whilst giving sacrificially both financially and personally. Hence it is when this culture is operating well that a congregational program is more typically regarded as ideal.
and it is within this culture that the dream for congregationally-based community service activity is typically given birth.\footnote{Wineburg (2001) notes that it was with such an argument that President Reagan in 1982 set the US agenda for replacing government social services with church congregational and other faith-based programs, an agenda now set to be actively implemented through President Bush’s creation of the \textit{Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives} in 2001.}

\textit{b. The Culture of Formalising Professionalism}

Formalising professionalism is most identifiable when a service is provided by paid professionals using professional standards as the criteria for actions following formal job descriptions with well-structured processes of accountability. It is also seen to operate out of buildings specifically suited for its purpose and is overseen by an executive director accountable to a board. Services are established through rational planning processes based on formal needs assessment studies and access to those services is through appointments and official intake processes. Effectiveness of outcome and cost for service users, staff and funders are hallmarks of this culture at its best.

This culture is consistently reinforced through in-service training for program staff and board members and through regular supervision of its workers.\footnote{These processes are fully elaborated by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) in their paper \textit{The Iron Cage Revisited}.} For service users it is reinforced through administrative procedures that are implemented to control workloads and aid time-management. However this culture tends to reflect little more than legal accountability to its formal sponsors, instead operating rather independently of them. Indeed it is typically quite alienating for the sponsoring congregation whose identification with it is generally perceived to be in name only.\footnote{An example of this is reflected in the public debate which arose in 2000 around Melbourne’s Wesley Central Mission after the congregation, in response to some program proposals that some deemed unacceptable, began to query the accountability of senior staff and the governing board to the congregation itself (see \textit{Age} Editorial, 2000; Ellingsen, 2000 and Zeigler, 2000).}

6. A Model of the Development and Functioning of Congregational Community Services:

The practical value of this hypothesis about Cultures of Operation in congregational community services is more evident when considered within an overall model of how such community service arrangements actually work. Based on data analysis an overall map for developing, operating and modifying congregational community services has also been possible. The basic outline of this is depicted in Diagram 1.
This model identifies three phases of development and operation.

- First is an **initiation phase**, which explores the processes involved when a congregation grapples with the idea of intentionally providing a service to their wider community. This grappling may relate to a particular activity not already being provided or to overall the idea of intentionally providing any service activities. Within this phase, 3 influential aspects and the way they coalesce to develop a vision for the service or activity are identified.

- Second is the **operation phase** which identifies the various factors that influence how an intentional community service operates, who operates it, and where its is sited. This phase incorporates **six dimensions** or aspects of the operation whose properties indicate where between the two extreme cultures of operation a particular service, and/or a particular activity within that service, is located. This phase may well overlap chronologically with the initiation phase as ideas move into implementation.

- Third is a **modifying phase** which can be entered at almost any time should any of the factors that promote modification be activated. Hence, here also, there is necessarily no clear boundary. In this phase three clusters of influences promoting change are identified and explored.
Each of these phases in this model is explored in turn in order to clarify the factors perceived to be impacting on the provision of community services by religious congregations, that is groupings of people primarily meeting in a particular place for the primary purpose of spiritual expression and nurture. At this point however it is worth noting that, whilst clearly grounded in and emerging from the data, no claim is being made that at the broad conceptual level this three phase model is unique to religious congregations. Nonetheless, as the detail of the model is developed, certain features of it will be identified as potentially unique considerations, although a full discussion of that is beyond this paper’s scope.

**Phase 1: Initiation**

Data analysis suggested that, in order for a congregation to successfully commence an intentional community service as an activity of the congregation, three factors need to coalesce. There needs to be a **congregation culture** that affirms that community service activities of at least some particular types are legitimate activities for this congregation. There also needs to be a **key person** who has energy and time to give to putting into effect the developing dream for this activity. And thirdly, there needs to be some sort of **catalyst** that “kick starts” the active interest of the congregation in doing something rather than ignoring it, only ever talking about it, or leaving it to a keen individual. Only when these three come together can a viable **vision** begin to be articulated and become the focus for involvement by people within the congregation.

a. **Congregational Culture**

It is this issue of congregational culture that this model proposes to also be unique to church congregations, although later research may well suggest it is a feature of any secondary or host setting for a community service, i.e. any setting where a particular community service activity is not the primary purpose for involvement. Congregational cultures refer to a pervasive set of values and norms shared widely, even if not consciously, by members which tacitly more than overtly guide what a congregation does and esteems. These cultures usually have a long history within any congregation, change only slowly, and have an amazing resilience if pushed beyond what they will accept. Indeed, when significant groups espouse clashing sets of norms and expectations,¹³⁷ these cultures are typically the basis for most conflict that exists within churches generally. The features of these cultural differences and how they may be altered to incorporate an intentional community service then become critical issues within this model.

¹³⁷ See Becker (1998,1999) and Becker, Ellingson, Flory, Grisswold, Kniss & Nelson (1993) for research directly on this point.
- **Different Cultures**

One of the key features of this concept of culture within congregations is that, at any given time, more than one culture is likely to be evident within any given congregation. In part this reflects the previous experiences and understandings of the people forming the congregation. However within any particular setting it is likely one culture will predominate\(^{138}\), while others will be less evident or influential, at least until something too far beyond their limits occurs. Within the four data sets upon which this research was based, two broad but clearly different cultures were identified\(^{139}\), one more of a traditional worshipping culture that valued regular and predictable styles of worship as the focal activity, and the other a less formal, more flexible style seen to be more open to involvement with the wider community. Sometimes this latter was associated with an “evangelical” faith orientation as opposed to a more “liturgical” one; at other times the latter was seen to be more “liberal” in theological terms while the former was seen to be more “fundamentalist”. Whilst the issue of theology is clearly a key aspect of congregational culture it did not appear to be a fixed or determinative aspect\(^{140}\).

What is very clear is that *if the culture doesn’t endorse community engagement, then there will be little affirmation of any community service proposal and little likelihood of success as a congregational activity.*

- **Changing Cultures**

This then raises the question of how a congregational culture may be altered if a conducive one does not already exist. The data suggests that, though far from easy, this can be done. In one instance this seemed to be achieved when the congregation merged with another two culturally different congregations in such a way that they were forced together in order to survive and had to relocate successively to two sites not associated with any former congregation. This time of crisis, and the strong need for the different congregations to cooperate to address it, produced a resultant congregation with a sufficient number of core people willing to put time into a range of community service proposals. This group appeared to form the dominant culture within the newly merged congregation, and not all were from the same original congregation. These involvements were supported by the Parson\(^{141}\) involved.

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\(^{138}\) This is supported by the reinforcement of this culture through its pervasive influence on congregational life. However it is also likely to be aided by the tendency for those uncomfortable with a particular predominant culture to leave, and those looking for it to join.


\(^{140}\) A point also identified by Mock (1992) and Mock adapted by Koppitch (1992).

\(^{141}\) Various names are used to identify an officially appointed and institutionally ordained person within a congregation - vicar, priest, rector, pastor and minister are probably the most common in the
although that person was desirous of a more extensive and formal involvement by the
congregation than even this merging culture was prepared to endorse. Hence some conflict
still ensued.

In another case the Parson concerned strategically set about to build on the liturgical culture
that was already there and, over a period of 6 years, to re-orient it to reflect a more
comprehensive faith understanding that included community engagement. This presented as a
process of **massaging** the culture rather than trying to impose or **pummel** it into change. A
crucial aspect of this process seemed to be one of interacting with, rather than avoiding, those
who did not want this community service proposal to develop and thereby exploring with
them how it could indeed be seen to help support the goals they sought. Through this process
opposition was abated and a committed core group of supporters eventually emerged.

- **Theology**
The issue of theology seems always to be pervading any consideration of congregational
community engagement. Whilst arguably some theologies are more open to community
engagement than others, there seems to be little that is inevitable about it. The explanation for
this seems to lie in the recognition that church congregations don’t appear to be as
theologically articulate as might sometimes be supposed. Rather people seem to reflect a
somewhat eclectic approach that integrates their range of faith experiences. However this
understanding appears more intuitive than explicit for most people - what I have come to term
a **street theology** evident by actions rather than words\(^{142}\). Typically it is the clergy and a few
theologically astute lay people who seek a more formal articulation of the theological basis
for a congregational culture, but even that is not necessarily inevitable. The data actually
suggests that explicit statements of the theological basis for a congregation’s community
involvement are rare, and normally when provided, they come later on when a congregation’s
involvement is being reviewed rather than initiated; they represent more of an “after the
event” clarification rather than a guiding set of principles with which to begin.

Christian tradition. I have chosen to use “Parson” for this person as, unlike most of the others, it is no
longer a term formally associated with any particular Christian tradition (indeed it appears to have
dropped out of use), it is less cumbersome than the more generic, gender neutral term “clergyperson”
and it is less archaic than the related term “cleric”. However, where I am referring more generally to
the role these people fill, I still use the term “clergy”.

\(^{142}\) Ammerman (1994, 1997) reflects a similar discovery in her research on congregations and their
response to their local settings. My term, “Street Theology”, was adapted from a paper entitled **An
Agenda for Field Theologians** given at a Conference for Methodist Missions and Social Services in
1978 in Christchurch NZ by Rev. Keith Rowe in which he emphasised the need to do theology in the
street by listening to ordinary people talk about their lives and the stories by which they live.
Within each setting it was evident that there were key persons who were identified with the commencement of any congregational community activity, and more especially, the response of a congregation to community engagement. Typically this is the congregational Parson, but it was not unusual to find other key people, perhaps in relation to particular sets of activities, were lay members of the congregation.

- Clergy

Clergy clearly have a very significant role in the development of any practical action by a congregation towards engagement with their local community. In one case it was clearly the Parson who had a well thought through sense of the needed approach to community involvement and how it could be implemented. He spent 6 years readying the congregation to absorb and respond to his perception. It was an approach developed in response to frustrations previously experienced in other ministry settings.

In another case it was a problem that was arriving at the Parson’s front door and which was shared with the congregation that gradually led to a new set of community support activities. In the third case it was two new Parsons arriving at a congregation and asking questions about how the congregation could link with their community that opened up the congregation to exploring possibilities. All data sets reinforced the perception that, without the overt support of the clergy associated with a congregation, it is all but impossible for a congregation to develop, let alone sustain, an engagement with its community. Yet it is also clear that clergy alone are not necessarily the key drivers of it. They may be, but more often it seems that it is their “permission giving” in an active rather than a passive sense that enables developments to occur i.e. they actively support the efforts of others rather than give formal assent and stay in the background. Hence the clergy are clearly crucial persons in this process. And it may well be they who articulate the vision, or at least invite people to focus on the creation of it.

- Laity

Lay people\textsuperscript{143} within church congregations also clearly played key leadership roles in the development of each congregation’s community service response. Those interviewed could readily name these key people who were available, either within any individual activity, and/or within the development overall, to give of their time and energy to get something “up and running”. In one congregation it was a woman who, encouraged by a bible study

\textsuperscript{143} I use the term “lay people” to refer to congregational people who are not ordained as clergy. I am not contrasting them to “professionals” generally for, in a number of congregational community service activities, qualified professionals are the key persons involved eg the nurse who instigated a congregationally run social dinner for housebound aged persons encountered in her professional role.
discussion (as it was reported to me), responded to the Parson’s shared concern about the
demand at his door for emergency food and set in place a vision for a clothing exchange (later
an Opportunity Shop) and a Coffee and Chat activity to be added to the Food Pantry idea then
being mooted. In another case it was a businessperson who could see the need for a formal
organisation linked to the church to be incorporated and registered as a charity for the
Parson’s vision for a counselling service to have a viable context. In each of these settings, no
overall activity seemed likely without such key people.

At the more specific level of particular community service activities, all data clearly
suggested that a particular person had to be “possessed” by the idea of implementing that
activity for them to begin. In one case this was a woman who heard that the leaders of her
congregation felt unable to respond when asked by another congregation already providing
breakfast to homeless people to initiate a meals program for low income families. After
meeting with one especially keen leader feeling unable to act alone, these two commenced
this meals activity initially as joint organisers. It was not long however before this women
was left as the activity’s sole organiser. Key persons at this activity level are probably more
typically lay people as their vision is often concretely tied to a specific activity that makes
sense to them, rather than to the overall concept at the congregational level.144

c. Catalysts
Along with a supportive culture and a key person to drive the development, it also emerged
that congregations needed some sort of catalyst or trigger event to stimulate this
developmental activity. This catalyst seems to have any amount of diversity, which makes it
hard to conceptualise simply. However, one pattern emerging in the data sets was recognition
of catalytic triggers that appeared “out of the blue”, or as if spontaneously, and those that
seemed to arrive almost sedately and find fertile ground.

- Spontaneous
Spontaneous catalysts were events such as the collapse of a large locally based financial
institution leaving many local people without immediate cash or their financial reserves.
Many of these people arrived at the church door seeking help in numbers not previously
encountered and in total ignorance of the formal supports available. This triggered the
development of an intentional food distribution program in cooperation with a large welfare

144 Cameron (1998) identified in her research into the social action of 5 English congregations that the
activities chosen were undertaken because they related to concerns the initiating leaders had directly or
indirectly experienced themselves, rather than because some need was systematically identified.
agency. It also led to openness to a wider range of services able to be offered to the community from the congregation.

In each congregational setting researched, the arrival of people with mental health concerns led to the establishment of various support activities, from informal individual support, to semi-formal friendship support groups, and even to a formally instituted cooperative program involving staff from the local hospital’s psychiatric department. Prior to being confronted with these challenges, congregations had not contemplated these sorts of activities.

- Sedate

Other catalysts seemed instead to have been “lying around” waiting to find a suitable setting. One congregation had begun to look at ways to bridge their life and worship to their diverse and growing local community. Action began as a direct result of their encounter with the central church agency researcher looking for ways to form a partnership between a congregation and certain agency programs, the purpose of which was to enhance the agency’s links to the wider church life at the same time as developing new programs within that community. It perhaps seemed at the time something like a “marriage made in heaven” even though the formal partnership agreement proved a challenge to formulate.

In another setting the catalyst was the discovery of a lay person who shared the vision of congregational community engagement and had expertise in formulating a formal structure by which such a vision could be implemented. One respondent in the first data set tells of a program developing from a realisation of the need to spend a bequest left to the congregation for a particular set of purposes that previously had been deemed hard to meet.

However at no time was it ever suggested that a formal social needs study contributed to a congregation’s sense of need to develop a community service activity. Such an analysis, where it even existed, only ever seemed to have a minor role in the overall process of vision development. Rather, what the concerned congregational people knew from their personal experiences at work, home, in the neighbourhood or at church was typically seen to give them a keen understanding of the issues confronting that community to which they might respond\(^\text{145}\).

\(^{145}\) The research of Dudley (1996 & 1997) goes so far as to suggest that congregations can only perceive as community issues those things for which they also intuitively perceive they have the capacity to respond.

\(d.\) Vision
Which comes first, the key persons, the catalyst that triggers movement, or the congregational culture seems not to be relevant as each impacts on the other in an interdependent way; but the result of this encounter is the formulation of a vision of how a congregation may engage with some of the issues confronting its local community and the formation of a group of people who are either captivated by that vision or who are ready to follow-on and support those people. The vision may start off as fairly general with the processes for setting out to get something started giving it greater concreteness over time; or the vision may be quite specifically tied to a particular activity.

- **Agendas**
A key component of this developing vision relates to the agendas that are imbeded within congregational motives. For some, community service activities represent an opportunity for promoting religious change in the life of a person involved in the program i.e. for “evangelising” either directly or indirectly eg through encouraging pamphlets. For others, this is an unacceptable goal, an intrusion into people’s right to choose. It is instead replaced by a goal of exhibiting God’s love and compassion in action more so than words, and letting the context itself “speak”. For some the issue is even less specific, but with an ultimate hope that the congregation will get some new members out of it.

In some situations there is only the expectation that what they offer is a place for people to come and be cared for in whatever way they want, no strings attached or implied. For yet others there may be the sense that what is offered is a relationship through which a more informal, unhurried, caring sort of support can be experienced, and that this may or may not have any spiritual impact. For some it is more about just living out God’s compassion in the world, irrespective of the result.

Congregational members appeared to have quite an eclectic collection of these agendas, which were rarely articulated and, when articulated in such places as Mission Statements, were still be left to individuals to interpret as they chose. However it would be fair to say that there was always an underlying sense that there was at least something spiritual, however defined, underlying these congregational community service activities.

- **Imported**
Visions are, as already noted, sometimes imported into a congregation by, most typically, the clergy. Promoting ownership of such visions by a congregation can be a difficult activity that does not always work. One clergyman told of developing a very explicit program of community service with his congregation and its governing body and never making any move
without congregational involvement or formal support. He reported a very successful commencement of this program, apparently having been confident that he had communicated it well to the congregation, who participated well in its initial activities. However when unforeseen circumstances necessitated his early departure from the congregation, he was dismayed to see that the development was wound up by his successor shortly after that person’s arrival. Whilst perceived by this interviewee as an apparent abuse of clergy control within a congregation, the question of effective ownership by the congregation could not be overlooked as a factor in its demise. Intriguingly this interviewee noted incidentally that a large group of key lay leaders in the congregation had progressively moved on to positions as ordained leaders in other settings, as if the model of leadership valued in that culture was a clergy-based one, rather than a congregationally-based one. Where such clergy-based leadership is dominant within a congregational community service (and its supporting culture), congregational ownership of an imported vision seems questionable at best. In the third situation, as previously noted, there was a long lead-in process that prepared the congregation for the Parson’s vision, and then gave shape to that vision through a congregationally-based process. Nonetheless, many parties interviewed were still concerned at the capacity of the merged vision to survive a change in clergy.

- Emerging

In contrast people within congregations were clearly found to have visions for community service activities. Where these visions were affirmed and facilitated by the clergy, it seemed that the activities could readily survive a later change of clergy. Such survival of a vision, with further development of new activities, was very evident in two of the congregations, both of which reported extensive congregational participation in the early beginnings of the developing vision, even though an embryonic articulation of it had first been made by the congregational Parsons. What happened from there seemed rather to emerge from among the congregations, or small groups within them, rather than be presented to them. In one case, where the Parson then pursued additional activities based on visions they themselves had, it was clear that congregation participation was qualified and support often lacking. It seems from this to be more effective if the vision is helped to emerge from the congregation, albeit with the active facilitation of the associated clergy.

Phase 2. Operation

Understanding how congregational community service operations are pushed towards one culture or the other, and how they might be located somewhere in between, is the most practical aspect of this model. The analysis of the data identified six dimensions which impact on the actual operation of congregational community services; and it is the way in which the
various features of these dimensions find their location between the cultural extremes which depict the actual functioning of a program at any given time. The “optimal” operating pattern reflects the vision developed within the congregation for any given activity, and for their overall perspective on community service involvement. It is clear that, if the operating culture moves too far toward formalising professionalism, on the one hand, then concern is expressed about the willingness of the congregation to remain an active participant. If, on the other hand, it moves too far towards altruistic volunteerism, then concern develops about acceptance by the wider community of the effectiveness of any program offered. Despite that, what was optimal was never explicitly identified.

a. Programming
The first dimension identified is the program or activity types that a community service develops i.e. what it sets out to make available to the community. Some congregations may well offer only one such activity, although the data was surprising in that the three congregational settings researched offered, or had at some stage offered, 13, 13 and 20 identifiable activities respectively - and there was no certainty that this was a complete listing. As others have also found, simply asking what activities a congregation provides to its surrounding community is no guarantee that all will be identified. The approach used here was to identify the separate activities that were talked about.

- Formality
Programs or activities clearly varied in their degree of formality. In one congregation personal support was offered to people with mental health concerns whenever the door was open whilst in another work-for-money support was offered whenever the Parson was there to identify a task and make the agreement. In contrast the family counselling provided by another congregation was available by appointment on two specific days of the week and was fully backed by paid professional supervision whereas another congregation offered fee-based personal-development groups that required prior enrolment.

In between there were many examples of semi-formal groups that were structured with regard to time and location of meeting but informal as far as format and participation were concerned. Any program could readily be conceptualised as operating somewhere in the continuum between the two extremes of formality, with the less formal ones typically being seen to have closer links to the voluntary culture and the more formal ones more closely linked to a professional approach. A change of expectation, eg through a new worker, will

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146 See footnote 1 on the discrepancy between the 1991 and the 1996 NCLS data on congregations providing community services.

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change where in the continuum a program will operate, with consequent implications for the level of congregational involvement.

- **Service Users**
  
  It would be true to say that services that focused more on support for people in poverty tended to be less formal, more concrete in emphasis, more reflective of the volunteer culture, and seen as more typical of congregations. Services for people who were in need of personal development and counselling were seen as less typical but, when occurring, more reflective of the professional culture. Mid-range service user group catered for were those with mental health concerns, who needed social supports that congregations sought to provide despite the complications that could only be addressed by relevant professionals. One congregation dealt with this by devising, in conjunction with a nearby psychiatric service, an activity program that ran with volunteers backed up by appropriate staff from the specialist service. The other two congregations dealt with it by providing a friendly environment for these service users, whilst leaving the more involved support to the Parson, in one case very informally whilst in the other through a low-key mutual support group.

- **Bridging Processes**
  
  Some programs were clearly seen as activities to build bridges between people outside the church setting and the people inside this setting. A bible study group was deliberately opened to the community service users in one congregation researched, with a similar arrangement mentioned by an interviewee in the first data set. In others the program included opportunity for the congregational volunteers to interact in a less formal way so that personal sharing along these or other lines could occur eg the volunteers sharing the meal with the service users in a meals program for low income families. At the more professional end, some counsellors interviewed were very clear that aspects of faith and spirituality could be included in professional counselling sessions where service users indicated their interest in that aspect of their life. A contrasting professional view was expressed strongly by one interviewee who saw any attempt at infusing a religious element as a problem.

  \textit{b. Staffing}

  The staff available to enable the activities and the service as a whole to function are one of the clearest differences between the two cultural extremes - unpaid and unqualified volunteers in one case, and paid and professionally accredited professionals in the other. However the continuum between these is very blurred indeed.

- **Support Workers**
The first, and often not so readily recognised aspect of congregational programs is the use of congregational members as the support people for any service. Typically this would be a small group of women with secretarial backgrounds acting in unpaid, or poorly paid, administrative and reception roles. Direct involvement with the service users is limited, but “back ground” activities such as handling donations, answering the telephone, word-processing and photocopying support are readily handled this way. In one setting this work was completely voluntary even though it was effectively a part-time job. In another setting the bulk of this work was handled by the congregation’s general administrative person who was paid for only a portion of their working time. In the third congregation this seemed to be handled in a fairly ad hoc way, much by the Parson, some by the Opportunity Shop manager (who was paid a small honorarium for a half time job) and some by volunteer committee members.

- **Contact Volunteers**

All programs researched had volunteers working in direct contact with service users. At the start, training for these volunteers seemed to be largely overlooked in all cases, although various more formal responses emerged, and in some case, later activities such as English language tutoring, included formal training. Some of the interviewees in the original data set expressed great concern about the tendency of congregational programs to use untrained volunteers in contact roles and encouraged the implementation of a Code of Standards for volunteer involvement as a way of protecting service users as well as volunteers from inappropriate practice. Whilst many volunteers were linked with the congregation, it was also evident in all 3 congregational settings that a fair proportion, perhaps even around 50%, had no such links, sometimes having no links to any congregation at all.

- **Professionals**

What was also striking in the research data was the number of qualified professionals in program as well as management roles who provided their time and expertise voluntarily to congregational community services. In addition there was recognition that even the paid professional staff would work many more hours than those for which they are paid to ensure the services provided were effectively available, and despite evidence of a link to burnout. Hence there was no clear boundary between the normal professional role and that of congregational volunteers, but rather a continuum of involvement that varied with each setting.

- **Clergy**

Another identifying characteristic of congregational community services is the availability of one particular professional to participate in the service provided. Beyond being a crucial
contributor to the development of any service (as previously discussed) clergy typically also undertake a number of “hands-on” roles that are added to their normal pastoral, liturgical and educational roles within their congregation. This participation can extend from being a member of the management committee, to being its chair, through to being the formal or even unofficial executive officer of the community service, and even being the senior direct service worker (formal counsellor in one case, case manager in an other).

This work is variously seen as part of their role as the Parson within that congregation. However it leads to them having widely divergent work demands, thus risking criticism for being less available for their “regular” activities as congregational clergy, and at times facing an excessive dependence of the community service program on them. Whilst their availability for this involvement is a potential asset few other community services groups would initially have, the risk of conflicting demands and resultant personal problems cannot be overlooked. One clergyman interviewed coped with this by arranging to be released from his congregational responsibilities for half the week in order to make official his involvement in the developing community service.

c. Resourcing

Congregational community services also have unique access to a range of resources that minimise establishment costs and often camouflage their real operating costs. However as these services develop, they tend to then compete in the “open market” for suitable replacements as the congregational resources can no longer meet the demand or are no longer deemed suitable.

• Funding

Funding needs vary from programs run at little cost to programs that are fully funded through government grants. At the first extreme, one congregation ran its entire 13 activities with little more than what could be raised through its very low priced Opportunity Shop. Indeed this activity, which provided much more than just low-priced clothing and household items, not only covered the honorarium for its manager and the coordinator of its emergency food service, it also paid its own operating costs, purchased perishable food from another agency’s food bank, and still had change over to contribute to the general operating expenses of the congregation - even though that was not the purpose of the activity. At the other extreme one congregation moved into competitive tendering in the quest to balance its budget and develop new activities with government funds, an approach seen to take a large amount of its paid coordinator’s time.
In contrast, another congregation operated two small businesses (one in cooperation with other local congregations) to raise general revenue for the congregation, some of which was then used to cover operating costs for the community service, including the salary of the first paid professional staff member. Whilst this congregation had initially anticipated that their service could operate on donations made by congregational and community members, this proved not possible. Consequently the congregation’s donations to outside causes were redirected to fund their own community service. In addition two congregations sought and eventually obtained small grants from their local municipal council; a result perceived to carry formal recognition of their contribution to the local community.

The third congregation actually developed a varied array of funding sources. These included fund-raising activities like information dinners promoting the agency which were fully catered by congregational volunteers at low cost. At its commencement organisers were also able to access a grant from a philanthropic trust (indeed all congregations eventually accessed small grants from such sources) whilst a later significant grant covered 3 years of activity. In addition, through its partnership arrangement with a central church-sponsored agency, an arrangement was made that this agency would cover any operating shortfall the congregational program experienced. Subsequently, this congregation also provided one of its services on an enrolment fee basis (as did another eventually).

- **Building**

The use of congregational buildings seems quite ubiquitous in the development of congregational community services. However an interesting phenomenon was that all three congregations eventually made extensive alterations or implemented new building programs to ensure that their facilities were more suitable for these developing programs. All seemed to note that it was important for the integration of congregational community services with congregational life that these services operate under the same or an attached “roof” as the church itself. In fact, in two cases, quite extensive link-ways between previously separate constructions were included in the alterations to achieve this. The idea of operating “off-site” was originally considered in one case, but finally rejected when a way was found for the church to vacate its Parson’s house to make way for the planned community service “on-site”. The sense seems to be that a move off-site not only diminishes the congregation’s sense of identification with the service, but that is also diminishes the potential for those using the service to make links between the service and the spiritual aspects that the congregation wants to communicate by its actions, and in some case even its words.

- **Community**
Another resource clearly evident in congregational community services is their ready access to a support community identifying with it in some way. However this doesn’t just consist of potential volunteers from the congregation at any level of involvement (administration, support activities or direct service); it also consists of the network of support people in the wider church, i.e. in other congregations and/or the churches’ central structures, able to offer advice and even assistance to establish and maintain such a service. For example, one congregation received advice from a central church official about the implications of incorporation of the service as a legal entity separate from the congregation; it also gained knowledge from central sources of philanthropic trusts interested in their requests for funds. Another congregation used this wider community to find professionals willing to volunteer their services free of charge to achieve a particular goal. Whilst the core community may well be linked to the congregation’s locality, these tentacles spread much wider through the diverse structures of the wider church.

- Partners

Congregations also have access to partners with a range of cooperative structures available to support their community service activities. One congregation had a detailed and tight partnership arrangement with a central church agency, one that was meant to deliver to the agency a community support program to complement the formal counselling service being offered nearby. Over time this did not eventuate, as agency staff involvement dwindled to just that of the Chief Executive Officer on the board and the Regional Manager as the Senior Consultant to the service coordinator. However the agency kept paying the budget shortfall the congregational service encountered and kept paying rent to the congregation for the use of the Parson’s former house.

Partnerships also formed with government departments to deliver a community-based government funded English Language service, involving other congregations which extend the service beyond the immediate locality. Another congregation formed a partnership with a large agency in a city-wide food distribution activity. Hence partnerships varied between the structural arrangements and the arrangements related to specific activities.

- In-Kind and Cash Assistance

Finally, congregations reported accessing their food supply and their goods for sale or donation in their respective opportunity shops from a wider pool of church congregations and the wider community. It seemed rare indeed for these items to ever be purchased directly in order to give to the service users. At one extreme was the ad hoc donations from the congregations and from wider congregations. Towards the other end was the participation of
one congregation in a formally organised “food bank” operated by a larger local agency. Further along, two congregations accessed a centrally based church related trust fund willing to provide small amounts for this type support service.

Whilst in-kind support seems to be a crucial component of congregational community service provision, only one agency went close to the most formal extreme in accessing the government’s emergency relief funds once they became known for providing this assistance.

d. Managing

The structure and management of congregational community services is quite diverse along two dimensions, **leadership** of the community service activity and/or the overall service, and the **structural arrangements** actually put in place to operate it.

- Leadership

Leadership of congregational community services, at one end, was informally vested in the Parson who was looked to in a rather ad hoc way for any guidance needed. As they normally operate in consultation with or under some sort of accountability to a congregational council, then it would be rare to find them acting alone with others merely following. However the degree of effective control of congregational life and/or of the congregational council does vary with the overall congregational culture. For example, in one congregational setting the Parson was the main developer of most activities, whether being the primary person dealing with all aspects of it, or being the person who brought the idea to the congregation and then found support. However they were at times frustrated when the congregational council either would not commit to acting on their advice or would formally agree but then not implement that decision. This mechanism, essentially operating outside the direct structures of the community service activities, would nonetheless impact on them. Within that setting the Parson officially chaired the support committee for the Emergency Relief and Opportunity Shop activities. This committee however was a very informal one, consisting of all volunteers in those two activities. Meetings were informal and were the sole context in which any training, to the extent that it occurred, actually happened. These two activities seemed to be the only ones in this congregation to have any sort of support group associated.

Another of the congregational settings had a formal committee with the Parson as the de facto executive officer and, after an initial period, the official chairperson. Even when a director to a particular activity was later appointed, the structure retained the Parson’s role as executive officer making all the day to day decisions involved. Despite this, in both settings, individuals functioned as effective, even if only informally designated, leaders in a number of other
activities, typically in ways that did not challenge the clergy. In a couple of instances two of these “quiet” leaders took themselves off at their own initiative to gain training for the roles in which they were involved. In one case the person sought pastoral care training, whilst the other trained in telephone and relationship counselling. Both unobtrusively took responsibility for a couple of key roles that significantly influence the effectiveness of the activities concerned, even though their official role would have been understood as supportive. They became leaders because they were “there” and they knew what to do.

In the third congregational setting leadership was achieved in a more official way when a person was appointed as the community service coordinator. Initially this person was linked to the central agency which formed this service in partnership with the congregation, but after only a couple of years into the service’s development, a long-time member of the congregation took over that role. The Parson merely had a place on the support committee and its executive and so played more of a supportive rather than a directive role. Whilst this latter approach was clearly placed towards the more professional cultural extreme, the fact that the appointee was from the congregation had the reverse effect of locating the leadership back toward the altruistic culture of the congregation. Data indicates that the developmental processes which this community service underwent left this leader, along with other professionally appointed congregation staff, grappling in various ways with the tension between these two cultural expectations.

- Structures

The actual structures found to exist within the congregational community service settings varied enormously. At the voluntary end there were clearly a number of individuals who, in the name of the congregations but on their own initiative and with little official sanction, commenced a community service activity eg a food “trolley” for people dropping in for immediate food assistance.\[147\].

In between the cultural extremes are informal committees related to particular activities. This clearly existed in one case, and was seen as the means for keeping all volunteers identifying with the two activities concerned. However formal decision making seemed to be missing, being displaced by a consensus resulting from collective discussion if and when necessary.

\[147\] Whilst not actually a feature of an intentional community service activity by a local church congregation, there is reason to believe that even in seemingly uninvolved congregations there are a core group of individuals who find caring involvements among and beyond the congregational members as their individual acts of “Christian Care”. These activities seem to be rarely recognised within the congregation, though sometimes they become well known in volunteer networks outside the church. These would represent an even less formal type of community involvement and leadership than those being considered here.
Also in the middle area would be the informal but effective partnerships that all congregational services entered into with other community groups to jointly provide a particular activity. Such partnerships existed around facilitating support groups for people such as those with mental health problems and around provision of social activities such as for the housebound aged.

The second and third congregational settings both had formally structured committees. In one the committee membership and role was defined by its separate rules of incorporation. Whilst not all congregational community services came under its control, there seemed to be an aspiration with some that others would be based there eventually. Yet despite that formal existence, the actual decision-making within this setting was reportedly ad hoc, and largely dependent on the Parson. This is perhaps a not uncommon way to blend the two cultures, the more so as concern to protect the wider church from legal liability sees more programs of these types become legally incorporated. The other congregation solved this issue by having a committee structure that consisted of key congregational people and key people from the partner central church agency with the senior regional clergyman as the chair. Whilst the actual structure was reformulated a number of times during the service’s existence, this basic tripartite structure remained in place. This structure not only helped maintain the links between the two partners with the active support of the institutional church structures, it also ensured a continuing formal accountability for the whole program development. Nonetheless, at times it seemed that some thought the structure so formal that the coordinator, as designated leader, lacked sufficient authority from this joint board to fully exercise their role.

e. Networking

Networking refers to the procedures in place to integrate a congregational community service into a local service provision network. They too were remarkably varied.

- Referrals

At one level effective links to other services hardly seemed to exist. It was as if those conceptualising an activity saw no need to work with others, even where their involvements overlapped locally, eg one congregation providing emergency aid seemed to have no working links with another congregation also providing aid in their area. When asked about this congregation’s policy and procedures, and how people moving between them were dealt with, nothing clear could be found. Whilst some past contact was acknowledged, names of those operating the other settings were not known and no processes were in place to facilitate cooperation.
This lack of coordination also extended to inter-service referrals. Whilst I was told that referrals typically came from 3 or 4 other local settings, when I sought to clarify the referral procedure in either direction, none seemed to exist. People were apparently sent to and by other services without either party knowing for certain that the referral, if acted on by the service user, would even be appropriate. It was as if, at this extreme, little more than the name and location of other related services was known.

Yet for other activities referrals were dealt with more personally, with the congregational service member sometimes even going with the service user to offer moral support and perhaps even advocacy. As mentioned elsewhere, there were also shared support groups arising from some of these staff contacts around the referrals eg the referral of psychiatric outpatients to a craft group for social contact, leading to the participation of a psychiatric staff member in the congregationally-based activity.

- Organisational Links

In a similar way general links with staff at other services also varied from non-existent, to fairly ad hoc based on personal knowledge and relationships more than intention, and on to very formal ones intended to build a wider network of service provision. An example of the first is that of the volunteer professionals who filled the same role as counsellors in one agency and who rarely met together and seemed to have little idea of the counselling approach each used in this congregational setting. The isolation of these volunteer professionals was something of a surprise, not only because it was happening but because the interviewees with whom it was discussed seemed in no particular hurry to change it.

An example of the relationship approach to joint involvement concerned the staff from the same congregational counselling service who worked with staff from a nearby service where the Parson’s partner happened to work. Together they provided a support group for family members of people who committed suicide. This seemed an informal link that cooperatively provided a much needed support service. Within the third congregational setting it seemed that, instead of being left to chance, links were built by the coordinator with, for example, other centres of their central-church agency partner and with the nearby hospital.

Even more towards the formalising culture, was the arrangement the third congregational service entered into with other church congregations to act as the “broker” for funding for them to provide English tuition in each locality. The agreements were fairly formal, they extended well beyond this congregation’s immediate area, and they involved support with the training of tutors within these congregations.
The overall impression is that, when the culture of volunteerism is more dominant, congregational programs are slow to make links outside to any extent, be they to aid the referral process or to promote wider interagency cooperation. However, on this dimension, more formalised linkages develop as a more professional culture develops. The mid-way changes seem to reflect generalised links born either of existing personal relationships used in the interests of service provision or born of intentionally general contact with other agencies.

\[ f.\ Owning \]

Ownership of congregational community services seemed something of a vexed issue, with the means to sustain it a frequent issue. As ownership was expressed more in actions than in words, it seems that the willingness of a congregation to put resources into its own community service activity reflects this dimension of its life. Enhancing this sense of ownership therefore seems critical to maintaining and extending the congregational capacity to operate their service.

- **Links with Congregational Life**

In part congregational ownership is achieved when the congregational culture is conducive to community service engagement. Then the congregation’s capacity to operate the service is enhanced, e.g., people can be found to provide voluntary time to assist. However, the volunteers drop off when outside professionals begin to replace them, leading to ownership waning and back-up volunteer resources disappearing. Nonetheless, links with the congregation can be retained when other actions facilitate it; actions such as the regular inclusion of these activities in congregational announcements, notice bulletins, displays, and collective prayers. All three congregations adopted this approach in varying degrees.

Formalising the congregational link by its inclusion within rules of incorporation was another way to sustain community service activities as part of congregational life. However, it is clear that if there is little dynamic awareness of the activity within the wider congregation, then problems arise with retaining sufficient congregational participation. The second congregation was the only one to implement this approach, however, a few interviewees noted a considerable turnover of congregational members on the committee and that people willing to be office-bearers were hard to find. The joint committee of the third congregation also involved congregational members, but they were fewer in number, though apparently easier to retain, than those representing the central church agency.

- **Location**
All congregational community services operated from the same site as the congregation’s worship centre. More than that all three remodelled their buildings, or rebuilt, so that activities were seen to operate “under the same roof” as worship. Not only was this seen as saying something to service users about the spiritual undergirding of the service, it was also seen as saying to the congregation that this community service is an integral part of congregational life and activity.

There is little in the data to explore the implications of operating a community service from a different site, or even under a separate roof, though there is a suggestion that this would damage congregational identification. Only one service, the partnership with the central church agency seriously considered operating off-site. In another, operating “next door” worked as well, but further away (as a meals program was) ran into problems with volunteer participation.

- Deterrents

Ownership and identification was also seen to be limited by the changing pressures on congregational member’s lives. With increased numbers of dual-income couples, frequently now having to work longer hours and with children to taxi around between school, home and sporting groups, it was a frequent observation that church families tended to be less active overall in church today than perhaps they were 20 or so years ago. Likewise the increasing expertise needed in the more developed activities beyond emergency aid, was seen to discourage people who felt they didn’t have and/or couldn’t acquire such expertise. Hence it was not uncommon to note that the main volunteers tended to be older retirees and non-working women. However, there were still a number of professionals, perhaps working part-time with young families, who seemed to get involved. One congregational member indicated they valued the community service so much that they sometimes took leave days to volunteer. And after formal data collection was completed one person indicated they took early retirement just to be available to work as a volunteer in their congregation’s community service.

One setting noted a threat to ownership when the demand on volunteer congregational members in one particular support area was more than they felt able to handle. This seemed to see people retreat whilst still recognising that this issue of community-based mental health was a genuine concern. There was a sense, it was suggested, that the congregation had reached its limit for support.

Phase 3. Modification
Discontinuous change to any congregational community service can happen at any time. Some influences are predictable, such as a decision to undertake an evaluation or review. Others are not necessarily in the control of those managing the community service yet require critical decisions be made. And finally, a third set of influences are intrusions that were never on the agenda, but induce change anyway.

a. Evaluations

Only one of the congregational settings implemented any sort of policy of review and evaluation of its congregational community services. However one other clearly identified an informal review process that led to the closure of one particular activity after only twelve months. Such informal reviews with their ensuing changes are probably inevitable, as seems apparent in the wider experiences reported in the first data set. However more intentional reviews seem to be a necessary part of involvements that are intentional in their development.

• Regular/Internal

The most involved congregation maintained a regular reporting process to its committee. This enabled a regular awareness of the developing demands confronting the service, and informed decisions to be made about such activities as, for example, the continuation of the Opportunity Shop.

• Special Purpose/External

Beyond that this congregation undertook a number of specific purpose external evaluations. These detailed reports were taken seriously by staff and committee with major redirections of policy and practice implemented. Much of this however pushed the community service practice away from the more flexible congregational culture and toward the more formalised practices of the professional culture, though not without some tensions. That this created a more formally valued community service seemed clear yet its links to the congregation remained strong due to the large staff participation in congregational life. This is not always so, and the issue of what balances such changes to retain desired congregational links cannot be overlooked. This appeared less obviously addressed in most evaluations.

b. Critical Decisions

Critical decisions are expected to arise from time to time in any organisational setting. In relation to congregational community services they consisted of personnel changes, whether expected or not, changes in income source, and changed emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the activities being undertaken within the congregational setting.

• Changed Personnel
The strongest identification between a congregation and its community service activities developed when the leadership team and a significant proportion of other personnel were associated with the congregation in its worshipping and community life. In the early stages, and in the less professional manifestations, congregational involvement usually emerged without any concerted effort. However, data suggests that, as the professional culture is adopted more strongly perhaps to get local recognition of the service, and/or as those initially involved from the congregation move on, this involvement readily wanes. Appointment of people is then critical for future links with the congregation. Data suggests this is especially so for senior professional staff, clergy within the congregation, and committee members.

Data indicates that desirable appointments are of people from within the congregation who understand, value and seek to develop the congregation and its involvement with their community service activity. The third congregation was readily able to find such a person to take over as community service coordinator. This appointment had a profoundly constructive impact on ongoing congregational identification. However when such people cannot be found, it seems that congregational community services then look for people with relevant professional skills and who have a spiritual orientation practice, but who are outside the congregation. In those settings where these people then joined the congregation, this option seemed to be almost as effective. The limitations evident were that such people often stayed for only a limited period, and that they didn’t build the capacity of congregational members to acquire the skills needed to fill their role.

External professionals who don’t become associated with the congregation but who still identify with the spiritual rationale undergirding the congregational community involvement were the next choice. However as positive as that seems, the data reported that this still distanced the congregation from its operation. Hence, despite expectations, an unexpected drift of the community service away from the congregation and towards a professionalising culture seems to occur. When even this level of identification cannot be found it seems that, in order to ensure the necessary role is filled, a qualified but merely “sympathetic” professional is typically appointed. As understandable as it is, one interviewee explicitly observed that such an appointment unwittingly risked a move away from the volunteer culture and congregational ownership toward the professional culture. Much common wisdom seems to suggest that this is the historic process by which faith-related services become secularised and dissociated from their faith basis without this ever being intended. Conversely if a community service activity is intended for transfer to the wider community, decisions of this type are crucial for such changes to be effective (not that the data sets noted such an expectation).
Clearly certain staffing positions are critical for these types of decisions. However, should they need to be made, this analysis implies that critical decisions in other aspects of the program are able to balance out such an influence and so retain a desirable overall balance, for example in the second congregational setting the energy of congregational members on the management committee and the integration of the volunteer support workers with the wider congregation seem to compensate for the appointment of a professional worker heavily involved with another local congregation of a quite different denomination.

- **Changed Income Sources**

In a similar way the source of funds for congregational community services also presents as a critical decision that regularly faces congregational (and other secular) community services. Certain funding sources commonly impose requirements on how a service is provided that is not necessarily congruent with the goals of the congregational service. This is most likely when government funds are taken up. Again some first data set interviewees are very clear that problems around ethically acceptable levels of service provision are often encountered through this process. It is also clear that the effort involved in seeking government, and even philanthropic funding, can divert key personnel from their primary tasks so detracting from the operation. Hence, whilst obtaining funds from these sources may well extend the capacity of the congregational program to deliver services more effectively in the way planned if it is obtained, there is also the possibility that it will have an impact other than what was intended. Clearly such decisions have to be made carefully, with the likely impacts recognised.

- **Spiritual Orientation**

The final area of concern is the way in which the congregation’s spiritual orientation is integrated and expressed within its community service activity. In one setting tension arose between a professional whose personal approach was more active than what the congregational Parson and the community service committee were seeking. Whilst this person left the community service soon after for other reasons, it seemed this difference of expectation about spiritual expression in the service was nonetheless likely to confront both parties with a need to part.

In other congregational settings, an approach was identified that shared a friendship open to a spiritual dimension with some service users in a way not valued in more professional settings. This was presented as instrumental in assisting a small number of people to exercise a choice to become involved in the congregation without any compulsion. However it also meant for these staff that they experienced even “going to church” as being at work, so adding to the risk of burnout. Clearly these decisions have to be thought through careful and collectively for
they are critical to staff survival as well the wider community’s expectations of what being involved in a congregational community service would be like. In the third congregation it seems that divergent expectations became apparent at an early stage in its development and at least one volunteer committee person withdrew in the face of this developing approach.

**c. Intrusions**

Less expected changes in congregational community involvements are brought about through events which intrude into a community service’s operating context. The data analysis identified three such events; those which **dissipate the vision** through some sort of distraction that otherwise would be acceptable within itself, internal **conflict** within the congregation, for example, over the place of the congregational community service within it, and the disturbing implications of professional **misconduct**.

- **Vision Dissipation**

  In the first congregational setting, despite many years of involvement in a range of community services, data indicated some of the more involved members were getting tired. One interviewee commented that they had problems because, along side the community involvement, the congregation had just come through a complex and quite emotional process of closing and selling three congregational properties, merging three distinct congregations into one at a temporary setting, purchasing a new property, and constructing a new worship and community facility. This had kept a number of core people intensely involved for a good number of years and had also left the congregation with a sizeable debt that the current congregational would have trouble meeting. This respondent noted that, as a result, many people were by then quite tired. Hence maintaining the existing community service was seen as a challenge, and the idea of extending it as the Parson was proposing, was not feasible.

  Another person within the same congregation, whilst noting all these changes, also noted that the experience had helped merge the congregation in ways that they had doubted possible. However the process had left some tensions within segments of the congregation and the increased demand for the community services generated in their newly accessible setting were stretching congregational capacities too far. It was evident there was strong feeling among many in this congregation around this experience, so dissipating the congregation’s vision of what is possible.

  It is through such processes, as well as the gradual withdrawal of those with the original vision, that can readily see a community service vision dissipate, and see various activities close down or otherwise alter. Clearly a key aspect for understanding congregational
community services include paying attention to the impact these involvements have on the other aspects of congregational life and the energy these other activities also legitimately need\textsuperscript{148}.

- **Conflict**

Congregations it seems are prone to conflictual relations. The processes associated with this are well beyond this research, however the existence of the conflict is identified in the data sets as an occasional influence. Three interviewees in one congregational setting acknowledged such disagreements had developed and that these were intruding into their capacity to put energy into further community service developments. In fact the Parson indicated there was little more he could achieve in that setting and, soon after being interviewed, announced acceptance of a new appointment. Another person also indicated that many in the congregation had concluded it was time for the Parson to move on, and to let the congregation recover its own expectations of its future. Conflict in the other two congregational settings seemed insignificant by comparison, but wider awareness of congregational life suggests that the potential for it can never be ignored. Yet, in both there was at least an expression of concern about the time the Parson was spending in community service involvement at the expense of other congregational roles, such as pastoral care for the congregation. Such concerns have the potential for developing into serious conflict over the very existence of the congregational community service, or at least particular activities within it.

- **Misconduct**

Professional misconduct, such as a serious breach of professional ethics, has unfortunately become more apparent within congregational life than was expected or recognised in times past. Data obtained in the course of this research noted such concerns. What was clear from this was the impact of such conduct on people’s overall perception of the church, the community service’s reputation, and the staff of the service activity. Whilst it is appropriate that central church bodies now have well developed procedures for addressing these allegations, and that church policy and professional codes of ethics are widely displayed, their occurrence still intrudes into congregational life and community service activities as relationships of trust are damaged irreparably.

\textsuperscript{148} Garland (2000) notes well that even in all the recent research undertaken in the US this aspect of congregational community service involvement is yet to receive any attention.
7. Implications for Conceptualising Congregations in Local Community Services:

There are a number of crucial implications of this exploration and understanding of the community service activities of local church congregations that need to be brought into sharper focus in order to be properly grasped. And it is only in grasping these implications and taking them into account that the role of church congregations in local community service provision can be properly addressed.

- Not all congregational cultures will be conducive to the development of community services, and any involvement that is possible will be reflective of the perspectives that are valued and affirmed within that culture. Hence, if the involvement of a congregation is sought, the nature of this culture needs to be taken into account so that the most conducive form of involvement can be identified.

- The attitude of clergy to congregational community engagement is critical to active involvement, though not necessarily determinative of it. Without the active support of clergy little collective intentional participation will eventuate. However even with this support, participation will only result if the predominant culture is open to it. Where such openness is not immediate, clergy may be able to massage the culture into openness through a strategy of affirming the existing culture and building onto it a broader, more socially active understanding. Such a strategy is likely to be more effective than trying to force or pummel a congregation into community engagement.

- Clergy are not the only people in congregations who need to be considered when seeking to develop congregational community involvement. To be considered also are any who are likely to be actively interested in being involved, especially if it relates to some social concern that is personally known to them. Congregational people are more likely to be motivated to take action on such a concern than they are on a concern that is only academically identified.

- Congregations may benefit from assistance to collectively share their personal perceptions of community concerns and to explore how those concerns relate to their congregational culture. From such explorations a vision for community involvement may well be identified. Whilst clergy will need to affirm this for effective congregational action to result, others who respect this process, and the spiritual basis of both the culture and any proposed service activity, may also be effective facilitators of this process.

- Congregational community service activities operate in complex ways reflecting influences from both a voluntary culture based on altruism and flexibility, and a professional culture based on rational planning and formal organisation. The dimensions
of their operation which reflect these influences in varying ways relate to their programming, staffing, resourcing, managing, networking and owning by the congregation. Depending on the congregation’s vision for its service, these dimensions need to be strategically monitored and developed with respect to their overall balance and potential impact for operationalising the congregational vision. Without that the complex dynamics of this setting may lead to unwanted and problematic outcomes, and may presume a service capacity inconsistent with what the congregation has to offer. In this setting it is unlikely that either contrasting culture will be sacrificed in order to simplify the implementation of the other as both reflect aspects that are valued and both are perceived to have intrinsic limitations. It also appears therefore that, in these congregational settings, both cultures of operation are intrinsically reinforced.

- Like any community service, congregational activities are also influenced by factors generating unexpected or discontinuous change. These factors are related to other activities happening within congregational life and are more directly associated with a congregation’s primary reason for existence. Hence these factors reduce the capacity of congregations for community involvement. Within that setting these are not seen as distractions from their community participation - rather their community participation is more likely to be seen as a distraction to these other concerns.

- From time to time congregational community services will be faced with critical decisions about such aspects as who to appoint, what funding to seek and accept, or even what facilities to use. These are critical because they affect the balance between the two operating cultures. Decisions have to be made in view of the likely impact they will have on increasing or decreasing either of these operating cultures. However this in turn affects a congregation’s sense of ownership of their community service and therefore the contribution congregations will make to their operation.

8. Implications for Social Workers:

Congregations are part of our community’s social service system, though often rarely recognised. It is incumbent on social workers and other social welfare personal to not only just assume that they are there, but to actively liaise with them and seek to understand them. This model has the capacity to enable that understanding as it identifies not only a number of significant influences impacting on congregational community involvement, but it also identifies a way of understanding the relationship between them. This understanding then enables a strategic approach to working with them to be developed.
This challenge particularly applies to social workers acting in social planning and community development roles with the aim of incorporating community groups like congregations into the new policy approaches that depend on partnerships with community groups. It also applies to social workers and similar welfare professionals who are associated with congregations and may be called on to be internal consultants or committee members in the development of congregational community services or even professional practitioners in the emerging programs.

In addition, recognition of congregational community service involvement reminds all social workers that a spiritual dimension is a crucial motivating factor in many people’s lives, and even motivates people to initiate and participate in community service activities. Whilst this dimension is not shared by all, its influence on those associated with congregational community services needs to be accepted and respected, for it is within this context a wide range of local community services can be found to have their genesis.

Finally, as much US research into congregational responses to their local communities has shown, religious congregations do indeed make an important contribution to the building of social capital within communities under stress (see for example Ammerman, 1996, 1997a & 1997b; Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Cnaan, Boddie & Yancey 2000; Farnsley, 1998; Lyons, 1996). The indications are that in Australia the lower levels of religious involvement do not diminish the potential for local religious congregations to contribute constructively to care in their surrounding community. Indeed the situation as expressed in the section on the role of faith organisation in a Home Office report on community self-help in Britain, where religious involvement is even lower than Australia, would equally seem to apply here:

In many [disadvantaged communities] faith groups...will be the strongest around and yet their potential may be overlooked by funders and others engaged in programmes of community development. There can be a tendency not to see beyond the ‘faith’ label to the community role of these groups. There is also a tendency not to recognise the diversity of faith groups, many of which have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity (Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help, 1999 p.21).
Appendix: How the Core Concept of “Cultures of Operation” Emerged in the Data Analysis

Rather than providing a detailed analysis leading to the core concept and how it is grounded in this data, this paper first presents an outline of this concept, and then presents this concept within an integrated model of congregational community service development, operation and change also evident in data analysis and the issues impacting on the various stages within it. These understandings were derived inductively in a progressive fashion, with each successive step in the process promoting “theoretical sensitivity” (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to the emerging concepts, their properties and relationships.

The analysis of the first data set identified a series of 14 issues that the respondents perceived to impact on congregational community service activity (see Bedford, 1999, for a discussion of these issues). When analysis of the second data set commenced, this set of issues formed the initial basis for coding. A 15th issue was thereby identified but other issues confirmed, suggesting a probable theoretical saturation of the data with respect to issues (see Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This second data set was then coded for process themes, in an endeavour to identify the sorts of dynamics evident in these interviewees’ perceptions of their congregation’s community service involvement. From this coding four linked clusters of themes gradually emerged with these clusters, later characterised as interconnected periods, forming the initial framework for coding the third data set. This third data set was then coded for issues, with a 16th issue then identified. An overview of the analysis based on these two data sets was then presented as a tentative model of congregational community service development and functioning (Bedford 2000).

The fourth and last data set was initially coded using the four clusters or periods as a framework, with only a few documents coded against the 16 emerged issues (due to the sense that these themes had been theoretically saturated i.e. that further coding was not generating any new issue themes or properties of those themes). In the process it was found that, whilst the identified themes fitted this fourth data set well, the apparent links between these identified concepts seemed to be “all over the place”, as the sequencing of the four periods did not seem coherent. This sense that there was little patterning with too many events happening in quite diverse ways seemed incompatible with the model as originally conceived. It was only then noticed that a concept of “cultures of operation” was running through this data set, a concept readily seen as consistent with the previous data sets and characterised in a dichotomous way by two of the previously identified periods. The difference with the fourth data set was that these cultures were interacting constantly in quite diverse ways throughout the various activities of this congregation’s community services.

Once this concept was identified, it gradually became clear that, for all data sets, congregational community service activities could be understood to operate in the conceptual “space” between two cultures of operation. It has been common to articulate these as dichotomous opposites, what one interviewee termed the levels of “ordinariness” and the levels of “professional competence”. Certainly in the analysis of the first two congregational settings, it was easy to see all activities beginning at this level of ordinariness, or “making do” flexibility as I have previously characterised it, as people within congregations used their innate gifts and abilities to provide the human resources needed to operate the programs they had established. However in each case there were clear aspirations for the development of some programs at the level of professional competence, or “purpose specific” structuring, as the inclusion of professional processes were sought by whatever means available. In the first

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149 As this fourth data set was based on chronologically drafted documents rather than reflective in-depth interviews it was expected to exhibit more complex patterns in sequencing. That was why it was “sampled”.

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case this proved little more than the Parson’s dream, whilst in the second it was achieved by a
type of blending across the dichotomy with the involvement of qualified professionals
working voluntarily in the provision of this level of service. From interviewees in the first
data set it is clear that this blending across the formal dichotomies is not unusual in
congregationally-based community services; it in part is reflected in the “martyr” behaviour
of committed professionals that some interviewees discussed as well as in the ambiguity and
boundary blurring experienced by professionals working for the congregations where they
also worshipped.

The third congregational setting was so packed with these “across-the-dichotomy” processes
with, for example, lawyers working voluntarily, unpaid clergy providing pastoral care to
people with no church involvement, volunteers taking their cues from such clergy and so on,
that a simple dichotomous model was no longer possible. In at least some settings, including
some in the original data set, it was far more complex than that. Further, concerns were often
raised about the possible inevitability of congregational community service programs
becoming professionalised, secularised and then removed from congregational involvement; a
process sometimes viewed as only a matter of time. Such a view seemed to see church
congregations as places where new local services might commence, but away from which
they would move as they matured and gained more steady funding and more professional
staff. One such service discussed by a couple of interviewees in the first data set took
around four extended cycles of leaders before this finally occurred. However the data from
the third congregational setting strongly suggested that this process was not inevitable, and
that moves in that direction could just as readily be balanced out by moves back toward the
congregation as a base in other aspects of such a service.

This conceptualisation was the clue that then gave rise to the Model of Congregational
Community Service Involvement as presented in this paper (See Diagram 1). Data was not re-
encoded for this emergent perception; only the way many themes were perceived to relate to
each other was reconceptualised. It is therefore through this process that a model for
understanding the development and operation of congregationally-based community service
activities has emerged, grounded in the data derived from 3 congregations and 14
practitioners with diverse experience in this area.

150 Such an observation is also made by Harris (1995) in her study of the “Quiet Care” provided in four
English congregations.
151 This has “reverse” trend has now been noted in a Uniting Church congregation not included in this
study which intentionally relinked its community service to the congregation by redeveloping an
emphasis on using only congregational funds, placing a priority on integrating the community service
and worship life of the congregation, and promoting a volunteer base built around but not exclusive to
members of the congregation, whilst still employing a range of relevant professionals some of whom
were also linked directly to the congregation but all of whom shared the faith-community service
perspective being sought.
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Appendix 11: THEOLOGY OF [CONGREGATION C's COMMUNITY SERVICE]

Tabled and agreed by the...Board 2nd September 1998 [1st edition]
2nd edition November 1999

This paper has been developed from the paper prepared in April 1997.

“The overall mission of the church is to enable people to come to that life abundant which Christ offers”…

1. Parish and Mission have agreed: (1991)
   1.1 To base ministry on Micah 6:8 -“To do what is just, to show constant love, to live in humble fellowship with our God”.
   1.2 To respect the integrity of the Christian faith, witness to this faith and offer a servant presence in the community.
   1.3 To provide services to support families and local community and to work with the “isolated, vulnerable or disadvantaged. To focus the ministry on those most in need.
   1.4 To offer this ministry in ways which enhance human dignity, respect privacy and confidentiality and the right of individuals to make choices.

2.0 Key Values of the Partners (1998)

2.1 The Board of [the Community Service] is committed to this partnership with [the Church Agency] and shares the above key values.
2.2 The Mission Statement of [the Church Agency] - “To create a more just society by expressing God's love through service, education and advocacy.”
2.3 The Motto of [the Church Agency] “Standing alongside children, young people and families.”
2.4 “The primary motivation of [the Church Agency] will be to express the love of God for humankind. This love, as exemplified in the ministry of Jesus Christ, has a distinct bias towards the poor, the outcast and the disadvantaged.”
2.5 [The Church Agency] intends that, “Services will aim to promote clients' ability to take control of their own lives, uphold the dignity of families and individuals and help people to build and maintain a positive self image. Services will promote and build on the strengths and capabilities of families and individuals, working in partnership with clients to help them find solutions to their problems.
2.6 [Congregation C] believes that it is called to express God's love in a ministry of care and is committed to parish involvement in [the Community Service] at both executive and service levels.
2.7 The Board of [the Community Service] will focus service on the [Local] area in particular; determining policy, supporting staff in identifying needs, seeking resources, allocating them and evaluating the service delivery.
2.8 The Board will also oversee the development of services outreach in the [Church] Region and beyond.

3.0 Theological Basis and Values

3.1 God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3.2 God has loved this world and humankind into existence and continues to nurture and sustain creation by this love.
3.3 Humankind has been created in the image of God. Therefore all people have equal and infinite value.
3.4 We have been created for loving relationship with God, each other and the cosmos.
3.5 Perfect love cannot create bondage, therefore humankind has the freedom to reject God’s love and will and has done so throughout the ages. This turning away from God (sin) leads to alienation from God and from each other.
3.6 Since God is love and must be true to this, judgement naturally follows any rejection of love - not as retribution or vengeance, but as consequences which affect every aspect of life.
3.7 This requires redemption, but ultimately we are unable to redeem ourselves or others, however much we try to do and be our best.
3.8 Redemption is grace and gift and has been effected by God reaching out in love. Jesus is the expression of this redeeming love in his incarnation, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension.
3.9 Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God (the reign of God in the world now, which is yet to come to full perfection.)
3.10 The Holy Spirit works in the world to bring in the Kingdom and offer redeemed and transformed life to all.
3.11 Christians are called to accept this grace and transformation and to work for the Kingdom. To respond to God’s love with love.

4.0 Ministry implications for [the Community Service].

4.1 Values are to be based on the rule of God’s love and should be constantly assessed and reviewed. (Ref 3.2)
4.2 All people deserve to be accorded dignity and respect. (Ref 3.3)
4.3 We are committed to building supportive relationships and setting mutually agreed goals for all involved in providing ministry at [the Community Service]. (Ref 3.4)
4.4 We recognise that we are all imperfect, broken and in need of acceptance, love and redemption. (Ref 3.5, 3.6, 3.7).
4.5 We are called to recognise the truth, recognise the destructiveness of evil and exercise good judgement, without being judgemental. (Ref 3.6)
4.6 Where appropriate we can share our faith in ways which respond to the expressed interest and needs of people. (Ref 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11)
4.7 We acknowledge the work of Holy Spirit in God’s world and accept that God is already working in the lives of the people we meet. Therefore we endeavour to discern this action of God and humbly work with it. (Ref 3.10)

5.0 Practical Exercise of Ministry

5.1 The Board will regularly review core value statements and mission statements etc in the light of ongoing theological reflection on perceived community conditions and needs and the current ministry offered by [the Community Service]. (Ref 4.1)
5.2 Staff and volunteers will provide services in a manner that preserves and develops dignity and self esteem. (Ref 4.2)
5.3 The role of reception is vital to setting this climate of welcome and respect. The receptionist will be provided with resources and information to aid efficiency and also training to encourage initiative and sensitivity to people. (Ref 4.2)
5.4 The sitting room is to be welcoming and also respecting of people’s need for privacy. (Ref 4.2)
5.5 Sufficient comfortable, confidential rooms are to be available for counselling and other activities to occur. (Ref 4.2, 4.3)
5.6 Client information will be treated confidentially within the staff team. There is constantly a fine balance between confidentiality and the need for mutual support and consultation between supervisor, manager and team members. (Ref 4.2, 4.3, 4.7)

5.7 There will be intentional contact each day between staff and the volunteers on site. The aim is that volunteers have an informal opportunity to comment on each day. (Ref 4.2, 4.3)

5.8 The current pattern of staff prayer, business and supervision meetings will be maintained, reviewed regularly and modified if necessary. (Ref 4.2, 4.3)

5.9 Staff will aim for an attitude of openness which will provide support, affirmation and a climate for the resolution of difficulties and the alleviation of stress. (Ref 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)

5.10 Staff and volunteer self care and effective practice will be facilitated by regular reviews of position descriptions and goals. (Ref 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)

5.11 We will continue the policy of listening to people with an attitude of unconditional positive regard to enable them to feel secure enough to share the brokenness in their lives. (Ref 4.5)

5.12 We will give ourselves permission however, to exercise good judgement in responding to information and requests. We will not affirm attitudes or behaviours that are actively or potentially destructive or contrary to Christian values. (Ref 4.1, 4.5)

5.13 Faith sharing occurs in response to a person’s expressed interest in the subject or when it feels essential to simply state our position in response to the expression of life diminishing attitudes or values. (Ref 4.6)

5.14 We will regard each person with hope and expectancy, because they too are born in the image of God and may have the wisdom of the Spirit to share with us. (Ref 4.7)

5.15 We will listen to people, journey with them in their difficulties, and encourage them to identify and use their strengths and to assess the additional resources they need in order to improve the quality of their lives. (Ref 4.2, 4.7)

5.16 We will respect people’s dignity and self esteem by affirming their wisdom and strengths and by encouraging them to use these for themselves and for others in the community. (Ref. 4.2)

5.17 We will help people to enhance their quality of life through offering information, advocacy, referrals and education. (Ref 4.7)
Appendix 12: BRIEF COMPARISON WITH HUMAN SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

Hasenfeld suggests the principle function of human service organisations is “to protect, maintain, or enhance the personal well-being of individuals by defining, shaping, or altering their personal attributes” (1983, p.1). He sees this as unique because they work directly with and on the people about whom they are concerned, with a social mandate to protect and promote these people’s well-being. Whilst the religious activities of congregations may not be seen as consistent with this understanding, congregational activities providing services to the wider community are consistent with it. Hence it is relevant to compare the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement to the literature on human service organisation. Hasenfeld’s overview of this understanding, which covers an organisation’s environment, goals, technology, structure, and change, is used here to aid this comparison, adding to it Jones and May’s consideration of an organisation’s own culture (1992).

A12.1 Environment

Hasenfeld identified two levels of environmental interaction for human service organisations – the general environment from which resources must be obtained, and the task environment with which resources must be exchanged to provide the services (1983, p.51). The Framework recognises that Resourcing issues need addressing, but does not explicitly identify the importance of the wider environment. In contrast, the organisational literature clarifies which variations in the wider environment have impact. For example, economic factors will indirectly influence resources such as donations, and cultural factors will influence the availability of women volunteers who, historically, have been the backbone of many services. Further, the literature recognises overtly that government policy about partnerships with congregational services will impact on community expectations of congregational services, an aspect of the wider organisational environment promoting greater awareness of this form of community service in recent years, particularly in the US.

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152 Hasenfeld also includes “Organisational Performance” and “Client–Organisation Relations”. For the present purpose the former has been as an aspect of Change. The latter can be considered an aspect of Technology. It is not separately considered as this research did not seek service user input, focusing instead on the congregation itself.
However, the **Framework** does recognise the importance within the task environment of specifically networking with other community organisations to access particular resources, including referrals of service users, and other cooperative arrangements. Usefully, the task environment literature, such as Hasenfeld (1983, pp.59-82) and Jones and May (1992, pp.112-121), elaborates ways in which this works, so expanding on the detail the congregational **Framework** provides.

### A12.2 Culture

Just as the environment of wider society reflects a culture, so organisations themselves exhibit a culture, which Jones and May explore (1992, pp.228-259). Likewise, the **Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement** explicitly identifies “culture” for congregations and elaborates on its implications. Firstly, this relates to a congregation’s openness to community services and, secondly, to the cultural balance between volunteerism and professionalism with which services then operate. The **Framework** identifies aspects of special concern in congregational settings, however the literature on organisational culture provides a broad frame within which to consider this.

Both approaches affirm the influence of shared values and beliefs, and the potential for conflict, especially for professional staff who are also influenced by their profession’s culture. Both approaches confirm the need to understand these cultural influences, a point the congregational **Framework** emphasises. What Jones and May present constitutes a general elaboration of the issues raised in the **Framework** concerning two cultural features, so providing useful points for consideration (1992, pp.256-258). A tendency to overlook this issue in many human service settings is illustrated by Hasenfeld’s omission of it in his otherwise comprehensive discussion. The **Framework**’s strength is the focus it gives to culture, exploring the two key ways it impacts on congregational community services, i.e. their initiation, and then, their operation.

### A12.3 Goals

The organisational literature views goals of human service organisations as “central…, even though they are often multiple, vague, conflicting and in a constant state of flux” (Jones & May 1992, p.154). This occurs through the need to “satisfy
the interests of diverse social groups” (Hasenfeld 1983, p.85). As a result, analysis of goals distinguishes between official goals, representing the public purposes of the organisation, and the operative goals, reflecting actual operation (Hasenfeld 1983; Jones & May 1992). The operative goals are differentiated between transitive goals, which identify the intended impact of organisational effort, and reflexive goals, which identify the exchange required for people to contribute to the organisation (Hasenfeld 1983). Other words associated with goals are “mission” which expresses the broadest aim, and “objectives” which expresses specific intent. “Goals” are then identified as the broad intent statements in between (Jones & May 1992).

The Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement identifies Vision as a component which highlights the goals and aspirations various people in congregations espouse for their community services. Both approaches affirm the variability of the goals implied or stated, and that the implemented goals result from debate between associated personnel with differing aspirations to those formally espoused. For example, the aspirations Congregation B’s Counsellor C had were not shared by the Parson or the committee overseeing the Counselling Service and so were incompletely implemented. That also meant that Counsellor B sensed the exchange he anticipated through his involvement was not occurring and so began to question his contribution to Congregation B. The Framework also recognises the variety of “agendas” found in congregations initiating community services, and that some were defined by key people rather than the congregation while others were developed with the congregation.

All these understandings seem congruent with the literature, whose strength is its recognition that different goal statements reflect different degrees of specification, and that there are different types of goals, some of which relate to the services offered, and others which relate to the structures offering the services. Review of the Vision of congregational community services in these terms could aid clarity of the various levels, types and processes for defining goals, but at the risk of over-professionalising the discussion of a service. The strength of the Framework is again its consideration of these issues in the specific context of congregational settings, and the potential inclusion of spiritually-related agendas within these various goal understandings – whether official and/or operative. This is important because, when
they are not clearly acknowledged, some people raise questions about the appropriateness of congregations auspicing community services.

**A12.4 Technology**

Hasenfeld defines human service technology as the “procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status”, these procedures being “sanctioned by the organisation” (1983, p.111). As mentioned when discussing program design, this technology is influenced by the particular program logics and hence is incorporated into the Programming dimension of congregational community services. Whilst the technologies congregations use are normally chosen from those used by other human service organisations, data considered in the development of the *Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement* suggests that three particular emphases may be incorporated within those selected. Firstly, the contribution of informal, friendship-oriented approaches for working with people is valued, though at times diminished when the professional culture gains influence. Secondly, the capacity of congregations to be supportive communities to people with particular needs, and as a resource to people providing services, is also valued even though this also can be diminished in the face of growing professional emphases. Thirdly, the inclusion of spiritually-oriented aspects, such as prayer or faith-nurture, within the technology is legitimised by the congregational context. These three “technologies”, all presently debated in secular community service settings, have an identifiable place in congregational community services.

The organisational literature also identified that technologies affected people in up to four ways to achieve the change sought. These are people-processing, people-sustaining, people-changing or people-controlling (Hasenfeld 1983, p.134; Jones and May 1992, p.91). Yet the technologies typically selected by congregations enable people-supporting responses, e.g. supportive group contacts and basic relief assessments, and people-changing responses, such as the “more potent” counselling approaches of Congregations B and C. The people-processing and people-controlling approaches do not fit well with the congregational values and belief, and therefore are less likely to be selected. The technologies selected also seem likely to be applied more intensely in congregational settings because the altruism of their operating
culture encourages voluntary and paid staff to extend normal professional boundaries. Clearly, as Hasenfeld suggests (1983, p.118; see also Jones & May 1992, p.87), guiding ideologies and moral values are influential, and congregations may be more aware of these values than other human service organisations because they tend to be articulated within the primary congregational activities of worship and spiritual nurture.

This confirms that the understanding of human service technologies in the literature is congruent with the understanding of programming within the congregational community service Framework, but these technologies may have options that are more valued in congregational settings than elsewhere.

**A12.5 Structure**

Hasenfeld sees human service organisations as “loosely coupled systems” (1983, p.150) because their activities are “weakly connected and weakly coordinated”, with weak control over staff and multiple but weak authority processes over generally autonomous work units. Such an understanding can readily be applied to each of the three research congregations, though in varying ways as examined in the Managing dimension of operation. Congregation A’s parishioners considered the Parson too autonomous, whilst the Parson considered support from the congregational council for his work was not always forthcoming. Neither coordinated with the other in ways the congregational structure suggested. Congregation B was more formally structured though an incorporated committee, exhibiting greater cooperation, although Counsellor C considered the Parson in effective control as others readily acquiesced to his views. Likewise, volunteer Counsellors worked independently of each other and even the Director of Counselling. The prevalence of “loose coupling” is further illustrated by other, lay-initiated activities in Congregations A and B which operated without identifiable accountability to the congregational council e.g. the Congregation A’s Meals Ministry and Congregation B’s Aged Persons Events.

In contrast, Congregation C was much more tightly structured, with control actively exercised by a small executive, at times leaving a perception that the coordinator had insufficient day-to-day control or authority (Congregation C Documents 6 & 16), even though the leadership she provided permeated all that happened at the Community House. However, this Community House appeared “loosely coupled”
with its partner agency, operating relatively independently of its central executive and board, e.g. even to running a substantial deficit budget.

The *Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement* therefore identifies degrees of “loose coupling” in its Managing dimension, so being consistent with the literature. The elaboration of these into structural types with specific means for working within them, as outlined by Jones and May (1992), is a useful extension not explored within the congregational *Framework*.

Leadership itself has been extensively considered within the *Framework* and illustrates one source of power. For the Parsons, this was associated with their formal role as a legal-rational or traditional form of authority, whereas Congregation C’s Coordinator seemed to exercise her leadership through personal acceptance more than her formal role, reflecting the literature’s charismatic authority (Hasenfeld 1983, p.160; Jones & May 1992, p.190). Leadership in all settings however illustrates Kramer’s assertion that voluntary sector human services are “unusually dependent on the quality of their executive leadership and, therefore, more subject to idiosyncratic rather than structural factors” (1987, p.244). Nonetheless, each congregation had other laypeople providing leadership in their own idiosyncratic ways which often was less overtly recognised as leadership, e.g. the contribution of Congregation B’s Parishioner A as administrator. Congruent with Hasenfeld’s assertion that professionalisation derived from special competencies becomes a source of influence in human service organisations (1983, p.162), the status of Parsons, and even some lay leaders, can be linked to their formal training. Even minimal and non-traditional training, such as the brief course in pastoral care which Congregation A’s Parishioner C undertook, can contribute to this.

### A12.6 Change

The *Framework*’s Modification phase addresses the change within congregational community services through three components – those resulting from evaluation, those reflecting crucial decisions, and those subsequent to unexpected events.

Kettner et al (1990) presents an approach to monitoring organisational programs which enhances its ability to be evaluated, and through that for decisions about change to be made. Frequently two purposes for evaluation are discussed –
summative or output-related, and formative or process-related (Grbich 1999; Wadsworth 1991). These relate to whether or not output criteria are being met, and identification of what is actually going on (Kettner et al 1990). Evaluation then raises questions of effectiveness, efficiency, quality of service, quality of life, satisfaction, and outcomes (as opposed to outputs), all of which are debated in the literature (see Kuechler, Velasquez & White 1988; Osborne 1992; Patti 1987, 1988; Pruger & Miller 1991a, 1991b; Rapp & Poertner 1988). Owen (1993) identifies 5 forms of evaluation.

- Impact Evaluation, akin to summative evaluation;
- Evaluation in Program Management, which monitors performance;
- Process Evaluation, akin to formative evaluation and includes the perceptions of different stakeholders;
- Design Evaluation, referred to by Smith (1989) as Evaluability Assessment, which elicits the inherent program logic for later review; and
- Evaluation for Development, akin to needs assessment.

In the development of the Framework it was identified that few congregational activities were evaluated in any other than impressionistic ways, except with Congregation C. However Congregation C showed how evaluation influenced modification of congregational community services. Without articulating them, it also illustrated the use of different forms of evaluation. To the extent that a congregational setting warrants a more professional approach, there is a place for the evaluation methodologies in the literature and the issues these address. Statistics monitoring service use, and the regular monthly and annual staff reports used by Congregation C, form a basic Evaluation in Program Management that most activities could incorporate to enable congregational reviews of its community activities. Likewise, Design Evaluations have a place in identifying the program logics and theories which actually inform congregational activity. This understanding of how the vision is expected to be achieved can then become a starting point for considering program changes. Clearly, this literature is congruent with the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement, but adds detail relevant to evaluation not evident in the Framework itself.
Jones and May (1992, p.354) identify changes in areas such as goals, structure, environment and culture which generate wider organisational changes. For them, change is a product of planned processes aimed at strategically addressing concerns raised by individuals in organisations (p.361f), rather than an uncontrolled consequence of unanticipated influences, as the Framework includes.

Aldrich (1999, p.20-41) presents a different approach to organisational change, associating it with four generic evolutionary processes:

- Variations, both intentional and “blind” or “independent of selection pressures” which could be considered unexpected (e.g. mistakes);
- Selections, which eliminate variations in the wake of external and/or internal “forces” such as market pressures, or pressures for stability;
- Retentions, which preserve and reproduce selected variations such as specialised roles; and
- Struggle, which involves competition for the required resources or legitimacy.

Whilst incorporating both intended and unintended changes, this evolutionary framework is a reminder that organisations, including congregational community services, are dynamic social entities. Change occurs within each of the areas considered here – environment, culture, goals or visions, structure or management, and technology or program activities – all the time, and not just in obvious ways. “Rather”, as Aldrich writes about organisations (1999, p.33), “their forms reflect the historical path laid down by a meandering drift of accumulated and selectively retained variations.” Although here the focus has been on the more overt changes, intended or not, this is an important reminder that congregational community services are, in this respect, like any other organisation; an accumulation of subtle and not so subtle changes happening constantly to all organisations areas. The Framework and its various components and dimensions needs to be understood in this way.

**A12.7 Conclusion**

This comparison of the Framework for Congregational Community Service Involvement with the human service organisation literature highlights three aspects.
Firstly, it confirms that the Framework derived from the data analysis in this research is congruent with established understandings. Secondly, it identifies that the Framework presents its concepts in ways more applicable to congregational contexts to enable a better grasp of their relevance in that setting. Thirdly, it recognises that organisational concepts can be applied to congregational community services, especially in an operating culture which is more oriented to formalising professionalism. However, to impose such an emphasis risks congregational identification and participation, and thereby risks the congregational contribution to the wider community.
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