FROM ANOREXIA TO CELEBRATION:

Sickness and Healing in the Parish

Church and the Community of Moreton

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Lesley Anne Bailey

Using a collaborative action research methodology and a liberation theology approach, the thesis draws on the psychology of anorexia, the insights of Isaiah 58:1-12 and its socio-religious setting, the contextual setting of the Parish Church and the community of Moreton, to develop new insights into the breakdown and restoration of community. It devises what it terms "diagnostic theology" to aid in the understanding of complex forces acting on communities and individuals. Developing from a grassroots exegesis, the signs and symptoms of both breakdown and restoration are clearly delineated, always with a view to celebration, in the knowledge that full restoration can never be achieved. It is posited both that this work will be of value to other communities of faith, and that the methodology can be applied in other situations.

Dedication

To the people of Christ Church

"I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
Ephesians 3:16-19

Moreton Cross

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Introduction

Understanding where we have come from and what has made us into the people we now are is fundamental to understanding the people that we can become. This is true of us as individuals, and, as this work demonstrates, it is true of us as a church and as a community.

Discerning the process is what makes us able to map our path and to see the signposts along the way. It is a delicate and complex process. This is what I have attempted here, by simultaneously balancing the history of the community Moreton, that of the congregation of Christ Church, the disease and the recovery process of anorexia, and the history of the post-exilic community of Israel, focusing on our key passage of Isaiah 58:1-12, for reasons that will become clear as the work progresses. Trying to discern a process and to discover where that process leads is not an overnight task, and is not one that should be undertaken alone, as the path is fraught with often unexpected obstacles – sometimes taking the shape of "principalities and powers" and sometimes more simply people and pounds! Certainly, the path leads into life-changing territory for all involved, if the task is undertaken with the dedication that is needed if the results are to become lasting.

In the modern west, we have all become familiar with eating disorders. It has come to the point where these are used almost casually as shorthand for other things – even spiritual conditions (see Chapter Four). The grassroots research undertaken by members of Christ Church lead into an action research project that sought to address the poor self-image of both the church and the community – and this lead onto some questions: Can we use

anorexia to describe a communal process? What might we learn about the development and recovery from the condition that aids our understanding of the communal process? And can we see the links and resonance between our difficulties and those faced by the community Isaiah addressed – and how does our understanding of anorexia help this process? So it was that we began to be drawn in to what we eventually termed "diagnostic theology".

It is not simply my work, even though I live in and am part of Christ Church, but that of many people who form part of the community of Moreton, or the congregation of Christ Church, or scholars who know far better than I the nature of that post-exilic community, or those psychiatrists or psychologists who know intimately those suffering from anorexia. Mine have merely been the eyes that have discerned the process and have asked the questions. My sincere hope is that I have managed to honour them all.

The title was chosen with this thought in mind, as we have used anorexia throughout as a metaphor for a Church that chose to deprive itself, even as an anorexic chooses to deprive themselves. Celebration was chosen as a symbol of healing, a culmination if you will, with its connotations of feasting and freedom, laughter and joy – a coming together, which was something that had not happened in either the church or either of the communities that we studied so carefully.

After fifteen years in the field of health research, I have come to understand the process of research as being about far more than the compilation and

analysis of data. It is ultimately about seeking to understand the nature of a situation, and, in matters of health, this usually means seeking to understand something about people. It is therefore, even in its simplest form, difficult for a thinking researcher to divorce research entirely from questions that sound as if they may be questions of epistemology. Certainly the move from a scientific model to a theological framework was, in many ways, easier than may at first have been supposed. Indeed, personally, I found it a liberating experience to be able to consider not only quite narrow questions concerned with one domain of health or illness, but to explore much more holistic questions concerning community, church, and ultimately the nature of restoration, but always with the discipline and rigour of my own background.

The research and the subsequent thesis was undertaken using a liberation theology approach (see 1.2) with the establishment of a base group (known as the Site Team) in the candidate's own location, Moreton (on the Wirral in the north west of England, lying between Liverpool to the north and North Wales to the south) and a collegiate group within the Urban Theology Unit, which comprised tutors and peers from other locations. The Site Team comprised fourteen individuals chosen to be as representative as possible of the congregation of Christ Church (the Parish Church of Moreton), along with a Reader from a nearby parish, who works in Moreton (details of the selection and the sampling strategy of the Site Team members can be found in section 2.6). I am a licensed Reader and commissioned Parish Assistant (Pastoral Worker), who has a background in health research and applied theology.

Influential in my own thinking and development has been the writing of Stephen Pattison[1] and John Swinton[2]. Both, in their own way, led me towards seeking more systemic causes (and possibly solutions) for the problems that confront individuals within their contexts, and helped to ameliorate, for me, at least, some of the limitations I was beginning to find in a primarily pastoral role.

The action research methodology primarily employed here led us to explore and to seek to ameliorate the dynamics of a divided community using the psychological processes of anorexia (and recovery) as a model with its symptoms acting as a metaphor for the division and fragmentation around us, and food as a metaphor for recovery. We were drawn to Isaiah 58:1-12 with its emphasis on futile fasting.

It is important at the outset to lay down some parameters, and here these parameters are suggested by ways of knowing. Discovering not only the facts but also what lies beneath the surface of a community or a congregation, its history and dynamics, and how it feels and hopes, demands different approaches. Trying to learn what God may be saying in this situation, I argue, demands a different approach again. All of these are valid ways of knowing, and each are set within a liberational theology framework.

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[1] I was expressly influenced by his <u>Pastoral Care and Liberational Theology</u> (1997)SPCK, London, as it gave me a whole new way of looking at situations I had previously thought of as being hopeless. He facilitated my move away from being primarily interested in pastoral theology towards liberation theology.

[2] Here I must mention his monograph "Building a Church for Strangers: Theology, Church and Learning Disabilities"(1999a) <u>Contact Monograph</u>, Edinburgh, as it began to change my views of what church could be.

The opening question is, "How can we know?" and then "If we know, what difference can that knowing make?" The answers to these questions took myself, and a group of colleagues from the congregation of Christ Church, Moreton, on a journey that we could not have foreseen at the outset, and to conclusions that have not ceased to challenge us long after the practical part of the research was completed.

I suggest in Chapter One that there are principally four ways of knowing: enumerative, descriptive, experiential and inductive: and each of them are demonstrated through this thesis – in the initial situational analysis, in the project development and evaluation, in the subsequent development of the model for the breakdown and restoration of community, and in the theological reflection on that model. All are indispensable to it, and without any one of them, this work would be incomplete. Even so, none are approached uncritically, and the weaknesses of each are considered. But, in employing as many ways of knowing as possible, we hope we give as full as possible a picture of our context, and our difficulties, thus providing a firm foundation for both the practical project phase and for the development of the model that follows.

Just as all the ways of knowing are vital to this thesis, so too are the contributions from all the members of that group, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. The debt that the author owes them must be acknowledged - and it has been a pleasure to see them grow and develop subsequent to the practical project phase of the research, in the hope that

they too have learned something positive from the experience. Equally, the support and encouragement received from colleagues at the Urban Theology Unit has been of inestimable value – especially when the road has been particularly troublesome. The benefit derived from having colleagues to share the experience with, who are not intimately connected to the context, cannot be underestimated.

While it is true that we can never 'know' fully, and what is presented here is presented in the recognition of that truth, this is an exercise do what best may be described, perhaps, as 'diagnostic theology'.

Nouwen (1976:88) writes thus:

> Diagnosis is the beginning of treatment … When we take the word in its most original and profound meaning of knowing through and through (*gnosis* = knowledge; *dia* = through and through), we can see that the first and most important aspect of all healing is an interested effort to know patients fully, in all their joys and pains, pleasures and sorrows, ups and downs, highs and lows, which have given shape and form to their lives and lead them to their present situation.

The examination of our context in Chapter Two attempts to paint for the reader a picture of our community that gives a flavour of what it is like to live there, and how it compares with other communities in Britain. We hope that it provides a glimpse into the life and history of Moreton, and into the life and history of the congregation of Christ Church, which is itself a part of that larger community. It also traces the process whereby both the project stage of the research and the underlying process of the thesis began to develop and

thereby has strong links with Chapter Five, which develops the process and model of the thesis fully.

Chapter Three contains the evaluation of the practical project phase, and, as such, has strong links with Chapter Six, which proposes the symptoms and signs of a restored community. It uses a systematic, evaluative model developed at the project proposal stage and so is not uncritical of the project's success. It also allows the opportunity to reflect on developments in the time elapsed since the completion of the practical project phase of the thesis.

Chapter Four contains a literary investigation into recent writings, which have used the theme of eating disorder in the field of theology. Given the very recent surge in interest in the field, it was felt to be worthwhile examining the use made by other theological writers of the phenomenon and to explore something of the role of medicine in our society.

Chapter Five is the lynch pin of the thesis, with a return to our key biblical passage, which is examined in its original socio-historical context and some detailed exegegetical work undertaken prior to the text being used radically in a modern context. Thereafter, a model is developed derived from the psychological processes of disease and recovery, which is in turn re-applied to the scriptural context, the community context of Moreton and the congregational context of Christ Church. Each step in this process is examined in detail and evidenced separately. However, I argue, the ultimate

recovery phase must in some of the realms be somewhat speculative. This leads on to the penultimate chapter in the thesis.

Chapter Six is concerned primarily with what a restored community may look like. Using the language of disease, I argue that there are both symptoms (what may be felt) and signs (what may be seen) and suggest what these could be, based on the key biblical passage, and our experience.

It was our hope that although our context was unique, what we discovered was not, and that others may find both the process and the model of use in ministry.

Chapter 1

Defining the Issues: Methodology

1.1 Introduction

Understanding how we can know is vital to a work of this complexity, thus, the different methodological approaches to the work are explored. The complexity is because of the need to explore three community contexts: that of the community of Moreton, that of the congregation of Christ Church and that of the post-exilic community of Isaiah. In addition there is the need to understand the psychology of anorexia. There is a brief opening introduction to the theological approach that frames the thesis. Following on from this, three major types of research methodology as ways of knowing are examined: both the quantitative (enumerative) and qualitative (descriptive) methods, and action research, which is primarily experiential. Our approach to scripture is looked at in some more depth. The key term, 'community' is discussed at some length before a fourth way of knowing is described. This is the inductive method, which is termed 'prophecy' by the Site Team (see the key section 2.7) and is developed with this is mind.

1.2 The Theological Approach Framing the Thesis

Liberation theology is relatively new as a discipline, emerging in Latin America and dating, according to Lernoux (1982:13), from 1965 at the Second Vatican Council, when the Roman Catholic Church began to consider seriously the living conditions of the vast majority of the people. Liberation theologians seek to give a voice to those 'ordinary' Christians, and, as a result, remove theology from an ivory tower and back into the realm that Christ himself inhabited, that of daily life, with all its rough edges and social and political

dilemmas. What is more, it is a theology that is developed from action and demands action as its consequence.

With their emphasis on local context and inductive thought, and with the aim of 'conscientization', liberation theologies remain directly and powerfully relevant to local communities of Christians. Liberation must precede liberty and remains inextricably linked with action (Guitérrez 1974:27). Its call is to a humanistic commitment (Boff & Boff 1984:15). As such, liberation theology as practised locally can make, not only a spiritual difference, but also a practical one. Liberation, then, takes place at different levels: at a social level, where oppression occurs; on an individual level, where there is injustice; and on the spiritual level where sinfulness has its origin (Boff & Boff 1987:3), and where the Holy Spirit acts "for the sake of transformation of the world through the liberation of the poor and oppressed." (Comblin 1989:76). One of the major purposes of liberation theology is to both inspire and inform Christian action within the overarching struggle for liberation of the oppressed.

As such, one of the greatest achievements of liberation theologies in the practice of ministry has been its call to authentic ministry. It demands that ministers live out their lives alongside those with whom they minister - the notion of ministering 'to' is misguided in this sense. Someone entering a new context can only hope to learn about that context from living with it and with the people who also experience it. The burning question seems to be, then, what difference can knowing about that context make to Christian ministry? The first point is that God, the God of history, is also the God of the present

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and the future. Herzog (2000:15) stresses that God acts in the 'now' – the point at which humans experience reality, which gives immediacy to both their experience and God's presence and gives validity to peoples lives. Understanding this lends a prophetic edge to ministry within a particular historical context. Secondly, it lends not only a prophetic edge to ministry but also a political one. The call to justice remains merely words if it is non-specific. It is the specificity of context that makes the call to justice real. Horsley (1987:209-285) portrays Jesus working for the renewal of community at a local level. This suggests that true Christian ministry inevitably includes being involved within community affairs.

Thirdly, it means allowing people not only to tell their story (a traditional approach in pastoral care) but also encouraging them to engage with that narrative in the light of scripture, and in company with others. This notion of relationship stands opposed to much that we see in our society about the primacy of the individual. Benner (1998:101) says that western psychology has been greatly influenced by Descartes' famous dictum, 'I think therefore I am'. In contrast, "The Urbuntu African spiritual philosophy states 'I am because we are; we are because I am'". He argues that this African view is closer to the Christian understanding of the self – there is no meaningful development or actualisation apart from intimate relationships one with another and each with God.

In each different context, the approach of liberation theology produces different notes, but they are notes that blend together: each note is of value.

Ministry becomes about allowing each to learn what Christ is like from their unique context, and that realisation changing not only spiritual lives, but physical and psychological lives as well.

1.3 <u>Liberation Theology and the Site Team</u>

Using liberation theology as an approach with the Site Team enabled 'ordinary' Christians in Moreton to grapple with theological, biblical and social issues. It was reflected in the use of an action research methodology (see 1.6) as the primary methodology with the Site Team[3]. It assisted the discovery of Christian ministry where they are – in a specific context at a specific time. It was hoped that this would lead to an innovative approach within the community – engaging with the issues confronting Moreton (described at length in Chapter Two). These issues are political – the division between rich and poor and the lack of a voice for the community among others – as well as profoundly spiritual. The experiences of the Site Team and their stories helped them to engage with scripture in the company of one another that lead to both personal and group growth, and, it was hoped, facilitated change within the community as well.

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[3] There are clearly ethical implications to a piece of work such as this. An information sheet was devised and given to all participants in the Site Team explaining the purpose of the project and matters relating to confidentiality. Should they reveal (or have revealed to them) information that suggests they or another person is at risk, the lead Supervisor would be approached for advice, and they would be advised of this. Likewise, it is possible that some social, medical or psychological difficulty may emerge. In this instance, the researcher is under a moral obligation to encourage the participant to see appropriate help. Similarly, if there is evidence of poor professional practice, the participant will be advised of existing channels through which to voice their concerns. These guidelines have been drawn from the British Psychological Society Code of Practice for Research (1999) amended to meet the requirements of this project.

Major problems facing both the local parish Church (Christ Church) and the community of Moreton were identified and a strategy drawn up to help in the meeting of those key needs. This was done in conjunction with biblical and theological reflection to identify appropriate themes and included the Site Team's own spiritual journey where apposite. Consequent upon this, the practical ministry project took place over approximately a five-month period, commencing January 2004 and finishing in May 2004. Its evaluation led to theological and biblical exploration within the perspective outlined above. This five month period makes up the detailed, practical research phase of the thesis, but it was both anticipated and hoped that the project phase would have long term repercussions that would influence the community and church for a significant length of time thereafter.

Within the encompassing liberation theology approach, at least three distinct types of research methodology have been employed in order to gain the fullest picture possible of the particular context and to outline the results of the project. Each will be explored in turn, although the most important of these in terms of the process of the research is the action research methodology.

However, it seems important at the outset to place the whole process, including the Site Team (whose importance cannot be overestimated) into some sort of context).

1.4 The UTU Experience and the Selection of the Site Team

Over several years, from 1983-1988 the Urban Theology Unit was the UK base for the Doctor of Ministry Programme for the New York Theological Seminary. This degree was subsequently adopted by the University of Sheffield, then by Oxford Brookes University and latterly by the University of Birmingham in 2004 – at which point it changed its name and outlook somewhat to being a Doctorate in Theology. That change in outlook seems to be still evolving.

Nevertheless a distinctive methodology has evolved at the Urban Theological Unit (UTU) that has definite roots in liberation theology, with the establishment of base groups, both in the community (or congregation) and in the UTU setting and its approach to scripture and its interpretation.

It is a grassroots "bottom up" exegetical approach that seeks what Clodovis Boff (1987:145-6) terms a 'correspondence of relationships'.

The first step in the process – which was delineated both at UTU and in a handbook given to candidates – was the establishment of this base group – or, in UTU parlance, "Site Team". Its parallel group at UTU comprised tutors and compatriots within the year group who were studying for either M.Phil or Ph.D. degrees.

Selection of the Site Team was of necessity left to the discretion of the candidate and based entirely on their particular context. The criterion was that they were firmly rooted within that context.

In selecting potential members of the Site Team, considerable effort was made to ensure that they were as representative as possible of both the geographic community and the congregation of Christ Church. (See also 2.6)

An early and invaluable purchase was an A1 sized Ordinance Survey map of the Parish. Using the Family Contact list from Christ Church (which was available to licensed Ministers only) I mapped onto it the addresses of all the 182 families and individuals on the list. This gave me a clear visual indication of who lived where. The results limited my options somewhat in some areas. So much so that I then chose (on a proportional basis) to select two people who lived beyond the strict bounds of the Parish.

Secondly, based on my knowledge of the three rather separate congregations who attended on a Sunday, I re-divided the list of names on the contact list based on this criterion. This gave me another list of names.

Thirdly, using my own age as a pivot – I divided the lists again on an older/younger basis. This gave me another list.

My final criterion was more subjective – would they be likely to see the process through?

This ruled out anyone in their GCSE or 'A' level year – or anyone I knew who was suffering from severe health problems.

I cross-referenced the lists – giving me fourteen names.

I then added to the list the Rector – as I felt it was at least courteous (and at best politic) to invite him, and a Reader I knew who lived from outside the Parish, but who worked within it, and who could perhaps offer a different perspective.

This process ended with an initial list of fourteen names to approach. I did not anticipate all agreeing – although as it turned out eight attended the opening two meetings.

This Site Team begins by analysing their current situation in all sorts of ways. Duffield (2001: 67) explicates that it draws upon practical experience, statistical data, historical records and observation. In particular the Team is asked to ascertain the key joy and sorrows of both their congregation and their location.

This provides both a richness and depth of data, which needs careful consideration.

The number diminished subsequent to this – and by the time the Site Team ended time in May 2004, six remained. The critical meetings, as is remarked upon in 2.8, were meetings three and four – which took place in November and December 2003, where scriptural resonance was sought. People who

were present at these meetings were likely to continue throughout the life of the Site Team.

The search is for what John Vincent (1996:14-20) calls 'Imaginative identification' – between ourselves, our place, our context, our possible actions and the biblical ones.

In tackling this approach I was rather more defined in my approach to research methodology than the handbook suggested. I was careful to apply overlapping methodologies in addition to the action research paradigm indicated within the liberation theology paradigm suggested by the framework proposed by UTU.

I had reservations about the academic rigour of the methodology proposed and realised fairly early on in the process that it would be difficult to sustain at a high level. This lead to the precision and clarity of Chapter One – particularly as I have also to justify prophecy as a way of knowing based on the theological stance of the Site Team given that authenticity is crucial to a work such as this, but it has also to include the other means of knowing included within the thesis in as concise a way a possible (bearing in mind the word limitations).

Whether this piece of work could be done using another method is a matter of debate. From the perspective of the Project it is highly unlikely that as much could have been achieved by one person working alone as by a Team

working together. Certainly, it would seem doubtful that so many would have developed so far in their individual ministries without the room for experimentation that the Project afforded. While it is freely acknowledged that action research does not require the development of a team, in this instance it does at least appear to have been beneficial, if only to the members of that Team.

The second question is one of the theological development of the model. Did this require the work of a team – or of one person? I am not sure that it was possible to develop by committee– although the initial correlation between our situation and Isaiah 58:1-12 did indeed come from a Team meeting. It was the 'correspondence of relationships' that rang out to us across the ages. Alongside this, we had the prophecy of "Christ Church is my anorexic bride." (See 2.8)

This led to some early, very much first fruits, work on anorexia and linking it back with the gospels and Isaiah 58:1-12 – which I produced in November 2003 for the Site Team to help with our thinking (parts of which are reproduced at 2.8) and to help act as a bridge as we moved into the project planning phase of the work.

This proved to be a fairly important piece of work to me personally in beginning to focus my thoughts towards the subsequent development of the model – and, had I been working alone, would not have been produced.

McAfee Brown (1984:15-16) suggests that even, perhaps especially, those who have studied the scriptures at length should return to them with what he terms 'secondary naivete' – approaching the text as it stands and asking 'What does this passage say to us?' and to remember that the Bible is an account of the struggles of flesh and blood people – who were, in all the ways that really matter, very much like us.

While I am a little unsure about the precise detail of this, I appreciate the thought behind it. I am quite certain that there is no requirement for anyone to be a biblical scholar in order to have insight into scripture (indeed, sometimes scholarship can be an impediment) – but equally that a certain degree of scholarship is needful to obtain a Ph.D. Thus, in some ways, the basic ethos of UTU may be argued to be slightly counter academic. This is a source of tension throughout the Ph.D. – as I have striven to remain authentic to the original vision and subsequent development of the Team whilst producing a piece of work with sufficient academic rigour.

1.5 <u>Quantitative Research Methodologies</u>

While an overall quantitative understanding of the nature of the Parish of Moreton is important - it resembles a black and white line drawing on a piece of paper - it has outline, but no shading or depth. The use of statistics and numbers, such as the numbers of people who are unemployed provide a useful and necessary overview. However, they cannot tell you what it is like to be unemployed, for example, and for that another approach must be found. The National Census itself is a prime example of quantitative data, a survey

using standardised questions, and is typical of a problem definition type of approach (for a simpler example, see Horne & Reyner 1995:565-567). Although the same methodology is commonly used to evaluate an intervention (Green & Lewis 1986:36-57) and gathered over time can provide an indication of trend, the data presented here on household income derived from the Mott Macdonald (2002) Pathways Impact Monitoring Document is a good example of this type of usage. However, this sort of approach is subject both to non-response and to variability in the quota sample used (Boyd 1975). The skill in gathering this type of information is in understanding and minimising the possible sources of error. According to Leather (1987:90-98) quantitative methods are far more rigorous in their sampling representativeness than are qualitative methods, and cites an argument that qualitative research should adopt a purely exploratory role, with the hypotheses it generates 'properly' measured by quantitative research later on.

Research, in whatever form, cannot be research unless it makes every effort to minimise error. This is the extent to which elements in the research process prevent or inhibit the valid measurement of the research issue in question. Sampling is crucial to this, and in quantitative research this varies from the fully representative random probability samples to the much more common quota samples, such as the study by Horne and Reyner cited above. Quota sampling especially may be subject to non-response (such as via a postal questionnaire, including the National Census), weighting errors and quota variability.

Non-sampling error covers just about anything else that can go wrong. According to Leather five of these may be important in quantitative research: Hyman (1975:123-134) describes the effect of different interviewers getting different answers; Schuman & Presser (1981) discuss the problems raised in question order, wording and so forth; then there is the problem of forcing complex attitudes into arbitrary categories (evidenced by Cooper & Stein (1989:38-45) in their study into life events and postnatal depression); bias in responses; and the effects of fatigue upon the interviewer (Ring 1976:447-473).

There seems to be no consensus on what is the 'best' method in quantitative research. The real skill seems to be in understanding all possible sources of error. Their relative significance is a subjective decision made by the researcher. This needs to be borne in mind when assessing the purported objectivity of quantitative research.

Quantitative researchers use deductive reasoning, and therefore begin with a general principle or belief (hypothesis) and then apply that principle to explain a specific case or phenomenon. The experimental approach is involved with the verification or otherwise of that belief. It frequently builds on the work done by others, such as Morris (1987:279-281) building on Brown & Harris (1978), a seminal work on the social origins of depression.

To return to the original analogy of an outline drawing when talking of quantitative methodology, an outline drawing is influenced by perspective, and by the subjectivity of the artist, however much they may try to deny it.

1.6 <u>Qualitative Research Methodologies</u>

If a pen and ink drawing reflects quantitative approaches, then the qualitative approach of semi-structured interview employed here best resembles an Impressionist painting. It draws on the feelings and experiences of its subjects, it hints and suggests. Indeed, Hastings (1990:118-127) states that its main advantage is in the depth and quality of data it provides. It allows the researcher to approach the topic in an open-ended manner, using their language and concepts to develop the discussion (Blinkhorn et al 1983:311-314) and relies on their experience to illustrate it, as in the focus group. There is no need to make assumptions about what the important issues are, or how to label these, or even the type of responses that may be expected.

Qualitative interviewing procedures also allow a range of responses to be examined. An example of this is checking reactions to media materials: fairly straightforward matters, such as the understanding of the information, or its ability to put its message across clearly can be checked as well as the more complex issues such a like or dislike, audience identification and other emotional responses – all of which are crucial to the efficacy of such material. A classic example of this may be found in Hastings et al (1991:17-25) where they examined the response to the fear inducing, anti-AIDS advertising. Qualitative research revealed a tendency for people to distance themselves

from the message – and it only became apparent after detailed probing. These findings have informed government health education ever since.

The quality of data produced by qualitative methods is enhanced by the fact that they tend to lead the interviewer to delve for the motivations and reasons underlying the responses, but it also has three important practical advantages: Its flexibility means that unfinished ideas can be tried out; secondly it is fairly quick to undertake; and thirdly, it is relatively cheap because of the small sample sizes involved. The qualitative technique of the semi-structured questionnaire is used here to try to examine the impact of the interventions of the community art exhibition and the barbeque (3.3) during the project phase, and the Likheart scale with room for additional comments to assess the efficacy of the Bible Studies (3.4).

However, it does not give any real idea as to the scale of a problem or experience (Mitchell & Jolley 1992:41-59) and its statistical validity is open to question. Furthermore, it tends to put participants into artificial situations such as focus groups; but it could be argued that all research, both quantitative research in its experimental designs and qualitative research does this.

Finally, it could be argued that qualitative research depends to a large extent on a well-conducted interview, and well-analysed data. The selection and interpretation of data produced can be contrasted with that of the quantitative researcher's production of apparently independent and hard statistics. Statistics may not, of course, be all that they first appear.

The formation of a focus group may have been another way forward in exploring the issue of what the Parish is like, and, indeed, some of the early work undertaken within the Site Team closely resembles this approach. This is especially true of the 'Joys and Sorrows' exercise to be reported later (Tables 2 & 3).

1.7 <u>Action Research Methodology</u>

In both classical quantitative and classical qualitative methodologies something must be said about the role of the researcher. This is that they try to remain outside of the process as far as is possible, being simply the 'questioner'. Their responses and emotions should, as far as is possible, be kept away from the topic or theme that they are exploring. This is the ongoing quest of the researcher in striving for objectivity. However, here this is not something that is sought or, in the context of liberation theology, even desirable.

In the research that follows, I am a participant as well as an observer. I am an insider. There is something of the diarist in describing what the Parish is like to live in. This is where the investigator lives within a group or community, and perhaps takes a direct part in their activities (Giddens 1992:668). My experiences of being a part of this Parish are, in a sense, indivisible from the picture I paint. Perhaps the best well-known example of this type of study is Goffman's study of behaviour in an asylum (Goffman 1961). Having lived in Moreton for ten years and worked in a recognised role within the Parish for

the last six, justifying my presence has not been an issue, although asking others' opinions sometimes has – it has been assumed that I will already know. The Site Team and I entered this work as a group wanting it to change our lives – it was not simply an academic exercise designed to a qualification. The depths of passion and commitment that this work has generated within the group, and latterly outside of that group, and its overall coherence has come as a surprise, even to me, as time has passed. It has proven to be true that this type of approach can generate much richer information about social life than any other methodology; and understanding how things look from the inside can give a much better understanding of why those involved act as they do. Certainly we found it generated painful honesty as trust was built up within the group as we continued to meet.

Essentially, this is action research: Nunan (1993:42) states "For me, the salient difference between action research and other forms of research is that in action research the research process is initiated and carried out by the practitioner." Such an approach is unique in that the researcher relinquishes total control of a research plan and its implementation to those who are the subjects of its inquiry. This can be seen in the dynamics of the Site Team particularly in their theological discussion, but also in the opening joys and sorrows exercise that began to shape the whole project. The research project is essentially collaborative in nature. Clearly it represents a naturalistic form of enquiry because of its paradigmatic framework (Depoy & Gitlin 1994:135); because it views knowledge as emerging from individuals and groups who know the best way of obtaining knowledge. It is based on a proposition

developed by Lewin, (cited by Argyris & Schon 1991:86) stating that causal inferences about human behaviour are more likely to be valid and enactable when the human beings in question participate in building and testing them. Hence action research aims at creating an environment in which participants give and receive valid information, make free and informed choices (including the choice to participate) and generate internal commitment to the results of their inquiry. This is true of both the Site Team and their allies.

None of this is without risk, however. There are dangers inherent in this methodology:

First, there is the danger that the results of the project and the subsequent theology developed from them are only relevant in one place and at one time. As Durning (1989:168) sums up succinctly: "Small may be beautiful, but it can also be insignificant." To a certain extent this must be true, but nevertheless there is an opportunity here that, by examining and exploring an underlying theology operating in this community at this time, a dynamic may be found that applies or is of relevance to other or similar communities at other times. However in order to find this, the exploration must be undertaken and must be explicit. Somekh (1993:35) alludes to this danger when he says, "Our explanations of what we think we do and say, and why, rarely tally exactly with what an observer sees who observes what we actually do and say. Much of what we do and say is guided by either half known (or tacit) or sub-conscious values and beliefs." The need to be explicit is not always the case in published work. A good example of the failure to do this may be found in

Jones (2003: 31-46) which is essentially 'raw' congregational data lacking sustained reflection or outcome.

Secondly, as this research is intentionally participatory in nature, it is associated with attempts to bring about emancipation and social justice based on the desires and direct involvement of ordinary people (Todhunter 2001:1-6) – this is a 'high risk' strategy for those in authority. Action research has been used to promote the empowerment of disadvantaged and oppressed groups through the development of common knowledge and critical awareness, which are suppressed by the dominant voice of authority (Finn 1994:25-42). Its roots may be traced to radical writers such as Marx, Engels, Gramsci and Freire (Selener 1997).

Thirdly, there is the danger of unhealthy group dynamics arising that could lead to the domination of the Site Team by one member or a group of members acting as an alliance. This could then force the track of the research to follow their agenda rather than producing an accurate reflection of the community and its difficulties. Avoiding this relies on the skill of the researcher in identifying and managing the dynamics of the group. In published work this is difficult to discern, but it remains a potential pitfall in this type of research. At any point in the action-reflection cycle, the project can be derailed. Aware of this danger, the maintenance of the collegiate group within the Urban Theology Unit was a means of moderating this tendency.

Then, lastly, there is the danger of missing the crucial issues in the mass of detailed data that arises from this methodology. This may be overcome by using different methods of data collection in order to identify common themes as has been undertaken here, with the quantitative census data being filled out by the questions used in the semi-structured questionnaire, and interviews, and all reflected in the exercise to identify the joys and sorrows of both the church and the community. Combining research approaches, it is hoped, will give the reader a fuller picture of the Parish of Moreton. Brewer and Hunter (1989:17) argue that while each individual method may be flawed, the flaws are not identical as they have non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths.

Nevertheless, action research is more demanding than more conventional research methodologies, in that the practitioner is responsible both for the research and for the changes it evokes as part of its nature. This responsibility is shared by all members of the Site Team here, but nevertheless attention has to be given to the ethical implications of the work undertaken. It is both harder to write up and to justify than more conventional approaches to research, and it is less well recognised in overall academic terms. Because it is responsive and evolving, literature searches become more time consuming. As the researcher is intimately bound up at an emotional level with the context, it is much more intimate and to become distanced is, in a sense, to defeat the process.

However, as Garrett (1998:33) writes:

It is not just 'having been there' that gives authority to a sociological analysis, nor does having studied an academic discipline make for "expert" accounts. Rather it is the combination of personal experience, attention to the experience of others, consideration of social theory and a critical appraisal of them all in the light of each other which gives readers the broadest information from which to make up their own minds.

1.8 <u>Action Research and Reflexivity</u>

Action research is more about an approach to research than any given set of methods (Cameron et al 2010) - but it does have characteristics that set it apart, according to both Goodwood and Levin (2007) and Burns (2007). These may best be summarised as:

1. Action research is specifically context based. It addresses real life problems.

2. It is an essentially collaborative process between participants and researcher(s) in which everyone's contributions are taken seriously.

3. It possesses an attitude that prioritises the diversity of experience of experience and diversity of the participants. It sees this as an asset that enriches the process and is integral to it.

4. It holds an expectation that meanings derived from the process will lead to new action.

5. It likewise holds an expectation that reflection upon the action will lead to new meaning.

Action research derives it credibility from the resolution of the participants' problems – and whether, ultimately, they gain more control over their situation.

Cameron (p36) helpfully summarises that action research can therefore be seen as:

- A partnership

- A process

- A conversation

- A way of knowing

It is its fundamentally collaborative nature that distinguishes it from other forms of research:

> The immense importance of insider knowledge and initiatives is evident, making a clear distinction from conventional research that systematically distrusts insider knowledge as co-opted (Greenwood and Levin 2007:51)

As someone who was already on the inside of the situation, I wondered often what more I could bring – except that I honoured immensely the contribution and dedication of my colleagues on the Team. However there were times when it was clear that (because of what I was experiencing at the Urban Theological Unit in terms of training) I was indeed apart in a sense from the rest of the Team. Greenwood and Levin (p54) make this explicit:

> There is a clear value in the action researcher having a level of outsider status, whether as a newcomer to a group of stakeholders or as *an outsider because of experiences or training that set them apart from the rest of the group.* (My italics)

Action research proceeds by a process of reflexivity – that resembles many standard models – such as the Kolb learning cycle (1984).

Reflexivity is concerned with placing the researcher (and the Team) at the centre of an analysis of the knowledge produced through action research. It draws on a variety of biographical aspects such as values, motives, politics, employment and personal status as well as on issues related to the key social

divisions of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and ability as they specifically apply to the researcher. Thus reflexivity is based on the view that all knowledge produced through the research is imbued with these aspects of a researcher's biography. It also can demonstrate how the researcher is `produced' through action research by forwarding the view that action research acts are constitutive of a researcher's identity in some way.

So it encourages the researcher to develop a critical reflexive awareness of themselves as a knowledge producer, and of the research itself as productive of identity.

The term reflexivity is not such an easy one, as it covers several fields of knowledge, such as adult learning, work-based practice, qualitative research, nursing and counselling practice and even theological reflection. Many practitioners in each of these fields have written about what is in essence the same process – for example, in adult learning

Mezirow's Seven Different Levels of Reflection (Jarvis, 1995: 96)

1. Reflectivity: awareness of specific perception, meaning and behaviour

2. Affective reflectivity: awareness of how the individual feels about what is being perceived, thought or acted upon

3. Discriminant reflectivity: Assessing the efficacy of perception, etc

4. Judgemental reflectivity: Making and becoming aware of the value of judgements made

5. Conceptual reflectivity: assessing the extent to which the concepts employed are adequate for the judgement

6. Psychic reflectivity: recognition of the habit of making percipient judgements on the basis of limited information

7. Theoretical reflectivity; awareness of why one set of perspectives is more or less adequate to explain personal experience.

In work-based practice (I first encountered this in Health Visiting):

The key to practitioner success is 'developing one's own continuing theory of practice under real-time conditions' (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 157). This requires `the practitioner to be able to reflect on his or her own microtheories of action (that is, contextually specific ideas about what works in the real world) and to relate these micro-theories to institutional norms and to client expectations' (Brookfield, 1986: 245). The process of reflection-in-action is essentially artistic, that is, the practitioner makes judgments and exercises skills for which no explicit rationale has been articulated but in which she nevertheless feels an intuitive sense of confidence' (Brookfield, 1986: 247).

Reflection in Action: Schon's The Sequence of Moments (Reeves, 1994: 105) summarises the process succinctly:

· Routine Response

· Surprise

· Reflection

· Question Assumptions

· On the spot experiment

Awareness in Action (Reeves, 1994: 107)

Learning-in-action demands heightened self-awareness. As well as reflecting on events - before, during and after, the researcher needs to be aware of their

`surreptitious agenda'. By this is meant those inner, not always conscious, forces, that causes each to handle situations in ways that accord more with the needs of the ego than the needs of the circumstances. The kind of factors that might come into play - needs, preferences, perceptions, emotions – which divert from being as effective as might have been. It is not always easy to be fully conscious of all the nuances of motive. Nevertheless, some self-reflection, coupled with awareness of the more common forms of distorted managerial behaviour, can be a first step to bringing that surreptitious agenda under conscious control. Many of the things that are learned from experience are practical skills, clearly observable behaviours, which can be practised and on which a judgement can be made about how well one has performed. Inner competence is less tangible. For example, while exerting power is something done, it is not always so certain about the outcome. In the final analysis one may only be able to judge upon results. Awareness of self thus has to be linked to the purpose and task in hand.

And there remains the value of retrospective reflection - thinking back, evaluating and recapturing experiences.

In undertaking qualitative research:

Doing qualitative research is by nature a reflective and recursive process. (Ely et al, 1991: 179)

> Reflexivity in research is built on an acknowledgement of the ideological and historical power dominant forms of inquiry exerted over the researcher and the researched. Self-reflection upon the constraining conditions is the key to the empowerment `capacities' of research and the fulfilment of its agenda. As we see it, the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts

recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it. For us, being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice that requires researchers to `stop being "shamans" of objectivity' (Ruby, 1980: 154). To not acknowledge the interests implicit in a critical agenda for the research, or to assume value-free positions of neutrality, is to assume `an obscene and dishonest position' (ibid).

The objectivity or otherwise of the researcher has already been touched upon in 1.6 – and other issues concerning this include subjectivity, social reality and identity. As I reported originally, one of my main problems in asking questions was that the respondents assumed I would already know their answers, as I am well known in the local community (because of the Moreton Partnership group and so forth) and the congregation.

As the approach of the researcher has itself been observed so it has become more multidimensional and nuanced – Burgess (1984) demonstrates it impact on educational research, Hughes (1992) develops the "confessional account" within a family, Oakley (1981) develops a feminist critique of objectivity in research and Maynard and Purvis (1994) look at the intersections of gender and race in undertaking research. I reflect (3.6a) on the importance of being laity in undertaking this particular work as I suspect that some of the issues raised would look or sound very different to, for example, the Rector of the Parish and would be impenetrable to him because of who he is (Rector) – this is nothing personal.

What we "take for granted" is the result of what a social world does to social beings – what reflexivity asks is that this is questioned with the goal that we

will know both ourselves and the social world around us better or in a new way.

Nevertheless, nothing here should be taken to imply that objectivity is a totally forsaken goal – or indeed, as the postmodern theorists tend to imply, that everything is relative so that there is no point in somehow striving for a "better" world.

1.9 <u>The Practitioner and the Practice</u>

In a piece of work such as this, the practitioner or researcher is a much a part of the research as that which is being researched – in that they themselves influence the process and the outcome. That much can be said about almost any methodology – and in most classical research methodologies it is considered something to be avoided as far as possible. However, here it is something to be welcomed and explored as a part of the process.

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My academic experience began later in life, with a M.Sc. in Health Research and Promotion (specialising in Mental Health Promotion), moving on to a M.Th. in Applied Theology (with Distinction) – with a particular interest in

Pastoral Theology. It was at this point that I began to chafe at the limitations of pastoral work – how was it possible to work authentically with an individual if there was then no "healthy" place for them to go? This was, in a sense, a starting point for wanting to undertake further ministerial study – to seek out more about what that "healthy place" could look like. That I wanted to do something intensely connected with people and place was a given to me – and this was the reason for looking at an M.Min. or a D.Min., rather than an M.Phil. or Ph.D. in Theology. In my reading, I found that I was not alone in my wondering (see, for example, Pattison 1997). This did not, and does not, mean that I have given up on pastoral work, merely that there is far more to it than I at first imagined.

I did not anticipate that this work would have a "health" theme. This came out of the Site Team meetings – specifically the prophecy described in the detailed account of Site Team meeting Four (2.8). That it did made it both easier and harder to work with: easier in that the material surrounding the issue was readily accessible and comprehensible; harder in that it was all too easy to get lost in the minutiae and clinical detail and lose sight of the overall scope of the picture or metaphor that was central to the vision of the Team.

In my personal journey through the process, I also encountered something of a "health theme" in that I developed a brain tumour – and underwent surgery and radiotherapy for it. I remain on long term chemotherapy and multiple hormonal replacement therapy alongside anticonvulsant treatment. My personal journey has included the discovery of a life limiting illness – and the

process of the thesis has become extremely significant to me personally, but has, by its very nature, extended the writing significantly.

1.10 <u>Our Approach to Scripture</u>

A parallel approach has been taken to scripture. Primarily it involves taking a text written some 2500 years ago and seeking its potential meaning for a group of people gathered in Moreton today. It involves looking closely at the context of that passage and discerning parallels, or resonances with our own context. This includes looking at the behaviour of the figures in the passage, and assessing in what ways we behave in similar ways today. It does not discount the poetry and structure of the passage, but considers especially the way in which one person treats another. This then is rooted in the experience we share as human beings through the ages, informs our actions and influences our conclusions. The process is formalised by Green (1990:7) as the theological reflection cycle – and he argues that this is something all Christians should be doing: "All Christians worthy of the name should in fact already be theologians". The approach to scripture used by the Site Team reflects this. The liberation approach seeks to give a voice to 'ordinary' Christians. This is grassroots exegesis. The various members of the Site Team brought not only their faith, but also their experience to the project – and so a counsellor brought an understanding of psychology, another, an expertise in health promotion, yet another, the insights of an artist and so forth. Each colour our approach to the biblical text. In what may be termed 'liberation exegesis', the exegetical enterprise does not seek anonymity (Rowland & Corner 1990:37). Mesters (1984:197-210) argues that the Bible is

not simply past history, it is also a mirror to be held up to reflect the story of today and to give it a new perspective – it involves not only the letter of the word, but the spirit of the word. Thus the search is not only the quest for the meaning of the text, but also the direction that the Bible is suggesting to the people of God, within the specific circumstances in which they find themselves. Vincent (2005:155) puts it thus:

> Of itself, the concept of 'reception criticism' could concentrate merely on the historical literary usages of the text, rather than taking seriously the occasions in which individuals have seen themselves as contemporary embodiments or re-enactments of the practice behind the biblical texts.

This echoes the thoughts of Williams (2000:50) on the same theme:

> Christian interpretation is unavoidably engaged in 'dramatic' modes of reading: we are invited to identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to re-appropriate who we are now, and what we shall or can *be*, in terms of the story. *Its* movements, transactions, transformations, become *ours*; we take responsibility for this or that position within the narrative.

As a Site Team, we could not pretend to be neutral in our approach, although (as pointed out in the earlier discussion of quantitative research), neither could anyone else in their reading of the scripture. However, our approach was initially unashamedly inductive rather than deductive. We would argue, along with Vincent (2001:108) that:

> We recreate the Gospel in our own time by repeating bits of the actions of the Gospels in our own contexts. We need the variety of the Gospel stories to discover which stories we are being called upon to re-enact, but also which contexts, problems, issues, people and communities these stories belong to.

While we did not use a gospel passage to centre our deliberations, we nevertheless regard this quote as representing a particular truth that we discovered during the course of our meetings together. Further we saw that

this way of understanding also applied to the rest of scripture. So, we would read "gospel" within the quotation not merely as the four gospels of the canon, but as the Gospel meaning the good news of God's enduring presence with and His faithful love for His people, despite all their difficulties and failures.

Again, this is not without problems. A biblical passage could become so identified with our experiences that any other meaning becomes excluded – including its original one. This is another reason why care has been taken to identify the social and historical aspects of the text: to serve as a reminder that many have read it before in different situations and will do again. Nevertheless, in seeking meaning from the text for us, there must be careful analysis of how and in what context that meaning has been derived, and what this in turn means for us as a community – initially as a community of God's people, and then as a community called Moreton. Our test for 'truth' is not that of a fundamentalist, nor that of a liberal theologian; nor that of an historical-critical exegete; we would argue, as does Elliott (1985) that the test for 'truth' has to do with the effect it has on people's lives and whether as a result of it our community moves closer towards liberation.

1.11 The Problem of Community

Meanings can be slippery, and few words carry so many vague and contradictory meanings as 'community' – a word that will be used throughout this thesis. Milson (1974:1) writes that the word is used to refer to describe a wide variety of social units. Community is not merely, and not always, a simple localized reality. Redfield (1955) provided characteristics for describing

community as distinctiveness, small size, self-sufficiency and homogeneity of its inhabitants. However, this is a very limiting definition, and the community described here would fail on two of the four criteria he lists. Although the community of Moreton is pretty much self-sufficient in terms of services, it is neither small, nor homogeneous: there exist within it many 'communities of interest' (the church being merely one of these in strictly sociological terms) – and these networks may extend beyond the geographical area that is Moreton. However there does remain a notion of geography attached to the concept of community. The sociologist König (1968:40-41) asserts: "In the strictly sociological sense the phenomenon of spatial proximity of neighbourhood is inseparable from the idea of community"; however he is also concerned for us to think not merely in geographical and administrative terms, but to turn our attention to the social relationships involved in community life.

There is something about modern living that affects our understanding of community. The twin modern developments of urbanisation, which, as will be shown, has deeply impacted upon Moreton, and industrialisation, have affected the development of community. There are four main theses in scholarly terms that would back this conclusion. Tönnies (1955), writing originally in the 1870s, contrasted *Gemeinshaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The first of these referring to a form of human grouping that is marked by intimate, rich and satisfying relationship; the latter describing an alliance that is contractual, cold and impersonal. Although he was to find neither in its purest forms, his

conclusion was that under the process of industrialisation, the first was being replaced by the second.

MacIver (1937) defines community as being a group of people who shared their lives at many points, and an association as an assemblage simply to pursue one interest in a group of interests. Here we may contrast the business, church or club with the village, town or nation.

Lying somewhere between these two viewpoints, is the influence of Durkheim (1964) who, with characteristic sensitivity to social pressures, saw the division of labour as a primary cause in the change of the common pattern of social cohesion. He saw that specalisation, particularly in the workplace "mechanical solidarity" (based on like-mindedness) was giving way to "organic solidarity" (based on individual diversity).

Lastly, the American social psychologist Cooley (1992) introduced the notion of "primary groups", which were small enough to allow for complete face-to-face and intimate relationships. These, he argued, were very powerful in forming the social nature and ideals of an individual – so much so, that, in speaking about them, the individual would be likely to use the term "we". From these beginnings, a body of belief has grown that industrial and urban society has created a number of what may be termed "secondary groups" (much more impersonal groupings) with a diminution in the number and effectiveness of primary groups. So, an argument may be made that an individual knows society more and community less. Evidence will be offered

that there remains a longing for community, and also that it is premature to say that community is extinct.

In this thesis, the term community is used mainly in the sense that it refers to the locality of the Parish of Moreton and especially the people who live within it or choose to gather there – this is not to dispute that there are both 'primary groups' and 'secondary groups' operating within it. Indeed, one such primary group is the Site Team, another may be each of the congregations. Further primary groups exist in the Residents' Associations (and so forth) and almost certainly, given the geography, in each of the four parts that make up the parish. The parish is clearly a secondary group in this sense. However, the parish system has its strengths. Living as a part of the community they serve, faithful Christians share in and are affected by local issues. Some argue that the parish system is irrelevant to life in the twenty-first century and the revisions to the Pastoral Measure proposed in 2003 (removing the residency criteria for marriage, baptism and so forth within the Church of England) are recognition of the number of people who 'shop around', as it were, regardless of locality. However Saunders (2004:114) writes:

> There is still life in the old model. However mobile and multi-centered peoples' lives may be today, home for many is still a centre of gravity where life's issues find their hub and where contact with a local Christian community makes most sense. For all the hopeful work of those scanning the horizons for new ways of being Church, there is nothing yet with the critical mass to offer an alternative to the Anglican Church's 'High Street' presence in places of population. Nor do I believe we should willingly relinquish it. Once lost, that footprint in the life of the community will not be regained.

Considering the congregation at Christ Church in 2003 - 182 individuals and families who are sufficiently committed to have their names and contact

details held by the Church – only 16 live outside the parish boundary and 13 of these have close family members living inside it! Despite its numerical growth, Moreton remains a recognisable geographical community with a parish congregation that reflects that fact. It is fair to say that the congregation is in some sense the community and in some wider sense the community is the congregation, in that their memberships overlap and the problems facing the community are reflected in the problems facing the congregation at Christ Church, and the reverse is also true.

1.12 <u>Congregational Studies</u>

Congregational studies is a field that has grown rapidly in depth and complexity over the last twenty or so years (Lyon 2000). His argument is, in many ways, similar to my own theological development – in that pastoral care for the individual is, of necessity limited, unless there is some healthy community in which to site consequent growth and healing. Hence there is a need to care for communities also. He approaches the subject with respect for the congregation, citing Carroll et al (1987:7) that transformation

> is best accomplished when we take seriously and appreciatively, through disciplined understanding their present *being* – the good and precious qualities that are within them – as a means of grace themselves that enable the transformation of congregations into what it is possible for them to *become*

He argues that there is a richness of care within congregations about which we must learn if pastoral care is to progress. While I am not sure that laity would necessarily agree that care is limited to clergy, but that members of a

congregation support one another on a daily basis, his starting point is one with which the Site Team would concur – however there is more to congregational studies than its pastoral aspect.

In its rapid development, various theological disciplines have jumped on the bandwagon, so there are feminist approaches (for example Aune 2004) anthropological approaches (for example Collins 2004) and so forth. There are examples that look solely at a congregation – termed "intrinsic studies" by Woodhead et al (2004:9) and those that "extrinsic studies" (p2) whereby the congregation is seen to exist as a part of a larger community. Some are concerned with church growth (such as Harris 1998), some with church health (Lovell and Widdecombe 1978). Others are concerned with aspects of church life such as worship or ritual (for example Stringer 1999). There are congregational studies that seek to place or situate congregations within their social setting (such as Jenkins 1999) and here the work of Gill (see Gill 2003) has been particularly influential, and finally there are congregational studies that combine any one or more of the above types. Indeed, almost anything that discusses a congregation could be termed a congregational study, or so it seems.

So, I am left wondering if this work is in fact a congregation study. It did not set out to be one. In that it discusses a congregation at length and explores its history, its present and its potential – the answer must be yes. However, the vast majority of congregational studies that I have read have been primarily descriptive of the congregation and here there is active intervention in its path, by means of action research. This is as different as a movie is from a photograph. There is a process discerned here too that may be applicable to

other congregations at other times and in other places. It was also applicable to our community, which was also examined and acted upon and changed as a part of the action research. So is this a congregational study? The answer is maybe. Students of congregational studies will find this work of interest, because the people who undertook it, including myself were from an ordinary congregation in a not terribly special parish in an ordinary community. It changed all of us.

1.13 A Fourth Way of Knowing

In reading this, I suspect the Site Team would argue that I have moved away from a central point – and that is to ask how we can know what God is saying to us as a community of committed Christians about the community in which we live and to which we have been called. Christ Church has a congregation with a long history of an evangelical tradition, which is written into its foundation, and has an equally long tradition as a charismatic church where the gifts as well as the fruits of the Spirit are welcomed and accepted. This influences the research approach. The research that follows here is "Conceptualised, designed and conducted by researchers who are insiders of the culture, using their own epistemology and their own structure of relevance" (Maruyama 1981:230). So, central to this work is another way of knowing that we consider as biblical in origin, and that is prophecy (see section 2.8). Reason (2000:7), a noted action researcher, argues for the inclusion of prophecy as a way of knowing, because

> Prophecy means speaking the unspeakable with clarity and courage. It means speaking against the current habits of thought without anger, but with love and concern.

A flash of inductive insight so often sheds new light on a current situation, leading to change or renewal, healing or a change in thinking. It is very much the kind of speaking into a current situation that is seen in much of biblical prophecy and is experienced in charismatic churches today.

However, as with all other ways of knowing, prophecy cannot be taken at face value, but must be tested and tried. Cavanna (2006:11) writes that the New Testament writers use *pneuma* as a word to describe such spoken messages, both the genuine and the suspect – and that it is these that Paul is most likely to be referring to when he talks of testing the spirits in 1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:32,1 Thessalonians 5:1 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (see also 1 John 4:1-2). Indeed, even in extra-testamental sources (such as the Didache), prophecy is rarely mentioned without some caution or warning about testing the validity of any message.

Ralph Martin (1988:246) describes this testing as follows: "The gift of discerning of spirits is the Spirit conferred capacity to judge the origin of and content of prophecy." However, if Paul's instructions are examined carefully, it can be seen that this discernment was to be undertaken by a group rather than by an individual for, as William Kay (1991:62) summarises: "We end up with the man or woman with a gift of discerning of spirits as the policeman of the church. But what happens if the policeman is corrupted?"

Nevertheless, Vanier (1979:107) argues that the prophetic element must remain if a community is to remain alive and hopeful. He writes:

> With time the prophetic element tends to disappear and the community's members are in danger of looking not to the present or to the future, but to the past, in an effort to maintain the spirit or the tradition. But the prophetic spirit must always be there if the community is to remain alive and hopeful.

While accepting that he writes of one particular type of community, we would suggest this is no less true of a congregation or a church.

As a church, over the past fifteen or so years, the approach to prophecy at Christ Church has been influenced by Clifford Hill. A group of the leadership team from the church attended a series of workshops and conferences run by Dr. Hill in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The following passage is indicative of his approach (1986:37 & 45):

> A major part of the task of the prophets in ancient Israel was to interpret the signs that the Lord sent to them and which enabled the people to perceive his word. The prophets were students of the contemporary world. They kept a constant watch upon events … They were interested in what was happening in the family life of the people in villages, towns and cities. They studied the social situation as a barometer of the health of the nation … In our day there is an urgent need for clear discernment so that we may understand the signs of the times and therefore interpret the word of God.

So, in Christ Church prophecy is seen as forth telling – that is a spark of inspiration that speaks directly into or about a situation, rather than foretelling, or prediction of the future. It is about interpreting in a new way, and as such, is very much at the heart of what this thesis attempts to do. Weber (1978:545) describes this as mystical knowledge but uses similar terms:

> Mystical knowledge is not new knowledge of any facts or doctrines, but rather the perception of an overall meaning in the world … [From] such gnosis … there may be derived a new practical orientation to the world, and under certain circumstances even new and communicable items of knowledge.

So forth telling moves towards a practical response – the prophetic work. We would further agree with Fison (1958:18) who says:

> He speaks directly to the present concrete situation and about this situation he speaks a definitive and decisive word. This word is usually unconditional in form – it is categorical, not hypothetical – but it depends for its efficacy and application upon the co-operation or non-co-operation of those to whom it is addressed.

Thus, while accepting that prophecy is a fourth and valid way of knowing, it is one that must be tested by the evidence it produces just as all methodologies must be. Prophecy will, it is suggested, produce evidence that is of a different order to any of the other three methods, providing unique insight and structure if it is valid. Its validity must, however, be tested by a group (such as the Site Team) and cannot rest upon the shoulders of any given individual. As Dunn (1998:31) concludes:

> Prophecy was a vital and valuable heritage, which Christianity took over from Judaism. In this matter perhaps more than any other Christianity was the true heir and fulfilment of Judaism. And no word better expresses the mature evaluation of prophecy based on centuries of experience than 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22: "Do not stifle inspiration and do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them and avoid the bad of whatever kind" (NEB)

1.14 Conclusion

Having then considered and evaluated four very different methodological approaches: quantitative, qualitative, action research and prophecy - in the next chapter we will see them applied to the community and congregation in question by a group of ordinary lay people. The journey that we took together is recorded in the latter part of Chapter Two and continues into Chapter Three with the Ministry Project we devised and implemented. The analysis and reflections on our community of Moreton and our congregation of Christ

Church went on to shape the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2

Defining the Issues:

Local Context and Action

"First to discover the God who is out there, before us in the world of neighbourhood and work, street, shop and square"

(Ballard 2005:119)

2.1 <u>Introduction</u>

Methodology comes alive when it is used. Understanding our community and our congregation in a structured fashion began a process for us that was both exciting and rewarding. Having completed an impressionistic 'Joys and Sorrows' exercise about Moreton themselves (see 2.6), the Site Team literally walked through Moreton exploring what was available to the local community and gathered this information together for the first time in the history of the community. In addition, we sought out other statistical data to begin to make sense of what was happening in our Parish. Finally, having begun to understand something about all of these things, we sought out people to talk to who may be able to describe what living in the different parts of Moreton was like. Explaining our local context so that others can understand our community and our congregation as well as what happened has been a challenge and a privilege. In this chapter, Moreton and Christ Church is opened up for the reader to understand what it is like to be a part of these interlocking communities. Then the process that the Site Team experienced is explored to the point where the Ministry Project was devised as a response to our findings.

2.2 <u>Moreton</u>

In tradition, Moreton shore is where King Canute reputedly tried to hold back the waves to demonstrate that he was not God, and much of Moreton faces the same problems today – around half of the Parish is on flood plain land (The Countryside Agency 2002). The ongoing building of homes on flood plain

land is of much local debate and concern to those living nearby, and in living memory Moreton Cross, at the centre of the village, although not technically in a flood plain, has flooded on numerous occasions. My father, a native of nearby Neston, told me that in his youth, Moreton was known as 'Muddy Moreton' because of its propensity to flood. Indeed, around the turn of the twentieth century up until some sixty years ago, Moreton Cockles, taken from its mud flats, were highly prized and some of the old fishermen's cottages still survive.

At the village's highest point and close to the Cross (only fifteen metres above sea level, Ordinance Survey 2002) stands Christ Church, built between 1861 and 1863, a fairly mundane mid-Victorian building (Appleyard 1966). Adjacent to it, stand the modern Parish Centre, built with funds donated to the Church by its members, and completed in 1980.

Within ten minutes walk of the Church and within the Parish boundary to the south east lie three 1960s high-rise blocks known as the Heights, which are all rented, and form part of the Sandbrook estate, dating from the same period, a Pathways[4] regeneration area, but also within the Parish boundary to the south and west lie houses with an asking price of nearly one and a half times the average for the ward of Moreton in which they lie - £140,000 (The Land Registry 2001). Walking roughly north east for ten minutes brings you

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[4] These are areas of high socio-economic deprivation and awarded Objective 1 European Economic Community Funding Grants. The Funding ended in June 2006 and was replaced by Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. This slightly altered the geographic picture in Moreton, as it was less specific (being Council Ward based, rather than postcode based) but the Sandbook and Yew Tree Estates continue to qualify for additional funding on the basis of deprivation. The Lingham Estate lost its funding.

into the Lingham estate, mostly council owned properties, dating from the 1940s and 1950s, and walking roughly north east for the same length of time brings you into the Yew Tree estate, again mostly council owned properties, and again within a Pathways regeneration area, the North Moreton Pathways Partnership. In geographic terms, around half the area of the Parish is recognised as being deprived, by virtue of acquiring Pathways status.

DIAGRAM 1

REPRESENTATION OF THE PARISH OF CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

N

Millhouse

Tarran Way   Yew Tree

Lingham

Moreton
Cross

Christ Church

Sandbrook
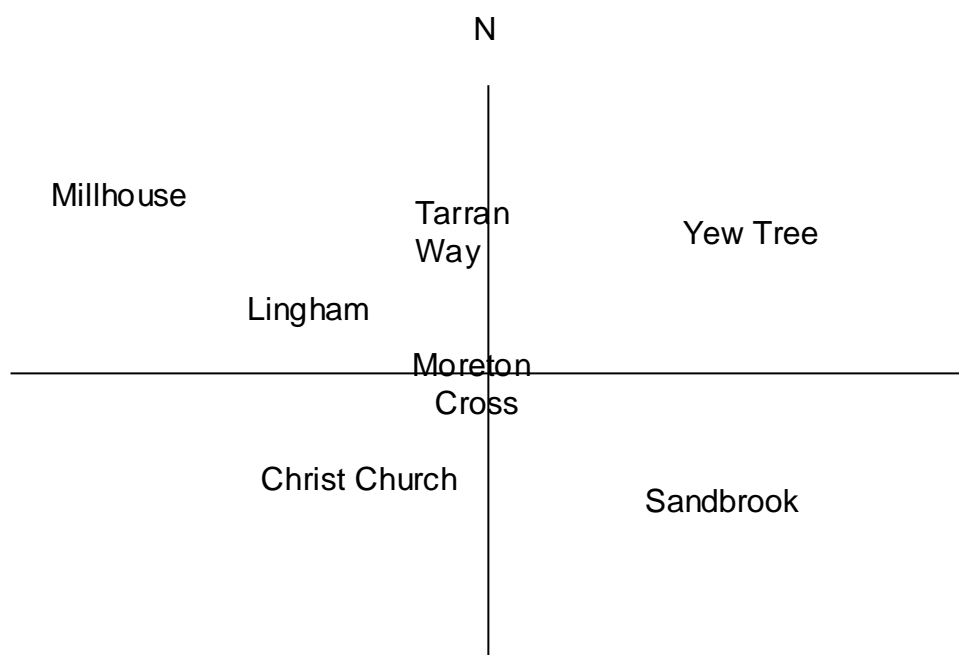
Diagrammatic representation of Parish of Christ Church Moreton showing various areas referred to in text. North is to the top of the page. The neighbouring community of Leasowe is to the North East.

Moreton Cross (actually a roundabout) stands in the middle of the village, and represents the point where two 'A' roads meet (See Diagram 1). It effectively

divides the community into four parts. In the area of the Cross, there is a reasonable shopping area, containing a Kwik Save supermarket, Iceland frozen foods, and Cool Trader, a budget frozen food shop. The remainder of the shops include a couple of greengrocers, two butchers – again one 'budget' and one a little more expensive. What dominates the Cross are the number of charity shops (eight) and the number of cafes (six). Immediately behind the Cross in its north-eastern corner is Moreton Market, which is actually a very large Pound Shop – selling short dated food, cheap toys and toiletries, cards, plastic goods and a huge array of fake flowers. To buy the weekly shopping, those who can commute out of Moreton to the Tesco Metro around three miles away to the east or to the Sainsbury's about the same distance from Moreton to the south. It is therefore possible to live cheaply within the village in terms of everyday needs, but those who have the means avoid the village, as the range of shops, although complete, is generally poor in terms of quality, generally depressing in terms of layout, lighting and choice and often (in the case of charity shops) temporary. Although Moreton Cross does not have more than one or two empty shops at a time, the turnover of the actual businesses is high. A recent development has been the arrival of a couple of firms within the Cross offering mortgages and loans to those who have previously found it difficult to get credit.

There is a smattering of 'local corner' shops away from the Cross – a small parade of shops in the Lingham estate, and a similar one in the Sandbrook. Both comprise a post office, a small general store and newsagents, an off licence and a chip shop. Other than this, there are no other shopping facilities

within the Parish for the 19,863 residents (Diocese of Chester 2001). At the extreme edges of the Parish, particularly the newish (1980s) privately built and owned Millhouse estate, it is only possible to walk to the local corner shop if you are young and fit.

In political terms the Parish is divided into two wards – Moreton (comprising the western half of the parish in its entirety) and Leasowe (this comprises the eastern side of the Parish plus the more northerly estate of Leasowe itself – almost exactly half of the Leasowe Ward is within the Parish boundary). All the councillors for both the Moreton and Leasowe wards represent the Labour Party (Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, 2002). This means depending upon enumeration district statistics for the eastern part of the Parish (comprising the Yew Tree and Sandbrook estates). Fortunately from my perspective this area is the North Moreton and Sandbrook Pathways area and so detailed information is available for this more deprived part of the Parish, comprising some 2036 residential properties (Mott MacDonald 2002) along with the small industrial estate to the immediate north of Moreton Cross, known as Tarran Way.

Painting a quantitative picture of the Parish means therefore thinking of it in two halves with the divide falling on the north/south axis in the above diagram.

2.3 'Prosperous' Moreton

While it is easy to think of the western half of the Parish as being prosperous, it is only so relative to the eastern half. In fact it ranks just

on the lower 25th centile on the Indices of Deprivation 2000[5] (2,187 of 8,414 wards). Of the 12,900 people who live here 19% are under 16 (National Statistics 1998 figures). 8.75% were in receipt either of Disability Living Allowance (under 65 years) or Attendance Allowance (over 65 years) in May 2000 (Department for Work and Pensions 2001). This is slightly higher than the 8.6% for Wirral overall. A further 6.97% were claiming Income Support in August 2000 (Department for Work and Pensions 2001), although this is a significantly lower than the Wirral overall, with 9.45% at the same date. These figures give a fair idea of the economically inactive population and thus a reasonable indicator of the economic prosperity of an area.

Employment in this western area tends to be in the service sector or in public services, such as the police force or nursing, and this means that many living in this part of the Parish commute to their work, and many work shifts. Most are not from Wirral originally. The vast majority of the housing in this part of the Parish is privately owned, well over 80% compared with the Wirral average of 73% (National Census 2001), and house prices are relatively cheap compared with the national average (£84,231 in Moreton compared with £119,436: Land Registry 2001), making it generally an attractive place to live for young families where both parents work. The huge, sprawling Millhouse estate is entirely

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[5] This is the Government's most recent published record of relative deprivation across England, using a sophisticated methodology developed by Oxford University, analysing and combining data from six separate domains – income, employment, health and disability, education, housing and geographical access to services There is a separate indictor for child poverty. It shows detail at ward level only with 1 as the most deprived ward and 8414 as the most affluent.

private housing built over the past twenty years by large house builders such as Barratt and Redrow. A further attraction to this area is the excellent road connection to the M53 motorway leading to Liverpool (15 minutes) and Chester (30 minutes) and the train service to Liverpool, (every 15 minutes throughout the day).

However, the Lingham estate nearer the centre of the village is far less prosperous than the Millhouse. Originally council house stock, most of the more desirable properties have been sold off into private ownership under the 'right to buy' originated by the Conservative government of the 1980s. The properties that remain in council hands as a result are largely flats, semi-sheltered accommodation for the elderly, and those properties whose tenants are too poor to buy their homes. The 900 individuals claiming Income Support in this part of Moreton in August 2000 (Department for Work and Pensions 2001) all lived on the Lingham, although it is by no means the most deprived area of the Parish. People living on the Lingham estate are more likely to be in semi-skilled and manual jobs as employees.

Interviewees here were largely self-selecting. I asked the congregation if people would be willing to talk to me briefly about their day to day lives away from church and how they saw Moreton as a community. The choice was random in that I took the first respondents from each of the four areas regardless of age or sex, and asked the same two questions of each:

"Tell me a little about your day to day life"

"How do you see Moreton as a community?"

Prompts were available for the first question around work and shopping habits, but no prompts were offered for the second question. Background biographical details were completed from material given in the interviews supplemented by the author's pre-existing knowledge. The interviews were conducted in February and March 2003.

The view of life from the Millhouse estate and that from the Lingham estate are then quite different. Cheryl,* who is 46, lives on the Millhouse estate. She has two teenaged children, and works part time as a librarian. Her husband works in the accounts department of a large firm. They moved to Moreton from the Midlands about fifteen years ago. I asked her what her day-to-day life was like and how she saw Moreton as a community.

> *I work Monday and Thursday in Hoylake Library, and on Tuesdays I used do to voluntary work at the Fountain Project[6] until the manager left. I don't really know what to do with my spare time now. We go shopping to Sainsbury's or to Tesco. I don't really shop in Moreton – there isn't enough choice, although Iceland in quite handy. Moreton doesn't really have any problems as such, does it? Oh, except for the teenagers hanging around outside the Library. They can be a bit of a nuisance, according to the staff. I don't know about Moreton as a community – perhaps they ought to knock the Heights down – they're a bit of an eyesore – I don't know.*

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* All names have been changed.
[6] A Drop-in Day Centre for people with Mental Health Difficulties in Birkenhead.

Rene* is 72 and widowed. She lives on the Lingham estate. I asked her the same questions.

> *Well, of course I don't work now, but I help out at the luncheon club for the elderly at Maryland Lane[7]. I used to work at Cadbury's[8] on shift work, but they only had temporary contracts and no pension scheme then. I get my pension on a Tuesday, and of course the Housing pays the rent. Ray didn't believe in pensions, or getting into debt, so we didn't buy the house, although I've lived there since it was built. My grandson lives in the flats opposite me. I mostly shop local, at Kwik Save although I take a friend in the car to Tesco's once a fortnight. There are drugs on the estate, I suppose, but it doesn't bother me. What does bother me is that since the Council closed the home for the elderly, the building is lying derelict and kids gather, drinking. There and the Cross – I don't walk round it now at night.*

2.4 'Poor' Moreton

The eastern side of the Parish, forming half of the Leasowe Ward, paints a very different picture of life from that of the western half of the Parish. As all but a handful of roads in this part of the Parish are within Pathways areas, more detailed statistics are available. Essentially, the eastern half of the Parish is made up of two large estates – Sandbrook and Yew Tree, both in this Ward. The Leasowe Ward is recognised as being deprived – ranking 289 on the 2000 indices of deprivation. This part of the ward has a population of around 6000 people, 23% of whom are under 16 (1998). 11% of the population were in receipt of either Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance (May 2000) markedly higher than the Wirral average of 8.6%. 36.13% of households in this part of the Parish claim Income Support (1999) and 17.74% of

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[7] Maryland Lane here refers to the community centre built in the 1960s to serve the Lingham estate.
[8] Cadbury's (now Horizon Biscuits) is the major employer in Moreton, having a large factory opposite the Tarran Way Industrial estate.

these claimants were lone parents. (All data from Mott MacDonald Pathways Impact Monitoring Report 2002 – (abbreviated here to PIMR).

Between 1998 and 2001 the rate of Council Tax Rebate claimants in the area actually rose to 55.4% of all households from 49.2% (PIMR 2002). This a fair indicator of deprivation, as it covers not only those who claim Income Support, but also the elderly (22% of this population in 1998, National Statistics) on low incomes, as well as those on low earnings. 74.4% of the properties within Yew Tree and Sandbrook are rented accommodation, showing that the right to buy has largely bypassed these communities, unlike the Lingham estate. Of those families with children of school age, 67.7% claim free school meals (compared with 25.7% for Wirral overall in 2001 – PIMR 2002). This is an apparent increase since the figures were first collected in 1998 of 9.4%, although this figure must be treated with caution owing to differences in entitlement over this time. However, rates of unemployment actually declined from 18.6% to 15.5% of the economically active population in the year April 2000 – April 2001: but this compares poorly with the rest of Wirral with the district rate in April 2001 standing at 7.4% (PIMR 2002).

The gap in mean household income between this part of the Parish and the Wirral average continues to grow. In Wirral overall mean household income in 1996 was £18,730 and in 2000, £21,200, a growth of 14.2% over the four years. In this part of the parish, mean income in 1996 was £11,680 increasing to £12,570 in 2000, a growth of only 7.6% in the same

four year period. Over the same period, mean incomes nationally rose by 19.6%. (CACI Ltd 'Paycheck' Data[9] used in PIMR 2002).

Wallace* is now 76 years old. He lives on the southern edge of the Yew Tree estate in a privately rented house. He was Mayor of Wirral, and worked at Cammell Lairds as a shipwright until he was 52, when he was made redundant. Now he suffers from asbestosis as a result of his work. While he has a small pension, he relies mainly on benefits to pay the rent and Council Tax. He lost his wife in 2001, and of his five grown up children, only one lives in Moreton. I asked him what his day-to-day life was like and how he viewed Moreton as a community.

> *Moreton, well, when all this estate was new, people were queuing up to live here, but now ... well, no one seems to care much. The Cross is a bit of a dump, all the thrift shops and charity shops, although I'm glad of the Kwik Save. It's getting a long way to walk to the bus stop now, and I'm thinking of moving, perhaps to Sunningdale[10] but I'd prefer Maurice Jones Court[11] as it's nearer the Cross. Moreton used to be quite nice, as I said, but there's no hope around now. A couple of weeks ago there was a gang of youths joyriding in my road, and they burnt the car out in front of my house. I don't mind admitting I was scared. Two o'clock in the morning it was! They all ran off quick enough, though.*

It is possible that there are special problems experienced on the Sandbrook Estate. There are, in fact, four tower blocks – one of which has been expertly converted into sheltered accommodation for the elderly. Of the other three, one is rented exclusively to single men and the other two are used to 'decant' into while the Council upgrades

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[9] CACI Ltd undertook interviews with statistically significant numbers of households within the area, although being based on a sample the absolute figures cannot be guaranteed, however they do provide a consistent and regular picture of relative levels of income.

[10] A specially converted high rise block on the Sandbrook estate for sheltered housing for the elderly, owned by the Council.

[11] Another sheltered housing complex, owned by Maritime Housing Association. Wallace would qualify for this because of his previous occupation.

housing in other areas of Wirral. There are three or four regular falls from the top of one or another of the latter three blocks in most years, and five or so years ago, when one of the more notorious areas of Birkenhead was being upgraded, burglary rates within Moreton rose significantly, according to local residents. I have particular reason to remember this time, as I had just started working in the Parish, and visited an elderly lady whose husband had died. On the day of the funeral, her house was burgled.

Arthur* is now 55 years old. He lives on the Sandbrook estate on the ground floor of a low rise block. He cared for his mother until she died about five years ago, and now lives alone except for his dog, Sheba. He is severely affected by arthritis and suffers from bouts of severe depression. As a result of this, he receives Disability Living Allowance at the middle rate for care and the high rate for mobility (allowing him to have a 'Motorbility' car) and Incapacity Benefit as well as Housing and Council Tax benefits. I asked him the same questions.

> *The kids come round and bang on the windows and shout names at me. They call me a 'dog sh*gg*r' and they throw things at me sometimes. If it wasn't for the car and getting out, I think I would have ended it all before now. Sometimes I go to Sunningdale, it's only over the road, and sit and chat to the old folk there, but I'm not old enough to get a flat there. That's where I'd like to be – company if you want it. I don't cook much at home – I eat in a café, or get a Chinese in, or I drive to Tesco and get bargains in their reduced section. If you know when to go, you can get some good ones – late at night is best. But when I turn into this estate a big black cloud settles over me. There is something dark here. Moreton is OK itself, lots of cheap places to eat, and I can always get smuggled fags.*

As the 'kids' or 'youth' were mentioned specifically in all four of these interviews, I felt it would be useful to ask the younger people what they thought of Moreton, so, in April 2003, I went up to the Cross to ask them. Many were reluctant to speak to me, but eventually Jez*, who told me he was seventeen, agreed to speak to me. He would not tell me which part of Moreton he lived in, or how he spent his time. I asked him what he liked or disliked about Moreton.

> *I actually like Sacred Heart Church[12] although I don't go there. It's the nicest building in Moreton, but every shop needs knocking down. Moreton offers melancholy to all its visitors, but the Shore is good when it ain't covered in dog c**p. I like the cycle paths too – clutching at straws, or what? Moreton is the home of the cr*ppiest bus service and the people in the pubs look at you like you shouldn't be there, hostile isn't in it. The shops get me down, and the Council taking all the fields for housing. You've got to get out of Moreton to go anywhere good, and I can't most of the time. All the things I want to buy I can't here. CDs at Roxy[13] are too pricey. There are too many bloody charity shops, no classy joints. There's nothing else. Nothing to do, nowhere to go……*

I wanted to check this out and so I asked my eldest son, who was then 14, what he thought:

> *Moreton is, well, slow – there's not much to do, although the Cross looks nice. The Shore is always untidy. I don't shop in Moreton, not enough choice – I go on the train to Birkenhead. Other places have more things to do.*

2.5 Education – Learning for Life

There are three LEA primary schools in the Parish, only one of which has a nursery class (Lingham Primary), and two Church Aided Primary Schools – one Roman Catholic, the other Church of England. Further to this, there is one special school, catering for primary aged children with

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[12] The Roman Catholic Church standing beside the Cross.
[13] Roxy Records, a shop on the Cross. This closed in 2005.

specific learning difficulties, and a unit for visually impaired children of primary age attached to one of the LEA primaries (Sandbrook Primary). Just over the parish boundary in one direction lies a primary school for children with moderate learning disabilities, and in another lies the special secondary school for children with moderate learning disabilities for the whole of Wirral. One of the two secondary schools for children with severe or complex learning difficulties is within the parish boundary, as is an Adult Training Centre for adults with learning disabilities. There are no mainsteam secondary schools within the parish, and on leaving primary youngsters are faced with a long journey to school. As Wirral continues to have Grammar schools and the eleven plus is still an option here, there are as many as eight secondary schools any child from the Parish could attend. Actually around twenty percent of pupils attend grammar school in Wirral (Department for Education and Skills 2002).

Results vary from school to school within the Parish as the Key Stage 2 results for 2002 (Department for Education and Skills 2002) indicate in Table 1:

TABLE 1

KEY STAGE 2 RESULTS –MORETON PRIMARY SCHOOLS (2002)

	% SEN	L4+ English	L4+ Maths	L4+ Science	Av. Points
Christ	17.6	90%	80%	98%	28.9

Church					
Sacred Heart	7.8	96%	96%	94%	29.4
Eastway*	52.2	70%	65%	76%	26.4
Lingham	17.0	64%	64%	85%	27.3
Sandbrook*	41.7	75%	81%	83%	27.2
England Average	N/A	75%	83%	86%	27.4

* School within Pathways Regeneration area – both East Moreton. Note: both Church Aided Schools take children from the whole of the Parish, but are significantly more likely to take children from West Moreton as two of the three other primary schools are situated within the (geographically smaller) East Moreton area.

Children from the eastern half of the parish are less likely therefore to have done well in school by the age of eleven than are the other children in the Church aided schools and more likely to have been noted to have some form of special educational need.

Adult education in Moreton is sorely lacking, although Pathways funding has been responsible for the development of an IT suite at Moreton Library, which has computing courses, and provision, through European funding, of the new UK On Line Centre in the Yew Tree estate. The Further Education Funding Council also fund classes run by Birkenhead Sixth Form College at Christchurch Parish Centre, which is the only adult education provision within the Parish to run a crèche alongside. All classes are full and have a waiting list, indicating a potential for further development.

The number of special schools and units along with the presence of the Social Services base for children with disabilities and an Adult Training Centre, combined with at least twelve small group homes for adults with learning disabilities means that there are far higher numbers of children and adults with various disabilities within the parish for at least part of their day than would be expected. In part the reason for this is a series of historical anomalies (for example, as a school building became vacant through a demographic change, its use was changed) but in part it is because Moreton is relatively flat and so easy to negotiate with wheelchairs. Naturally, as one home became successful, so it attracted others in the case of the group homes. The adult community generally is accepting of children and adults with learning or physical disabilities (the same cannot be said of the younger people). For example, I asked two families in the parish with children who have disabilities, one an adult child, how accepting they found their local community (Bailey 2001:88 & 91):

> *Everybody's been marvellous. In fact I think the neighbours in this road have been fantastic … Everybody rallies round. They've accepted Alec* really well – never had anything bad. I can't fault them. When Darren* was younger he had a lot of stick about Alec from school. He got in lots of fights because of what other children said about Alec.*

> *The local community in this street, they accept them and are quite friendly with them. We've had no upset whatsoever. The people are quite kind. They accept them. They bring the ball back, things like that – old people, eighty odd will chuck the ball back and laugh...We don't have any friends round for the kids. They play as a family group. Jamie* had a party not long ago, and invited people round, from school, and they said they'd invite him back for tea – but it's never happened and this happens quite often. I don't know.*

2.6 Christ Church and the Site Team

The congregation at Christ Church is drawn mainly from the more prosperous western side of Moreton. The congregation is divided between three main services: one more traditional in nature, a family service and an evening service that is free in style. Within the Church of England, Christ Church would call itself conservative evangelical in nature, although it remains open to the gifts as well as the fruits of the Holy Spirit, unlike many other conservative churches. There are approximately 160 people on the Church Electoral Roll, but 182 individuals and families on the more informal contact list – with approximately 100 people attending the services on any given Sunday. Christ Church suffered a serious schism in 1999,[14] which resulted in the loss of between 30 and 40% of its congregation and from which it has yet fully to recover. The previous Rector left in January 2000 as a direct consequence of this and the present Rector arrived in November 2001. In 2003 the Church began to look seriously at the ways in which it engages with the local community, through pastoral work, such as bereavement and baptism follow-up, and through the use of the Parish Centre next door to the Church itself – which currently offers computing classes,[15] parents and toddler group, keep fit and an art group among others. It also hosts a tea bar open throughout the week, and used mainly by people who experience some level of mental ill health or learning disability.

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[14] There will be more said about the schism and its consequences, especially in Chapter 5.
[15] These closed in July 2005 in part because of access problems and in part because of difficulties in working between the Service Provider and the Parish Administrator. The same classes are now provided at Moreton Methodist Church.

As far as was possible, the Site Team[16] was drawn proportionately from across the three main services and across Moreton as a whole. Initially, it comprised fourteen members – three from the Millhouse estate, two from the Lingham estate, one from the Yew Tree estate, two from the Sandbrook area and three from the area marked Christ Church in the diagrammatic representation shown earlier. Two commute to the church from outside of the parish and work in the parish and the final member attends another church, but works in Moreton – thus enabling some objectivity. Members were advised that this was going to be a serious commitment in terms of time and effort, and had to "opt in". As far as was possible, the group was also representative for the age range of the congregation and was roughly equally split at the outset between male and female. Initially, it included the Rector of the parish, although he chose not to attend after the first two meetings. This group has drawn up its list of ten joys and sorrows about both the community of Moreton and about Christ Church. To do this each member of the group was ask to think of three positive qualities and three negatives - these were written onto a flip chart without comment. The group were then asked to discuss them and rank them in order of importance, to give a final "top ten". The results are shown below in Table 2 and Table 3.

TABLE 2

THE COMMUNITY OF MORETON:JOYS AND SORROWS

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[16] All members of the Site Team gave their voluntary informed consent to be involved with the Project.

	Joys	Sorrows
1	Good situation/location	Gangs of kids doing nothing
2	Schools	Vandalism/petty crime
3	Pleasant walks to coast	Poor image (self and others)
4	Christ Church	Alcohol/drugs
5	Eating out - Wetherspoons	Family breakdown
6	Shopping	Negativity
7	Motorway	The Heights
8	Being near the sea	Sense of hopelessness
9	Transport system (trains/buses)	No secondary school
10	Churches – a wide choice	No open spaces

These images and thoughts reflect the analysis of the context of Moreton which was undertaken later by the Site Team, and are backed up both by the interviewees from the various areas of the community and by the statistical data presented. One example is the positive view held about the transport links and the negative view of "the Heights". It is, of course, harder to say whether the group's view of Christ Church as a community is accurate, but it reflected fairly well the joys and sorrows around the community as a whole, suggesting a fairly accurate representation, as, in the main, the congregation live in the community of Moreton. Even though the Site Team went on to admit that they were not really representative of the community as a whole (the overwhelming majority of the congregation come from the more prosperous part of the parish), it seems as if their concerns about their

community do in some measure reflect those uncovered so far: "Jez" reported that there was nothing for young people to do and nowhere for them to go, and the Site Team were also concerned about the same issue. "Arthur" reported harassment and petty crime, "Wallace" more serious crime and "Rene" reported vandalism and kids drinking in the streets, all likewise reflected in the Site Team's concerns. The Site Team further mentioned the consequences of these types of problems: a sense of hopelessness and a poor image of ourselves as a community, and a poor image being had by others of Moreton as a community.

TABLE 3

CHRIST CHURCH: JOYS AND SORROWS

	Joys	Sorrows
1	JOY-One Way groups for youth	Division
2	Friendship	Lack of joy
3	Teaching	Not representative of the community
4	Financial policy	Spiritual inertia
5	Parish Centre	Self-absorbtion
6	Christ Church School	Lack of encouragement
7	Toddler group	Moaning
8	Range of styles of worship	Conflict
9	Being the 'Parish Church'	Underused Parish Centre
10	Hunger for growth	No evangelism/mission

The team seemed to view the youth work as a particular strength in the church, reflecting the concerns around young people in the 'sorrows' concerning the community. One Way in particular reached out directly to young teenagers "hanging around" the Parish Centre and graveyard on a Monday evening. This team, drawn from the church, was courageous enough to examine itself and found the same problems with self-image reflected in the community as a whole. In 1999, the congregation experienced a schism, which resulted in around a third of the congregation leaving the Church. The wounds of this have yet to heal fully – and this may be reflected in the 'sorrows' expressed here, such as self-absorbtion. From this 'low point' however, the congregation has grown steadily. The financial policy of the Church is not to raise funds at all, but to rely on giving and ten percent of its total income is tithed for mission at home and abroad. This included the building of the Parish Centre, for example. Such giving is impressive in a relatively poor community overall.

2.7 Some Possible Conclusions about the Local Context

Moreton seems to be a community that is divided along several lines, the geography of the Parish itself lends weight to this notion, but there are other, more subtle, and ultimately more damaging divisions – between the 'rich' and the 'poor', between the old and the young, and between the able and the disabled, and even between the three main congregations within the Church. All these have been indicated here.

These divisions have led to fractures at the heart of the community itself, and all those interviewed, while not explicitly saying so, seem to be experiencing a lack of hope that division and conflict engender. This is reflected in the 'sorrows' lists drawn up by the Site Team, such as a sense of hopelessness in the community and a lack of joy in the church.

Some of the available information has been omitted with the aim of enabling a reader to glimpse what Moreton is really like to live in; bare statistics alone cannot provide that insight gained by personal experience. In omitting or including data, I am aware of my own bias, but all communities have some level of problem with drugs, for example, and Moreton is no different, but no worse and no better than anywhere else. Patterns for crime follow the regional averages, except in the regeneration areas, but that has been alluded to by the interviewees and can certainly be inferred. In common with national trends, health is worse generally in the Parish the poorer you are, and little would be gained by repeating the detailed data here.

I have chosen, at this stage, to focus on the parish and not on the congregation, but one of the Site Team's sorrows was that the congregation was not representative of the parish as a whole; and mapping where the members of the electoral roll live serves only to confirm this – the vast majority living in relatively 'prosperous' western Moreton. Several years ago now, we chose to move house from the Millhouse to the Sandbrook. We now live on the northern fringe of the

estate, within sight of the Pathways defined area (even though we did not know it at that time), as a sign of our commitment to the more deprived area of the parish.

2.8 <u>Seeking a Scriptural Context</u>

Having examined the local context the Site Team, as a group of Christians, wrestled with scripture. What might we find the Bible that was relevant to our situation?

As a conservative evangelical church, scripture is seen as having the ultimate authority. For us as a congregation, high value is placed upon both the reading of the Bible at services and upon good exegetical preaching – and it is expected that all who preach will have attained an extremely high level of biblical scholarship. Indeed, more weight is generally placed upon exegesis than upon application, and certainly much more than on experience and tradition, both in preaching and in bible study. All church activities begin with a passage from the Bible being read and expounded upon, and sermons generally are expected to last for at least twenty minutes. For us to change our mindset and to approach the Bible through the medium of our experience, rather than our experience through the medium of the Bible was a major shift.

The process of selecting and working on passages of scripture was done initially over the course of two Site Team meetings in April 2003. During the first of these, the group concentrated on identifying themes that had emerged from our discussions thus far, and looking for scripture passages that seemed

to us to resonate with Christ Church and our local community as we understood them through our investigations and our experience of being a part of them.

Three main themes were identified during the initial discussion:

1. The first theme focused on the "Sense of hopelessness" and "Lack of joy" that had featured on the "sorrows" lists (see Tables 2 and 3). We felt initially that this may have to do with a lack of identity or a feeling of having no significance. We felt that, as a Church, we needed to learn who we are in Christ.

2. Our second theme centred on outreach, noting that one of our first joys about the Church was our youth work, and one of our first sorrows about the community was around the gangs of kids "doing nothing". Our feeling was that we needed to reach out to others both to build community and to bring others to Christ.

3. Our third theme concentrated on negatives again – around "moaning", "conflict" and "vandalism". Our conclusion as a group was that we are self-centred as a Church and as a community. We recognised this as being a breach of the Great Commandment to love one another.

We explored many potential passages, for example, Philippians 2:1-4 and Luke 14:15-24. However, both of these passages somehow spoke to us about where we "ought to be" rather than where we were, and we wanted to hear

reflected for ourselves the jarring notes of conflict and lack of community that we had already identified as being a part of the experience of living in Moreton and being part of Christ Church. There was something about the passage that we finally chose that somehow 'chimed' with everyone present, as being an honest reflection of where we felt both the church and the community stood, but which opened up to us the potential for redemption and renewal: Isaiah 58:1-12. Each of us identified with the quarrelling, strife and malicious talk with a degree of shame! We all agreed that this passage would form the basis for our further discussions and direction; and the group decided that they would go away and meditate and pray about this passage, and return to our next meeting with something they could contribute, even though nothing was yet finalised.

In opening next the meeting, I read the Isaiah passage to the group so that we could recapture that sense of resonance that we had felt at the close of our previous meeting.

> 1. *Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.*
> 2. *For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.*
> 3. *"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet on the day of fasting you do as you please and exploit all your workers.*
> 4. *Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.*
> 5. *Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and*

> *for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?*
> 6. *Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?*
> 7. *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*
> 8. *Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness (or your righteous one) will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard.*
> 9. *Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, "Here am I." If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing of the finger and malicious talk,*
> 10. *And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like noonday.*
> 11. *The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*
> 12. *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age old foundations; you will be called "Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings"*
> (Isaiah 58:1-12 NIV)

There was a long silence, which felt both appropriate and God-filled. We noted that while our list of "joys" about our community and our church had to do with location and facilities, the "sorrows" lists for both were mainly psychological or spiritual in nature, being concerned with hopelessness, inertia, conflict and so forth. One member of the Team recalled a prophecy, given to a member of the Church during an evening service about four years earlier, in March 1999. This was immediately prior to Christ Church experiencing a schism, which resulted in almost one third of the congregation leaving, an experience we felt, the church was still recovering from.

Nobody present had fully understood this prophecy at the time. The words of the prophecy were "Christ Church is my Anorexic Bride". This strange

description of Christ Church had a huge impact upon the team. It was experienced existentially. As Fison (1958:21) says:

> True prophecy is never theoretical; it is always "existential". The prophets stand up against the sins of their own people; they do not deal with the sins of others, except in so far as such an extension of the scope of their prophecy follows inevitably from its own fundamental premises and doctrines.

With the context of fasting in Isaiah 58, we felt that anorexia – that is the notion of self-imposed fasting - was worth exploring further in order to try to understand our context better and to see if we could uncover ways of addressing at some level the problems facing both our church and our community. This was a hugely important moment for the Site Team as a whole. It was a pivotal moment. The "leap" was made intuitively and was accepted immediately by everyone present in the room. It has taken me six years to disentangle that moment! It was by no means as simple as it first appeared to be. Certainly there was a level of unease within the Site Team, as we all felt that we were indeed on the edge of something that "speaks the unspeakable". What we had previously come to accept as 'normal' was in Laing's words:

> A product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience … Radically estranged from the structure of being. (1967:25-27).

In other words, quite suddenly, and with great sadness and apprehension, we realised that, as participants in our context, we were not as healthy as we had thought. The project we were embarking on quite suddenly took on a new dimension – it became an issue of understanding and healing. Reason (1998:10) writes:

> To heal means to make whole; we can only understand our world as a whole if we are a part of it. To make whole also means to make holy;

another characteristic of a participatory worldview is that meaning and mystery are restored to human experience, so that the world is once again experienced as a sacred place.

In seeking to take the prophecy about Christ Church seriously as a way of knowing (see 1.9), we sought to begin to understand together something of what anorexia might mean and something about the nature and meaning of food. Summarised and annotated below are the major points of our research and subsequent discussions, which I produced as part of a handbook for the Site Team in November 2003

> Anorexia Nervosa is an abnormal psychological state giving rise to a substantial loss of body mass (Rosenhan & Seligman 1989:537-539). The sufferer has a very distorted body image, and feels fat even when actually emaciated. The rising trend of incidence has led some (such as Garfinkel & Gardner 1982), to blame the overwhelming pressure to conform to some idealised image of the body found in modern Western culture, at a time when the average weight has increased due to better nutrition. However, this only goes some way to explaining the disorder. Additionally, there seem to be issues surrounding control and self-image that have a powerful effect. It is postulated that the sufferer feels that they have no control over their lives, suffers from a poor sense of identity (Pasquali, Arnold & DeBasio 1989:724-728), and that eating is the one thing that they can have power over (Bruch 1982:1531-1538). Having control over how much they eat enables them to gain a sense of mastery and control. Despite the presence of, and encouragement to eat, available food, the sufferer can starve to death (Oehler & Burns 1987:163-171). The preoccupation with controlling food distorts the sufferer's relationships with others as well as with herself (most people experiencing anorexia are female), and the disorder includes concealing food (to avoid eating it) and 'pointless' exercise, such as pacing, to encourage weight loss further. In mood, the sufferer can be euphoric or depressed, and reject any idea of emotional neediness – extreme dieting and exercising serving to create a barrier between the anorexic and her own emotional needs.

> At a human level, we are all aware of the power of food to enchant. When we remember significant events in our lives, we can almost guarantee that food will feature in there somewhere – weddings, parties, funerals. Food can make us feel comforted, reassured, or challenged. With the variety of cuisine available, we can literally have a 'taste' of another life. Tasting is quite literally a form of knowing, in the same way as listening to music, or looking at a painting. Preparing food has about it an element of creativity, akin to making music. The smell,

colour and taste can almost transport the cook even in the midst of labour in the same way as writing music can a musician. Thomas Moore (1997:58-65) explores this point at some length.

However, one thing is clear, food is about more than just acquiring nutritional adequacy in its most efficient form. The quality and quantity of the food we eat will affect both our bodies and our minds. Today, hardly a day passes without some dietary claim or warning being issued – from the benefits of fish oil for the circulation, to the possibility of us contracting CJD from the Sunday joint.

We, too, need feeding at more than just a physical level. Jesus went so far as to say: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) - although he was certainly not averse to food as celebration (for example, the feeding of the five thousand, with more than enough food for everyone) or as marking some vital mark of passage (the last supper), or even as a way of making new friends (the meal at the house of Zaccheus).

Our thinking about the significance of food brought the group back to some very 'unlovely' conclusions about Moreton and about Christ Church as a community. The treatment of anorexia may appear harsh – the insistence upon eating regularly, the restriction of physical exercise, even the involvement of the whole family, with the subsequent distress that this may cause, but the reorientation of the sufferer away from their excessive preoccupation with themselves is designed to save their life. Likewise, although Isaiah seems harsh in his criticism of the people (after all, they believed they were doing well) and the remedies prescribed was designed to save their life as the people of God.

Isaiah 58:6-12 points to the type of worship that God finds acceptable. God does not see the fast as being as important as sharing the food that we have with others. To seek justice and freedom for all is far more vital than 'superficial' disciplines. Indeed, without the right motivation, any fasting is completely worthless in God's eyes. The concept of sharing food with someone is powerful psychologically as well as spiritually, leading to a feeling of being accepted and welcomed. Jesus went out of his way to mix with the social outcasts of his time – this is demonstrated in four independent gospel traditions

and in all literary forms within the gospels (Nolan 1977:37-42), even entertaining them in his own house, as Jeremias (1971:115) argues of Mark 2:15. Indeed, a brief scan of the gospels shows how much store Jesus put in sharing meals. The effect of sharing a meal with Jesus would have meant so much to the oppressed of his time, giving them a sense of dignity.

We admitted freely as a team that our thoughts represented, for us, as conservative evangelicals, a radical interpretation of the passage – but nevertheless we were drawn back to it again and again in our deliberations. Ours was a contextual, Site Team reading of the passage, which was firmly located in Christ Church in Moreton in 2003. It was time for us to "draw breath" as a Site Team. For us as a group of conservative evangelicals we had travelled a long path from our usual approach to scripture, but had followed faithfully the method outlined in 1.7.

Having covered so much ground, we wanted, as Christians, to 'locate' Christ in our discussions and where we, as a Team, felt Christ stood. One of the Site Team said, in admitting our need for healing both as a Church and as a community:

> We may have good foundations, but we need to grow in Christ. Christ stands in our brokenness. Christ stands in Moreton's brokenness.

The team recognised that Christ was located both in the congregation and in the community, and that Christ was standing in the same place in both – our brokenness. Reflecting further on this, we saw that Christ was in fact present, whether people acknowledged it or not, and that in some sense the congregation and the community at large were one and the same thing (although not identical) – one being an integral part of the other.

In order to reflect our need for healing, we chose the term anorexia to refer to our collective poor self-image – both as a church recovering from schism (see 2.6 and chapter 5) and as a community that lacked a voice. This deliberately reflected the words of the prophecy that had been integral to our thinking thus far. Likewise, they reflected a central thought in the Isaiah passage of the people concentrating on the wrong thing (fasting), while remaining blind to the needs that lay right in front of them (the needs of their brothers). Food here is, of course, a metaphor, for healing, just as anorexia is used as a metaphor for sickness. They 'stand for' a complex process, which will be explored in its fullness in Chapters Five and Six of the Thesis.

In choosing to use anorexia as a metaphor for a complex social process, we are not doing something all that unusual, as Sontag (1988) recalls that many infections have been used as vehicles for social anxiety – bringing to mind leprosy, epilepsy[17] and, in our own day, AIDS. Her arguments may not seem particularly applicable to anorexia, (despite attempts to link it to genetic or brain dysfunction), because it is recognised (according to Garrett 1998:55) to have social roots. However, what is not so clearly understood is that medical definitions of anorexia are themselves metaphors, because it is described "as if" it were a physical or mental pathology – just like an infection.

Medical anthropology and sociology make a distinction between illness and disease: illness being the experience of human suffering (phenomenology),

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[17] Epilepsy is also not an infectious disease, although Sontag describes it as such here.

and disease the occurrence (epidemiology). This can be thought of as a parallel between the individual and the community (Kleinman 1988:5).

Nevertheless, transferring a 'diagnosis', such as anorexia, from an individual to a community (whether that is the congregation or more broadly) even as a metaphor is difficult; and it may not prove to be a perfect 'fit'. However both Rajan (1993) and McKnight (1994) argue strongly that community is central to human health and well-being, and that the relationship between individual health and community health is reciprocal. If this is true of health then, similarly, the sicknesses that we experience as individuals also can have an impact upon a community and, likewise, at some level be reciprocal. As far back as Fromm (1956) mental health has been viewed as very much a product of the community in which the individual lives. So, Fromm argues, mental health should be defined according to how well the society adjusts to the basic needs of the individuals within it, rather than by how well an individual adjusts to society. This makes the achievement and maintenance of wellness not only an individual effort, but a social and community goal, also. Just as an unhealthy community creates in its members hostility, suspicion and mistrust, so a healthy community allows its members to develop love for one another and to be both productive and creative.

Initially we saw the inability of the community to work together and the inertia of Christ Church as being symptoms of the same problem, in that each are depriving themselves of something that would be life giving. For each, the remedy is freely available if we can but bring ourselves to accept it. There are

parallel issues developing here in terms of spiritual and social recovery. Both were equally important to the team – and both are reflected in our proposal for a project in one guise or another.

2.9 Summary Statement of Problem

On the basis of these reflections the Site Team proceeded to devise an action research project that mirrored and attempted to address the context of a divided and 'sick' community. To develop a practical project, we sought to define a specific problem that dealt with the health of our community. After lengthy discussion – the Team agreed on a statement:

Post 1950s, Moreton is a divided settlement of 20,000 people with an internalised poor self-image and no corporate structures to represent it to itself or others.

2.10 Reasons for Selecting the Problem

The following were regarded as reasons for selecting the problem specified in 2.9: and continues into 2:11 and 2:12

2.10a Division

Because of its divisions, Moreton as a community is losing out on funding that has the potential to improve significantly the quality of life for the most disadvantaged within it. Equally, the divisions between the congregations within Christ Church, and the ongoing repercussions of the schism, makes the development of strategies for mission or social action much more difficult.

2.10b The Role of the Parish Church

The Parish Church has a remit for the whole of the parish and, while limitations are acknowledged, this is not currently reflected within the community. The 'watchword' used on all Christ Church letterheads, is "The Church at the heart of Moreton, with Moreton at its heart." It is therefore important, if this is what we send out into the community, that it is made true for us as a congregation within it. In a prophecy received by the congregation, Christ Church was described with grief as the "anorexic bride." This image has been powerful for the group and relates to the powerful images of fasting in Isaiah 58: 1-12 and the real sacrifice of service described within the passage.

2.10c A Potential for Change

The division and lack of representation of the whole community within the Church and in the community itself is recognised by the Site Team. The community and the congregation would benefit from improved communication and both the sharing and enhancing of resources that would result from addressing this problem.

2.10d Previous History within the Community

A previous attempt to bring the community together in mid 2002 failed because of poor planning and a lack of knowledge. It was sabotaged by a power group within the community, who saw an attempt to bring people together as a potential diminution of their power base, rather than an opportunity to work together for the good of the whole community. The

desired outcomes of the project would have an impact upon both the community and the congregation in terms of improving their self-image.

2.11 Social, Political, Economic and Psychological Factors

The specific problem we identified demanded a systemic approach because the divisions within the community are facilitated by the local political system. Socially, economically and geographically the community of Moreton is divided. This has all contributed to its poor self-image. Because it has no strong united voice to speak for it, planning decisions have been imposed that have led to the further division of the community. Where community groups exist, because of their poor self-image, they have become very narrow in their aims and introverted in their activities, never crossing the local political and geographical boundaries. Literally, one group in one part of Moreton does not know what a similar group in another area of the community is doing. In many ways, Moreton has come to accept its lot, and has taken on the role ascribed to it by others, such as the Borough Council, as an "incomplete" community – with one half being "Moreton" and the other half tacked on to (and secondary to) Leasowe.

Understanding of how this situation arose may be assisted by sociological theory. Weber (1958) argues that power is simply the extent to which a group (in this case Moreton) can get its way in a social relationship. To this extent Moreton as a community is relatively powerless, evidenced by the planning decisions that have been imposed and the failure to work together as a community – meaning that it has no real voice. Weber further implies that

power holders will tend to use power to further their own interests – an implication that Marx (in Bottomore & Reubal 1963) takes to further lengths. According to Marx, power is held by a particular group in society at the expense of other groups. This is seen in the dynamics between Moreton and its neighbouring community of Leasowe where (in terms of drawing resources to itself) is much more powerful than Moreton. The residents of East Moreton, who, according to the economic statistics for the area, are in equal need, resent this. Milibrand (1969) examines various ways in which the subject class is persuaded to accept the status quo by means of legitimisation of the existing system. Using advertising as an example, he shows how this is devised to send out 'good' messages, whereby the well being of the consumer is of top priority and profit merely a secondary motive. When we consider the seemingly endless sale of flood plain land in and around Moreton for private housing, and the consequent enhanced flood risk for existing residents, it is clear that the profit motive is, in fact, primary and any benefits minimal. This level of building does not occur anywhere else on the Wirral – and provides further evidence of the powerlessness of the community. The early Italian sociologist, Mosca (1939) writes of the issue of power that decisions affecting society are taken by the elite and, even in so-called democratic societies, these decisions will reflect the concerns of that elite rather than the wishes of the people. Interestingly, the community did object to the latest phase of house building on the eastern edge of Moreton, but the Borough Council overruled this.

2.12 Biblical and Missional Factors

The Site Team discussed various images of division and unity – including the division of Israel into the Kingdoms of the North and South (1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17) – a situation that was finally ended only by the eventual Babylonian Exile and subsequent restoration of the Temple following the rise of Cyrus. The notion of the re-building of the Temple was powerful for us in the light of the passage from Isaiah 58, particularly the idea of the repairers of the breach found within it.

> Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorers of Streets with Dwellings (v12)

The Site Team felt that there were several questions that we needed to address in relation to mission:

- Which side of the wall were we on? (Isaiah 58:12a.) Were we building to include people or to exclude them?
- Where is the need greatest? How do we determine who the hungry and oppressed are in our community? "If you spend yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed …" (Isaiah 58:10a)
- Where do we start? "Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6)

The concept of the Church as the bringer of hope seemed to us to be important. In all the qualitative work thus far, Moreton has been felt to be without hope, most evident in the most deprived areas of the parish. As the most deprived area of the parish is the Sandbrook estate, this seemed the most obvious place to plant a bridgehead. However, this needed further reflection before a final decision could be made. When we asked ourselves the question "Where would Christ go first?" the answer seemed to us to be the Sandbrook Estate, specifically to "The Heights".

The Site Team also considered biblical antecedents to the notion of the bringing together of community. It can be seen in the calling of Abram in Genesis 12 to be a community (a nation) and a blessing to others. The call to be community resonates throughout the Old Testament – it can be seen in the calling out of Egypt by Moses in Exodus; and throughout the Scripture there is an ongoing call to unity – despite all the difficulties faced by Israel. In the New Testament, the Church is called to be community (for example in Acts 2:42-47) in order that others may be welcomed into community with them. Paul in his writings is quite clear that everyone has their own place in community (1 Corinthians 12) and that this must be marked by what the community does as well as what it is (Galatians 6:7-10 for example). That the early Church struggled to be community is clear (Acts 10:9-48 and Acts 15:1-21), and perhaps provides the reason for the writing of the whole of 1 Corinthians. This acted as a clear warning to us that the road ahead would not be easy; but that we are called to be community does not, biblically, seem to be questionable.

Theologically, we saw the notion of perfect community enshrined in some contemporary understanding of the Trinity. Because being in community is all about relationships, Fiddes (2000:38) writes:

> Identifying the divine persons and relations brings together a way of understanding the nature of being (ontology) with a way of knowing (epistemology). The being of God is understood as event and relationship, but only through the epistemology of participation; each only makes sense in the context of the other.

On such an understanding, the community of the Trinity is not merely something that is recognised; it is something in which we participate. Fiddes

argues that it is only by bringing together being as relation and knowing as participation can we begin to overcome the view of the human as subject which began in the Enlightenment. The appeal of this view of the Trinity is that it has ceased to be static, but indicates relational momentum. Ricoeur (1974:477-478) looking at the way in which language is used in worship identifies three modes: declarative (identifying who the God is about whom we speak), narrative (in which a story is being told indicating the direction or orientation of a relationship) and finally vocative (in which we place ourselves in relationship with the God who exists in eternal relationship.) It is the placing of ourselves in relationship with a God who is Himself in relationship that can enable us to build relationships.

2.13 Action Project Goal Setting

Reflecting on the discussion of the problem identified above, the Site Team drew out the following goals for the action research project. Each of these goals, with its attendant components, was designed to bring about change in the situation. These are now presented below with a brief narrative accompanying each.

Goal 1

To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community:

> **By identifying** the various groups operating within the Parish – Residents' Associations, Clubs, Churches and others.
> **By providing** a directory of community resources
> **By developing** a format for the exchange of information and the sharing of resources.

The aim of this first goal was to begin to break down barriers between organisations operating within the community to improve collaboration.

The first thing we had to do was to discover what groups were currently working within Moreton, so the first sub-goal was a fundamental pre-requisite for the remainder of the project. At the outset, knowledge was limited and there was no central point of access for newcomers to the area, or simply for those who wished to become more involved in community groups or affairs. It was a task that the Site Team felt able to complete by breaking Moreton down into small geographical areas and discovering information about groups operating within that area, before meeting to compile it. We all recognised the fundamental importance of this work in that it both enhanced out knowledge and formed a basis for the other stages in the process. From a methodological point of view, the early practical activity involved and the short-term nature of the goal enabled the Site Team to experience an early measure of success (which helped motivation with some of the more abstract components involved). We felt that this was something that we could do quickly and went some way towards building a more complete picture of our community.

The second sub-goal logically follows from the first, if we wanted to facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community. Gathering the information alone is not enough: To produce a directory of community organisations as a gift from Christ Church would stand as a tangible witness to our community. We hoped that funding for this would be available from the

Pathways Partnership. We hoped it would be distributed to all community contacts discovered, as well as to estate agents, and even distributed free with the local paper. Because we could see the benefits to the local community, the Site Team were very enthusiastic and felt that it would begin to move us practically towards the statement on all the Christ Church letterheads "The Church at the heart of Moreton, with Moreton at its heart." We also saw this sharing of knowledge as directly relevant to the Isaiah passage, with its emphasis on feeding people and helping them truly to belong to the community, rather than on mere religious observance.

Sub-goal three, on the other hand, was rather more about sustainability, but had, even at the outset, excited interest among the Site Team. Any resource aimed at facilitating intersectorial collaboration had to be more than simply a "one off" production. It may include re-issuing the directory annually or bi-annually, or the development of a website, which could be updated more frequently. To undertake the latter, we needed to find "allies" from outside the Team – as none of us had the necessary expertise, but we all knew that a four or five month project could not achieve the vision we had begun to grasp. We recognised that we were developing a commitment that would outlast the life of the project, but that having Moreton at the heart of the church needed to be demonstrated as a long term goal.

Goal 2

To develop awareness within residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community:

> **By providing occasion** for community gatherings.
> **By providing a neutral space** for the residents of Moreton to begin to discover community

By reflecting biblically on notions of community and wholeness. This goal was concerned with what the church could offer to the community in terms of space and what the church needed to learn for itself about the nature of wholeness as a community.

Despite possessing an identity as a village, and people identifying Moreton as "where they live", Moreton is divided both politically and geographically, so opportunities for the community to meet as a whole are extremely limited. We felt we needed to develop opportunities for Moreton to gather as a community. As the Parish Church, we have a remit for the whole of the Parish, and we have the physical space to host any such gatherings. The Site Team anticipated seeking new ways to engage with the community and realised that this could take many forms. Any response made by the Team would be an improvement on the situation at the outset of the project phase, as there were not opportunities for the community to gather. The Team recognised the interdependence of church and community, and felt called by the Isaiah passage to look at ways of addressing the problems of division that the community experienced.

There is a "potential" for community here but we developed the latter thought by recognising that places where people could gather to talk without incurring cost are difficult to find. It was important to the team that the more prosperous sections of the community and the least well off could gather together without cost being a bar to participation. We recognised that we had, in the Parish Centre, a space where people could meet easily without cost, and, while there was currently a Tea Bar, this was only open for short periods of time and was

not widely known about. The Parish Centre was significantly under-used at the outset of the Project. The team identified this early on as a 'sorrow' in the 'joys and sorrows' exercise (Table 3) and therefore there was a motivation to look at ways of achieving this objective, as everyone on the Site Team wished to see the Parish Centre fully used. However, we recognised that this would demand more than simply our time and effort, and would probably involve, to some extent, most regular members of the church. The inadequate use of the Parish Centre has been a longstanding issue, and has been discussed periodically for as long as the author has been in ministry at Christ Church (since 1998), but in terms of the sharing of resources, as directed by the Isaiah passage, this was seen as a priority by the Site Team.

As Christians, biblical understanding of community and wholeness were seen as both necessary and fundamental if the project was to succeed at all, and this forms the basis of the third sub-goal. We recognised the critical importance of helping Christ Church as a whole understand something of our vision and also we wanted their support in prayer during the project phase. In consultation with the Rector (who was a member of the Site Team), the author prepared a bible study series and teaching notes for use by the Christ Church prayer meeting and home groups, to provide space for teaching, reflection and prayer. So, Christ Church as a whole would have gained a new perspective on working with the community and the importance of the role theologically, practically and symbolically. The team recognised that this meant overcoming significant obstacles having identified some of the processes at work within the church in terms of anorexia, and we knew that

we needed to continue to meet together to reflect and pray. However, we felt

a clear sense of calling to undertake the work we were doing expressed in the

implications of the 'anorexic bride.'

Goal 3

To empower the community to find its own voice:

> **By opening opportunity** for the gathering of community within the most deprived areas of the Parish of Moreton.
> **By providing** occasion for Moreton to celebrate as a whole community.

The third goal was concerned with opening occasions for the community to

gather and discover for themselves what it felt like to be a community, and to

celebrate that.

In terms of empowering the community to find its own voice, the team first

acknowledged that the church community was not representative of the

community as a whole, and so we needed to make a particular effort to

engage with the more deprived areas of the parish, and with marginalised

groups within our community. This first sub-goal seemed to us to be entirely in

line with biblical principles. This demanded careful planning so as not to

overload the team, but it did look as if we had sufficient resources to begin

something small as a part of the project, with the opportunity for further

growth. The team were motivated to work on this part of the project by their

sadness at the state of the church and the state of the community as revealed

by our initial research and we felt it would be exciting and challenging to go

out into the community with the aim of making a difference. Being the Parish

Church brings with it responsibilities as well as privileges, we felt, and we saw

that we needed to have a relationship with the whole parish and not just with those parts of it that were prosperous or relatively easy to relate to.

Finding our own voice also reflected the notion that the meeting together to celebrate what we have been given is a significant feature of both Old Testament and New Testament worship. We felt that it was as important to acknowledge the strengths of our community and our church as it was to identify and try to remedy their weaknesses. Equally a celebration could have significant symbolic and psychological impact. The planning of such an occasion was something, which we could plan and undertake reasonably readily. The planning and delivery of a celebratory event could help to strengthen links already forged within the community and the response from the community and from the church could help to change how people felt about their community. The team saw this as a practical demonstration of the phrase, "The Church at the heart of Moreton, with Moreton at its heart."

In the light of there three goals and their sub-goals, various further issues needed to be researched:

The first question is one of funding for the publication of the directory and web space – this will have to be researched in order for the Goal 1 to be realised. How can we afford to put this into practice?

The issue of resources continues into the second and third goals but rather in this case, there is a question of finding the right folk to collaborate with in

order to make them a reality. How can the Site Team identify the necessary expertise?

In order to facilitate Goal 3, it will be necessary to enter into a new dialogue with the residents of the Sandbrook and to discover who the community leaders within it are. Currently, they do not attend any community forums (such as Pathways). How do we establish a bridgehead into the Sandbrook estate?

2.14 Project Strategy Development

Each goal was then broken down into a series of steps and a time frame allocated to each step. People and resources needed to achieve each step were identified as part of the process and measures identified so that we would know when we had achieved our goals. This then formed the evaluation procedure for the project (see 2.15). The following presents an outline summary of the various strategies that were developed, allocated to their respective goal:

Goal 1

To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community:
1a. *By identifying the various groups operating within the Parish*
- Through breaking down the whole of the Parish into smaller areas beginning at the start of the project.
- Through a Site Team member approaching every place in that area where people may gather.
- Through collection of data on all activities or groups meeting at each venue throughout that small sector within the first month of the project.

To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community:
1b. *By providing a directory of community resources*

- Through the collating of the information gathered at 1a.
- Through production of a written format containing this information by the end of the second month of the project.
- Through the printing and distribution of this information at all community gathering points – clinic, library, churches, pubs, estate agents and site offices for new estates – during the third month of the project.
- Through the annual updating of the directory.

To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community:
1c. *By developing a format for the exchange of information and the sharing of resources*
- Through the co-option of suitable expertise onto the Site Team.
- Through the development of a web site devoted to Moreton as a community (to include all groups and activities as a well as a forum for the exchange of information and resources) by month four of the project.
- Through the three monthly updating of the web site.

Goal 2

To develop awareness within residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community:
2a. *By providing occasion for community gatherings*
- Through the provision of a community barbeque within month three of the project.
- Through the staging of a local history event within month four of the project.
- Through the staging of an exhibition involving all the art groups operating within Moreton within month five of the project.

To develop awareness within residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community:
2b. *By providing a neutral space for the residents of Moreton to begin to discover community*
- Through critical examination of the current usage of the Parish Centre in month one of the project.
- Through communicating with other community organisations from month one of the project.
- Through the enhanced use of the Parish Centre by month five of the project.

To develop awareness within residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community:
2c. *By reflecting biblically on notions of community and wholeness and the role of the Church as the bringer of hope*

- Through the writing of a series of ten Bible Studies.
- Through the use of the Bible Studies throughout all small group and home group meetings taking place within the Church over a period of three months of the project.
- Through preaching on community and relationship by all members of the preaching team during this period

Goal 3

To empower the community to find its own voice:
3a. *By opening opportunity for the gathering of community within the most deprived areas of the Parish*
- Through negotiation and discussion with all parties involved in the first and second months of the project.
- Through the provision of a monthly act of worship within the Sandbrook Estate ongoing from the third month of the project.
- Through the provision of social events for people with learning disabilities from the third month of the project.

To empower the community to find its own voice:
3b. *By providing occasion for Moreton to celebrate as a whole community*
- Through the provision of a community celebratory weekend in month five of the project.
- Through the provision of a celebratory community service in month five of the project inviting all those groups and contacts identified throughout the course of the project. This may become an annual event.
- Through the provision of a celebratory meal.

2.15 Project Evaluation Procedure

In developing an effective evaluation procedure, it was important that any evaluation was measurable, so that we could check our progress against the goals that we had set ourselves. In order to gain the fullest picture possible, measures were set in both the quantitative and qualitative domains for all goals. Ongoing theological reflection is accepted as a given throughout. Evaluation strategies were agreed prior to undertaking the research. It seemed only logical to the Site Team to agree what outcomes should be measured before we started.

We set the goals and decided into which domains they fell. We wanted to make things as clear and as simple as possible for ourselves, while still generating as much data as we could.

Most of the evaluation procedures suggested themselves. So, for example with Goal 1, we were looking at concrete ways of facilitating the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community. This could not possibly be started if one part of the community did not know what was happening in another area.

Our solutions were to produce a website and to print a community directory.

The evaluation procedure started with the production of both of those things: in other words, had we managed to do what we set out to do?

If the answer was yes, then had they been distributed effectively?

So, how many copies of the directory had been given out, and how many visits had there been to the website in a defined period?

These were both things that could be counted – so were quantitative results. However we needed more than this to provide us with a fuller picture of how Moreton was. So we looked for comments and feedback about the directory, comments and feedback on the website and also every member of the Site Team who collected contact date for the directory had a space on their form to record their feeling and observations about each of the places they visited. We agreed to record details about whether it was easy or difficult to get into the building, find someone to speak to, find posters or information about what

was going on at a given location – and whether they felt welcome or not. In other words the sort of impression someone new to the area might get.

Goal 2 followed a similar pattern. Here numbers of people were counted to give a quantitative outcome and the author interviewed different groups of people using the same semi-structured questionnaire to give a qualitative flavour to the results. Here possibly longer interviews could have been used, but this was difficult to organise amid the business of the final weekend and the demands of work and church life. It would, however, have provided a deeper and richer seam of material.

Goal 3 was slightly different in that this was in part about preparing the congregation to open up to the community it purported to serve by use of the Bible Studies. The Site Team felt that we had to prepare to change (as is evidenced in some of our discussions recorded at 5.5). The provision of the Likert type scale enabled their effectiveness to be measured in a non-threatening and anonymous way – and, although in the end it was decided that the group leaders would not be interviewed, there was space given for their comments, again to be given anonymously – so that they would not feel threatened or coerced in any way into giving what they felt to be the "right" answers. This method of evaluation is similar to that used to measure pain in hospitals or limitation in lung disease in the community. It is by its very nature subjective and therefore qualitative.

The evaluation tools agreed for each goal may be summarised as follows:

Goal 1
To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community.

Quantitative

- The production of the directory
- The number of directories distributed
- The development of the web site
- The number of visits to the web site

Qualitative
- The comments received about the directory
- The experiences of the collectors of information as they collect it – i.e. were they welcomed and how people reacted when the purpose of the collection of this data was explained to them. This can be recorded on the collection form.
- The comments posted on the website

Goal 2
To develop awareness within residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community

Quantitative
- Through the numbers of people attending each event (excluding Site Team Members)
- Through demonstrating enhanced usage of the Parish Centre (before and after comparison)

Qualitative
- Through the used of semi-structured interviews with
    a) People attending the events
    b) Users of the Parish Centre
    c) Members of other community organisations

Goal 3
To empower the community to find its own voice

Quantitative

- Through the production of the Bible Studies and sermons (hard evidence) and the agreement of the Rector to their use.
- Through the photographic evidence of the social events for people with learning difficulties.
- Through the numbers attending the community celebratory weekend.

Qualitative
- Through the provision of a Likert scale type questionnaire for group leaders to discuss with their groups, evaluating the effectiveness of the Bible Studies, and including space for ongoing and overall comments.
- Through the use of semi-structured interviews with participants
- Through the perceived growth of the community network as judged by the Site Team.

In addition, in terms of personal growth, three members of the Site Team agreed to keep a personal journal throughout the duration of the project including the author. Members of the Site Team who have attended regularly (more than sixty percent of the Site Team Meetings) would be interviewed by an outside observer and these interviews will be tape-recorded. Furthermore, I decided to keep an ongoing diary of the Site Team meetings.

A summary of the project design is included in the Appendix .

2.16 Conclusion

At this point we were ready to launch the Action Research Project which forms Chapter Three. We felt that the central themes of Isaiah 58:1-12 and anorexia had been given to us by God, and we were beginning to understand the brokenness of Moreton and of Christ Church. We understood also that Christ was out there before us - "Christ stands in our brokenness: Christ stands in Moreton's brokenness" - and that in some way we could meet with him and share in his work of restoration. A fuller understanding of this will be sought in Chapters Five and Six. But first we consider the outcomes of our project and what it began to teach us.

Chapter 3

The Moving Together

(Project Reflection)

"There is no private theology. Our theology is a community production!"

Koyama (1974)

3.1 Introduction

As the Research Project in ministry unfolded, the team were anxious to maintain some of the key motifs that we had discerned in the exploratory processes outlined in Chapter Two. Central to these were the notions of building community in different ways and the ideas of sharing food - welcome and celebration being central to community as we had come to understand it. We felt that it was especially important to extend this to the most marginalised in our community. Even so, what we were attempting to do could only be symbolic and fragmentary in many ways, but nevertheless this represented a real opportunity for us to refocus and try to see what God was (and is) saying to us as His faithful people in Moreton in and through this project.

3.2 The Project Timetable

In November 2003, I prepared the Site Team Handbook outlining the anticipated progress of the project phase. It included a brief outline for the Site Team members of how we had reached this point, a copy of the Project Design Diagram, that summarized the goals and the strategies that we had devised (see Appendix 1), a copy of the evaluation procedure, and an anticipated timetable for the project. The anticipated timetable for the project is reproduced in Table 4:

TABLE 4

ANTICIPATED TIMETABLE FOR PROJECT

January 2004	Collect information on groups in Moreton Analyse current use of Parish Centre Investigate opportunities to develop usage of Parish Centre Negotiate with Sunningdale/other potential venues for worship Identify small group homes for adults with learning disabilities
February	Collate and print directory Investigate opportunities to develop usage of Parish Centre Negotiate with Sunningdale/other potential venues for worship Contact small group homes for adults with learning disabilities
March	Distribute directory Investigate opportunities to develop usage of Parish Centre Community Barbeque Institute monthly act of worship within the Sandbook area Social event for adults with learning disabilities
April	Develop website Investigate opportunities to develop usage of Parish Centre Local History event
May	Investigate opportunities to develop usage of Parish Centre Art Exhibition Community Celebration weekend

In practice we discovered this timetable to be was overly optimistic! Early on in the project the timetable was revised and two decisions relating to this were made at the first Site Team meeting during the project phase (16.01.04). First, that we lacked the expertise to develop the website and therefore we needed outside assistance to do this. Second, that a community barbeque in March was not viable because of the weather. This was moved and combined into the Community Celebration weekend in May.

Further, our investigation into community groups revealed that there was no local history group in Moreton, and so this idea was shelved – although it was felt to have merit and it may be worth looking for groups based further away

and doing something along these lines in the future. The final timetable for the

Project is presented in Table 5:

TABLE 5

FINAL TIMETABLE FOR PROJECT

January	**16.01.04** Team Meeting Information collection about local groups commenced Allies needed for website and possibly Sunningdale Project **19.01.04** Meeting with Project Worker for Leasowe **21.01.04** Meeting requested with Parish Administrator to define current usage of Parish Centre **22.01.04** Meeting with Reader with previous experience of working in Sheltered Accomodation re: Sunningdale. He agrees to head this up. **23.01.04** Meeting in Leasowe with Moreton and Leasowe Pathways Partnerships **26.01.04** Meeting with Chair of Fender Heights Tenants and Residents Association
February	**03.02.04** Meeting with Facilitator for Moreton Pathways Partnership **04.02.04** Discussion with Reader re: Sunningdale (no progress) Further request to Parish Administrator for meeting **09.02.04** Team Meeting Information on local groups continues to be collected Date set for Social event for Adults with Learning Disabilities Date set for Community Celebration weekend Ally identified for website **10.02.04** Meeting with Website designer **11.02.04** Meeting with Parish Administrator – current use of Parish Centre Assessed **16-17.02.04** Tutorial meeting at The Urban Theology Unit – Sheffield **20.02.04** Meeting with Manager Yew Tree On-Line Centre **25.02.04** Series of bible studies commenced with all Church groups. (10 weeks) **26.02.04** Meeting at Christ Church with Moreton and Leasowe Partnerships
March	**01.02.04** Meeting of Moreton Pathways Partnership. Contact starts to be made with Art Groups **02.03.04** Team Meeting Collection of information as complete as it can be Details of events discussed **05.03.04** Meeting with Project Worker for Leasowe **08.03.04** Directory information begins to be collated Discussion with Reader re: Sunningdale (no progress) **09.03.04** Meeting with P.C.C. Events Committee (to be covered by Church insurance the planned project events have to be

	approved by P.C.C.) Same obtained
	10.03.04 Publicity begins to be developed for events
	16.03.04 Trial run of new bus route.
	Discussion with Job Club about holding sessions in Parish Centre
	18.03.04 Joint meeting of Leasowe and Moreton Pathways Partnerships
	22.03.04 Meeting at Parish Centre with Job Club
	23.03.04 Moreton Pathways Partnership AGM
	31.03.04 Visit from Dr. R Pagan from UTU. Progress discussed.
April	**01.04.04**. Funding for directory agreed from Moreton Pathways Partnership. Logo requested for inclusion in directory
	07.04.04. Printing quotes beginning to be requested for Directory
	12.04.04. Introduction written for Website
	17.04.04 Social event for Adults with Learning Disabilities
	20.04.04 Moreton Pathways Partnership Meeting – logo requested again
	22.04.04 Events Committee Meeting – planning for Community Celebration weekend
May	**11.05.04** Publicity Printed for Community Celebration weekend
	14.05.04 Meeting with Parish Administrator re: Job Club and reading group. Meeting with Reader re: Sunningdale (no progress)
	17.05.04 Team Meeting – final details discussed for Community Celebration Weekend. Personal and group evaluation discussed.
	18.05.04 Moreton Pathways Partnership Meeting. Logo requested for directory again.
	18.05.04 P.C.C. meeting
	21.05.04 Community Celebration Weekend begins: Art Exhibition and Cheese and Wine evening
	22.05.04 Community Celebration Weekend: barbeque and exhibition
	23.05.04 Community Celebration Weekend concludes: Service and shared lunch. Project ends
	27.05.04 Team Meeting – evaluation of project begins. Formal Team phase ends.

Any description of the project along chronological lines would be confusing and disjointed. Therefore, I have chosen to follow the agreed outline for evaluation (see 2.14). The format deals with each strand of the project separately and includes space for reflection on personal and group growth. The evaluation and theological reflection upon the project are thus interwoven thematically leading to a more coherent and structured approach, so making it easier for the reader to understand.

Using the evaluation procedure outlined previously, comments and conclusions will be drawn in a structured fashion. However, at the outset one overall comment seems applicable, and this is to say that at five months, the project implementation phase has been relatively short – and that sometimes only hints of flavours of the outcomes can be given.

3.3 Goal 1 Evaluation

To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community.
Quantitative Evaluation

- The production of the directory

This had not happened by May 2004. Although the hard copy existed, there was a substantial delay in obtaining the logo from the funders (Endeavour, formally Wirral Pathways) before submission for printing quotes. It was finally printed in October 2004 and funding was agreed for three years following an exceptionally positive response from the community.

- The number of directories distributed.

Two thousand directories were printed and distributed in October 2004. Comments received, such as "Why has nobody done this before?" and "What a great idea!" have been most positive and other organisations, such as the Presbyterian Church, unwilling to participate in the first edition, are asking to be included in the next. This demonstrates a desire to be a community within Moreton.

- The development of the web site

This has happened much more quickly than could have been anticipated at the outset and may be found at www.wirralforums.com/moreton

- The number of visits to the website

In the first six months, the number of 'hits' to the website launched on 23.05.04. stood at 188. However, the website needs to be given further publicity through the directory and through formal contact with community online facilities (although this has been done informally).

Qualitative Evaluation

- The comments received about the directory

The directory has become an established part of community life in Moreton and the second edition was prepared for publication in October 2005. Another church asked to be included and so did the local councillors. All the organisations who were included in the first year have reported contact as a result of the directory and were anxious to be included in the second edition.

- The experiences of the collectors of the information as they collected it.

On the bottom of each collection form was a brief questionnaire for the collector to complete (see the Appendix 2 for an example of the data collection form.) Responses varied. Most of the information collectors found difficulties in contacting the venues that they had agreed to approach. The churches were generally the least easy to contact, despite the Rector himself choosing these. In the end the Rector had to write to each of the churches to gather the information – and at time of writing it remains incomplete. The Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches did not even reply to his letter.

The history of inter-church working in Moreton, as with everything else, is regrettably poor. This may be reflected in the difficulty encountered. Information about the Roman Catholic Church was, however, included both in the directory and on the web site. This is due to a direct approach to their Parish Centre by another member of the Site Team. When this was done, the member reported that the venue was welcoming and keen on being included in the directory.

Occasionally, members of the Site Team reported they were met with suspicion, despite explaining that this was for a free publication (and therefore offered a venue free publicity). This was much more likely to have occurred at a commercial venue, like a pub, than at a community based venue. However, one Community Centre was quite suspicious about being included, and needed reassuring that the directory did not represent any kind of a threat to them. One of the Community Centres (Sandbrook) was extremely difficult to contact, and required considerable effort on the part of the collector to ascertain a telephone number and then a time when the person could be contacted on that number. The British Legion in Moreton is still not included owing to extreme difficulty in gaining access to the venue and despite the valiant efforts of the collector! Eastway Community Centre remained closed for upgrading throughout the collection process.

Nevertheless, despite these exceptions, the venues were in general welcoming (scoring a 4 or a 5 on the scale provided) and mostly in favour of the directory once the purpose had been explained to them (scoring between

3 to 5). In the case of the community centres mentioned above, this required very careful explanation indeed! None of the venues scored well for publicity at question 4 (Was the same information visible at the venue? i.e. could you have found this information out without talking to a contact?). The highest score achieved by any venue was 2. This seems to indicate a need for the directory or website, as the average passer by would not ask for this type of information on the off chance that there was something to interest them at this venue, and there seemed to be little hope of them finding it out for themselves by way of notices and so forth.

The last question – How easy was it for you to visit this venue? – proved apposite. As explained to the collectors, it was to do with practical issues like opening times, parking, access to public transport and so forth. For most of the venues parking was not too great a problem (The exception being Sandbrook community centre, which has no car park), but opening times proved awkward at the Library and at the British Legion. All of the venues were within reasonable walk of a bus stop except the Yew Tree Centre. However the bus service in Moreton means that it takes two buses to get from the Sandbrook estate to the Lingham Estate, which is where the largest of the community centres is located.

The experiences of the data collectors is important as in some ways it can mirror the ease with which ordinary people in the community can access information about community activities in Moreton at the moment. Although there are quite a lot of opportunities and activities in the community, all of the

Site Team found information that was new to us despite living for the most part in Moreton for many years. Many places were difficult to get to and it took a determined effort to seek out the information about the opportunities that they offered. Having said that, the venues were welcoming once we had crossed their thresholds, even if the notion of the directory took some explaining in some places. It was disappointing that some venues remained inaccessible or chose not to respond to our approaches despite our best efforts, which only demonstrated to us how deep rooted some of the problems we intuited Moreton experiences really are.

- The comments posted on the web site

This has been slightly disappointing given the number of 'hits' – but the comments that are posted are useful and constructive. One asked for a way of 'finding people' and in October 2004 a link was added to Friends Reunited. Generally, as shown above, the tone of the comments is positive and encouraging.

3.4 Goal 2 Evaluation

To develop awareness within the residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community
Quantitative Evaluation

- Through the numbers of people attending each event (excluding Site Team Members). See Table 6

TABLE 6

PROJECT EVENT ATTENDANCE

Event	Total Number	Number excluding Site Team Members
Social Evening for Learning Disabilities	21	17
Art Exhibition	71	66
Barbeque	193	185
Celebration Service	86	82
Shared Lunch	51	47

- Through demonstrating enhanced usage of the Parish Centre.

There have been 'one off' events during the course of the project, but the overall usage of the Parish Centre has not increased during the life of the project. However, we now have the Action Team for Jobs (part of the Jobcentre network doing outreach in deprived areas) posting local vacancies weekly in the Centre. (They were unable to hold sessions in the Centre because the centre is situated on the wrong side of the ward boundary dividing Moreton. Following a local boundary change on 01.06.04 this means literally the wrong side of the road.) This development is a direct result of the research undertaken as part of this project, and is a part of our renewed understanding as a church of need to reach out into our local community.

There are negotiations in hand for a joint youth group for children with special needs and mainstream children together, a need for which was demonstrated during the project. It is hoped that the scheme will be run by Scope via a local project called 'Family Friends'. The difficulty for the Church is that this scheme would be lottery funded and a Standing Committee decision is awaited, although the need for this is recognised. The author was instrumental in setting in train this enterprise. It

emerged as a result of our social evening for people with learning disabilities, which will be described further later (3.4).

Qualitative Evaluation

- Through the use of semi-structured interviews with people attending the events, users of the Parish Centre and members of other community organisations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all three groups using the same set of cue questions. Responses from people who consider themselves to be members of Christ Church are excluded at this point from the analysis.

In all, 43 responses were collected, see Table 7.

TABLE 7

RESPONSES FOR NON-CHURCH MEMBERS AT EVENTS WEEKEND

	Art Exhibition	Barbeque	Total
Male	3	18	21
Female	8	14	22
Total	11	32	43

Clearly, more men were attracted to the Barbeque than to the Art Exhibition.

Motivation for attending any given event was asked for.

These varied from the obvious: '*I've got paintings on show'* to the less obvious: '*To take part' 'To be involved in something locally' 'To be with the community'* (bearing in mind that these folk did not count themselves to be church members). Several responded that they had just been 'walking past' when it came to the Barbeque. Several had been 'invited in' as we had people on the streets giving out invitations to both events. Some 'came with friends' or to 'see friends' and typical response here was: *'My friend asked me to*

come along and to bring the children.' One response was: '*To meet nice people*' (naturally that had nothing to do with the fact the author was asking the questions!) Another response came from a gentleman who clearly had mental health difficulties: '*Nice people, happy atmosphere – it cheers you up.*'

It seems clear from these responses that a sense of community is sought for and perhaps being found at these events.

I asked the respondents what the good things about the event were. Some of the responses (as may be expected) were event specific – for example '*the bouncy castle for the children*' '*the weather*' '*to see other people's paintings*' but often the response was more generalised:

> '*People can mix*'
> '*Friendly people*'
> '*Meeting people*'
> '*Everyone is welcoming*'
> '*The hospitality.*'
> '*Never realised how much went on at Christ Church*'
> '*A good atmosphere*'
> '*A family atmosphere*'
> '*People mixing together – the young and the old.*'
> '*Seeing children just being children.*'
> '*Seeing people happy*'
> '*The quality of the work – friendly people, good food – I'm having a really good time.*'

Naturally the next question that was asked was whether there were things we could improve should we run a weekend like this again. Many people were 'stumped' when asked this question – and typically said, '*Not that I can think of*''. However, when people did come up with something, it was mostly to do with letting others know that it was on. '*Put bunting out and flags – so people don't think this is some private event'.* That had never occurred to the team who were organising things! '*Advertise it better*' '*Publicity seems to be a problem*' '*Tell more people that it is on'.*

Advertising proved to be a real problem. Shops locally either declined to put up posters or took them and then did not put them up. I wrote to all four community centres, inviting them and including a poster – one put the poster on display. None of the other churches displayed posters. Having emailed both of the local papers informing them about the weekend and inviting them to come and cover it, no response was forthcoming and nothing appeared in either paper. This was an extremely disheartening aspect to a very positive time for everyone involved in organising and running the events.

The final question asked how people felt about Moreton as a community. It is worth repeating at this point the list of joys and sorrows about Moreton as a community arrived at in the very earliest days of the Site Team, see Table 8:

TABLE 8

THE COMMUNITY OF MORETON:JOYS AND SORROWS

	<u>Joys</u>	<u>Sorrows</u>
1	Good situation/location	Gangs of kids doing nothing
2	Schools	Vandalism/petty crime
3	Pleasant walks to coast	Poor image (self and others)
4	Christ Church	Alcohol/drugs
5	Eating out - Weatherspoons	Family breakdown
6	Shopping	Negativity
7	Motorway	The Heights
8	Being near the sea	Sense of hopelessness
9	Transport system (trains/buses)	No secondary school
10	Churches – a wide choice	No open spaces

Being part of an event clearly made a difference to the respondents. Although they did not have a lot of time to think about the answers (unlike the Site Team) their answers were generally more positive.

> *'I think Moreton is fine.'*
> *'It seems to be very friendly and hospitable'*
> *'I like Moreton – the shopping, the environment and the easy access to the motorways.'*
> *'It's a wonderful place, improving all the time and the people are vibrant.'*
> *'It has a good shopping centre'*
> *'It's very welcoming and friendly – lots of people really care about one another.'*
> *'I love Moreton – always have done.'*
> *'I'm proud of Moreton.'*
> *'It's a good place to be part of.'*

However, some of the responses were neutral:

> *'It's the same as anywhere else: some good, some bad.'*
> *'I liked old Moreton better, before all the new estates.'*
> *'It's not a bad place to live – I've lived here for thirty three years now.'*

And some reflected the concerns of the Site Team fairly well:

> *'Moreton is a fractured community – but fractures can be healed.'*
> *'I come from an enclosed block of flats' (Sunningdale[18]) 'and yet there is not a real sense of community even in there. Moreton as a whole is just as bad, or even worse.'*
> *'The Heights[19] are bad. I feel sorry for people with kids living there. I wouldn't want my kids living there.'*
> *'Moreton's, well, just OK. I think there could be more at Christmas like there used to.[20] But that's the Council's problem for not donating to Moreton or being interested in us.'*
> *'I used to run Moreton Market[21] – but the attitude of some youngsters is appalling.'*
> *'That new estate on the Paddock[22] is a bad thing – and I've lived here thirty years. Sandbourne[23] should come down of course as well.'*

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[18] A renovated high rise block on the Sandbrook estate used specifically for elderly residents
[19] A group of three un-renovated high-rise blocks on the Sandbrook estate sometimes used to decant people into while other areas of Wirral are being renewed. It is against Council Policy to have children in these blocks owing to the dangers of the lifts and the balconies, neither of which are safe for small children, but nevertheless families live in them.
[20] Last Christmas (2003) was the first year Moreton had no Christmas decorations around the Cross. The community had bought the decorations, but the Council refused to put them up unless a further £5000 was raised.
[21] A fairly major part of the shopping experience in Moreton, situated immediately next to the Cross on its northeast side.

3.5 <u>Goal 3: Evaluation</u>

To empower the community to find its own voice

Quantitative Evaluation

- Through the production of Bible Studies and sermons and the agreement of the Rector to their use

These may be found in Appendix 3

- Through the photographic evidence of the social event for people with learning disabilities

These may be found in Appendix 5 to this document. This was an interesting event on several fronts. First, although the author wrote to thirteen small group homes within Moreton, none of them chose to attend this free event. This was, of course, a disappointment. However, when we looked at the children who had attended, twelve had special needs of one type or another. This lead the author into discussions with the Family Friends project regarding a youth group at the Church for children with special needs and mainstream children together. Despite the relatively small numbers attending, all present felt that it had been worthwhile. The atmosphere was unusual. There was an air of innocence about the whole evening. Children could just chill out, enjoy the crisps and pop, play pool and enjoy the music. All of the adults present were very relaxed as well. Talking to Site Team members present, we all felt that what was important is that we had offered the evening, not the numbers attending. While it is difficult to put this into words – it 'felt right'.

- Through the numbers attending the community celebratory weekend, see Table 9:

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[22] A brand new estate, built on flood plain land at the south eastern edge of Moreton. Residents protested about the environmental and flood damage that this estate would cause, but were overruled by the Council.

[23] The one of the three tower blocks with the worst reputation. Officially used to house single 18-25 year olds, but now including families.

TABLE 9

COMMUNITY WEEKEND ATTENDANCE

Event	Total Number	Number excluding Site Team Members
Art Exhibition	71	66
Barbeque	193	185
Celebration Service	86	82
Shared Lunch	51	47

Qualitative Evaluation

- Through the provision of a Likeart type scale for group leaders to discuss with their groups, evaluating the effectiveness of the Bible studies, including space for ongoing and overall comments.

Between forty and fifty members of the Church undertook the Bible studies, and their group leaders rated them with their groups. The average (mean) marks are given below in a duplicate of the table given to the group leaders. It includes the scores given by the Rector to those questions he felt were applicable to him, see Table 10.

Thus, each Bible study (in the series of ten) was marked by each home group leader for each of the ten questions (and their group's response to the study). Each question was marked on a possible scale of 1-10, giving a possible maximum score of 100 for each study and 100 for each question over the 10 studies. As each study was marked and returned each week without an overall explanation of the system as outlined above, and the authorship of the studies was not disclosed to group members, prejudice was avoided as far as possible.

Number of Bible Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total out of 100 for question
a) How relevant was this study to your group?	5.5	5.5	5.5	6.5	5.5	6.5	8.5	7.5	7.5	10.0	**68.5**
b) How did you find it related to the passage of scripture?	6.3	6.6	6.3	7.6	7.3	8.5	7.3	5.6	7.3	8.0	**64.5**
c) Was this study about the right length for your group?	5.5	4.0	6.0	7.5	4.0	5.0	6.5	6.5	6.0	7.0	**58.0**
d) Was this study appropriate for your group?	7.0	6.5	7.0	6.0	6.5	6.5	5.5	4.0	6.5	7.0	**62.5**
e) How did you find the questions posed?	8.0	8.0	7.0	6.3	7.3	6.6	7.0	7.3	7.3	6.0	**70.8**
f) Were the stories opening the study useful to you?	8.6	8.6	6.3	6.6	6.3	8.0	6.0	7.6	7.3	6.0	**65.3**
g) Were the questions asked helpful?	7.0	5.6	7.0	7.6	6.3	7.6	8.3	7.6	7.0	7.0	**71.0**
h) Were your group challenged to think?	8.5	7.0	7.5	8.0	7.0	5.5	6.5	6.0	6.5	9.0	**71.5**
i) Were your group challenged to pray?	4.5	6.5	4.0	5.0	6.5	5.5	4.5	5.0	4.0	3.0	**48.5**
j) Were your group challenged to act?	6.5	5.5	3.5	4.5	3.5	5.5	5.5	3.5	6.0	2.0	**48.0**
Total out of 100 per study	**66.9**	**63.8**	**60.1**	**65.6**	**61.2**	**65.2**	**65.6**	**60.6**	**63.4**	**65.0**	

TABLE 10

BIBLE STUDY RESPONSES

The overall ratings for each study show remarkable consistency (range 60.1-66.9). The Hawthorne effect (DePoy & Gitlin 1994:105-106) may account for the high marks given to the first study. The ratings for relevance show a gradual increase, which is pleasing, as the groups have clearly begun to consider for themselves the importance of being a community. Again, an overall increase in the scores for relationship to the passage back this conclusion.

There was a clear problem with length for some of the groups, but some met for a specified time (for example an hour and a quarter) and others met without a time limit.

As I was anxious about the questions being too 'wordy' for some, answers to question (e) were reassuring: that the questions had been pitched correctly.

The opening narratives declined in relevance as the studies progressed as may be expected, given that the group were now getting 'into' the theme for themselves.

Question (g) referred to the personal helpfulness of the questions, and again these scored well, demonstrating that they got the group to discuss and ponder the issues raised.

As points for prayer were included at the end of each study, I found the scores to (i) slightly disappointing. The response to (j) indicates just how difficult it is

for Christ Church, along with other churches, to link faith and action. This may in part be down to our conservative evangelical nature as a Church, and the fact that we have little history in the field of social action. Nevertheless, the numbers of Church members helping out during the celebration weekend was encouraging, so maybe it had more effect than the groups realised at the time!

Comments were generally encouraging:

> *"It's good to see a themed series rather than just working through a book"*
> *"These help me to make sense of my life"*
> *"We liked the stories – it helped us to see where things fitted in"*
> *"They really made us think"*

The Rector felt that there were too many questions:

> "*Maybe fewer questions would have encouraged more probing answers. There is always a tendency to try and answer all the questions, which could leave some of the personal application areas under-explored."*

This was not an issue raised by the groups themselves, although it may be reflected at (c) where the length of the studies was asked for.

Overall, given that this was a first attempt by the author to write Bible studies, there seems to have been good outcomes. The members of the groups were not aware of the authorship of the studies, although the group leaders were.

- Through semi-structured interviews with participants

Overall, thirty two responses were obtained from Christ Church members, see Table 11:

TABLE 11

RESPONSES FROM CHURCH MEMBERS AT EVENTS WEEKEND

	Art Exhibition	Barbeque	Total
Male	1	10	11
Female	3	18	21
Total	4	28	32

Although, as may be expected, most of the respondents had come to help in some capacity, other motivations were also stated:

"*Something to do*"
"*I wanted to come, and someone offered me a lift*'"
"*To support the Church and share fellowship*"
"*Interest in the local community*"
"*To feel part of Church activities*"
"*It's important to witness to the people of Moreton*"

Most of these responses had to do with being a part of a community, and a longing to be so.

Respondents were asked what the good things about the event were. Many of these were event specific, such as the lovely paintings (Art Exhibition) or the Bouncy Castle (Barbeque). However, some were more general:

"*It's something social – not churchy*"
"*The people and the conviviality*"
"*It's an opportunity to meet new people*"
"*The friendliness and the fellowship*"
"*People socialising and the children having fun*"
"*The lovely community spirit*"
"*Seeing people from the local community taking part in a Church event*"
"*The smiling faces*"

It is clear that for Church attenders there was a feeling of community about the events.

When they were asked what we could do to improve things, responses varied, although several mentioned the advertising. This issue has been explored earlier on. Excluding this issue, respondents replied:

"*I need a babysitter*" (Art Exhibition). (This was something that we had not really thought about.)
"*I'm disappointed more strangers didn't come*"
"*I am sure the more of these events we have, the better they will become and the more activities will come into being. It's good to be open to new ideas*"
"*Maybe include some karaoke*" (Although I expect this was the only respondent not in the music group who was willing to hear her voice beamed across Moreton!)
"*Maybe a puppet show*" (What a good idea for next year.)
"*More people coming who do not normally go to Church*"
"*More varied food – some people who took leaflets said that they could not eat burgers*" (This is another thought for next time. It wouldn't be too difficult to do salads and so on.)

It seems as if Christ Church had really come together over the weekend and were anxious to do this kind of thing again. Despite the comments about the lack of non-church people, this was actually more true of the Saturday than the Friday in the experience of the author.

The final question asked concerned their perceptions of Moreton as a community. There was a mix of responses including a fair number of 'don't know'. Some of the responses were positive:

"*I feel Moreton is a community*"
"*Coming from Liverpool, it is always a pleasure to be a part of a smaller community, although I love my home town. People here are very friendly and everything is within walking distance*"
"*Fabulous! I moved from Oxton twelve months ago, and I love it!*"
"*It still has a village feel*"
"*I think it's improving - People are friendly*"
"*I think things are improving around the neighbourhood, people are more friendly*"
"*It's like a small community; you soon get to know folk. Christ Church is the focal point*"

Some were negative:

"It's OK but more people in the area could get involved"
"I've always been happy here. It had a village atmosphere, but it is losing that now. I'm scared to come round the Cross at night"
"I hate the traffic – it's getting worse, like a river dividing Moreton"
"It's not as friendly as I'm used to in the North East"
"Not as close a community as in times gone by"
"I feel very sorry for the people of Moreton. People only go out of Moreton"
"I hate Moreton, it's boring. All the green spaces are going – it's too much of a town"
"It's a splintered community, there's not a bit of togetherness"
"It's the same as anywhere else in England. People are only interested in themselves, rather than in the community"

Others somehow recognised a potential within Moreton:

"They need rallying more"
"It needs to be brought together through the love of Christ and for all the Churches to be united in Christ for this to be a reality"
"It's a very mixed community, but it has the potential to be great if we all come together a little more often"
"We need to be more involved in practical ways in helping one another in the community (looking at the needs of the people.)"

- **Through the perceived growth of the community network as judged by the Site Team.**

All the Site Team members felt that the community network had grown as a result of the project. They were all now aware of activities going on within the community that they had not been prior to the project and in particular the Art Exhibition was mentioned as something that had demonstrated a growth in community network.

3.6 Personal Growth

Throughout the duration of the project, the author kept a journal reflecting her thoughts and feelings and giving a chronological order to events as they unfolded.

The excitement and apprehension as the project began 'officially' was almost tangible. The long process of preparation was over and now we had come to the moment where we could get 'stuck in'. The author reflected on how Jesus must have felt at the beginning of His ministry – having spent forty days in the wilderness. This has parallels with the ways that the Site Team experienced the process of Project Design. It felt very dry and arid, almost without sign of an end. It felt difficult not having the backing of the whole church as distinct from the Site Team. It would seem, upon reflection that several strands permeated the duration of the project and, rather than dealing with events strictly chronologically, these themes which arose again and again in different guises are best dealt with as themes in their own right. Then, the issue of an emerging and distinctive ministry will be addressed, before envisioning the future for Moreton and for Christ Church as a result of the project.

3.6a <u>Issues of power</u>

One of the distinctive themes that emerged within the project phase that has demanded reflection separate from anything else has been the issue of power. Although this really ought not to have come as a surprise, the truth is that both the candidate and the Site Team may have been rather naïve at the outset, and this issue has both shaped and to a degree limited what we have been able to achieve.

Within the church, there are both difficulties and advantages in being laity undertaking a project of this nature. The difficulties are fairly easily discerned

– in part it is that if clergy feel threatened then may become an obstacle to the work that is being done. The Rector has told me that, in his view, most clergy would not support (let alone condone) a member of the laity undertaking a project like this. He said: "I do not believe this course should be open to laity." However, it is important, theologically and practically, that I am a lay person who does not have executive power within the church – otherwise, it would be extremely difficult to enter into dialogue and work with a disempowered community with authenticity.

At the Parochial Church Council, a Project presentation was requested. This was extremely difficult for the author to undertake, as I was aware of the Rector's ambivalence towards my undertaking the course at all, and also of certain other key figures who could perceive the project in an unfavourable light. Martin Percy (1998:8) writes: "An extraordinary feature of life in the late twentieth century is the amount of power that individuals can exert over one another. The nature of power often hides this." Richard Holloway (1994:14) applies this to churches: "Churches can be cockpits of conflict; deeply neurotic places, where people play power games and deny the reality of their own circumstances. I have witnessed these things and been part of the strange collusion that allows Churches to be extremely dishonest places." The author had to amend the context and nature of the project (including that it was to form a crucial part of this academic research), and re-write it in order to meet the aims and objectives of the Parochial Church Council, so that they would pass it. It included emphasising certain aspects, and downplaying others – which were, if anything, the most important. This felt extremely

uncomfortable – but was recognized as being necessary politically if the project were to get off the ground at all. Being a part of that 'strange collusion' did not lead me to feel optimistic at the outset. Indeed, it even required the intervention of the Programme Leader before even this could be done. This was in spite of the demonstrable theological merit of the project as devised by the Site Team, and its relevance to Christ Church and the community that it purports to serve – the 'watchword' used on all Christ Church letterheads is "The Church at the heart of Moreton, with Moreton at its heart." As it was, although at some cost to the author, the Parochial Church Council permitted the project to run.

The demands of remaining true to the Site Team's vision and the author's convictions about the way in which power should be used, that is to say in the service of others, were to remain a constant throughout the project in one guise or another, and remain an ongoing source for personal theological reflection, rigorous self-examination and, all too often, repentance. I found myself returning again and again to the concept of 'servant leadership' as described by Chalke (1998:39-40). He writes that the servant leader assumes leadership because they recognise it as the best way they can help or serve others. Their desire is not to be dominant, but rather see others develop, progress, mature and achieve for themselves. Within a couple of days of the project beginning the issues about power were beginning to emerge again – this time within a different context:

Within the community, Leasowe (the community nearest to Moreton in geographic terms) is seen as a powerful community. This means that it has well organised community groups, and has seen an influx of funding designed to improve the quality of life of the poorest in that community. This includes the 'Millennium Centre' which houses adult education facilities, Online Centre and the Women's' Centre, a new Primary Healthcare facility including instant access to GP/Nurse Practitioner Services, and housing stock improvements, including new kitchens and bathrooms, double glazing and central heating. This is clearly a multi-million pound investment. Often this has come as a result of pressure from community groups. Exploring issues with the community groups existing in Leasowe may well provide us with some insight. It has to be borne in mind however that relations between the two communities of Leasowe and Moreton may best be described as cool. Because of the historic influx of funding into Leasowe, Moreton, especially the more deprived parts of the Parish, has come to view itself as the "poor relation". The people of Leasowe prefer to avoid coming into Moreton unless it is to shop at the Cross, and the people of Moreton will not access the facilities offered in Leasowe. Among the young people the division between the two communities is even more marked with regular fights occurring between youngsters from the two communities.

The Moreton Pathways Partnership seemed to come under pressure to 'merge' with Leasowe. The Project worker from Leasowe, Kenny, came out to visit the author at home and could not quite understand that the author was not paid for doing essentially the same job that he is paid for doing. This

enabled an explanation of the author's motives in term of serving God and the community – so was a wonderful opportunity, but on reflection, the author can see that Kenny was trying to see how the ground lay with regards to the proposed merger.

Bearing in mind the inequity in power between the two Partnerships, the author's view is that, while Moreton does indeed have a lot to learn from the experience of Leasowe, a merger would not be in the interests of the Moreton Partnership, as it would quickly be subsumed.

The Moreton Partnership has had difficulties in becoming established due to the fractured nature of the community itself. Whereas Leasowe effectively has only one Tenants and Residents Association (for example) the Moreton area has three. Whereas Leasowe has only one community centre, Moreton has three. Leasowe has only the Church of England and Roman Catholic Churches, Moreton has seven (one of which was established as a result of a split in the Baptist Church some years ago). Each group in Moreton, to a greater or lesser extent, has become parochial in their outlook and concerned mainly with maintenance rather than development. Most are somewhat suspicious of any form of working together, as they see it as a diminution of their power base, rather than an adding to the community. This means that a change in attitude has had to take place before any groups in the community could begin to work together. The Partnership operates mainly with one Tenants and Residents Association, one Community Centre (in the same geographical area) and one Church (Christ Church) represented. The other

two Tenants and Residents Associations are occasionally present at meetings. The greatest difficulty for the Moreton Partnership (as if these were not enough) is that the Pathways Regeneration Area in Moreton is spread across two local authority wards – only one of which is recognised as being deprived. This means there are potentially six local councillors who could be involved. As it is, only one councillor attends regularly – and he is from the Moreton Ward. None of the councillors from the East Moreton and Leasowe Ward attend regularly, preferring to attend the Leasowe Partnership meetings – again giving this Partnership greater power to make its voice heard.

The relative success of the Leasowe Partnership compared with that of its neighbour may be explained in terms of power. Within a Marxist perspective, inequalities in service provision are explained in terms of the lack of productivity in some groups. (Ham 1985:193). At the macro level of analysis, this has considerable explanatory value – yet there is little difference in terms of economic productivity between the Leasowe Pathways area and the Moreton Pathways area when statistics for unemployment and disability are compared (Pathways Impact Monitoring Report 2002) and so a different, more pluralist explanation must be sought. The essence of the pluralist democratic theory of power is that the resources, which contribute to power, are widely distributed among different groups. True pluralists would argue that no one group is dominant, and each is able to exercise some influence (for example, Dahl 1961). In this analysis, the secret of Leasowe's relative success in attracting resources lies in its Partnership's ability to speak for the whole of the community – and hence have the power to make itself heard effectively in

the decision making process. This is something that the Moreton Partnership is unable to do. Consequently, Moreton is starved of resources compared with its neighbour, Leasowe.

Early on in the life of the Project, following Kenny's visit a 'joint' meeting was called in Leasowe to 'discuss' the merger at more length – few of the Moreton Partnership were able to make the meeting as it was at short notice, but the author and four others were there. Some twenty-one people attended from the Leasowe Partnership and the agenda for the meeting was headed as if the merger had already taken place. This felt very much as if the Moreton Partnership were being bullied into a merger that none of us had considered at any length and it would be fair to say that the meeting got quite heated! In the end, when everyone was beginning to go around in circles, the author called a halt to the meeting and offered to reconvene it at Christ Church once everyone had had time to consider the proposal. Mercifully, this was agreed to and the group reconvened at Christ Church a week later.

The meeting at Christ Church was an entirely different affair. This time, it was more balanced in terms of numbers attending from each Partnership and was conducted in a civilised manner. The meeting was jointly chaired by Kenny and the author and we concluded that a merger was not viable between the Partnerships, partly because the Moreton Partnership covers two Local Authority Wards (the division of Moreton on this occasion has worked in favour of the community, in the author's opinion) and because of the poor public transport links between the two communities, it would be difficult for

members to attend meetings regularly in another area, particularly in the evenings. However the two Partnerships would be prepared to work together on projects that affected them both.

Two months into the project, the Partnerships were to meet again, for the only time to date. This was held in Moreton and for the first time, the number of the Moreton Partnership outnumbered that of the Leasowe Partnership.

The Moreton Partnership acknowledged that it had a lot to learn and a long way to go, but as the Chair of the Moreton Partnership put it succinctly: "Moreton is gathering strength." He attributed this to the 'threat' that we had overcome from Leasowe. The author is not entirely convinced by this and I think it may have more to do with the recent appointment of two part time workers to focus on Moreton. Certainly the 'liasing with other community organisations' in the Change Goals is having unexpected results.

At the meeting, the group present identified the Sandbrook as the area with the most problems. Its Community Centre has no paid worker (unlike the other community centres in Moreton) and consequently the Sandbrook Centre is underused. A feasibility study to look at the Centre and its possible further development was agreed – as one of the Councillors put it: "We'll give it a go, it might just work."

The second item this meeting agreed upon was to look at the possibility of working together to upgrade Moreton Shore. This is at the coast and it is a

popular local attraction. However, it has very poor facilities – with portable toilets only open during the summer and a small wooden shack, which sells the best chips in the area. Most Sundays there is a car boot sale nearby and also Leasowe Lighthouse (actually in Moreton, but recently restored) and the adjacent nature reserve provide additional attractions. The toilets were a particular cause for concern, but the café owner has offered £20,000 towards an upgrade and the Partnerships could match fund to give £40,000 in total. With Liverpool having been granted Capital of Culture status in 2008, and Wirral hoping to ride on the back of that – an upgrade of some description to the Shore seems a distinct possibility. It would do both Partnerships good to achieve something together in terms of their relationship. Suddenly things seem to be looking up for Moreton.

A couple of weeks later, all that optimism would disperse. The author attended a meeting to the Yew Tree Centre to assist in re-devising the Action Plan for Moreton. This is the guiding document for the work of the Partnership.

What really struck me was how little things had changed in the three years since the last one was produced. Our priorities remained unchanged and there was little visible progress towards achieving most of them. We are simply not impacting on the problems of fragmentation and deprivation that exist in our community. In many ways the problem seems far larger to me now than it did when I began to work on it. I need to return again and again to prayer for Moreton. I am convinced that there is little that we can do to rebuild a fractured community, but that God can work mightily when we align our will

with His. Almost since I moved to Moreton, I have held a vision of the whole of Moreton joined in celebration and praise. I have an image of a host of people thronging around the Cross - praising God, with division a thing of the past. I believe this was from God, and I must try to hold on to it. Reflecting on things, I saw I had fallen into the trap of being caught up in a secular agenda – and I needed to return again to scripture and to prayer – so that I would not become overwhelmed by the task of completing the project and of the task that lies ahead of me.

Four days after this fairly critical meeting, Kenny again visited – although I'm not quite sure why he came. He seemed to want to give money towards this project, although I'd already explained that Christ Church does not raise funds in that way, and that the cost of the Directory would be met out of the Moreton Partnership's budget. I do not think he quite believed Christ Church's policy – it simply is not the way in which the world operates. We work by faith that God will provide through the generosity of His people.

However, when I spent time in prayer that evening, I realised that I had begun to hope for a paid role for myself in this. Although we are by no means rich, I believe God has given me the opportunity to work for Him in Moreton – and I should not compromise that for the sake of a wage slip. How can I expound the policy of the Church, which I believe to be in line with biblical teaching, if I am not prepared to live like that myself?

3.6b Finding Allies

The first Site Team meeting during the Project Phase made me suspect that if the project's outcomes are to be achieved, even partially, then we must seek 'allies' outside of the Site Team. These 'allies' will be willing to participate, offering specific areas of expertise that we lack, or even developing aspects of the project that we cannot undertake because of our lack of authority within the Church.

The most obvious deficit in terms of the project proposal was that none of the Site Team had any expertise with web design. However Arthur[24] who was living on the Sandbook Estate, was glad to assist. He had approached the author for pastoral help and the author had assisted in getting him re-housed. (He is now settled happily in a bungalow in a different area). His enthusiasm for the project was both a surprise and a delight – especially as he is not a regular member of Christ Church.

In terms of setting up something in the sheltered housing complex, Sunningdale, I approached a Reader and his wife, who had had prior experience of doing something similar in another area, to head this up. This was agreed by the Site Team. It was difficult to accept that this part of the project was in essence being taken over by someone else, but it seemed wise to do so. During the project, however, there was no progress in this realm – and it is something of a disappointment to the Site Team and to myself. Again, it may be a case of a lack of power invested by the Church in the Site Team and the project, but it remained something we were keen to try in the future.

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[24] His name has been changed.

In January 2005, I decided in conjunction with the Rector that this was something I should be doing. I now head up a successful church plant at Sunningdale, leading a team of five from Christ Church. The midweek congregation there has its own liturgical and pastoral style and shape and we feature in the "Fresh Expressions" Directory run by the Archbishop of Canterbury.[25] Recently we were given a grant by the Diocese of Chester to buy equipment to help us in our worship of £350.

A huge number of allies had to be found within the community in terms of getting the Art Groups together and within the Church in terms of getting the Big Event weekend to work. It was agreed by all that it required the Rector to put his authority behind getting the Church motivated, and I found one of the Local Councillors anxious to help with getting the Art Groups together (she leads one of them). The Art Exhibition was a great success in terms of bringing the community together – and now we have done it once, it will be easier to repeat in the future – and there are plans to do so. This was indeed repeated in 2005, and subsequently with equal success.

3.6c The Emergence of Community Ministry

Although 'networking' seems to be one of the vogue words in modern management and it is a term which some (for example Grundy 1995:39) use in relation to this type of ministry, I prefer the term 'bridge building'. It allows me to become a conduit rather than the centre of a network – pointing always towards the community from within the church, and to the church from within

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[25] http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sunningdale

the community. The opportunity afforded to me by this project to span different groups within the community has been enormous – far more than the relative size of the congregation at Christ Church would merit. It has been a steep learning curve to use and manage these opportunities to their greatest advantage and in only some have I been successful. There is a clear role in ministry for the bringing together of people or groups who find it hard to understand one another. (Grundy 1996:8-9)

In struggling to understand and to come to terms with the new role, which the project has afforded me, a new leadership role within the local church and community has been developed. I have become, in a sense, the bridge whereby these two may enter into dialogue. There is a clear strand of witness inherent within it, as is demonstrated in my reported conversations with Kenny, the Project Worker from Leasowe, but also with others. There is an almost symbolic role in maintaining the presence of the church in the regeneration of the community, but equally there is the opportunity for the extension and development of pastoral skills on an individual and group basis. In preaching, in leading services and in intercession, I have an opportunity to bring the issues and needs of the community directly into the church, and in being an active member of the Moreton Partnership, I have the responsibility of bringing the light of the gospel to bear on a divided community. It would seem that I have in some way been charged with a ministry of reconciliation that is basic to the gospel and to Christian mission (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

There is a key picture in the gospel of Luke (Luke 14:12-24) about people who are marginalized by their circumstances and involves the bringing together of groups of them in the context of the kingdom. This is where Jesus tells of the messianic banquet where the guests of honour are 'the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame'. There is a close connection between the gift of generous hospitality and the call to healing.

In selecting the passage Isaiah 58:1-12 as our key alongside the prophecy of the 'anorexic bride' given to Christ Church, the project has sought to find ways of responding to the challenge offered by a starving community. The hallmark of the project has been that of hospitality and welcome. It is a task that I am called to continue to pursue.

3.7 Dreaming the Future

Following on from the planned social event for adults with learning disabilities, which was attended mostly by youngsters with special needs, an inclusive Youth Group has been set up by the author in conjunction with Wirral Family Friends (a part of Scope) at Christ Church. This opened in August 2004, and as I write is growing fast. This will run initially for three years, with three paid staff (one of whom also works for Wirral Youth for Christ) and volunteers.

The work undertaken on the starving community was used to identify and structure the project proposal for Merseyfest in Moreton 2005 – which in turn united all the churches in Moreton in serving the community. They upgraded

the municipal heart of Moreton as a sign of hope to a hope-less community, a theme identified by the Site Team, and provided the community with a feast (a fiesta) at the end of the project week as a symbol of feeding a starving community. The churches now plan to continue this type of work in the years to come. (A copy of the project proposal for Merseyfest is in Appendix 9 to this document).

A bus route linking the four quarters of the community is badly needed and this has been tested and found to be viable. It provides a tangible method of re-uniting the fractured community. The author, the originator of the scheme as a result of the project, is working alongside the North Moreton and Sandbrook Partnership and Wirral Community Transport to try to ensure that this becomes a reality.

At last, it seems as if the Christ Church is beginning to share the riches that God has given us with the community. In releasing these, the Bride is beginning to overcome her anorexia and can start to meet the needs of a starving community. Christ Church is now striving to be a place of acceptance and belonging. It is becoming slowly what Martin Buber (1979:8) calls "the place of Theophany": the place where God reveals Himself and His love. It is becoming a place of friendship – where, instead of keeping itself aloof from the community it is called to serve – all are now welcomed, from the disabled youngsters of the Youth Club, to the constellation of the Art Groups, and even the admitted agnostics – such as Kenny, the Project Worker from Leasowe. Friendship is the perfect counter to the impersonality of a fractured

community. Moltmann (1978:115) puts it like this: "Friendship unites affection with respect. In friendship we experience ourselves for what we are, respected and accepted in our own freedom. Through friendship we respect and accept people as people and as individual personalities."

3.8 Group Growth and the Dynamics of the Site Team

The Site Team began as a group of fourteen, including the author, eight of whom attended the first meeting (and three apologies). The Parish Administrator attended the first meeting only, as did one of the Church Wardens (although he has requested and received regular updates from the author). Three other individuals attended only one meeting during the life of the Site Team. One lady, Angela, resigned formally from the Site Team during the project proposal phase, as she felt unable to understand it properly or contribute to it. Angela suffers from spells of depression and this turned out to be indicative of one of these spells and the author remains a source of support for her.

In all, the Site Team met on fourteen occasions between October 2002 and May 2004 – with six attending six or more sessions. This includes the Rector, although he was not present for either of our "key" meetings (sessions three and four – see below). Three of those six individuals have been interviewed or have kept a journal during the life of the Site Team. The Rector has not been included in this evaluation as his views of the course and the project have been made clear elsewhere.

By the third meeting, the Site Team had begun to settle down in to what was going to be its fairly consistent format throughout its life. It was agreed at the first meeting, and this rule was adhered to throughout, that the content of the Site Team meetings would remain confidential to the members. This is a basic principal of pastoral care (for example see Lyall 1995:58-63). It proved to be especially important during the biblical and theological meetings where several of the Site Team disclosed personal information - a rich vein of reflection for the team but it would not have been possible without the agreement to confidentiality within the group, and again at those points where members felt they were overawed by the task ahead of them.

It is interesting to note that those members of the Site Team who were present for meetings three and four (the biblical and intuitive meetings) were also those who were most likely to have attended for the greatest number of sessions thereafter. In fact, following these meetings, it became increasingly difficult for other Site Team members to join the meetings as these two meetings were instrumental in binding the Team together – and during these two meetings (and the time between them) the theological and spiritual nature of the project began to be shaped.

It was also agreed at the first meeting that the meetings would last no more the 90 minutes. This is simply a principle of good group management (Houston 1987:28-32), so that folk would know what time they needed to set aside, often in busy lives. This rule was only broken once (at meeting four) with the agreement of all present. This was because we had a real sense of

the Spirit of God with us during this meeting, and we did not want to limit what He was trying to do with our rules! Meeting four extended to just over two and a quarter hours. Looking back, meeting four was the lynchpin in the life of the Site Team, enabling us all to face the difficult and complex task of undertaking the Project Proposal with some confidence that we were acting within the will of God for our Church and community.

Handling the group dynamics within the Site Team often proved challenging because Betty (who is both a manager and a trained counsellor) was often anxious to impose her expertise onto the rest of the Team - before other members were ready for it. It was difficult to encourage her to hold back until the rest of the group had caught up a bit. Diana, a Reader from another Parish, was inclined to act as observer to the group and to comment in an often insightful way as much on the process as the content. This was found to be helpful to the rest of the team as we often found ourselves unable to see the wood for the trees because of our emotional commitment to Christ Church and to Moreton as a community. Unfortunately, she lost her mother quite suddenly just after the start of the project phase and was unable to continue with the Site Team as a result.

Two members of the group, Pauline and Lynn, both showed demonstrable growth in confidence during the life of the Site Team:

Pauline (a lady who has a history of strokes) became able to express her views and opinions more fluently and grew in her self-esteem as a result of

being included in the Site Team (from her own report). The author is pleased to report that this has lead to Pauline having the confidence to set up and run a basic bible study and social group for young parents within the Church, known as Coffee Plus. This was set up as the Project approached its end at the beginning of May 2004 and continued to thrive.

Lynn, who is both artistic and deeply intuitive, found that her spirituality was valued and encouraged as a result of being included in the Team. She reports that she has learned the value of not only depending on her intuition, but also combining it with Bible reading and support from other Christians to validate her insights.

Betty echoed the thoughts of the Team over the Project Proposal in her journal: "Site Team meetings now seem like a real chore and I often feel like giving up. However I committed myself to this task and will see it through."

This phase, which took several meetings, was definitely hard work for all involved and needed great determination from us all. The author felt quite humbled that this group was continuing to work together through the difficult times, because none of them had the impetus of achieving a qualification at the end of it – even if that remains some way off.

Lynn wrote concerning this phase: "I will keep going if only because (the author) is my friend. I wonder how many people commit themselves to church and continue to go only because of their friendships? It would be so good if

we were so committed to Jesus as our friend that we keep on going even when we do not feel like it. This is something of what this project is about – filling the friendship gap with the love of Jesus. This bit is simply about how we do it, so I will keep on going."

Betty was grateful that I took the time and trouble to produce the Project summary document and everyone could now see how things fitted together. "Things do look clearer and achievable."

As we moved towards the ending of the life of the Site Team, our time was largely taken up with practical details in completing the project phase. Those keeping journals (and those who didn't) reported feeling elated and exhausted at the end of the Big Event Weekend, marking the end of the project!

The last entry in both journals (Lynn and Betty) demonstrated their ongoing commitment to both Christ Church and the community. Here are the closing lines from one of them:

"I am committed to building community within the church and making opportunity for this to be open to Moreton as a community. Moreton is starving spiritually as well a practically, and if there be any truth in the Anorexic Bride – it is that, like anyone else with anorexia, they cannot yet see that they are starving."

The Site Team had changed through its life. The words of Vincent (2002:290) seem applicable to our group:

> It is as if the little companies of believers see themselves as being personally called not just to be believers and to maintain the service of worship and right belief, but even and much more, to be those who share the mystery, the tragedy and the triumph of being Jesus practitioners, God actors, Spirit led project workers.

3.9 Conclusion

It is clear to me now, as I write with hindsight, that the Research Project was the right thing to do at the time we did it, although I sometimes doubted it then. This is because it enabled not only those on the Site Team to "experiment" with ministry themselves, but gave the Church as a whole the chance to "experiment" with engaging with their broader community in terms of social action and witness, rather than purely evangelistic outreach (which is largely what Christ Church had done previously with events like the Jesus Video Project). I hope it laid some firm foundations for the congregation to have the confidence in themselves and in God to get involved with projects like Merseyfest in 2005.

It is with joy that I have seen some on the Site Team go on to develop in ministry themselves, one (Tim) now training for ordination, another (Betty) recently offered a chaplaincy in the Falkland Islands. In Christ Church, Pauline leads a group for young mothers, already mentioned, and Lynn is preparing to lead a drop-in session for people experiencing mental health difficulties – "Spirit led Project workers" indeed!

In the next chapter, in the light of current and developing media interest in the whole issue of eating disorders, there is an excursus examining the power of the health and medical experts in our society with relation to diet. Following this, and given that we began to consider church and community in a radical light, I will examine critically seven recent publications, which consider eating disorders with varying theological responses considering how they might inform this work and noting points of parallel and difference. Then I will proceed with my own examination of anorexia as a metaphor in the light of our own experience at Christ Church and in Moreton, overshadowed by Isaiah and the society of his time.

Chapter Four

What's Eating Us?

"God made each one of us different to reflect her rich and glorious image"

Jo Ind (1993:55)

4.1 <u>Introduction</u>

In defining the problem before us, the Site Team focussed on Moreton from the 1950s (see 2.8) and for this reason, in part, I have limited my writing to western concepts of health and illness from roughly that time onwards. The other main reason for excluding the valuable (and often more holistic) insights from other cultures and times[26] is that of the word constraint, meaning that I would be unable to do them justice within the space available. With this understanding of health and illness, in this chapter, I consider recent theological approaches to eating disorders.

The issues of eating disorders and obesity have sprung to the forefront of our national consciousness in the first decade of the twenty-first century. There have been popular television programmes, like "Jamie's School Dinners", sensational documentaries, such as "Supersize Me" and the more recent "Superslim Me"; and we have witnessed debates in the national press over the use of American size zero models on the catwalk in the big international fashion shows. Milan has recently banned the use of models with a Body Mass Index under 16, although London will continue to use them. Clinically, anyone with a Body Mass Index under 18 is probably underweight. Sadly, 2006 saw the death of two international models (both Brazilian) from anorexia (<u>The Observer Magazine </u>14.01.07).

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[26] For valuable historical perspectives see Vandereycken W. & Van Deth R. (1994) <u>From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: the History of Self-Starvation</u> The Athlone Press, London and Walker Bynum C. (1987) <u>Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Experience of Food to Medieval Women</u> University of California Press, Berkley, California.

Selecting possible theological partners to my own work has been done on the pragmatic basis of conducting an online search and choosing works where anorexia or eating disorders appeared in the titles alongside theology. In the light of this modern upswell of interest in eating disorders, the connections that two British Anglican theologians, Archbishop John Habgood and Joanne Grenfell, have seen between eating disorders and matters of faith may be relevant to our concerns. Another, Jo Ind, uses her own battle with an eating disorder to describe her spiritual journey. From the USA, L. Shannon Jung, Professor of Rural Ministry at the University of Dubuque and Wartburg Theological Seminary, sets food in a more global perspective; Michelle Lelwica, Director of Women's Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at St. Mary's College, California, examines the spiritual dimensions of anorexia; Mac Brunson, a Baptist minister and Ergun Caner, Dean of a Baptist Theological College, together parallel anorexia with the issues facing their congregations. Finally, Catherine Garrett Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, focuses mainly upon the lessons learned in the recovery from anorexia. Each will be examined separately to see what they contribute to understanding the overall process of community breakdown and restoration, mirrored in anorexia and its recovery, that I will explore in Chapter Five.

However, prior to discussion of these writings, I want to examine the process whereby eating itself has become a medicalised condition (see 4.2), that is to say that eating itself has become the centre of medical attention. This will help to set a socio-medical context for the whole discussion. To achieve this, I

need to look at the power of medicine in our society today and to consider the extent to which health has taken the place of religion, and so medical experts (although not necessarily doctors) the place of priests, and just how far we are judged on our appearance, specifically how much we weigh.

4.2 <u>Health, Diet and Society</u>

Health and medicine are actually two distinct and separate entities, although it is hard for most people to separate their ideas of health from their ideas about medicine. According to Hart (1985:1), we may say medicine is concerned with the treatment of illness primarily, while health is concerned with well being.

The best-known definition of health dates back to 1948, when the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined it as "Not merely the absence of disease, but complete physical, mental and social wellbeing." (WHO 1948). This begins to move towards the concept of an holistic approach to health such as that argued for by Berman (1981), who draws strongly on the work of the philosopher Bateson, as does Graham (1990) and Dossey (1982).

It is this concept of health that has now become fashionable, rather than the more limited treatment of illness that medicine offers. However, whereas our health was once a more private concept - one of doctor/patient privilege, there is now a sense in which it has become public property.

In modern Britain, especially since 2007, for example, it seems that public policy virtually encourages the consumption of alcohol with the introduction of

twenty four hour licensing, despite substantial evidence of the personal and social harm of excessive consumption. In contrast, public policy actively discourages the consumption of cigarettes – with the banning of smoking in enclosed public spaces from July 2007. While the evidence for personal harm in this instance is undeniable, the evidence for social harm is not so strong. The advent of the "Super Casino" and online gambling and Bingo allows gambling for everyone, thus seeming to encourage families and individuals to fall into debt, while the five-a-day fruit and vegetable campaign and the initiatives on childhood obesity (culminating in a recent child protection case on the grounds of obesity) seems to allow judgement to be made based on appearances alone, without taking into account cost, availability or the skill needed to prepare the food.

Indeed, appearance appears to be the one thing on which everyone is judged! This is one of the great discourses of feminist theology, especially body theology, but lies somewhat outside the remit of this thesis partly for reasons of space, however Isherwood (2008) writes persuasively on this very issue. But there is a more pressing reason: Our main concern here is with process – the process of dis-ease and healing - rather than appearance and acceptance; and our metaphor is one of process, rather than likeness. This renders Isherwood cousin to this work, rather than sister, although common ancestry is acknowledged in the work of writers such as Orbach (2001).

The metaphor of anorexia is critical to this work, and some time has already been spent within the Site Team establishing its origin. Below, and in Chapter

Five, some time will be spent looking at the origins of the problem as medical and sociological phenomena, and, while the historical framework precludes looking at the problem from this perspective, there is sufficient biblical commentary to suggest (see Chapter Five) that this was indeed self-imposed dietary limitation to conform to social (religious) demands – and that those demands had increased in response to social pressures. This suggests that anorexia is a viable metaphor – and the dis-ease/healing process elucidated enables it to be more than simply an interesting parallel. Fasting, as a discipline, has some merit, but under consideration here is the problem of fasting that has become a maladaptive response.

Hart (1985:17) describes contemporary medicine thus:

> Medicine presents an image of health which fits with the culture of industrial capitalist societies. The most important parallel is between the ethic of individualism in modern society and the focus of medical treatment on individuals. The modern way of life is more privatised and impersonal, and these tendencies pervade all aspects of experience including health care.

This makes it easier to understand why medicine in particular has become so influential in the determination of health policy, and why individuals alone are blamed for the state of their own health (and even that of others), largely without allowance being made for the greater factors and forces that determine and shape so much of all of our lives. Pattison (1989:156) writes that medicine has been arraigned as a covert but effective part of the apparatus of social control in society and:

> Some critics argue that more and more social and political issues are being swallowed up by the ever-expanding and ostensibly benevolent empire of medical concern.

Historical evidence suggests that the greatest health gains have come, not through medical treatment, but through social and economic development such as the provision of clean water, improved standards of housing and immunisation against the killer infectious diseases of childhood. As the highest living standards are found in contemporary capitalist societies, this is where people enjoy the highest standards of health in absolute terms – but even so, some writers (such as Doyal & Pennell 1979) insist that capitalism is bad for health.

The first argument put forward is that, as wealth increases, so people are encouraged to desire (and so consume) hazardous goods such as refined and processed foods (contributing to obesity), baby formulae (not as good as the natural alternative), cigarettes (with their known risks), and cars, because they produce greater profit for the manufacturers (healthy commodities being less profitable by implication). By appearing as "high status", goods in glossy adverts become associated with a "wealthy" lifestyle, thus consumers are encouraged to desire these goods in order to participate in the lifestyle that has become associated with them. Historically, the best-known example is the "Marlborough" cowboy – a rugged character who advertised cigarettes. The actor eventually died of lung cancer.

The second argument is slightly more complex. Although industrialisation does bring with it the risk of disease and injury, perhaps worse is its dehumanising effect (there is the influence of Karl Marx in this train of thought). Worth is measured in capital rather than in human terms; and work

itself carries no intrinsic value except as a symbol of social participation, a concept that owes much to Durkheim's model of the social division of labour as the principal mechanism of social integration in modern society (Durkheim 1964). As employment opportunities move, so people move, and community with its social network of support is weakened. Eyer (1984:28) writes:

> The basic social process of capitalism is itself the source of increased stress. The very same social changes which increased agricultural productivity and made possible a large non-agricultural labour force are also the fundamental causes of the health risks that increase with capitalism. These changes can be summarised as the uprooting of people from stable communities and the subjection of life to the constantly changing demands of the market for labour.

However, what has been evident in Britain for nearly thirty years, since the publication of the seminal Black Report in 1980, is that the poorer you are, the worse your health is. Why this should be is a cause of some debate, with Benner (1976) arguing that becoming unemployed itself is a stressful life event, which of itself makes one more prone to disease, and Stern (1981) contesting this theory. Stern argues that it is poverty per se rather than unemployment that makes a person more at risk of premature death. Obesity and smoking are both injurious to health and are both more prevalent in the poor. So, according to this construct, we have a society which is marked by increasing individuation, where those who are poorest suffer the poorest health, and where they are blamed for that by those who hold the power.

Medicine has come to hold such power in our society today that it has come to be a quasi religion, with doctors acting in the place of priests, and modern nutritional experts and celebrity chefs taking the place of street evangelists. Where there is a quasi religion there has to be "saints and sinners" – people

become blamed for their own ill-health (whether that be lung cancer, chronic bronchitis – or obesity) and lauded for the correct behaviour (quitting smoking, losing weight and continuing to lose weight). Little wonder then that we judge people on what they weigh, and it is all too easy for people's own self esteem to become bound up in the same issue.

Having explored how we have come to judge individuals on appearance, marking those who are fat as socially and almost morally as inferior to those of normal or slender build, and linked this to the power of medicine and government messages in today's society, I am now going to examine several theological responses to the issue of eating disorders, beginning with the most popularist, as a demonstration of how far the "language" of eating disorder has permeated Christian discourse as a whole. The remainder of the titles are discussed in order, from those I used least, to those I referenced most in this work. Section headings refer to the book or article titles and their year of publication.

4.3 Why Churches Die (2005)

Brunson and Caner use the metaphor of anorexia to describe a serious malady in a congregation. In their book, they "diagnose" terminal conditions in the congregations of churches, linking them to biblical characters. One chapter is devoted to anorexia and bulimia (12 pages). This book is filled with anecdotes about "difficult" members of congregations these ministers have encountered. Thus, "Darlene" walks out if the sermon is too long, because

she has an aversion to the "meat of the Word of God". Therefore, in their terms, they judge that she has spiritual anorexia (173).

This book reminds me most of conversations between ministers. The various chapters, using illness as metaphors, could possibly be preached as a sermon series, if the minister concerned were brave enough to try it, as I have (see Appendix 8). The book demonstrates that the language of eating disorder, however imperfectly understood, has become a part of the common tongue. Eating disorders, including anorexia, have crossed the line between being complex medical conditions that few except the specialists have heard of, and have become part of everyday experience and language, as our preoccupation with body image, diet and appearance has become greater.

4.4 Fat is a Spiritual Issue (1993)

The second of the seven possible theological parallels to my own work is also firmly based in this social narrative. Jo Ind (1993) describes her own battle with compulsive eating and relates it to the issue of spiritual growth: a literal body theology.

This is a uniquely personal account, as the author herself admits (xii). It is told for the most part in the first person, and, at first sight, seems to have little connection with my own work. However, as the narrative unfolds, the author confides that her eating disorder, real though that is, provides a means of escape from other more painful truths, and that, in a sense, her own eating

disorder provides a metaphor for something much deeper and yet more real. Ind writes (93):

> It was so reassuring to start my diet tomorrow. It protected me by fostering the illusion that pain is avoidable. By translating every situation into fat and thin I could deceive myself that the trouble-free life was only two stones away. Every time I said, "If only I was thin …", I distanced myself from the pain that I could not afford to feel.

As in the course of the ministry project, with our thoughts about fasting and starvation, we began to find a new appreciation of a God who enjoys celebration, so (and in its antithesis) Ind discovers in her battle with compulsive eating that God shares our pain (95):

> And so, when I was a compulsive eater, it was not just my pain that I was cutting off from, it was God-in-me too. In refusing to listen to my deepest parts, I was ignoring God.

We discussed her account within the team. We empathised with her as she writes, "learning to eat was growing in touch with God." (96). In Ind's painfully honest and personal battle with her eating disorder there are echoes of our own discovery of our guilt and shame when we discovered that we were not only the answer to the problems that faced our church and our community, but that we were also the problem itself (see Chapter 2). However, Ind is a diarist rather than a researcher. Ind's remains a resolutely individual journey and a personal account of her battle with an eating disorder through which she discovered both a spiritual disorder and growth – however, it is one in which we can see echoes of the journey discussed in the thesis, through spiritual disorder to celebration. So we must turn to two more recent authors who seek to paint on a broader canvas.

4.5 <u>Anorexia Religiosa (2000)</u>

John Habgood, in his book, based on a series of lectures, shaped loosely around the classic text by William James (1902), <u>The Varieties of Religious Experience</u>, examines the causes for and nature of religious unbelief in our society today. He examines the reasons why the culture of modern day scepticism can seem so attractive and how both believers and non-believers alike can benefit more from true dialogue and mutual criticism than from a restatement of an entrenched position.

What he terms the "varieties of unbelief" are as much a variant on the theme of secularism as idolatrous forms of belief as they are about faith or its absence – the themes that James wrote of in his original work. One of the varieties of unbelief Habgood describes he closely parallels with anorexia. He describes it as "anorexia religiosa" (82). His theme in this chapter of the book is the gradual starvation of the spirit. However, this is a starvation that has nothing to do with neglect, or with the dislike of what is on offer, but has more to do with self-image and self-chosen goals.

Habgood points out that unbelief can gradually overcome faith without any great crisis occurring (just as anorexia nervosa can arise from the simple desire to lose a few pounds), until in the end it becomes so much a part of life that any reversal of it seems unthinkable. He writes:

> Just as there can be untroubled religious faith – what William James described as the religion of optimism – so there can be an imperceptible erosion of faith, often hidden by maintaining some

> pretences, but essentially unaware of any great loss of consequence of having abandoned traditional forms of religious input. (84)

Without faith the spirit turns to substitutes – art, music or whatever it can find - but unrelated to a mature tradition these lack the capacity to stimulate reflection and growth, leading to an uncritical acceptance of what appeals to the individual, and what Habgood, like James, describes as a "cheerful complacency." (85). Anorexia religiosa can be seen in the growth of angel worship (carvings sold on home shopping television channels), crystal healing (available by mail order), psychic phone lines (at premium rates) and girls' nights out visiting the local clairvoyant. It is a modern phenomenon, a product of affluence, changing social expectations and the availability of alternative lifestyles that can then be diluted and sold. Habgood calls this "religious malnutrition"! (86) Sufferers simply fade away.

But Habgood also mentions "religious bulimia" (87). The sufferers from this he equates to those described by James as "twice born". These are those for whom faith matters intensely – but who move from one extreme or another, either for it or against it. Many of the most violent opponents of any faith will, at one time, have been believers. Conversion can go in either direction. It is little wonder, argues Habgood, that Hebrews 10:26-31 is so vehement in its condemnation of those who once believed but now have fallen away, or those who have experienced this emotional experience (like Richard Dawkins, a well known scientist, media atheist and author of the best selling The God Delusion (2006)), and are now so strident in seeking to prove to the world that they are not what they once were.

So far Habgood has attempted to describe two observed trends in faith behaviour by using parallels with eating disorders to make them more comprehensible to a modern audience.

Where Habgood's analogy starts to break down is when he begins to look at two specific examples of theologians who have moved away from their own former faith position. In describing them at the end of the chapter as "contented slimmers, happy to have found ways of retaining some vestiges of a former faith" he betrays himself and seems to be saying that growth and changes in the ways in which we understand God, if different from his own, must mean that we have lost our faith (99). Although one, Daphne Hampson (1996), no longer calls herself a Christian; the second, Anthony Freeman (1993), most certainly did, even if the Bishop of Chichester did not think his beliefs were fitting for parish ministry. Both display well-rounded theological and philosophical arguments, the second very much in the school of Don Cupitt. To follow Habgood's analogy more accurately than he himself does: I would say that these two have rather more turned vegetarian than become "contented slimmers", for there is nothing that could remotely be described as anorexic about either. They have simply found another way of "being" with God that is more appropriate for them.

Habgood, however, himself remains simply an observer. He is a narrator of a trend that he has perceived, which he then seeks, through a variety of analogies (of which eating disorders is but one in a larger volume) to make

comprehensible to his audience. His own position seems to be unchanged by what he has observed. In this book, he is a describer rather than a participant. In contrast, we actively seek to participate and to become agents of change in what we also observe – indeed this lies at the heart of action research methodology, as well as at the heart of Christian mission and witness. We seek to recognise the signs that change is occurring and look for ways of fostering positive change in restoration. However, Habgood's use of language suggests strongly that our use of anorexia may be a viable metaphor for the process that we describe. In his writing there is the use of the clinical condition, anorexia nervosa, applied to a text, and reapplied to gain theological understanding. This is what we will seek to do in Chapter Five.

4.6 Religion and Eating Disorders (2006)

Based on her experiences as a Chaplain at an English university, Joanne Grenfell looks much more specifically at the care of young Christian women who have eating disorders, suggesting that these disorders manifest the tensions felt by this group of young women in trying to conform both to society's expectations and to those of somewhat marginal Christian communities. She specifies that this type of Christian community seeks to define themselves strongly against prevailing cultural norms. She goes on to discuss models of pastoral care that may be helpful using scriptural narratives.

Alone of the seven authors, Grenfell uses scripture as a source for the answer to the problem that is confronting her – but does not use scripture (as the

Team did) to aid her in understanding it. She makes generalisations, which are not supported by research, such as the following:

> In my own experience in a university setting, relating to high achievers from conservative Christian backgrounds, it has certainly seemed the case that eating disorders reflect a burden of conformity upon a young woman which is symptomatic of the pressure that the whole of her family is under to prove that they are living up to the religious expectations of their community … And again the issues upon which this burden of conformity is laid are largely those concerning the body: sexual morality, negative views of menstruation, disciplining of physical desires, avoidance of unchaperoned situations where the girl might be the subject of rape, chaste dating of members of the same religious community, and strict enforcement of dress codes. (2006:376)

At least some of these issues of conformity are not specific to the Christian communities she targets, as it is difficult to see how any parent of any Christian persuasion, whether conservative or not, would actively encourage their daughters to behave in a way that is directly counter to biblical teaching with regard to sexual morality, or in a way that would expose them to danger.

Grenfell admits there is a puzzle in that in these conservative Christian communities women were supposed to marry early and stay at home with the children (377). Wondering why she had come across them in a university setting, she dismisses it as "over-achieving", which is "a common pattern among those with eating disorders, and the conservative Christian women I met were no different in that respect." In fact, she suggests that this stressor between individual and community expectation is a key factor in them developing an eating disorder in the first place. This is an interesting theory; however, she acknowledges that there are no references to support the view that eating disorders are more prevalent among young women from conservative Christian circles:

> I have been unable to find either quantitative or qualitative data to support my hypothesis that there is a connection between disordered eating in young women and current conservative religious practice. (368)

The sociological references she uses are generalised to eating disorder prevalence and the societal pressure upon young women in their teens, and she extrapolates that because there is a suggested higher incidence of incest and child abuse in fundamentalist Christian circles in the USA (citing Imbens & Jonker 1992, Finklhor et al. 1983) the cognate incidence of eating disorders must also be higher. This may or may not be true in America, but whether either are true in England is far more debatable.

However, later in the paper, having discussed incest and sexuality in the Mormon, conservative and Roman Catholic traditions, the author says that the problem of eating disorders is not limited to these traditions:

> Part of a wider setting of institutional culture in a variety of Christian churches which tend to find it difficult to be open and honest about the limits of its patriarchal system, about the costs that women pay for inclusion in that system, and about the areas of shame and fear which, because they cannot be named publicly, are projected onto the bodies of vulnerable individuals or relatively powerless groups (such as young women) in the supposed interest of the whole community … The imperative for these difficulties to be faced is particularly strong in Christian communities which unite around the notion of shared food and shared faith, and which profess to seek the flourishing of all who choose to believe. (380)

Grenfell goes on to point towards an interesting dilemma for pastoral carers in the situation she proposes of an outsider to the Christian community trying to help (or "rescue" in her words) an individual with anorexia. The sufferer then becomes the locus of a contested battle of religious interpretations. Grenfell

poses the question of how it is possible to help affirm the individual's self and agency whilst at the same time beginning to "question the demands which her religion makes on her body, and attempt to offer a more loving – of self and others - model of religious practice and community belonging." (381). Her answer is to present a model whereby the body is treated as something to be loved, and a model of care based on friendship and acceptance – *which does not denigrate the traditions of the established religious community*, but which seeks to "broaden them" to less conventional sources, in which the carer acts like Ruth with Naomi and Elizabeth with Mary to accompany the sufferer on the journey through "reinterpretation." (381-382)

Helpfully, Grenfell suggests enlisting other women in the religious community to explore their experiences together using biblical narratives such as those of wilderness, journeying and testing, as these focus on contested aspects of community identity and highlight how much we depend upon one another as social beings.

The main problem with Grenfell's thesis is simply the lack of evidence to support her central tenet. Initially, she speaks of Mormonism, Seventh Day Adventists and Brethren, but then writes about conservative Christian communities or circles (a much larger grouping, which includes many Baptist and Anglican congregations, including ones like my own). If this is her "experience", it is not mine, having spent twenty years as a member of conservative Christian communities.

It is equally possible (as a theory) that the demands of leaving a secure community (where an identity was established) and going into a strange setting (such as a university) was the stressor that caused the eating disorder to emerge. The conflict here was caused by the competing demands of the faith and the world, which can be a source of conflict for any Christian. This being the case, the most that Grenfell's experience shows is that the conservative Christian communities have more young people in their congregations than do others and they are therefore more likely (proportionately) to have to face this tension.

Grenfell's answers to the problem she poses do bear a superficial resemblance to some of the community based answers that we discovered in the course of our work, in that she advocates a community response to meet a community problem. Unfortunately, the problem that she discusses is difficult to quantify and it appears to be mostly a response to an individual's problem rather than to what she clearly perceives to be a community's problem. She considers that it is the individual who takes upon herself the fundamental dysfunction of the conservative community from which she comes. This is observational. Perhaps even more unfortunately, Grenfell has not permitted herself to be changed by the encounters she has had with these young women, nor do we hear their voices directly in this account.

What is of most interest is that, Grenfell, in common with this work, asserts that the Bible must be reinterpreted if healing is to be bought to Christians who are starving themselves (see Chapters Two, Five and Six of this work).

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She sees also that this healing must come from within a community and as part of a community. These are powerful insights that are developed in this thesis (see 6.4).

4.7 Food for Life (2004)

L.Shannon Jung's book focuses on eating as a theological activity, and refers to eating disorders as a theological disorder. He notes carefully the links between eating disorders and interpersonal relationships. But he does not dwell on this, preferring to move quickly beyond the interpersonal and community levels to the global and to farming methods, which is where the book dwells. He reminds us that eating and food have always been an expression of humans' relationship with God, and he argues that they are an expression of our deepest values. He claims "eating is a spiritual practice that reminds us who we are" (6) not only in our own bodies but also in relation to the world economy. A dichotomy emerges between the world-view that is holistic and revolves around relationships and sharing and the world-view that is business orientated and involved with "slicing life up into bits" (87). So food can either be a means of grace or simply fodder for management and control.

This book shares the basic concept that eating is a theological activity with much of this work (see, for example, Chapter Six) and actually references the Isaiah 58:1-12 passage that is central to the thesis. Noting carefully the link between eating disorders and disordered interpersonal relationships is a theme running through this thesis, based on the Isaiah passage. Of particular

interest, is the fact that this book links eating disorders (he majors on obesity rather than anorexia) and sinful behaviour in very much the same way as the Site Team did (see 5.5), which is not evident in any of the other literature reviewed. We found that we too had to acknowledge our part in the problems that were facing and confounding us, and repent of them, before we were able to move forward, and this is very much the approach that this author urges his readers to undertake. In this sense, it supports the process that the Team experienced.

Finally, he understands more fully than any of the other authors examined the need for food to be a theological and a community experience (see 6:3a).

4.8 Starving for Salvation (1999)

Michelle Mary Lelwica argues that eating disorders themselves are symptomatic of a spiritual hunger, which she defines as a hunger for meaning and value. It is a powerful and insightful work into the dialogue between what she argues is a patriarchal society - one that draws still of the legacy of Christianity in that sense - and the cultural preference for slim female bodies.

This leads, she argues, to the development, for women, of a new "myth of salvation" – that we can be saved if we are only slim enough – and that disordered patterns of eating are the result, with their concomitant legacy of self-loathing. This itself provides initially some sense of meaning and purpose in a world that that is beset with uncertainty and injustice – however it only

serves, she argues, to deepen the spiritual void that women long to fill. So, secular explanations of food and dieting, medical and aethestic, cannot fully convey what is at stake because they lack the subtlety to penetrate the many layers of symbolism with which both these things have been invested. She would argue that when we begin from a purely medical perspective when considering what size means we lose sight of, "its capacity to suggest a picture of the ideal social and cosmic order and to unify experience within that scheme." (68). She suggests that women's bodies carry so much significance for society that dieting has become a cultural rite of womanhood in which "fears and dreams are generated and regulated and the prevailing social order negotiated and reproduced" (69). She suggests that we have replaced the rite of passage with the diet, and in so doing we disempower the woman by encouraging her to deny herself the stuff of life.

The book recognises that food is in some sense symbolic of something else, and that anorexia can "stand for" a much deeper need, in the same way as this thesis does: but it takes its path directly from the existing medical condition. In comprehending the spirituality that lies at the heart of anorexia, Lelwica most closely parallels the material to be found in Chapter Five of this work, although Lelwica is too narrowly focused to be of greater value to overall sweep of what is a wide ranging thesis, however she is referenced directly at 6.4 and Chapter 7 of this work.

4.9 <u>Beyond Anorexia (1998)</u>

The book, by Garrett, was by far the most useful of all the recent literature surveyed. Catherine Garrett focuses exclusively on recovery. She is alone in the authors I examine in having this focus – as the others concentrate solely on the disease process. A former sufferer from anorexia herself, she looks at anorexia as a metaphor for many of the disorders besetting not only herself, but society. She writes "Anorexia is often read as a metaphor for social problems, or, more accurately, as synechdoche (or allegory), in which individual anorexic practices stand for processes of control in the society as a whole." (55) Recovery is seen as a way of reconnecting herself with society, her own body and nature. Persuasively she writes "Recovery is not about perfection, control, resolution or closure, but about continuing transformations" (67). She sees anorexia as a spiritual experience and analyses it in these terms, as well as recounting the experiences of around thirty other sufferers.

Her interesting insight is that the spiritual pain experienced by sufferers is part of a process that can of itself be viewed as positive – and so a question to be lived rather than merely solved. Certainly Garrett sees anorexia as a search for meaning on the part of those who develop that way of life and she argues that those who recover cite a higher power external to themselves as crucial to their recovery. From the perspective of this thesis, it was the early part of her book that was the greatest help, with the latter part of the work resembling more closely the first person narratives of sufferers that I have drawn on to provide evidence for my work in Chapter Five. Garrett's thoughtfulness has

directly informed 1.6, 2.6, 5.7m and Chapter 7 of the thesis. Particular engagement with the work can be found at these points.

4.10 <u>Conclusion</u>

Looking back at these seven accounts, there are hints in each of what the Site Team has found, yet none provides direct or complete parallels to it.

Each of these seven theological approaches is different from the Team's approach where we perceived, as participants, that there was a radical dysfunction within our community, and within our church, and sought to discover both its roots and how we can begin to bring healing to it. In Chapter Two we began to discover that we could call our church anorexic and the community starving – and we found that Isaiah 58, with its emphasis on inappropriate fasting and the building up of community had some real resonance for us. In Chapter Three, the Action Research Project with its motif of food and feeding in all kinds of ways, but especially those groups (such as those with learning disabilities) who may excluded from full participation in the life of the community, began to bring concrete signs of hope of the restoration of community to Moreton and to Christ Church.

Reviewing the process again in the light of the literature reviewed here, we perhaps began our journey at the point of Brunson and Caner (4.3), grappling with a metaphor that had sprung into our consciousness, but that we did not fully comprehend. We then struggled and wrestled with the diarist process

similar to that undertaken by Ind (4.4) as we examined the process whereby we had come to this point, all the time testing the metaphor as does Habgood (4.5). We realised that we had to understand and to reinterpret scripture if there was to be any hope of rescue for us as a church and as a community, as does Grenfell (4.6), before realising that we were ourselves part of the problem and that eating itself was a profoundly theological and community experience, which is an insight found in Shannon Jung (4.7). That all of this is a spiritual experience was clear throughout, and underlined by Lelwica (4.8). Garrett, with her optimism and humanity further enabled the link to be firmed up between human experience and theological and community truths (4.9).

From the literature surveyed, it is clear that anorexia can be a viable metaphor for a process, not only of an actual disease, but of another condition. Shannon Jung almost goes as far as applying it to a community, but not quite, while Habgood, and Brunson and Caner use it to refer to a spiritual disorder. This has led to confidence that the metaphor may be applied as it is in this thesis.

Applying the metaphor to the four spheres operating within the thesis (the disease process, the post-exilic community, the congregation of Christ Church and the community of Moreton) in the following chapters will test it and refine it, and disclose any weaknesses. These are pointed out during the process, and are most obvious during the latter, more speculative phases.

In the next chapter, all that has gone before will be revisited and built upon to produce a model of the breakdown and restoration of community. So, the social and historical context of Isaiah 58:1-12 is explored and an exegesis of the passage given, in parallel to the exploration of the context of Moreton and Christ Church presented in Chapter 2. The theme of anorexia is explored in more depth in Chapter 5 than in Chapter 2 to enable a model of community breakdown and recovery to be developed. In Chapter Six, the path towards restoration will be explored in much more deeply and the signs and symptoms of recovery will be elicited. The writings of Grenfell, Jung, Lelwica and Garrett will be utilised at various points in the exposition that follows.

Chapter 5

The Starving Community

and the Anorexic Bride

*"They were not the same eyes with which he had last looked out at this
particular scene, and the brain which interpreted the images the eyes
resolved was not the same brain. There had been no surgery involved, just
the continual wrenching of experience."*

Douglas Adams (1984:493)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter all the seemingly disparate threads that have been laid out so far are woven together. Initially, the social structures relevant to our chosen passage (Isaiah 58:1-12) will be explored for resonance with the situation which Moreton and Christ Church faces, then the images and events outlined will be linked to the symptoms of anorexia, which will then be explored in some depth. The chapter therefore follows a fairly concise, systematic and logical structure, with an introduction to the social and historical setting of the key text (5.2), followed by an exegesis of the passage itself (5.3). This is followed by a transitional section (5.4): how the text was used in the Site Team is re-explored from the perspective of having examined the text itself. Then, having identified common motifs and social settings, the major theme of anorexia is examined in more detail than in Chapter 2 (5.5). The strands evidenced in each of four spheres - the psychological processes of anorexia, the context and content of the Isaiah passage, Moreton as a community, and Christ Church as a body of Christians - will be explored to develop a working model of the breakdown and recovery of community (5.6).

5.2 The Social and Historical Context of Isaiah 58:1-12

There continues to be some dispute about whether the Book of Isaiah falls into one, two or three parts. Scholars generally accept the notion that there are three, but some still maintain that the same individual wrote the whole book, mostly for stylistic reasons. However, it seems likely that the early part of the book (chapters 1-39) was completed first, as the writer describes actual historical events, prophesying during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and

Hezekiah (Barton 1995:13) – and perhaps under the reign of Jotham,s predecessor Uzziah also (see Is 1:1) and that this Isaiah lived until at least 700 BC. The remainder of the book being somewhat later.

The second writer, traditionally known as Deutero-Isaiah, completed chapters 40-55. He mentions by name Cyrus, the conqueror from Persia, who finally conquered Babylon in 539 BC. In announcing this, the writer announces something new – that the people have been punished enough, that the people will return home. Jerusalem will be rebuilt. According to Childs (1979:323) Duhm, writing in 1892, was the first to distinguish between Deutero-Isaiah and the final Chapters of the book.

The last section of the book comprises chapters 56-66. These are a little later in date and provide context for Isaiah 58. According to these chapters, written by the author (or possibly group of authors – Childs, 1979:323) known as Trito-Isaiah, the exiles have returned to Palestine, but all is not well: They are dispirited because of unfriendly neighbours – notably the Egyptians to the south and the Samaritans to the north. Apparently, they have come back to find their faith diluted by pagan practices (59:9-15). The Israelite community is riddled with injustice (58:1-12; 56:9; 62:9), they have poor leaders who are themselves corrupted (56:10) and there is an apparent split between the contrite and the wicked (57:1; 55:1; 59:4).

The exact date of this third portion of Isaiah is difficult to ascertain (Bright 1960:374-380): but there is evidence by omission that it was written prior to

the rebuilding of the temple, and possibly even before the time of Nehemiah (who arrived in 445 BC) and the rebuilding of the walls of the city, as there is a reference to the walls being rebuilt in 58:12, which suggests that this dating is fairly accurate. However, this part of the book cannot be dated with the certainty of the earlier two parts as it does not refer directly to historical events.

According to the biblical text, Ezra was authorized by the Persian authorities to return to Judah in order to institute religious reforms (Ezra 7:8) and Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem by the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes (Neh 2:6) to serve as a governor there, and it was he who was made responsible for rebuilding the city walls and introducing a number of social reforms (Tollefson & Williams 1992:19-39).[27]

McNutt (1999:182), among other recent scholars, suggests that some of the material in this part of Isaiah could be a response to the Persian imperial strategy of encouraging the development of local religious and ethnic identities (a view supported by Garbini 1994:180-188); and so much of the material in this third part of Isaiah is most readily understood as related to the social and ideological tensions that developed in a reconstituted community. These tensions were between the indigenous and the immigrant, the urban

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[27]There are difficulties in exactly aligning the careers of Ezra and Nehemiah. According to tradition, Ezra arrived first – in the seventh year or the reign of Artaxerxes I (458 BC) while Nehemiah arrived in the twentieth year (445 BC). (Holmgren 1987:xv) Other explanations, including the reverse, have been proposed (see, for example, Williamson 1987). However, they are found together at the reading of the Law in Nehemiah 8:9 and at the dedication of the city wall (Nehemiah 12:26,36). It seems at least likely therefore that they were at least contemporaries.

and the rural populations, and between those with differing religious orientations.

Current scholarly views suggest that it was mainly the literate classes who were taken into exile and who returned from Babylon. Meanwhile a community of Israelites had remained in the land, despite the impression formerly given. The 'myth of the empty land' is not supported by the archaeological evidence and is most likely to have been a construct intended to benefit those who had returned (Carroll 1992:79-93).

Indeed, the prophetic traditions tend to support the returnees as the legitimate heirs of 'Israel', but Malachi and Isaiah both reflect social division and conflict. However, Berquist (1995:13-17) argues that for the majority of the population of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon meant very little, as only the elite were involved. The remainder of the population remained where it always had been and life went on. Their social order remaining largely intact as Barstad (1996) explains at length.

It is easily understood, if this is correct, why tensions increased between those who had remained and those who had returned.

Barstad explains that Cyrus did not essentially change the Babylonian system of administration, but instead encouraged the movement of the populace back towards the periphery of his empire. This was partly to keep the borders strong, and partly to increase the potential sources of and sizes of tribute

paid. But, if the biblical texts are to be believed, the religious restoration of Judah did not begin in earnest until the reign of Darius (522-486 BC) who allowed for the rebuilding of the Temple.

According to Eisenstadt (1969), the development of empire necessitates the development of a class of political elites. In the instance of Judah, these were readily available in the returnees. Elites who are in turn supported by a religion become especially powerful.

Berquist (1995:113-114) suggests that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem during the time of the Governor Nehemiah exacerbated the separation between the rich and the poor, creating a physical barrier between the elite and the rest of the population – this separation is a situation deplored by Isaiah (58:1-12), albeit apparently prior to the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah also came to recognise this and attempted financial reforms to curb the problem of extreme poverty. (Nehemiah 5).

That there were internal conflicts following the return from exile is clear. Hanson (1979) argues that a party of ruler-priests returned with the express purpose of rebuilding the temple – and quickly gained the upper hand in a local power struggle – which the more egalitarian prophets, such as Isaiah, responded to by issuing them with a challenge. This ruler-priest elite elaborated the purity laws and the laws related to fasting partly to emphasise their high status (Smith 1989 – citing Douglas 1966). However, the success of maintaining a community in exile depended on the success of establishing

cohesion with well-defined social boundaries and rules, with a rigid structure. This must have contributed to the conflict when the exiles, who perceived themselves as special, returned to a land where others had remained and had not been through the experience of exile. The separation of the two groups was a direct result of their responses to the same event – the conquest of Judah by Babylon. The returnees according to Smith (1989:64-65,201) maintained their delineating markers, referring to themselves as the 'remnant', the 'holy seed' or 'sons of the exile' – and this applied to their application of the purity and fasting laws – the poor economic situation of Judah at that time simply exacerbating an already difficult situation. McNutt (1999:209) argues that because of their loss of national independence, self-identity among the peoples of post-exilic Judah was grounded *more* in their religious beliefs and practices. Blenkinsopp (2003:183) writes that it was only after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Jerusalem that fast days became a regular feature of the liturgical calendar (although a critical situation, such as a plague of locusts could still call for an additional "sanctifying fast" – something easy to imagine in the hardship of the return from Exile). The first scheduled fasts in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months of the year commemorated successive stages in the Babylonian conquest, from the beginning of the siege to the assassination of the Babylonian appointee Gedaliah (2 Kings 25: 1,3,8,25). He further comments that pietistic communities and sects had additional fasts. These were in addition to Yom Kippur. This mirrors exactly the content of Isaiah 58:1-12, and would eventually result in the Jerusalem Temple becoming the centre of Israelite religion in the Persian period.

Dissenting from this view is Gottwald (1985:506-509) who argues that this passage belongs to a period after or during the rebuilding of the Temple, linking it stylistically via a chiastic arrangement of the whole of Trito-Isaiah with 65:1-15 on the grounds of an internal feud between the Aaronite priesthood and the Levite priesthood on the completion (or at least the rebuilding) of the Temple. This is a difficult argument to sustain because of the lack of evidence, and the dispute over the authorship of these chapters. In general, the weight of the scholastic argument is for the case, and dating, that I present here.

5.3 Exegesis of Isaiah 58:1-12

Having set Third Isaiah into its socio-historical context, the passage, Isaiah 58:1-12, can be examined in more detail. This reading of the biblical text seeks to read the text in the light of contemporary scholarship and to begin to address it in the light of the concerns of the thesis.

Helpfully, Brueggemann (1998:186-192) sets the whole passage within the context of a conversation. Firstly, in verse 1, the prophet is summoned and authorised to tell the people what it is they have done. In a sense next, in verses 2-3 we hear the complaint of the people – that they have done all these things – and God has taken no notice of them whatsoever. Finally, we hear God's response. He cannot be manipulated – real worship must be authentic. Life as God's people must be lived with integrity. Worship must be demonstrated throughout the entirety of life (verses 6 – 7 and 9b-10) with the promise of blessing to follow (verses 8-9a and 11-12).

1. *Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.*
2. *For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.*
3. *"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet on the day of fasting you do as you please and exploit all your workers.*
4. *Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.*
5. *Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?*
6. *Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?*
7. *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*
8. *Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness (or your righteous one) will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard.*
9. *Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, "Here am I." If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing of the finger and malicious talk,*
10. *And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like noonday.*
11. *The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*
12. *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age old foundations; you will be called "Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings"*

(Isaiah 58:1-12 NIV)

The purpose of the passage seems to be to demonstrate to the people how far they have gone wrong. Westermann (1969:334) goes so far as to suggest it was spoken by the prophet in public, perhaps at an assembly for fasting. The text will be considered verse by verse.

Verse 1

> *Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.*

Watts (1987:271) sets the scene on the balcony of heaven with the Lord speaking to his herald. The herald is instructed to literally 'cry with the throat' – in colloquial terms, at the top of his voice, so that all may hear. Verse 1a is a unique expression in the Old Testament, emphasising that to speak the God's words is the true purpose of humanity (Motyer 1993:479). What the herald is to cry, is then, serious and it is vital that all the people hear him. The herald is to announce that the people have rebelled against their God. Westermann (1969:333) points out the voice changes at about verse 8 so another voice speaks of the same God.

Verse 2

> *For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.*

Verse 2 begins to explain why the situation is so grave in the Lord's eyes. There is a contrast to come between mere religious observance and true religion. The opening word 'for' alerts us to the idea that, although these people may appear pious, there is something going on that is sinful – that they only 'seem' eager to know the ways of God and for God to come near. The question hangs in the air, "Is it true?" Their religious practice could appear praiseworthy; they were certainly assiduous, committed and devoted, as the 'me' here is emphatic in

Hebrew (Motyer 1993:479). Jones (1964:51) writes that the sin is not obvious, the people were conscious only of their good intentions. What the reality is will be answered by the subsequent verses.

Verse 3-4

> *"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet on the day of fasting you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.*

Herbert (1975:144) points out that the practice of fasting had no place in the original Law of Moses, except in connection with the Day of Atonement. The only other fast ordained was the fast of repentance ordered through Joel (Joel 2:12-18). Dean Chatham (1987:6) writes boldly that all other private and public fasts recorded in the Old Testament were self-imposed. After the fall of Jerusalem, however the number of fast days had multiplied (Zechariah 7:1-14, 8:18). Whybray (1972:213) comments that the people seem genuinely not to understand what is going on. They have returned to the promised land and they are living there – and yet the fullness of the expected blessing has not materialised. This could easily explain their confusion and the apparent tone of disappointment of these verses. Blenkinsopp (2003:178) in a pertinent comment for this work notes that it is interesting that it is only the inefficacy of their fasting (rather than any other religious exercise, such as prayer) that the people were complaining about. Fasting and mourning as a response to crisis were a distinctive feature of religious life at this time. However, Smart (1965:247) sums up the problem thus:

"One of the unique features of the Biblical faith is that there is no genuine relation with God that is not at the same time a relation with the brother." Sawyer (1986:172) concurs, writing: "Without righteousness and justice, outward observances – the formalities of organized religion – are not acceptable to God. Without a generous spirit, fasting can easily lead to selfishness, irritability and the suffering of the underprivileged members of society."

Here, in this social setting, the religious practice and discipline of fasting has become divorced from relationship with the brother. In their attempts to do what was 'right' from a religious perspective, the people that the herald addresses had become self-absorbed, allowing fasting to take the place of the very thing God wants. Watts (1987:273) writes that these fast days in the Jerusalem of around 464 BC had become almost pleasurable – in a sense masochistic. Surrounding the pious inner world of those who were fasting was a very unstable social and economic situation, compounded by opportunistic oppression and exploitation. While Westermann (1969:335) compares it with Amos in tone, we see the situation described by Nehemiah (Chapters 5,10 and 13) a little later. Jones (1964:52) comments that the prophet exposes the motives of the people. However 'correct' their observance was, it was essentially self-regarding. Blenkinsopp (2003:173) goes as far as to translate v.3c as "pursuing your own interests." In verse 4 we see that what was intended to influence God actually only brought out the worst in people. "One can easily imagine" writes Motyer (1993:480) "the

edginess that would result if a basically un-spiritual family spent the day together in increasing hunger!" And Thexton (1959:125) adds, a little harshly, that undertaking fasting or any other type of religious discipline, as a matter of form, with no inward devotion or spiritual aim, will lead only to depression or ill-temper. Jones (1964:52) concurs adding that those who are too self-centred to attend to God will be too self-centred to work harmoniously with their neighbours!

Verse 5

> *Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?*

The tone of verse 5 is almost incredulous. Indeed, often it comes as a surprise that self-denial does not bring any kind of peace (Smith 1893:419). But this kind of religious form, which has no substance in love, is often found and condemned in scripture (Matthew 23, James 4). Indeed, for Watts (1987:274) this sets the scene for what God wants in terms of worship. The criterion is what God chooses, not what people like to do. In the Hebrew, Watts remarks, it is more precise than this, it is what God requires of any human being. The question is asked: does God rejoice in seeing a person wilt like a plant, without water, as when he spreads sackcloth and ashes? Is the fast they observe a day acceptable to Yahweh? Clearly the answer is 'No'. Whybray (1975:212) remarks that what God is about to do is to give a new definition of what he means by a "fast".

Verse 6-7

> *Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?*
> *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

Verses 6 and 7 begin to outline the kind of worship that God requires. The link here, according to Westermann (1969:337), is that the actions God requires as true worship, also demand self-sacrifice (as in Matthew 6:16 onwards). Motyer (1993:481) describes how it points in two ways – the need to labour to abolish every way in which social structures destroy or diminish the due liberty of others. There is a need to eliminate every way in which people are treated like cattle (*untie the cords of the yoke*). The '*oppressed'* are those who have been broken by life. Amelioration is not enough; the objective is to secure positive values that have been lost. Instead of bondage and brokenness, there should be freedom – the yoke is to be broken, whether that yoke relates to injustice (verse 6b), inhumanity (verse 6c) or inequality (verse 6d). Although verse 6 could be read almost as a call to rebellion, remembering that the Jews were a subject nation of the Persian Empire and had to pay heavy taxes to them (Watts (1987:274) writes that Egypt did revolt at about this time), this does not seem to be the intention – rather it is an invective against the powerful and greedy within Israel, the very people who were 'indulging' in fasts for the sake of seeming to do the right thing.

But these are long-term goals, and in essence verse 7 says 'and this is where you start' – with individual cases, with shared bread, with shared clothes, with shared homes (Brueggeman 1989). The close social ties that had

characterised the community prior to the exile had been broken both by the exilic and post-exilic conditions. But to deny kinship and to turn away from those who needed help was to turn away from God. Acceptable worship meant not turning away from *"your own flesh and blood."* Indeed, as Whybray (1975:215) writes, "the rescue of the oppressed needs to be followed by positive action."

<u>Verses 8-9a</u>

> *Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness [or your righteous one] will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard.*
> *Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, "Here am I."*

Verses 8 and 9a describe the consequences of this form of religion. The '*then*' in both cases is emphatic. To '*break forth*' means to erupt almost like flood waters (see Genesis 7:11). Motyer (1993:481-482) describes the four blessings that will result – first, a new beginning to life; secondly, a personal restoration or healing (the noun here is used in Jeremiah 30:17 of new flesh covering a wound and in Nehemiah 4:1-2 for repair work); thirdly, security, with '*righteousness*' as an advance guard and '*glory*' as a rearguard (this thought can be found an Romans 13:12 and 2 Corinthians 6:7); and, lastly, there will be free flowing fellowship with the Lord himself. The Hebrew here has significant emphasis: '*then you will call and the Lord will answer: you will cry for help and He will say: "Here am I".*' This is the response of a waiting servant (1 Samuel 3:4-16). There is an assurance that if you do what is known to be God's will, then when you pray you will be both heard and answered (Matthew 5:23-24).

Verses 9b-10a

> *If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing of the finger and malicious talk,*
> *And if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,*

Verses 9b and 10a return to the theme of wrongdoing. However here there are two different kinds of action that are required – one to do with refraining and one concerned with spending. The reference to *the yoke* is a recapitulation of verse 6 (the '*of oppression'* is an addition in the NIV translation). Blenkinsopp (2003:174) translates v.9b as "If you banish perverse conduct from among you…" preferring this (referring to Ezekiel 9:9) to "the yoke". However, the meaning seems clear from what follows. The '*pointing of the finger and malicious talk'* seem self- explanatory. But it is true that the one thing guaranteed to fracture any community is this type of gossip or innuendo (see especially Proverbs 26:12: 2 Corinthians 12:20). More positively, Motyer (1993:482) powerfully paraphrases 10a thus: "If you grant to the hungry what you want for yourself and satisfy the needs of the oppressed."

Verses 10b-12

> *then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like noonday.*
> *The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*
> *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age old foundations; you will be called "Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings*

Verses 10b-12 parallel verses 8 and 9a with their four promises of blessing –
but the imagery of light here is not that of a dawn, but is given with night, and
therefore to the perplexing things of life - the implication is guidance, not a
new beginning. The next thought relates to where this divine blessing will
occur – when everything seems at it bleakest and least promising. Next the
Lord will strengthen inwardly – not only will the blessings come from outside,
they will come from inside as well. Lastly, there is the promise of restoration
and continuance. The *"your people"* here mean "those from you" or your
children and extend to the recovery from past disaster, to provision for future
well being (Motyer 1993:482). Jones (1964:55) comments that when the 'true
fast' is observed, the people's inward and outward condition will match one
another and, once inwardly cleansed and empowered by God, they will
become the agents of their own material restoration.

Watts (1987:274-275) interprets this whole passage as speaking to Nehemiah
and to the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes; but this is not necessary for the
passage to be convincing as an entity in its own right, speaking with
conviction to the post-exilic community. Herbert (1975:146) writes that without
a just ordering of society, and a practical concern for the needy, the hopes
engendered by Second Isaiah cannot be realised. But when this happens,
Third Isaiah is so confident of divine blessing that he can only express this in
a mixture of metaphors: that Jerusalem will once again become an inhabited
city, a fully functioning community – and, as is so often the case, a new name
is given, signifying a new character.

5.4 The Text as a Medium of Transference

In 2.8, we noted that the Site Team saw a parallel between the setting of the futility of the fasting described in Isaiah 58:1-12, that is to say, religious observances in the setting of a divided community, and that of their own context. This insight was largely 'prophetic' in nature, that is to say, inductive, and about using imagery and symbol (see 1.9). Within the overall methodology of action research, such insights are to be welcomed and pursued, rather than to be sidelined or dismissed. In this way, the text can become an "essential 'mediator' or medium of transference' from the action behind the biblical passage, over into the action awaiting the contemporary disciples acting in faith." (Vincent 2001:17) So for the Team this text became a "medium of transference": it became a bridge. This scripture and the circumstances facing the prophet (into which God spoke) came to life for us as we saw the parallels with our own situation and circumstances. Here, correlation becomes not only possible, but an imperative. The prophecy we remembered where Christ Church had been named as the "anorexic bride" made a connection for us with the fasting by the people of God that achieved nothing in Isaiah 58. Thus, for example, the actions that the prophet called for influenced the project. We saw, too, in our own materialism, concern with outward appearance and desire for control, cause for repentance. Isaiah 58:1-12 in its social setting spoke to us, and we listened and acted. The combination of a people living in a divided community, as we did, who had chosen to deprive themselves, as we were, of the blessings that God wished to bestow upon them seemed to us to be a powerful call to action that directed

the ministry project with its aims of unity and celebration. As Betty wrote in her journal:

> This call seems to be insistent – that God seeks from us a way of bringing together people who are lost, of feeding the hungry who are around us and enabling the starving to celebrate together.

In section 5.5, I explore further the resonance that the Team discerned between fasting and anorexia.

5.5 Fasting Today: Anorexia

While there is a long established and respected religious discipline of fasting, this is undertaken for a specified length of time and with specific spiritual purpose in mind. It was a legalistic undertaking of this discipline that Trito-Isaiah spoke against in Isaiah 58:1-12, where it had come to be seen almost as a means of gaining favour with God – the means being seen as being more important than the end. The people had lost sight of the truth. Today, we see an almost 'religious' discipline of fasting in wider society today – we call it anorexia. While self-discipline with regards to eating can be a health inducing process (particularly in our Western societal context of rising rates of obesity), the obsession of the patient with anorexia with form in order to maintain control and the essentially self preoccupied nature of the condition, as will be demonstrated later in this Chapter, seems somewhat to parallel the writing of Isaiah. We have seen, too, how the religious elite entered upon more fast days in an effort to make themselves heard by God, all the while ignoring the starving on their own doorstep.

In examining the psychological and behavioural processes of anorexia, we will be able to see something of the psychology of a fractured community – trying desperately to remain in control, while ignoring the fact that they and others are starving to death.

The Team acknowledged freely: "Christ stands in our brokenness. Christ stands in Moreton's brokenness". We felt that we were both part of the church community and part of the larger community of Moreton, and that the problem of one reflected the problems of the other. Equally, facing up to and dealing with the problems in our church would enable us to begin to confront the problems of the other. In the project phase, we actively sought out opportunities to serve the most marginalized and oppressed in the community, although we respected the fact that this would largely be a symbolic effort.

Firstly, then, I turn to the psychological process of anorexia, outlining the distortions and the social pressures that drive the individual towards the condition and how some see that society conspires to drive it.

In anorexia, the patient[28] has a distorted body image. Typically, anorexia begins with the desire to make herself[29] socially acceptable; this is virtually

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[28] There is a real difficulty with language here! I like neither the word "patient" – although it reflects accurately my own background - nor "anorexic" (the person always being so much more than their condition). There is no comfortable solution. Where the opportunity exists, I refer to people by pseudonym.

[29] The feminine pronoun is used throughout to refer to the patient. This does not preclude the possibility of males suffering from the condition, merely that it is much more common in women. It is interesting to note also that the church is typically referred to as female in scripture – for example, the 'bride of Christ'.

normal behaviour in a society where most women are on a diet at some time (Polivy & Herman 1987). However, the thinner an anorexic becomes, the fatter she feels (Levenkron 2001:35-40). The consuming passion has become her individual drive to lose weight. All other problems and relationships seem to fade before this desire. She uses her food-avoiding behaviour as a means to ward off her anxieties and fears, which leaves little time for friends and family. Eating even less (and exercising more) are the anorexics' only solutions to finding security. Often previously having had a compliant personality, the anorexic now becomes a tyrant. Unconcerned about the opinions of others and feeling no need to please them, she imposes demands and special conditions before she will eat, and becomes angry when these conditions are violated. Parents and other care givers give in to these demands because they fear that failure to do so will result in even more weight loss - no thought is given by the patient to their distress. The patient then develops a 'pseudo-identity' based entirely upon her capacity to starve herself. She will become even more secretive about food – and attempt to conceal or hoard food to avoid consumption. Some hide their thinness under layers of baggy clothing; others display it to the world. All who know about her 'special thinness' react in some way to it, whether by worry, anger or frustration and the patient has now achieved a way of being known as special and so this pseudo-identity fills the emptiness she has secretly felt about herself for some time. None of this need be at a conscious level, although often parts of this are known to the patient. Levenkron (2001:40) indicates why patients have a poor recovery rate:

> As the disease progresses it becomes *more valuable* to the personality, despite what is lost in terms of health, relationships and

real achievements. It begins with the desire to be thin, a need to feel secure, to eliminate self-doubt and poor self-esteem along with worries about the future. The result produces a sense of assertiveness and identity. To recover from anorexia nervosa would mean to temporarily lose oneself, to lose everything achieved by the illness.

The question arises of why anyone would become subject to such a condition where the mortality rate is as high as five percent per decade (Hawley 1985:659). Many theories have been advanced in this context. Orbach (2001:14-19) advances that its emergence in Britain is a reflection of the tension created by the economic logic promoted by recent governments, and the restructuring of capital (Friend & Metcalf 1981). This is the tension of a society struggling to free itself from an ideological puritanism of denial: Britain, a society caught between de-industrialisation and a consumer-orientated economy, finds itself with a population schooled with the pre-consumerist values of thrift, conservation and a search for meaning in community and spirituality. The resulting discomfort, Orbach writes, has created a kind of schizophrenic response – consumerism is good for you – if you can afford it. Bodies are no longer used for production, but as instruments of consumerism. The emphasis has shifted towards individualism. The female body is largely used as the gateway for this consumerism – the commodity becoming more desirable once dressed with human attributes. In other words, female sexuality becomes divorced from the individual and becomes another consumer item. For many women the body has become a commodity, an object with which they negotiate the world (Eichenbaum & Orbach 1983). This commodity is shaped by the beauty and diet industries, and although a good self-esteem ameliorates its effects, the truth is that the majority of women are affected by it to one degree or another, viewing their bodies as deficient and

in need of attention in relation to the dominant images of the female body, which is often all that they have to compare themselves to. This, Orbach argues, is particularly true of those raised in an era where the nature of parenting changes every few years: "What is right now will be wrong tomorrow. What was done yesterday is criticized today" (2001:17). This creates an insecurity in parenting that cannot help but be reflected in their children.

Feminist theorists, such at Mitchell (1973) have long located the family as the transmitter of women's inferior psychology. It is within the family that a girl both begins to learn about her social role, a process occurring alongside her developing sense of self (Lewis & Brookes-Gunn 1979). Despite the many changes in our society, mothers are still largely responsible for the psychological and social development of children (Eichenbaum & Orbach 1983:26-47) – mothers who are themselves subjected to social pressures both to care and to deny their own needs, which are transmitted to the daughter. This psychological drama reaches new heights in adolescence as the girl experiences conflict about her desire to separate from the family and yet remain within it. Lambley (1983:50-57) describes how the parents of young people with anorexia interfere in the child's attempt to establish normal peer relations (which are an important component of establishing identity) out of their need to keep the child close to home. The resulting insecurity in the child who seeks both outcomes, alongside the dramatic uncontrollable physical changes that puberty brings, result in her

seeking control over at least one aspect of her life. As the young girl enters puberty, the pressure to conform – to have the perfect body – becomes real to her, and a split begins to occur between her body and her 'self' (Orbach 2001:28). The scene is set for the symptoms of anorexia to develop in a person as a way for them to maintain some control.

5.6 A Correlation of Text, Context, and Condition

In each of our narratives, the history of Christ Church, the history of Moreton, the history of the post-exilic community of Isaiah and the path of the anorexic, several points of communality have been reached: the issue of maintaining control, an obsession with form, the challenge of growth, the fatality of fracture, the need for help.

A correlation can now be attempted between: (A) the condition of anorexia, (B) the Isaiah passage, (C) the nature of Moreton and (D) that of Christ Church. This is the moment to see how the four delineated areas come together. As these four spheres are different, any comparison cannot be precise, of course, although there are marked similarities. So we can see, for example, that the obsession with form/control is present in each sphere: obsession with form/control in an individual (A), has a parallel with an obsession with form/control in the ritual of the biblical Israelite community (B), has a parallel with the completion of building on every piece of land in the parish boundary (an obsession with form/control on the part of the authorities) (C), has a parallel with an unwillingness to engage with the

mission/evangelism in Christ Church (an obsession with form/control) (D) – even though the last one may not be quite so overt.

This is, of course, a new way of seeing the facts of a situation, which is of itself a trait of the prophetic, and is entirely in keeping with the methodology outlined in Chapter One, and evidenced throughout the thesis so far. This sense of a parallelism is not inevitable, but has been discerned through the research process. It will be examined in detail to see how far this correlation can be made and what can be learned from it. This will be done in tabular form so that the parallels between the four spheres can be seen as clearly as possible. Obviously there are elements that are not comparable, but I have focused on the most positive case that can be made, as this theoretical construct is designed to explore the breakdown and restoration, not only of an individual, but of a church (in this case, Christ Church) and of two communities - that of post-exilic Judah and Moreton. The difficulties facing these communities have been identified in various ways – through biblical social reconstruction, in the case of Judah, through the use of the "Joys and Sorrows" focus group exercise, through semi-structured interviews, through ongoing discussion, experience and quantitative data, in the case of Christ Church and Moreton. There appears to have been a set of identifiable "symptoms" present in each that has led to the breakdown of the community involved. However, the Isaiah passage equally led the Site Team to believe that things could change, and that communities could be restored. Anorexia, we concluded, was not always fatal. Restoration was possible.

Selecting the order in which to place the spheres in the table was largely intuitive and arguments can be made for almost any order. Eight major psychological symptoms of anorexia have finally provided a framework. In Table 12, I have used the psychological symptoms of anorexia as the framework, because they provided the link for us between the Isaiah passage and our contemporary experience of living in Moreton and being a part of Christ Church. Thus the symptoms of anorexia represent our 'wounds' as a Team and we have had to struggle through the process that will be outlined below and we recognise that for us, as for the people of Israel, that process is as yet incomplete. The ordering of the sequence of the symptoms of anorexia in Table 12 was about working from the superficial "obsession with form/image" to the deep "poor self image" – and was decided (apart from the last one) upon reflection based on Team discussions about the problems we faced as a Church, mentioning all of these phrases. The overriding factor has been left until last to show what is the culmination of all the preceding factors, as we explored the factors that had lead to our division. This part of the Team's journey was very much about locating ourselves in the process and exploring where we fitted into the process.

TABLE 12

TRACING THE BREAKDOWN

	A	B	C	D
	Anorexia	**Isaiah**	**Moreton**	**Christ Church**
1	Obsession with form in order to maintain control/ body image	58:2	Building on every spare piece of land	Unwillingness to engage with mission/evangelism
2	Desire for social acceptability	58:3a	'Rich' Moreton versus 'poor' Moreton	Unrepresentative congregation

3	Self-centredness	58:3b	Individualism/consumerism	Self-absorption
4	Anxieties and fears	58:2a	Negativity	Lack of encouragement
5	Aggressive demands	58:1	Family Breakdown	Conflict
6	Powerlessness	58:3a	Powerlessness	Spiritual inertia
7	Compulsive behaviour	58:5	Alcohol/drugs	Moaning/Lack of joy
8	Poor self-image	58:3a	Poor self-image	Division

The sequence of columns in Table 12 may be explained as follows: Eventually the progression of anorexia (A) will act as the template for the final model to aid explication (Table 13), so it makes sense to put this in the first column. The Bible passage (B) is the link for us between the symptoms of anorexia and our faith, and our community, so it seems fair to place that second; third comes Moreton, the community to which we belong (C), and which we seek to serve, and lastly comes Christ Church, which should be our spiritual home (D).

In column (B) the description is based on the social and historical context of the passage (the verse references are given). In column (C) the description given is based on comments in Chapters 2 and 3 and on the demographic data given there and on the "Joys and Sorrows" Exercise (Table 2). In column (D) the information is based on comments from the congregation and on the "Joys and Sorrows" Exercise (see Table 3 and Chapter 3).

So, in row 1 the first (and perhaps most easily discernible) symptom of anorexia is concerned with an obsession with form in order to maintain control (in circumstances that feel as if they may spiral out of control). This relates directly to body image in the anorexic. In the Isaiah passage (column B) it is

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concerned with fasting in order to maintain God's favour (in a social context of a disunited community). In Moreton (column C) the obsession with form is concerned with planning rules and regulations, which has led to the building on every spare piece of green land to the detriment of the local community (Table 2 and 2:11), but which that same community resents. Within Christ Church (Column D) the obsession with form has been about getting everything within the church "right" so that we have become introverted and unwilling to engage with mission or evangelism, and so be threatened with incomers once again.

In row 2, the anorexic's desire to be thin is seen by her as matching some socially acceptable body image for females. In the Isaiah passage (column B) it is clear that fasting was what the community did as a religious practice together – a socially acceptable thing to do. In Moreton, (column C) the community is divided neatly along social class lines, and this is reflected in the interviews with people from different parts of Moreton (2.3 and 2.4) one half having no real idea of "how the other half live", and even in Christ Church (column D) there is still this social division, as the Site Team discovered that the congregation was unrepresentative of the community as a whole.

In row 3, the anorexic becomes self-centred. There is no value judgement implied here, merely a description of the complete self-absorption and compulsiveness of the condition. In column B, we see the people almost whining to God that they have "humbled themselves" and God has not noticed! In Moreton (column C) there is evidence of individualism and

consumerism (see comments at 3.4 & 3.5) which has contributed to the breakdown of community and one of the "Sorrows" identified by the Site Team about Christ Church (column D) was self-absorption (Table 3)

In row 4 the anorexic (column A) becomes plagued by anxiety and fear. She may count calories, or hide food. She will see the changes that are happening to her body and be afraid of them. In the Isaiah passage (column B) the people sought God "day after day" – anxiously, fearing God did not hear them or notice them. In column C we find the people of Moreton being condemned for "negativity" (see Table 2), which is often the social face of anxiety and fear. In the same way Christ Church (column D) with its "lack of encouragement" (Table 3) is also experiencing anxiety and fear, because encouragement springs from security and love.

In row 5, the anxieties and fears of the anorexic (column A) manifest as aggressive demands on others, such as only eating alone, or demanding certain foods and so forth. In the Isaiah passage, (column B) the word "rebellion" has similar aggressive overtones. In Moreton (column C) the rates of family breakdown, usually accompanied by argument and aggression, were raised as a sorrow (Table 2), while in column D, conflict remained a problem at Christ Church (Table 3).

In row 6, the experience of the anorexic (column A) is that she is powerless in the grip of this behaviour, just as the Israelites were powerless to make God notice them (column B), and the people of Moreton column C) were powerless

to overturn the planning decisions that affected their lives (2.10). In Christ Church (column D) there is a reluctance to use its spiritual power, resulting in powerlessness, which the Site Team termed "spiritual inertia" (Table 3).

In row 7 the anorexic (column A) shows evidence of compulsive behaviour, for example exercising, or self-induced vomiting, or compulsive thoughts. In the Isaiah situation (column B) there is evidence that the fast days multiplied (Watts 1982:273; Dean Chatham 1987:6) while in Moreton (column C) there is concern around the use of drugs, but more especially alcohol (Table 2). In Christ Church (column D) there is evidence of that most compulsive of activity, moaning and its corollary – lack of joy (Table 3)

In row 8 there is a sort of summary – the anorexic has a poor self image, the people in Isaiah's time have a God who does not hear them, and are confused and bewildered, Moreton has a poor self image (2.9) and Christ Church is divided. It is the deepest symptom.

Throughout I have tried to demonstrate there is a similar underlying process. We seek desperately to maintain control – we resist change, whether "we" are a developing adolescent girl, a religious elite in Ancient Israel, a small town in Wirral, or an Anglican church congregation: and that equally we seek ultimate security in the wrong things – rituals and observances and priorities that will lead to our own downfall. This was the realisation of Isaiah, and it became the realisation of the Team.

Although the language used to describe these processes is inevitably different in each sphere, the nature of the process is similar.

From the evangelical perspective of the Site Team, each of these eight rows can be expressed in theological terms as sinful behaviours. We have had to understand that we have sinned and that we continue to sin, as a Site Team and indeed as a church. It was only when we acknowledged this and recognised our own part in the process that had led to the fracturing of our church and the ongoing division in our community, that we were able to stand alongside people and work with them and not do things to them or for them. It was only by acknowledging our own sinfulness that we were enabled to glimpse the hope that God holds out for us as a community – and to offer that hope in our church community and in our wider community of Moreton through the Project. We needed to find ways of making the signs of a restored community manifest within a divided and fractured community: to offer a concrete sign of hope.

But first we had to begin to understand the nature of the sins of which we were guilty. This was a hard, but for us, a necessary process. We needed to see what we had been doing that had been so wrong, that it had led our church to schism, for example, while all the time we had thought we were doing what God had wanted! This is not to condemn any individual, especially no-one suffering with anorexia; but we used the following facets of sin as a basis for self-examination, to see what God may be pointing out to us. For us, as the Site Team, this was part of what we felt to be a commissioning process

(see Isaiah 6:1-8) whereby we were equipped to understand and develop the project that lay ahead. It is a process repeated in the work of L. Shannon Jung (2004:68-73) - see 4:7.

In row 1 of Table 12, the sin is that of resisting the redemptive nature of God – the unwillingness to grow and to be welcoming of the changes that God brings, in the same way as the adolescent girl resists the changes that puberty brings with it by restricting her food intake. In Isaiah 58:1 this is described as rebellion, which is something more than mere resistance. Resistance is seen as a sin throughout scripture (but see, for example, Luke 13:31-35). It is the nature of God, shown through Jesus, to want to forgive us; but accepting God's forgiveness must bring changes to our attitudes and behaviour. Tillich (1957:174) explains that God's justice allows the self-destructive acts of existential estrangement go their way, as removing them would turn love into mere sentimentality. However, God's forgiveness is no private matter: it is not merely a question of overlooking the reality and depth of the estrangement between God and humanity because it is God's will that has been violated. No comparison can be made with any human relationship – God's forgiveness must effect change in our lives.

In row 2, the sin is that of desiring social status, of wishing to conform to the standards of the world. Paul writes, for example: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2).

In row 3, the sin is that of pride and selfishness. James was aware of the destructive power of selfishness and pride, writing: "For where there is envy or selfish ambition there will be disorder and wickedness of every kind." (James 3:16). Pride, as one of the seven deadly sins, is where man would set himself up as god in the place of God, thus breaking the first of the Ten Commandments.

In row 4, the sin is that of lack of trust, which leads to anxiety and fear. Psalm 37:3-5 instructs: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will act." Lack of faith is a sin.

In row 5, the sin is that of anger and rebelliousness. While anger itself may not be sinful, what we do with it often is! The exact meaning of the Hebrew in Isaiah 58:1 is indeed 'rebellion' (Herbert 1975:146). Rebellion against God was the nature of the original sin. (Alter (1996:12) interestingly links the original rebellion to lust in the linguistics in his translation from the Hebrew, which is a factor in many family breakdowns.)

In row 6, the sin is that of accidie; that is of not bothering to believe in anything, almost as a loss of motivation, rather than in the power of God. Tenenbaum (2003) discusses it at length, and decides that those suffering from accidie may yet recognise that that various things are good or valuable,

but yet lack the motivation to pursue any of them. Thus accidie is not so much disbelief as malaise. In modern terms, this might be summed up as "whatever". It is perhaps the besetting problem of our age. Buechner (1991:12) writes of accidie:

> It is to cast a jaundiced eye at life in general including your own life. You feel nothing is worth getting excited about because you are yourself not worth getting excited about.

In row 7, the sin is that of turning to false gods. This sin was committed time and again by the Israelites. One of the best-known occasions is in Exodus 32, where Aaron the brother of Moses makes a golden calf for the people to worship while Moses is on the mountain with God. To misquote G.K. Chesterton, "The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything" (Cammaerts 1937:211). In contemporary society, this is evidenced by such things as the growth of the "pick and mix" spirituality of the New Age, by the popular emphasis on angel worship and in the viewing figures for television programmes such as "Most Haunted". It would seem that humanity has not lost its need for God, but has lost sight of Him.

In row 8 of Table 12 is the outcome of such sins – the ultimate denial of being created in the image of God. This is the sin of failing to be truly human and finally of seeking death, rather than life. This is the original sin, that of Adam and Eve, who denied who God had made them to be while they were in the Garden of Eden in the attempt to become something different. The outcome, for them, was banishment from the garden and, finally, death. The ultimate outcome of a poor self-image is

destruction – death for the person with anorexia, suicide for the person with depression.

The traits demonstrated in Table 12 are indeed profoundly damaging to the individual or to the group of people displaying them. It is important that the behavioural evidence is remembered as the attempt is made to look behind the behaviour towards the process.

5.7 A Model of the Breakdown and Recovery of Community

Most diseases and conditions have a process – that is they are more than simply a set of symptoms. The symptoms tend to arise in a particular order and the disease will generally follow a particular course. This is perhaps easier to see in a physical condition than in a psychological disorder, but nevertheless is generally held to be true; and it means that a prognosis can be made for any condition. This includes anorexia.

Taking all of the spheres; those concerning (A) the psychological processes of anorexia, (B) the context and content of the passage from Isaiah, (C) the context of Moreton and (D) the context of Christ Church, it is possible to begin to weave them together to form a model of the breakdown and recovery of community. The 'signs and symptoms' of each stage in each of the four spheres in which the model operates can be set alongside an overlying process. Each stage in the model will be explored with evidence cited to support it from each of the four spheres in order to demonstrate its validity as

a theoretical construct.

Each level in the model will be taken separately and each strand in that row evidenced to show how it correlates with the psychological process outlined. Row upon row the model will be built up to show a process at work in each of the four spheres that parallels one another, with the overlying process at work.

TABLE 13

A MODEL FOR THE BREAKDOWN AND RECOVERY OF COMMUNITY

	Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1	**Rapid change**	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2	**Powerlessness**	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3	**Desire for control**	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4	**Introspection**	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5	**Low Self-worth**	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6	**Fragmentation**	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7	**Realisation**	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8	**Seeking help**	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance-implied)	Seeking help (Moreton Partnership)	Seeking help (Repentance)
9	**Reaching out**	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking regeneration	Seeking direction
10	**Increased self-worth**	Increased self-worth	New relationship with God (58:8)	*Seeing results*	Building community
11	**Ability to 'be'**	Healthy self-image	A new nation (58:12)	*Civic identity*	*A well Church*
12	**Power to give**	Healthy relationships	Healthy relationships (58:9b-10)	*Healthy relationships*	*Healthy relationships*
13	**Restoration**	Restoration	Restoration	*Restoration*	*Restoration*

In Table 13, the left hand column follows the generally accepted course of the psychological symptoms of anorexia, as outlined previously in 5.5. This moves from its onset into a gradually more disordered inner world each building step upon step until its nadir of fragmentation is reached. Then the

psychological steps of recovery are traced. The final named stages in the process of recovery owe something to the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1971).

Column A of Table 13 displays more of the outer world – the signs of anorexia, such as a parent or carer might see either in the patient or ascribe to her. So, for example, in row 2 there is ascribed to the patient with anorexia "social pressure" – this represents in the journey of the anorexic the media images of the idealized female form. But the underlying psychological symptom behind this is one of powerlessness as she realizes that her body does not meet this ideal.

Column B follows approximately the course of the biblical passage with the addition of some scene setting from the socio-historical context. Again, taking row 2 as an example, there is ascribed to the reconstituted community "social pressure" – which was an inevitable consequence of the return from exile into a land which was not empty. The underlying psychological process is a sense of powerlessness as both the returnees and the people living in the land fail to become a community in any sense of the word other than the geographic sense – necessitating Isaiah to speak out in the first place.

Column C traces the history of Moreton over the past forty or so years. Again, taking row 2, the rapid growth of the community from a small village to a small town had resulted in social forces that had left both individuals and groups within the community feeling (the underlying psychological symptom)

powerless in the face of the growth.

Finally, in column D. the history of Christ Church from 1993 is traced. Again, taking row 2, in the face of a rapid influx of talented and charismatic people into the congregation, the existing congregation felt powerless (the psychological symptom) in the face of the changes that they brought.

All may have yet escaped unscathed. After all, most do go through adolescence without developing anorexia; Moreton could have assimilated its newcomers and become a healthy community; Christ Church need not have experienced a schism; – and Isaiah need not have had occasion to speak as he did.

So, in turn, we will now move to explicate each row of the model:

5.7a <u>Rapid Change</u>

TABLE 13.1

RAPID CHANGE

	A	B	C	D
Model	**Anorexia**	**Isaiah**	**Moreton**	**Christ Church**
1. Rapid change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth

In each case (see Table 13.1) rapid growth or change brings pressure, which is put upon existing structures. In each case this results in a maladaptive

response.

A1. Anorexia usually originates at the time of the natural growth spurt that occurs in adolescence. Even in normal adolescence much time and energy is devoted to examining and coming to terms with the changes that the body undergoes. However, in anorexia the sufferer views their changing shape as a sign that there is something wrong with her, i.e. that in some way this natural growth and change in shape is abnormal. Ayelet, a patient with anorexia writes thus:

> Growing up meant the unknown, something out of control, and I didn't like losing control. I did not want my body to control me. I feared emotions and sensations, so I did not want to experience my growing sexuality … Thus I started to reject food. At first in order to stop my growing up. (Ronen & Ayelet 2001:57)

B1. Looking again at the context of the Isaiah passage, we find a whole society that is, likewise, in the throes of change. The Exiles were returning and finding a people already present in the place that they had dreamed of during their time away. It is reasonable to suppose that during the Exile, there had been some 'drift' in terms of religious and social practices, not least because it was the literate and priestly classes who had been taken into exile to begin with. Hanson (1987:155) puts it bluntly:

> In actual fact, however, in the early years after the return from exile, this group did *not* find the nation uniting in acknowledgement of Yahweh's sovereignty as a community of righteous priests.

C1. It has been shown previously how Moreton has had growth imposed upon it by the rapid development of housing over the past fifty years, to the extent that there is hardly any green space within the parish. The Lingham

and Yew Tree estates being built in the 1950s, the Sandbrook in the 1960s and 1970s and the Millhouse in the 1970s and 1980s and beyond have meant that the population of Moreton has grown from 2000 in 1945 to approximately 22,000 in 2005. There has been little time for people to integrate as a community, and, at the same time, the growth of traffic has effectively divided Moreton into four along its main roads.

D1. Examining the recent history of Christ Church, likewise, shows a rapid growth in the congregation in the early 1990s, this time largely as the result of a substantial group of people, around thirty, arriving at the church from another church (Wirral Christian Centre), which had itself experienced a schism in around 1994. These new members of the congregation had no concept of Anglican worship or tradition, coming from a non-aligned fellowship. This Fellowship has few links with any recognized church tradition, being led by one charismatic pastor, whose family members hold key positions within the church. The church services are Pentecostal in nature, and have no liturgical tradition or adherence to the recognized church calendar beyond Christmas and Easter. The preaching tends to draw strongly upon the emotional response rather than to be exegetical in nature. This substantial group made little effort to integrate with the existing congregation, but were vocal, and quickly became 'key' individuals within the church, involving themselves in the worship group and so forth.

5.7b Powerlessness

TABLE 13.2

POWERLESSNESS

Model	A	B	C	D
	Anorexia	**Isaiah**	**Moreton**	**Christ Church**
1. Rapid change	Rapid Growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social Pressure	Social pressure	Social Pressure	Social pressure

The pressure of sudden growth can then imbue the individual with the sense that they are powerless to alter its pace or to resist it (see Table 13.2). They are swept along by the pressure and feel they have no control. What has previously felt secure now seems under threat. Again this can be seen in each of the four spheres:

A2. The patient with anorexia is powerless to avoid the changes occurring naturally in her body and the dawning of her adult sexuality. As she looks outwards for role models, so she sees the impossibly thin ideals portrayed as the ideal of womanhood in our society, and becomes powerless to avoid being caught up in the image of the "media perfect woman".

> My whole aim in life was to be thinner than I was the day before. As I got smaller, so did my clothes size, a standard size 12 went to a 10 and then to an 8. What a joy being a size 8 was to me – no one else in my circle had that claim to fame! Although I had always been careful about my appearance, I now became obsessive; my make-up, hair, nails and clothes had to be perfect. You see, I felt so attractive! So elegant and fragile with such amazing hip and cheekbones! (Shelley 1997:71)

B2. In the context of the Isaiah passage, there is the pressure to amalgamate the returning exiles and the indigenous population. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that this is what the returnees expected to happen, as they were the

pure ones, the 'seed of Israel'. The people returning from the Exile certainly knew what should happen. Hanson 1987:267 writes that Isaiah had focused on Yahweh's acts on behalf of all those who were afflicted while contending groups focused primarily on their own contending interests. Isaiah's daring vision of what God was doing to restore his people to divinely ordered *shalom* was rapidly becoming obscured by party strife.

C2. While objecting to planning applications, the people of Moreton have been consistently over-ruled. The most recent example of this was the objection by the people of the Sandbrook estate to the building an estate of houses on the flood plain to the immediate east of the estate, fearing that their homes and gardens would be flooded. This estate of some forty new homes was completed in less than four months, once consent was given. They have seen Moreton grow at a rate that has precluded assimilation and commitment to Moreton as a community by many incomers. At the same time, they have seen resources and money pouring into their neighbouring community, while Moreton seems to have been left behind in a sense, unable to control its own destiny and powerless to support the most vulnerable within it. The houses in Leasowe have had new kitchens, bathrooms and double glazing, while the houses on the Yew Tree estate lack even central heating. Moreton has seen division between its richest and poorest residents increasing, as has been demonstrated in the Paycheck data used.

D2. In Christ Church, the congregation felt powerless in the face of the incoming group. They were using language and styles of worship that the congregation did not understand, but which were both glamorous and

seductive. The notion that, "God has told me/shown me" became increasingly difficult to counter without being accused of having a "spirit" of this or that (a concept that was never explained). On one occasion, the author recalls being told that another member of the congregation had "a spirit of Jezebel" and upon asking what this meant, was told to "go away and get to know the Scriptures 'properly' under the guidance of the Spirit."

5.7c <u>Desire for Control</u>

TABLE 13.3

DESIRE FOR CONTROL

	A	B	C	D
Model	**Anorexia**	**Isaiah**	**Moreton**	**Christ Church**
1. Rapid change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases

The whole experience of being swept along in a current of events are not sought or wished for and that one is powerless to alter is uncomfortable for both individuals and communities, and so we seek to impose some pattern on them, sometimes with 'magical' thinking, sometimes by becoming more controlling of those aspects of our lives where we feel we do have some control (see Table 13.3). This is human nature. Unfortunately, our attempts to impose our controls can be destructive.

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In each of the four spheres there is evidence of the desire to wrest some form of control in a situation that appears out of control and in each case this desire for control proves destructive.

A3. In the course of anorexia, the sufferer now begins to limit their food intake and initiate rituals around food (magical thinking) in an effort to regain some control:

> Food had become an enemy to me and the ritualistic behaviour that accompanied it was incredible. I had to sit a certain way on my bed to eat the food. I wouldn't allow any of it to touch my lips and after each mouthful I had to wipe my face. I would also eat in a set sequence – the 'safer' foods first, followed by the rest. When the food was placed in front of me I would panic so much that my breathing would quite often become so erratic that it was followed by a mild panic attack. (Shelley 1997:21)

B3. In the Isaiah passage, the returnees from the Exile proliferate their fast days in the effort to "persuade" God to act to restore the nation of Israel. Here they are seeking almost to control God by the diligence of their repeated fasting. However, as Leupold (1974:283) points out, it is not this outward form that will pave the way for Israel's restoration, for God seeks true righteousness. He continues:

> They have fasted, but God has taken their fasting into account; God does not seem to have noticed that they have achieved a certain amount of merit by their godly exercises. When men blame God for what is befalling them there is something decidedly unwholesome about their attitude. (1974:285)

C3. In the community of Moreton, people became embittered and stopped any attempt to work together. Each group began to compete with the other for resources and power bases emerged (2.10, 2.11, 3.3, 3.6aii). This establishment of power bases can be seen as an attempt at control by

individuals who initially may have had the wellbeing of the whole community at heart, but who, as their efforts were thwarted became insular and sought to control what resources they had and to compete with others.

D3. Within Christ Church various power bases developed, each insisting that they were right in their approach, and the others therefore wrong. Which home group one attended demonstrated clearly to which 'camp' one belonged. Seeing this, the then Rector closed down the home groups in 1996; however, one group in particular continued to meet. The refusal of the home group leader to close her home group and of the members of that home group to stop attending it played a large part in her and her husband finally leaving the church after nearly fifty years of membership. In 2006, nearly ten years later, that home group continues to meet, although not within Christ Church.

5.7d <u>Introspection</u>

TABLE 13.4

INTROSPECTION

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia

In each case, as the desire for control begins to dominate, and as each discovers that they are unable to maintain control over events, each turn inward on themselves (see Table 13.4).

A4. In the case of the anorexic, this introspection takes the form of self-centeredness, whereby she displays no concern for those around them, becoming increasingly preoccupied with her poor self-image and demanding of the time and attention of others. Levenkron (2001:37-38) describes it thus:

> Often girls who develop anorexia have a history of being nice, protective, compliant, agreeable, avoiding conflict – not assertive outside their immediate family. The third stage develops when the girl has been criticised for becoming too thin by many around her. She has disregarded their advice. At some point she realises she has become defiant to everyone around her. She is not afraid of conflict. She is not worried about what anyone else thinks about her actions. She feels no obligations to please them. She is aware, however, that she is comfortable with this newfound defiance only in defence of her anorexia … It has become the most important area of her life. She begins to demand special conditions before she will eat. She may drag her parents from restaurant to restaurant seeking the perfect fat-free dish. At home, she may stand over whoever is cooking to make sure no extra calories are secretly added to her meal … She becomes increasingly strident in her anger when her wishes related to eating conditions are violated … Parents feel frightened if they disobey her, lest she lose more weight.

B4. The religiosity of the returnees becomes more intense in their misguided efforts to get God to notice them, by dint of their own rituals. Westermann (1969:335) says that the fast days, as attested in particular by the Book of Lamentations, came into being following the disasters of 586BC and they became a customary observance prescribed for certain days. But the situation by this time was very different. The people had returned, and things were really not going as they had expected. What is marring the fasts is the fact that their whole being is not involved in the supplication. They are doing religion but not acting in a godly manner, continuing to behave selfishly: "pursuing their business, making their workers work for them, wrangling and quarrelling. It even comes to deeds of violence" (Westermann 1969:336). All the time wondering why God did not take any notice of them and why God continued to withhold His blessing.

C4. In Moreton, letters began to be written to the local papers saying that Moreton was neglected and overlooked by the Council and by service providers. Those with power bases within the community began to fight with one another and an attempt to bring them together failed.

> I am beginning to wonder how the Council can justify charging residents of Moreton Council Tax as no money is ever spent here. It is run down and a depressing place to live. Shops are closing and there was no Christmas tree this year. We lose out time after time to Leasowe and to Birkenhead as millions of pounds are spent there year after year. The streets are filthy and the traffic is a menace. It seems that nobody cares. *(Letter published in Wirral Globe 23.01.02)*

D4. In Christ Church, by 1998, the congregation broke down into cliques at the same time as the Church became a place for other Christians to visit because of the dramatic manifestations of the Spirit present within it. Each became isolated in their particular experience and it was possible almost to

see people walking into church with their sleeves rolled up for their 'spiritual fix'. People began to visit the church from as far away as Southport and North Wales because word of what was happening in Moreton had begun to spread. Coach loads started to arrive for the 6.30pm service on a Sunday. The older congregation who had faithfully attended the 9.00am service often over the course of fifty years (and who were often anxious about coming out in the evening) were starting to feel neglected and uncared for in the blaze of excitement and fame that now enveloped Christ Church. People had stopped caring for one another and were only concerned for themselves, and what they could gain from the "experience" of a service at Christ Church. A desire for phenomena rather than real spiritual growth was apparent.

5.7e <u>Low Self-Worth</u>

TABLE 13.5

LOW SELF-WORTH

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Pressure	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Rapid Change	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low Self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy

There is almost a self-perpetuating cycle that operates within each of the four spheres, taking them further away from the wholeness that they all seek and towards low-self-worth (see Table 13.5).

A5. The anorexic comes to hate herself:

> I could no longer see any grey or white, or bright things. I was in a terrible dark hole. There was no way to get out. I was obsessed with emptiness, nothingness and depression. I turned this emptiness, these black holes that I felt into my own philosophy of life. (Ronen & Ayelet 2001:79)

B5. In Isaiah, the insistence on form seems to have become absolute, but all their efforts were not producing any results. They were adopting the correct posture, and the correct dress (58:5), but without the right attitude all their attempts were bound to be fruitless. The people seemed to be bewildered that God was not hearing them and this would have had a detrimental effect on their sense of self-worth, especially as they knew themselves to be God's chosen people.

C5. In Moreton, people lost hope that anything would ever improve and Moreton became a place where people no longer wanted to live. House

prices stalled and Christmas 2002 was marked by three murders in the community. The sense of shock and horror in the community was almost palpable.

D5. By 1999, all the joy had gone out of the worship in Christ Church and increasingly people began to doubt the reality of what was going on, and signs of emotional manipulation emerged both in the leading of worship and, of more concern, in the preaching. The same people were going forward for prayer each week and services were becoming increasingly predictable. The leadership in the Church had begun to believe their publicity and an unwise paid appointment was made in January 1999, without the post being advertised or the P.C.C. being consulted. The appointee was one of those who had originally arrived in the church following the split in another fellowship. Members of the congregation felt unable to comment on what was happening, for fear of being ostracised.

    5.7f <u>Fragmentation</u>

TABLE 13.6

FRAGMENTATION

	A	B	C	D

Model	Anorexia	Isaiah	Moreton	Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice	Division	Schism

By this stage in the process, all sense of wholeness has been lost - and it has dramatic consequences in each sphere. The outcome is fragmentation of various kinds, as demonstrated in each of the spheres (see Table 13.6).

A6. In the anorexic, death sometimes results from starvation, as the patient is now not only unwilling, but unable to eat. The bodily systems begin to break down, with liver, kidney, heart and brain all malfunctioning.

> I thought I was getting near the end. The slightest knock to my legs would make them bleed, as my skin was so thin. It was uncomfortable to sit or lie down. I hardly ever slept. I no longer worked, as it was an effort to walk. I can remember going to the shops and falling in the road, as I could not lift my feel high enough over the kerb. I had to get up stairs on my hands and knees. And the cold – oh, I was so cold. I really thought I would die from the cold. My whole body hurt, and I was so tired. I think I actually died inside. (Shelley 1997:136)

Between one in twenty and one in ten patients with anorexia die in any year.

(World Health Organisation, 1992)

B6. In the Isaiah passage we see the results of introspection and low self-worth in injustice - the 'yoke of the oppressed', the fighting within the community of the returnees, their fasting contrasted with the starvation around

them. Despite what they wished to believe, there was no community, no nation.

C6. Huge divisions sprung up in different parts of the Parish without reference to one another at all, leaving huge gaps in the services provided to the community as a whole, as by now, no-one was able to take an overview or was willing to endure the suspicion involved in seeking information from each power base. Indeed, it was difficult to see who could undertake such a task, as they must appear completely neutral and without an agenda of their own.

D6. In Christ Church, the underlying tensions between the groups within the church blew apart dramatically - resulting in the sudden departure of one ordained minister and around a third of the congregation. The author, along with all of those present, vividly remembers the April evening of the Parish Annual General Meeting of 1999. Christ Church has a tradition of this midweek evening meeting being well attended. It is when the Church Council is elected (among others items of business) and reports are given by various organisations and ministers in the church. People from all the three congregations attend and attendance is often in excess of one hundred. A vote of thanks was being given to the then Rector and Associate Minister as is customary, when the wife of the new paid appointee stood up and told everyone that the ordained clergy hated the sight of one another and could not stand to be in the same room. The terrible nature of their relationship had made her husband ill and that they were leaving the church forthwith. Her husband meanwhile was urging her to go on and speak out the truth in the

power of the Spirit. They left. The Associate Minister likewise left the room. He too never returned. The congregation had no idea what was going on at all.

Within two months of this, a third of the Church Council had resigned (mostly those who had come originally from another fellowship), but not before they had accused the Rector under Church Canon Law of a breakdown of pastoral relations (which thus prevented the bishop from intervening in a pastoral capacity), and so the congregation was left without support. The Rector was sent on sabbatical immediately for six months.

5.7g <u>Realisation</u>

TABLE 13.7

REALISATION

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation

It is only now, it seems, after an experience of fragmentation, that healing can begin. It would seem that in all spheres there is a point of crisis, a 'hinge' upon which things turn. It may be that subsequently people can recognize the signs that things are going wrong and take remedial action prior to the point of crisis, but it does appear that there must be a moment of realization of just how bad things have become before healing can begin (see Table 13.7).

A7. In anorexia, the starving patient can become aware of the gravity of her condition.

> Seeing my family, seeing their pain, finally broke what little heart I had left. How could I have done this to them? After much resistance, I finally agreed to go into hospital. At five foot eight inches, and under six stone, the time had come. It's hard to remember much about it except that I felt safe and felt a certain relief. Control over my life had been taken away from me and I think I was glad. I was just so tired. My body ached and my heart ached and I just couldn't carry on. I guess it is like being in this awful fight with someone and being beaten senseless. In the end you're glad to be knocked down as at least then it's over and someone can come along and start picking up the pieces. (Shelley 1997:137)

Way (1993:83) writes that the origin of recovery comes when the anorexic becomes aware that they are out of control – that they are controlled by their obsessions. However, the real turning point often occurs only when they realize that they must choose between life and death (Way 1993:85).

B7. The whole of the Isaiah passage is the call to realise what is happening.

Dean Chatham (1987:25) writes:

> God was tired of the Israelites' pretense of worship. They were going through the motions of seeking him daily and desiring to know the ways by which he would deliver them and lead them.

Whereas what God actually accepts is (1987:26-27):

> Accompanied by due consideration for one's fellow man. Fasting must include loosing the bonds of wickedness which place men under bondage; freeing the oppressed; breaking bread with the hungry; bringing care to the poor; sheltering the homeless; clothing the naked and providing help and respect for one's kinsmen …. Blessings are conditional. They had to stop pointing a scornful finger at godly men, and speaking injurious words about their neighbours. They had to distribute alms to the needy and satisfy the needs of those bowed down by abstinence.

Only then would God provide light in the darkness and water that would not fail. Only then would they be blessed with repairing the city and rebuilding the walls.

C7. In Moreton, there was an influx of new people around 1998 who were genuinely concerned with, and for, the community. This included the author and the facilitator for Pathways. This new (and neutral) perspective began to enable key people in the community to look afresh at their situation.

D7. In Christ Church, the remaining congregation began to ask themselves how the schism could have happened. The Bishop of Birkenhead, now Bishop

of Exeter, Michael Languish, approached the remaining members of the Church Council and asked if they wished to proceed under Canon Law. They declined to proceed and so this thinking and prayerful consideration of all that had occurred was enabled by Bishop Michael in a series of meetings and services, while the Rector was away. Within twelve months of the schism, the Rector left. The ensuing interregnum lasted eleven months. The author's own ministry grew directly out of the pain and turmoil of the schism at Christ Church and as a result of Bishop Michael's intervention.

5.7h <u>Seeking Help</u>

TABLE 13.8

SEEKING HELP

Model	A. Anorexia	B. Isaiah	C. Moreton	D. Christ Church
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8.Seeking Help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Seeking help Repentance

In each instance seeking help and turning away from past behaviours becomes the only alternative to total disintegration. The point of realization is the point at which the potential paths divide and seeking help or continuing down the path of self-destruction become the two possible alternatives (see Table 13.8).

A8. In anorexia, the patient begins to see a way back to healing and wholeness. She begins to seek out help on her own behalf:

> Over the years my anorexia persisted, in spite of all the hospital admissions I'd had numerous relapses. I *did* want to get better. By the beginning of 1996 I was really ill again … Friends and family were very kind at the time and I am most grateful to them. They helped me in every way they could. Finally, my mother and brother pushed so hard for me to go into hospital that I was forced to go in again … Shortly after being admitted I began what proved to be my cure. (Shelley 1997:99)

B8. In the Isaiah passage, repentance is certainly implied if the community is to function as a whole. Repentance does not simply involve "saying sorry" but means a change of direction, a change of behaviour. The whole point of the rhetoric of the Isaiah passage is to get the people to turn away from their fruitless ritual and towards growth and wholeness for all the people. They have to see what they have been doing is wrong and change their ways if they want God to bless them and restore them. It can be seen too that repentance is more than just a turning away from something, but a turning towards a new wholeness of life. Herbert (1975:146) "Without a just ordering of society and a practical concern for the needy, the hopes engendered by Isaiah cannot be realised."

C8. In Moreton, the Moreton Partnership was established in 2000 - this was initially a meeting of people who had the well-being of the community at heart and who could influence the way in which money allocated to Moreton could be spent. It also included key professionals who wanted to provide services to the community. There was a sense among us that we were seeking a new way of being a community, actually that things had got so bad that the only way was up.

D8. In Christ Church there was a weekend of reflection and repentance in November 2001 to which key figures from both sides of the schism were invited. It was one of the first major acts of the new Rector's incumbency. Here too we were encouraged to reflect and acknowledge our own part in the

pain that we had experienced as a fellowship and then turn away from that and look forward to a future where we too could look forward to restoration.

5.7i Reaching Out

TABLE 13.9

REACHING OUT

	A	B	C	D
Model	**Anorexia**	**Isaiah**	**Moreton**	**Christ Church**
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8. Seeking Help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Seeking help Repentance
9. Reaching out	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking regeneration	Seeking direction

The importance of each other and of interdependence becomes evident as each strand begins to reach outside of itself (see Table 13.9).

A9. In anorexia, the patient is co-operative with doctors and therapists and wants at last to recover:

> It was not at all easy going through the enforced feeding and close observation, but after nine weeks … I came home a stone and a half heavier. From the four and a half stone wreck I had been when I went in, I came out very near my target weight of seven stone. For the first time I was thrilled at my weight gain. I felt better than I had felt in a long time and I knew I was on the road to recovery. I had been anorexic for so long that I had reached the stage where I was desperate to get better; the weight gain was only half the battle, and

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there was another 50% to go. During my time in hospital I had been able to do a lot of thinking, to reflect and to think about what I wanted from life. Anorexia is all in the mind. To get well you have to want to be well. The factors that trigger your eating problems will still be there, but you have to learn to deal with them effectively. Starving yourself to death is certainly not the way to do it. I am so relieved I will never go through that hell again. (Shelley 1997:99-100)

B9. In Isaiah 58, the people are shown that reaching out to one another across the social divisions will result in the kind of worship that God desires. Herbert (1977:146-7) puts it like this:

But when this happens, the prophet is so confident of the divine blessing that he can only express this confidence in a mixture of metaphors: light, sure guidance, abundance of food and water, restoration of health and vigour so that Jerusalem can become once more an inhabited city. As often in such a promise, a new name is given, signifying a new character.

C9. In Moreton, the Project (see Chapter Three) established mechanisms whereby the community could begin to communicate with one another and ways were actively sought of bringing the community together. The most obvious examples of this are the Moreton Directory, and the Moreton website. The new Moreton Partnership began to apply for and to be granted regeneration monies – not least of which was the "Moreton Community Fund" which could make small grants to local organizations, such as the local Art Groups.

D9. In Christ Church effort began to be made to reach out to those who had had contact with the church (for example in baptism follow-up and the institution of the special "Twas the Night before Christmas" service) and social events were laid on where the whole of the church had the opportunity to participate (for example the Big Event weekend marking the end of the

candidate's Project.). In January 2005, the I was asked to head up a church plant in Sunningdale, one of the tower blocks in the Sandbrook estate, and this continues to grow slowly.

Of course there is much to be said about the model beyond this point: but even within the model the recovery process, which lies beyond here, is of a different order and demands further theological reflection. Up to this point in the model there is evidence to support the assertions made in each of the four strands; beyond this point one or more of the strands become more speculative. However, not arriving at the end of a journey does not preclude some ideas as to what the next steps and the final destination may look like, as there are clues and signposts to help in the literature and in scripture.

5.7j <u>Increased Self-Worth</u>

TABLE 13.10

INCREASED SELF-WORTH

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low Self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8. Seeking help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Seeking help Repentance
9. Reaching Out	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking Regeneration	Seeking Direction
10. Increased Self-worth	Increased Self-worth	New relationship with God(58:8)	Seeing results	Building community

Here there is something about being able to make a new start. There is a distinct difference between egotistical pride and a healthy sense of self-worth (see Table 13.10).

A10. We can see this difference clearly in this account from Fiona, who had anorexia:

> It is difficult to know when the exact turning point was … It was a desperately slow process. It is a very true saying that to starve the body you starve the mind. Gradually as my weight increased my thinking did change for the better. I had a lot of decisions to make. Would I stay where I was or try to move on? I decided to move on a little.

> Today I still struggle at seven stone but I am able to function more comfortably on a daily basis ... Life is much more fun again and my self-esteem and self-worth has increased. (Shelley 1997:26)

B10. In Isaiah 58, the promise of a new relationship with God is offered if their behaviour is changed. This too seems to represent a new beginning, with the reference to dawn breaking in contrast to the darkness in which they were presently living. Jones (1964:54) remarks that this may have been suggested by Isaiah 8:22-9:2, and notes that the parallelism of light and glory are used again at Isaiah 60:1 to describe the presence and the self-disclosure of God.

Although 58:8b is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night of the exodus, there is no physical journey that needs to be made in this instance – but there is a long psychological and spiritual journey to be made. Nevertheless, the promise is there of a new relationship with God Himself.

C10. In Moreton, after a long and difficult birth, the Partnership has begun to see results. As an example, we clearly identified that we needed Adult Education provision in our community, as the public transport links are poor and it is difficult for many to get to the F.E. college provision on the Wirral. As a result of the Partnership negotiating with provider organisations, there is a range of provision at different levels with child care provision at two community venues in Moreton. This is in its third academic year (2005-2006), and has been consistently over-subscribed.

D10. Christ Church has taken a number of steps to rebuild a sense of community and to redevelop a sense of its own place within the broader community. A series of purely social events was developed for Church

members, which has been something that Christ Church has never really been good at doing, to enable members of the three different congregations to mix. The second "Big Event" weekend in May 2005 and the planning and involvement of Christ Church in the Merseyfest event of August 2005 demonstrated firmly our commitment and determination to be a visible and serving part of our community, even if the Parish Centre remains underused by the Parish as a whole.

5.7k <u>Ability to "Be"</u>

TABLE 13.11

ABILITY TO "BE"

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low Self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8. Seeking help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Seeking help Repentance
9. Reaching Out	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking Regeneration	Seeking Direction
10. Increased Self-worth	Increased Self-worth	New relationship with God (58:8)	Seeing results	Building community
11. Ability to 'be'	Healthy Self-image	A New Nation (58:12)	Civic Identity	A Well Church

At this stage in the model there is something about stopping striving and being at peace, in the secure knowledge of who you are (see Table 13.11). This stage of necessity precedes the ability to form healthy relationships, as without this self-knowledge, relationships will have hidden agendas and those within them will wittingly or unwittingly play power games. It does not, however, imply faultlessness, sinlessness or perfection. In a sense then, reflection at this step in the model should lead back to realisation and seeking help. Here is where the theological reflection cycle fits into the model.

A11. Here is how one patient with anorexia described reaching this stage in the model, where increased self-worth leads to reflection that has positive outcomes:

> I gained a lot of confidence and my self esteem grew. The realisation that I could help others helped me to help myself (through a group). I now live back in Derby…and mostly I enjoy my life. My worries about my body and food are still there, but they no longer dominate my life or cause me undue stress. In fact I now attend a naturalist park with my friends, which I think is great – very liberating!! As for the problems that caused my Anorexia – my parents are still very much there, but my ability to cope with them grows stronger by the day. I have stopped trying to be something I am not – the person they had wanted me to be. I have accepted the person I am and have grown to like myself, most of the time. Now, at last, I am proud to be me!   (Shelley 1997:112-113)

B.11. As we know from the Bible, Israel never made it to this point in the process. Despite repeated promises from God, in beautiful language, they were not heeded by the people. These promises are scattered throughout Trito-Isaiah. For example:

> I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, creating praise on the lips of mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near, says the LORD. And I will heal them. (57:18-19)

> The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, declares the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD. My Spirit is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendents from this time on and forever, says the LORD. (59:20-21)

See also Isaiah 60; 61; 62; 65:17-25 and 66:12-14.

C11. Although Moreton is still seeking a civic identity, Christmas 2005 saw the restoration of Christmas lights at the Cross, aided by the Moreton Partnership, which has done much to lift the mood of the community and four months after the completion of the Merseyfest project, the Adult Training Centre gardens

and the Youth Centre remain unsullied by graffiti or vandalism, a problem that has plagued both establishments in the past. The political division of Moreton remain an impediment to the establishment of a true civic identity, but there is evidence that Moreton is a more contented community.

D11. Christ Church was presented with a model against which to measure its own progress. This is the WELL Church model, devised by the Rector, Graham Cousins, which argues that a well church should be welcoming, evangelising, loving and learning. We have made several strides towards this, with the introduction of a formal system to involve newcomers into the congregation in 2006, a rolling programme of Alpha courses, which started in autumn 2005, along with the formal following up of pastoral contacts such as baptism and funeral families and the introduction of a biblical studies course, in 2005-2006, which the author co-tutored with the Rector, accredited by the Diocese of Sydney.

5.7l <u>Power to Give</u>

TABLE 13.12

POWER TO GIVE

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low Self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8. Seeking help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Repentance
9. Reaching Out	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking Regeneration	Seeking Direction
10. Increased Self-worth	Increased Self-worth	New relationship with God (58:8)	Seeing results	Building community
11. Ability to 'be'	Healthy Self-image	A New Nation (58:12)	Civic Identity	A Well Church
12. Power to give	Healthy relationships	Healthy relationships	Healthy relationships	Healthy Relationships

The ability to give oneself in healthy relationships with others comes out of a proper relationship with God and a good self-awareness (see Table 13.12).

A12. In the case of Fiona, we can see that as her self-esteem grew, so her ability to form healthy relationships was re-established, and she began to be able to give to others in a broader context, even to the extent of seeing a purpose in the suffering that she had endured.

> The best thing of all was that I got married four years ago. That helped considerably. The focus of my life is no longer on *me, me, me,* but

instead is on *us.* Life is much more fun again ... My husband and I socialise a lot and we have a happy life together ... All I can do now is to keep looking forward and thinking of the future. In my career I have come into contact with many adolescent girls who have shown signs of, or actually had, Anorexia. Many have put their trust in me. If anything has come out of my illness it is that hopefully my experience can be used to help others in a positive and constructive way by being able to spot the danger signs and act quickly. I hope that by doing this successfully I can prevent these children from having to endure the dreadful suffering that I went through. To stop just one will make my suffering worthwhile.(Shelley 1997:26-27)

B12. As was pointed out previously, the people of Israel never did achieve the healthy relationships that God desired, but the impetus for Isaiah 58:1-12 were the unhealthy relationships that existed within the community, the injustice and oppression that was prevalent – and God's view of that. It is clear throughout scripture that God takes our relationships with one another very seriously indeed – Jesus, citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, summed up the Law thus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 23:37-38). There are hints and suggestions in Trito-Isaiah that the blessings that God desires to pour out upon the nation of Israel will be extended to all peoples:

> And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve Him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship Him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Sovereign LORD declares – he who gathers the exiles the exiles of Israel: I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered. (56:6-8)

God's desires for our relationships extend beyond those with whom we ought to feel comfortable, to extend a welcome to those we perceive as strangers.

C12. In order to answer this fully for Moreton, relationships both within the community and with those 'outside' the community must be discussed: Moreton as a community is not at this point yet. However, as suggested earlier there are encouraging signs that it is more comfortable with itself. The Partnership has an agreement to work in co-operation with the Leasowe Partnership, which was established during the life of the Project, and this is to be welcomed, as the history between the two communities has been fraught with difficulties. Relationships between the community groups within Moreton can still be difficult on occasion, but gradually matters are improving.

D12. To address this for Christ Church, relationships within the Church, and between the Churches in Moreton must be discussed: Relationships within Christ Church are difficult to judge objectively, but there seems to be a general consensus that they are better than they were. Hard evidence is difficult to obtain, but generally, folk seem to be more contented and settled, and having asked both the Rector and the Curate these impressions are shared by them. Certainly, relationships between the Churches in Moreton are greatly improved and are going from strength to strength since the Merseyfest project began in September 2004. We have agreed to continue this as Moretonfest in 2006, as a joint church project, probably in the Lingham or Sandbrook estates. However, we would make no claim to perfection.

5.7m Restoration

TABLE 13.13

RESTORATION

Model	A Anorexia	B Isaiah	C Moreton	D Christ Church
1. Rapid Change	Rapid growth	Return from exile	Rapid growth	Rapid growth
2. Powerlessness	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure	Social pressure
3. Desire for Control	Food intake	Fasting (58:3a)	Power bases	Power bases
4. Introspection	Self-centeredness	Desire to be noticed (58:3b)	Desire to be important	Spiritual inertia
5. Low Self-worth	Low self-worth	Insistence on form (58:5)	Lack of recognition	Lack of joy
6. Fragmentation	Starvation	Injustice (58:3c-4)	Division	Schism
7. Realisation	Realisation	Realisation (58:6)	Realisation	Realisation
8. Seeking help	Seeking help	Seeking help (Repentance implied)	Seeking help Moreton Partnership	Seeking help Repentance
9. Reaching Out	Therapy	Restitution (58:7)	Seeking Regeneration	Seeking Direction
10. Increased Self-worth	Increased Self-worth	New relationship with God (58:8)	Seeing results	Building community
11. Ability to 'be'	Healthy Self-image	A New Nation (58:12)	Civic Identity	A Well Church
12. Power to give	Healthy relationships	Healthy relationships	Healthy relationships	Healthy Relationships
13. Restoration	Restoration	Restoration	Restoration	Restoration

Restoration is the ultimate step in the process, and, of course, it is one that will not be reached fully (see Table 13.13). For the anorexic, the scars, physical and mental will always remain. In her account of the experiences of people struggling with anorexia, Garrett (1988:67) asked those who had recovered what recovery looked like to them. All she asked agreed that the following were, for them, the fundamentals of recovery – something they described variously as 'part of a continuum' or 'a process'.

a) abandoning obsession with food and weight

b) strongly believing they would never go back to starving (binging or purging)

c) developing a critique of the social pressures to be thin

d) having a sense that their lives were meaningful – existentially or spiritually

e) believing they were worthwhile people and that the different aspects of themselves were part of a whole person

f) no longer feeling cut off from social interaction.

These are the building blocks of recovery. The "opposites" of the signs and symptoms of breakdown described in the model (steps 1-6 – and contained within the recovery phases – steps 8-12).

5.8 <u>Conclusion</u>

It has been shown that Israel was never fully restored, and neither Moreton, nor Christ Church will ever be perfect communities. Thus we can leave the consideration of the four spheres at this point. But it does not mean that we are without hope. As Grey (2000:2) writes:

> To live by hope is to believe that it is worth taking that next step: that our actions, our families, our cultures and our societies have meaning, are worth living and dying for. Liturgically speaking, it is hope that gives us the energy, simply, 'to keep the feast.'

Hope may then be considered as the first characteristic of restoration and it is with hope that the final chapter of the thesis opens as the signs and symptoms of restoration and salvation are explored in more depth.

Chapter Six

The Path to Restoration

"Bread for myself is a material question:

Bread for my neighbour is a spiritual question"

N. Berdyaev 1961:124

6.1 <u>Introduction</u>

As we look towards the recovery of community, so we become conscious that the goal of restoration is one that can never be fully attained. However, there are signs and symptoms of that recovery taking place just as there are signs and symptoms of illness. So (crudely), for example, in my own practice in surgery I may see that a child has a red eardrum (a sign), feel that they are hot (another sign) and the child may tell me the ear hurts (a symptom). Put together, it is likely that the child has a middle ear infection. Signs are, then, what can be seen or perceived by an observer and symptoms are what are experienced by the person themselves.

As discussed at the end of the previous chapter, the first symptom of the recovery towards restoration is the internal experience of hope. For the patient with anorexia, there must be the hope of recovery before that recovery can begin. It seems, even instinctively, that this must be true for without hope there can be nothing to look forward to. Beyond this first symptom, which suggests itself, the order of the symptoms is suggested by Isaiah 58:1-12.

However, this chapter is primarily concerned with restoration in all its forms, and commentators on Isaiah recognise this as a central theme of the passage:

Emmerson (1992:102-103) writes:

> One of the most powerful challenges to moral action is to be found in Ch.58. With the exception of v.1 and v.4 this is framed not in terms of

condemnation but in terms of exhortation. The radical reinterpretation here of the customary practice of fasting is concerned entirely with matters of social justice … Not the ritual motions of fasting, but care for the hungry and homeless will open the way to the restoration of the people's own relationship with God and the answering of their prayers (v. 4,9).

Wright (1982:141) further points out the intensity, saying that the words are, "fresh, penetrating and original." He notes that:

Beginning in v.8 the consequences of a sincere fast – that is genuine religion – that has radical consequences in the common life are developed. (142)

Here it says that if the people act in accordance with God's justice to restore community "Then light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your Righteous One will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard." (58:8).

The importance of 58:8 to the notion of restoration cannot be overestimated. Box (1980:300) speaks of restoration: The Hebrew word used for 'healing' here literally means: 'new flesh' – the flesh formed when a wound is healing. In Nehemiah 4:1, the same word is used of the restoration of the walls of the Temple. Here it means 'recovered health or prosperity.' Whitehouse (1908:267) points out that the Hebrew word used, *arûchah,* is not found in any biblical text predating the Exile. Blenkinsopp (2003:175) translates v.8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, your wound will quickly be healed."

This passage culminates in a description of what this healing will look like – of well-watered gardens, of newly built homes, of peace and plenty: a people a one with themselves and with God. Living in the light of His presence – but that is to come.

6.2 The Symptoms of Restoration

I shall now examine in more detail each of the symptoms of restoration. The symptoms are meant to indicate we should expect to experience in a community that is recovering, or moving towards, restoration. Likewise, a recovering patient with anorexia should expect to experience these symptoms.

6.2a Searching for the experience of Hope

Looking for the experience of hope within the four spheres is one that is, as with all speculative endeavours, fraught with difficulty. However, there is enough evidence to support the assertion that hope is the first of the symptoms of restoration.

Garrett (1998:68) writes:

> Recovery [for the anorexic] is not about perfection, control, revolution or closure, but about continuing transformations. Some denied there was such a thing as recovery even while expressing a desire for it: Jennifer says she would love to live life to the full and looks forward to the day when she gets well. Freda, although still full of self-loathing, is determined to stick around until she likes herself.

Within Isaiah 58:1-12 there is a clear thought that God has not abandoned his people. There are certainly things that are going wrong within the community, but they are not cast adrift without hope. As discussed earlier, the passage implies healing and restoration.

Turning to the community of Moreton, we began to experience hope as the community began to work together for the first time. After the initial distrust and entrenchment, doors began to open and we discovered that we were not a threat to one another, but a source of strength. We began to believe that we could achieve together. Moreton now has lights at Christmas!

The Team was not deterred by realising the scale of the task ahead of them. We identified very early on in the process that we were called to be bringers of hope (see 2.12). This was something that was felt strongly and inspired us throughout the project phase. From there, it has continued into many of our individual ministries as they have subsequently developed (see 3.9).

Houston (1993:28) writes: "Christian people must struggle to transform the world in which they live so that it may conform more closely to the world which God requires and is bringing into being."

Hope is future orientated and the notion of time is implicit within it. Time as we experience it is most important, rather than the simple passing of chronological time. Hours and minutes measured by a clock are not as important ultimately as our perception and our experience of time. Although, the construction of the perceived future has not been elevated to a faculty of a brain function in the same way as the construction of the perceived past (memory), anticipation, planning, foresight, indeed hope, are pivotal to human functioning. Hope includes the wished for future. Desire impels to the attainment or possession of something. It is goal orientated and positive. Hope is the belief that the desired future is both possible and probable. Aspiration or desirability, without expectancy, is best described as wishful thinking! Hope, then, is (in psychological terms) a general tendency to construct and respond to the perceived future positively. The hopeful person, subjectively assesses what is desired for the future to be probable or so important is to constrain belief and behaviour to be grounded upon its possibility (Nunn, 1996: 228)

Nunn, a psychiatrist, asserts that there are various components to hope. He says that hopeful people see that they have some control over their future, that they have a purpose in life that they trust in others, that they have a positive view of themselves and of the path that their life will take, that they are optimistic and that they subjectively report well-being. Indeed, he views hopefulness as being the single greatest marker of mental well-being. In view of this, it is of no surprise that hope is one of the symptoms of restoration and may justify its position as the first symptom of restoration.

However, Nunn writes of the individual and here we seek restoration of community, albeit a community that must be comprised of hopeful individuals if it is to succeed.

Any manifestation of the church is both partial and limited (see Reed 1996:289). Everywhere around us we see the contrast between the experienced present and the anticipated future. In its outworking of the living hope (1 Peter 1:3) there is an ongoing need for transformation by the Spirit, and Paul, in his theology, points more towards things unseen, than towards the seen (2 Corinthians 4:8). In so far as any Christian community is grounded in God, the Church (indeed the Christian community that is central to this thesis, Christ Church) has two aspects, the human and the divine – but these two permeate each other. We are made a witness to the essence of all things being derived from a future fulfilment rather than past sins. The Holy Spirit makes the Church a community of hope, and hope is a fundamental part of what it means to be the Church. Throughout prophecy has been spoken of as

a way of knowing, and hope is essentially prophetic in that it looks toward a partially revealed future, even if the reverse is not necessarily the case, in that prophecy is not always characterised by hope!

Newbigin (1993:2-3) writes that the resurrection of Jesus is our assurance that this world does not have the last word – that things are not what they seem. It authorises a scepticism regarding the wisdom of this world. It makes possible a life of radical dissent. It looks towards a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21) with a confidence in which it is possible to be both realistic and hopeful about this present world.

However, the hope to which Christians have been called must not be privatised, nor postponed indefinitely. While the pattern of breakdown, repentance and restoration on our part, or garden, Cross and Resurrection on our Saviour's, precludes an entirely this worldly restoration – the words we say regularly in the Creed: "He will come again with glory" give us a framework to operate within, a purposeful direction towards which to move. This direction is one of hope, and this moving is of necessity public and not merely private. Newbigin continues (1993:11):

> This doing is of course in the public world of politics, economics and culture as much as in the private world of intimate personal relations. The sundering of the two, and the suggestion that action is one sphere is to be directed by the revelation in Christ but not in the other is simply one of the illusions of Western culture. The human being is one person whether at home or at work and there is one judge of all his deeds.

However, there are other experiences involved in restoration – other symptoms to be experienced. Newbigin suggests the next important step. It is central to Isaiah 58:1-12, and to both communities and churches alike.

6.2b Searching for the experience of Justice and Righteousness

The restoration of relationships and the proper ordering of society – is no small thing. This is possibly the raison d'être for the Isaiah passage, but, the experience of being valued for who you are (and not for what you look like) is critical to the anorexic, being allowed to fail, being permitted to be poor or ugly or disabled – all these can be included here.

Garrett (1998:74-75) writes:

> Experiences of human connection were potential catalysts in recovery. Relationships often became a positive substitute for the importance of food. Social acceptance broke down isolation and restored self-worth. Meaning and participating in groups with others who shared similar political or spiritual values strengthened the sense of meaning the recovering person was beginning to create. Participants described the way they were transformed in their interaction with others.

Working in the Pathways Regeneration Partnership meant that opportunity was opened up for the poorest areas of the community to participate fully within it. The task of compiling the Moreton Directory undertaken by the Site Team helped to enable the community to participate fully in all of its activities without bar (see 3.3). This theme was further developed in the involvement of the Site Team in the development of a new social opportunity for young people with special needs (see 3.5 and Appendix 5, but also 3.7).

These thoughts led to the concepts of justice and righteousness. For example, Oswalt (1998:505) suggests that in Isaiah 58:

> The phrase *your righteousness* is an important one because it combines two ideas. On the one hand, the parallelism with *the glory of the Lord* suggests saving his people in accord with his ancient promises. On the other hand, the possessive pronoun makes clear that this is somehow the righteousness of the people themselves, the righteous behaviour they were commanded to have … In fact the two ideas are combined. It is as the Lord empowers the people in his gracious righteousness that they will be enabled to live righteous lives in his presence.

In Isaiah 58:1-12 there are clear characteristics given for this re-ordered community:

It will be a place of justice (*mishpat*)

It will be a place of righteousness *(sedaqa)*

These symptoms of restoration are key characteristics of God's Kingdom (see Herschel 1962:99-100). God's proper order of things also covers the proper ordering of relationships within human society and, observes Houston (1993:35), the characteristics of *mishpat/sedaqa* occur as a definition of the demand which God makes on His people in the present and of the characteristics of the restored community in the future, a case also argued by Rendtorff (1985). But it is clear that there is no way that this can happen without the recognition and co-operation of the people.

Righteousness is a whole: it is God's complete victory, and it of necessity involves the human exercise of righteousness. This means the human response of repentance is a necessary condition for experiencing fully the

benefits for God's righteousness. It certainly seems to be the condition

understood for the scenario of peace and prosperity in 58:10-12:

> Then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like
> the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs
> in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like
> a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your
> people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old
> foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of
> Streets with Dwellings.

And this becomes more explicit in the remainder of the book of Isaiah, for

example:

> "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their
> sins," declares the Lord (59:20)

> Then will your people be righteous and they will possess the land for
> ever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the
> display of my splendour. (60:21).

Defining the term 'justice' in the Old Testament is difficult, given its complexity

and varied usage. In the legal codes the terms describes the ordinances

which govern communal life, such as in Exodus 21, which prescribe the

restitution for injury done to person or property, as well as for cultic

regulations. But, what is clear is that throughout the Old Testament, justice is

overwhelmingly related to the idea of relationship and to the life of the

community as a whole – so, justice, in biblical thought, concerns fidelity to the

demands of relationship, both to God and to neighbour. (Donahue 1977:68-

69).

Justice (*mishpat)* normally relates to legal issues, the root of the word derives

from a term meaning "to exercise the process of government" (Culver

1980:947). Righteousness (*sedaqa)* denotes conformity to a norm – often in

the Old Testament context the covenant relationship (Smith 1993:218). But both are ultimately relational terms, to be interpreted in the light of the relationship of humanity with God and the people with their neighbour.

In contemporary liberation theology, injustice is understood as oppression and justice as liberation (see, for example, Hollenbach 1982, Nash 1991, Nysse 1992) and this is understanding has a venerable heritage demonstrated in the work of Weinfeld (1995) showing that the pairing of *mishpat* and *sedaqa* can best be thought of as a concept equating roughly to our notion of social justice. In Hebrew two nouns are joined by "and" to form a hendiadys, a single thought. So God destroys Sodom by sending "brimstone and fire" – one thing, not a bit of each. Weinfeld argues *mispat usedaqa* is a hendiadys, basing this on the work of Hebrew scholars like Melamed (1961), Avishur (1972) and his own work.

When Weinfeld considered similar cultures in the Near East between 3000 and 1000 BC, he found that social justice and the prevention of oppression was indeed not only the task of the king/ruler, but also the task of the individual. He writes that these kinds of actions "cannot be aided by righteous judgements in courts alone, but by the elimination of exploitation and oppression on the part of the oppressors" (1995:7).

 Avenging justice is intended for God's foes – the impenitent rebels, and the saving righteousness and the new community for the penitent, a scenario

described fully in Isaiah 64. This is further explained in these terms by Roberts (1983:134).

The popular Western concept of impartial justice, immortalised in the blindfolded statue above the Old Bailey in London reminding us that justice has no favourites, has little place in the Bible. Biblical justice primarily shows partiality to the marginalised and the oppressed; and it is grounded in the concept of the covenanted community that finds persons to be members of one another as members of one body. Our premise of justice is that people need protecting from one another and it occurs because we live largely separated from one another. The biblical view upholds the idea of mutual active care for community members and indeed strangers, in a context in which social, family and covenant relationships are the focus of life, and affirms justice as "that which is regarded as of basic importance in social relationships" (Mott 1993:23).

There is in our society, and so in the Church, a tendency to question whether someone "deserves" to receive justice. Or (to put this another way) to ask how much were they complicit in becoming a victim of injustice. This approach is quite hard to defend from Scripture.

The people of God so soon forget that we are simply the recipients of God's grace, and that this has nothing to do with our inherent goodness. God's justice is about relationship and community and the concept of Jubilee shows this working in practice as it purposed to maintain those in distress within the

community. Set out in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 the remission of debt reveals God as the compassionate and just protector of the poor and helpless. Brueggemann (1993:76) points out that this is an unusual text because of the intensity and urgency of the language used, giving a real sense of a social reality: the biblical vision of an incarnate just society.

This is far more than mere rhetoric, as Houston writes (1993:40):

> The functions of the visions of Isaiah is not merely to tantalise us with what might be, but to convict us of what should not be, and to enable us to struggle for what ought to be. As the vision engenders repentance and conversion, it becomes embodied in human existence.

This was precisely what happened for us in the Team with our key passage of Isaiah 58:1-12. We fell into stunned silence as the words of this passage were read into the Site Team meeting, each present realising how far we had to go as individuals and as a church from being the sort of people and the sort of community that God was calling us to be. How our sin was contributing to the fragmentation that we had already begun to identify around us in Moreton, and that we were actually part of the problem. It enabled us to begin to struggle for ways to become a part of the answer with God's grace, some of which in some form since have become incorporated into a renewed life in this community. We saw this begin to happen with the church's role in the Moreton Community Partnership, for example, and the development of the Community Directory (see Chapter 3).

6.2c <u>Searching for the Experience of Peace</u>

Given the history of all four of the spheres, it would seem obvious that the experience of peace (or harmony) would be a symptom of restoration.

Certainly, the recovery of a degree of inner peace does seem to be a symptom of recovery for the anorexic. Marcia, a former anorexic, writes (2010):

> Abandoned beliefs is my offering to those suffering from anorexia. It is my hope that sharing my recovery experience will lend support to those who seek it. Recovery is a process that often feels unbearable; I acknowledge this. However, the torture of anorexia is equally unbearable. The difference is this: struggling through recovery yields gifts – the discovery of self, peace and contentment. Anorexia's only offering is imprisonment and death – of heart, of soul, of self. There is an incredible sense of peace and freedom awaiting those who bravely endure the trials of recovery. I know, for peace fills my life each day.

Given the history of strife between the communities of Moreton and Leasowe, there is much evidence within the project of peace-making going on. Despite the disparity of power between the two communities, it was good to see them working co-operatively for the first time for the benefit of all. (See 3.6a).

Likewise, within the church, relationships improved as the whole congregation began to focus on common goals defined by the project and studied the same Bible study materials (see 3.5) and the comments of church members during the Big Event Weekend, with remarks such as, "To support the Church and share fellowship" and "To feel part of Church activities" – a new experience for many and one that would be carried on into subsequent years with the Merseyfest project and beyond (see Appendix 9).

But it is clear that this is more than the mere absence of strife, although from Isaiah 58:1-12, this is meant as well. The concept of *shalom* in Hebrew belongs to the same group of words as *mishpat* and *sedaqa*. It has about it a notion of a living experience of peace that does not deny the idea of unhappiness as being a part of it. Hawthorne (2001:390-391) writes thus:

> The word *shalom* occurs more than 250 times in the Bible and its richness is shown in its many usages. It is used as a courteous greeting and also to refer to health and to restoration to health, to general well-being, such as sound sleep, length of life, a tranquil death, and even to the physical safety of an individual.
>
> *Shalom* is also used to describe good relations between peoples and nations. Thus, it has important social dimensions that can be seen from the association of peace with righteousness, law, judgement and the actions of public officials. *Shalom* is used too, to describe quiet tranquillity and contentment. It can also be almost synonymous with friendship. The root ideas of the Hebrew word are well-being soundness, completeness.
>
> *Shalom* also has theological dimensions. God is described as peace and its creator and source, who gives it to his people. Peace, in its fullest sense, thus cannot be had apart from God, a conclusion especially prominent in exilic and post-exilic literature.

So we begin to see that these great Hebrew concepts have a distinct overlap in thought – justice, righteousness and peace cannot be gained apart from a relationship with the living God who is the source of all. The human sense of these words being nothing other than a pale reflection of that which is held in God.

Yoder (1987:18-19) describes *shalom* as God's ultimate will, existing where conditions are as they ought to be. Thus it becomes a powerful symbol of God's purpose and will for our world. He cites Isaiah 2:2-4 as a vision of *shalom* in operation, where people are in obedience to God and God is active in judging. So he writes, "On the one hand, shalom results when people live in obedience to God – learn God's ways and walk in them. On the other, it is also the work of God, who reigns and judges the nations. When God's will is done, shalom is experienced." (19) Here the overlap with justice and righteousness is clear.

Askew (1992:86) describes it as being the dynamic balance between humanity and the world in which we live, between one another, within ourselves and between us and our Creator. *Shalom* includes too a sense of security and permanence, soundness and freedom from defect, perfection, preservation, salvation and deliverance. In this passage, we can see it implied in the notion of repairing walls, providing protection, security and well-being. It speaks of wholeness. Our whole conception of streets with dwellings, after the people have returned from exile is of peace and a settled community after uproar and trauma. The word *shalom* has been used to describe positive mental health as well as community well being (Bailey 1997). Most importantly perhaps in this context, peace begins in reconciliation with God and continues in reconciliation with our sisters and brothers – even with our enemies (Dawn 2003:137). In short, it involves not only becoming whole, but embracing wholeness.

Barr (1999:327) says that humanity has a real need to live in a sound and ordered world. This too is a part of the promise of *shalom* as intended by God for His people. Schmid (1974:116) remarks that this peace is the real destiny of the world. However, this concept has not been met with uncritical acclaim from biblical scholars, as the debate has moved more into the realm of a natural theology than perhaps Schmid intended.

Murray (1992:82) describes *shalom* as the positive side of blessing, as against cursing, affirming the supremacy of righteousness: the right order of the cosmos, the right order of relationships between all the inhabitants on

earth. Thus, *shalom* and *sedaqa* are linked. He goes on to suggest that God is the mediator of *shalom* and that it can only occur in the context of *sedaqa*. Even in the creation narrative, God saw that it was good, and one of the senses of *sedaqa* is of a cosmic "rightness", and the initial picture of the Garden of Eden is of God, Creation and humanity dwelling in perfect harmony – *shalom.*

The concept of a community at peace with itself, God, and secure in its relationship with others implied clearly in Isaiah 58:1-12 is a picture of *shalom.* For the anorexic it lies at the heart of the ability to rest at peace with herself and with her body.

In the course of the Project, the Team sought various ways to bring Moreton and Christ Church to be a community at peace with itself (and with God) and secure in its relationship with others – examples can be found in the community Barbeque (3.4), and in the Bible Studies (3.5 and Appendix 3) among others.

6.2d Searching for the Experience of Beauty

 The consideration of anorexia as a theme with its distorted body image has left the distortion of beauty hanging somewhat, but there must also be a new experience of beauty if restoration is to be experienced.

The recovery of self, of an appreciation of one's own beauty is central consideration in the pathway to restoration from anorexia. Garrett (1998:52-

54) describes very briefly several different approaches to the restoration process, including psychoanalytic and feminist theory, existentialism and transpersonal and humanistic psychology. Nevertheless, throughout she stresses that this is not a "once for all" process. She writes (p53):

> Beyond anorexia the self is experienced as 'real', 'whole', and 'autonomous' : recovered participants in my study consistently referred to a sense of 'inner connection'…The self in this book is made up of many different aspects engaged in an ongoing process of transformation. Recovery is the movement towards their connection so that they are experienced as parts of a whole.

Ronen (2001:194) quoting her patient, writes:

> He accepted me with all my problems. And despite all that, he kept thinking I was wonderful. I used to talk about my problems and he used to tell me how beautiful, smart and sensitive I was. So, slowly, I began looking at myself with his eyes, trying to find the whole me, this wonderful personality who had so impressed him.

Experiencing beauty within the community of Moreton was exemplified for us in the bringing together of the Art Groups for the Art Exhibition on the Friday evening of the Big Event weekend. The delight as each group encountered the other was palpable and all enjoyed the work that the others produced (see Appendix 7 and 3.4). Equally, for those involved, the evening for young people with special needs had a sense of it being special that, too, could almost be described as beautiful (see Appendix 5 and 3.5). Certainly, it had something that made us want to pursue the concept further.

As a congregation, worshipping together in a beautifully decorated church with our guests on the Sunday (and sharing lunch afterwards) was a beautiful experience (see Appendix 7).

Within scripture we can see in the Song of Songs lavish consideration given to the concept of beauty. Dobbs-Allsop (2005:266) writing on the Song of Songs, describes how our culture's abuse of the body has deep roots, with

the mind and body being understood as two distinct entities, but that the ancient Semitic worldview knew no such dichotomy. The beauty (*yph)* of the Bible's heroes being regularly noted: David (1 Sam 17:43), Absalom (2 Sam 14:35); Sarah (Gen 12:11), Rachel (Gen 29:7), Esther (Est 2:7), Joseph (Gen 39:6). This refers not merely to an outer beauty (although it may have been) but to a beauty of the mind and spirit.

But there are echoes of beauty within the Isaiah passage itself. In verse 11, God promises that his people will be like a well watered garden. Rosenburg (1989:460) expands:

> A garden watered by fountains, which is always satisfied, and its plants are always moist and fresh*.

What a promise of beauty to a desert dwelling people! Perhaps it evoked images for them of an oasis in the desert – a place to find rest and fruitfulness after the aridity of the sand a dry, sapping wind. What a promise to the people who may well have seen or known about the hanging Gardens of Babylon! This passage was first written to the people who returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem (see Chapter 5). Wellard (1972:156) says that the hanging Gardens were an elevated park which Nebuchadnezzar was said to have created for the love of his wife Amytis, daughter of the King of the Medes. He cites Diodorus Siculus of Sicily (Book 2, Chapter 10):

> The Garden was 100 feet long by 100 feet wide and built up so that it resembled a theatre. Vaults had been built under the ascending terraces which carried the entire weight of the planted garden, which was 75 feet high, was the highest part of the Garden, which, at this point, was on the same level as the city walls … The highest gallery contained conduits for the water which was raised by pumps in great abundance from the river, though no one from the outside could see it being done.

Diodorus makes reference to trees growing in these galleried Gardens and to royal lodges forming a part of them. The Persian Gardens, after which we derive our word paradise, are proverbial, even though as Russell (2006:4) writes, "Paradise properly refers to the original state of humanity, which God created good."

There is something, however, of an ethical dimension to beauty. Kirwan (1999:63-68) highlights a certain transcendent capacity that attends the sight of beauty for us – it is as if it draws us towards itself, and there is a de-centering effect that accompanies this. So, in beauty there is an inclination towards the other. Scarry (1999:112-113) describes this process vividly:

> When we land, we find that we are standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before. It is not that we cease to stand at the centre of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease even to stand at the centre of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the beautiful thing or person that stands before us …. All the space formerly in the service of protecting, guarding, advancing the self (or its 'prestige') is now free to be in the service of something (or somebody) else.

Scarry goes on to insist that "beauty leads us to justice" (1999:99) and if this is true then it is here too that beauty becomes a feature of restoration, for we have seen that justice is also a feature of the restored community. She argues that because both beauty and justice have symmetry in common, then both beauty and justice must be of the same matter. What seems clear, however is that they are related analogically, but she presses a stronger claim (1999:97) "that it is the very symmetry of beauty which leads us to, or somehow assists us in discovering, the symmetry that eventually comes into place in the realm of justice."

But whether beauty plays a part in bringing about justice, as Scarry would argue, or whether justice is beautiful, it seems both clear and appropriate that beauty must be a part of what being a restored community or indeed person means, but that this beauty is not necessarily physical in nature.

There is something bountiful about the images of beauty expressed here, and alluded to within the Isaiah passage of a "well watered garden". There is a certain voluptuousness that is the antithesis of anorexia and negates the desire for control.

There are here then are some of the symptoms of restoration. We will know that restoration is occurring when we experience hope, justice and righteousness, peace or harmony, and beauty. Yet, all of these things are insubstantial and need to be made real for real people in real communities in real time if they are to mean anything in the real world. These are signs rather than symptoms, in the language of medicine.

6.3. <u>Signs of Restoration</u>

So, what can be taken as visible signs of restoration that are relevant to all four spheres (as described in Chapter Five)? Signs need to be concrete and visible to an observer. They need to be about more than an experience, so they could be measurable or determinable in some way – possibly requiring an act of will or decision on the part of the patient or on the part of the community. From our analysis, one answer lies, in part, in food, the one thing

that the anorexic seeks to control above all else and the post-exilic community sought to limit for their own reasons.

So Isaiah 58 provides the beginning of an answer to a search for a series of signs of restoration: Taking the key text as the general framework for the remainder of this chapter, and recommendations given to the people of Judah within it if they are become a "Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (58:12), what concrete signs might there be of restoration? In looking for evidence of restoration in a community alongside experience of restoration (symptoms as well as signs – remembering always that the two must appear together), there are several: celebration and festivity, hospitality and the gift of relationship (the one being able to exist without the other but not here), and finally worship and blessing. All of these are two fold responses to the challenges God poses in Isaiah 58:1-12. That they are two fold responses, matches the (largely) two fold exhortations of the text. Their specificity mirrors what Blenkinsopp (2003:179) notes as the "Detailed allusion to the epiphenomena of fasting – hanging the head, sleeping on the ground, sackcloth and ashes – and the preacher goes on to identify a very different set of actions as an acceptable from of fasting." Likewise, signs have to be specific and identifiable to point towards restoration. These then are what the observer, the "fly on the wall" would see, if they were to encounter restoration in progress. There are, then, epiphenomena that should accompany restoration – only these are not worthless behaviours.

6.3a Celebration and Festivity

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen? Is it not to share your food with the hungry? (Isaiah 58:7a)

The first concrete sign of restoration is concerned with food – one of the most basic of things needed for life. But more than that in terms of Isaiah 58:7a, it is clearly concerned with sharing food. Motyer (1993: 481) says that this verse is a direct command to serve the food yourself; to look at what is staring you in the face.

For the anorexic, for whom eating has become a secret and shameful experience, the sharing of food marks a significant step towards restoration. Ronen's patient (2001: 194) writes:

> From the start and up to this day my husband and I share food and share plates. We eat together. We don't have his plate or her plate, but rather our plate. In the beginning eating from the same plate, as something that combined us, that we shared together, made it easier for me.

This is consonant with the gospel narratives where meals were at the centre of many incidents. For Jesus as well as for the rest of the society of his day, table fellowship was a sign of acceptance and close fellowship. It was an act of solidarity According to Culling (1998:17) to eat with a person in Eastern society was to be bound to support and defend them. Each meal therefore had a significance for those present beyond that of simply sharing food.

Throughout the project phase, one of the things that the Site Team were very clear about from the outset was that food was to be provided at each event held and that the food was to be free to those attending (see Chapter 3). This held a great significance for us as a team, because we deemed that this

foreshadowed the restoration of community in Moreton, with all sections of the community, prosperous and poor, able and disabled eating together. In this we took our lead from Luke 14:15-24, turning no-one away, and inviting all. Sanders (1987:135) remarks, "The common denominator for Luke is that those who would not normally expect an invitation receive one." So it was for us and, as Marshall (1970:139) comments, "The invitation of such people to the banquet is a sign of God's promised salvation. Certainly the thought of table-fellowship is important." Shannon Jung (2004:9) writes of the importance of meals for believers who may not expect to find God in such everyday acts as eating, yet points out Jesus "eating his way through the Gospel of Luke." This was a deeply held perception for us as we begin the project and a tenet that we held to throughout. Each event that we arranged featured the sharing of food as a way of building community and breaking down boundaries.

This sharing of a meal led naturally into a characteristic of restoration that it was possible for us to glimpse – that of celebration or festivity. The sharing of meals in the gospels were often times of feasting and celebration – the Wedding at Cana, the great banquet already referred to, or impromptu meals such as the feeding of the five thousand, or the four thousand, that doubtless turned into joyful events by virtue of their very unexpectedness.

Real celebration involves an unselfconscious participation that prevents our analysing it while it is happening – which makes it difficult to research or to record. Huizinga (1955) famously describes it as a form of play.

Celebration always involves saying "yes" to something, usually life, in a bigger way than normal. It is a positive and joyful experience. We affirm something positive. It invariably involves the company of others, so it is a community experience and it equally invariably involves food and drink.

It is something special, in that it is a highlight. Its nature depends upon it being exceptional. However, it may be the spur to change or it may celebrate change, both of which were intended during the ministry project phase and both of which were again evident during Merseyfest (see Appendix 9).

Shannon Jung (2004:8) makes a similar case. He writes:

> Enjoyment is as mysterious as relationships. We cannot produce it; we simply have to appreciate it. There are many sources of enjoyment, however, and we can do much to experience those sources. We can open ourselves up to enjoy our lives and can encourage others to enjoy theirs as well. All of us are connected to each other and to natural life in a way that our enjoyment reinforces and increases that of others, and others' enjoyments increases ours. Thus we all have a stake in others' and our own enjoyment.

Cox (1970:24) writes that celebration is relational in that it links past, present and future into one event. This is clearly shown, for example in the Art Exhibition, where the past work of the artists was drawn together into one event, and the pledge made at that event to continue to work together into the future (see Chapter Three) It is also relational in that it draws disparate groups of people together into a common experience, providing them with a foundation upon which to build a relationship. In this sense there is something Christ-like about celebration.

However, the true sense of celebration that took place during the project phase was not in spite of the difficulties faced by the community and the church. It was not because they were avoided. It was enabled because these negative realities were recognised and because we attempted to tackle them. Celebration is not the same thing as frivolity. Without facing up to the difficult realities posed by our community and our church, frivolity is all that we would have had: a painted smile on a terminally ill patient. Celebration in spite of difficulties is an essential, we discovered. It is a real sign of resistance to these negative powers and affirms life in the face of death. It is a counter-intuitive action that of itself both strengthens and aids restoration. Downey (1986:83) echoes the same thought, writing about the L'Arche communities,[30] stressing that celebration is not a compensation for difficulty, rather:

> Joy born of deep suffering is nourished by moments of celebration …. Celebration properly understood is the acceptance of life in an ever growing recognition that it is so precious.

Shenk (1987:2-3) defines true celebration as follows:

> Celebration is the honouring of that which we hold most dear. Celebration is delighting in that which tells us who we are. Celebration is taking the time to cherish each other. Celebration is returning with open arms and thankful hearts to our Maker.

We cannot celebrate ourselves, we can only celebrate others, and feasting involves the heightened use of all our senses – smell, taste, touch, hearing and sight to provide us with a truly unique experience, which is nearly impossible to analyse as we do it. We can only give ourselves to the celebration, become a part of it – feast and celebrate.

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[30] The L'Arche communities, founded by Jean Vanier, a Roman Catholic French Canadian academic, are villages and homes where people with learning disabilities live alongside people without such disabilities as equals, all contributing to the life of that community.

A natural part of celebration, and a feature of festivity, is laughter. While we read in the Gospel of John that Jesus wept (John 11:35), nowhere is it explicitly mentioned that Jesus laughed.[31] Yet, the notion of a God who delights in all that He has made, and delighting especially in his children is a sub-theme that runs throughout the Bible. Isherwood and Stuart (1998:140) write that human beings are the only creatures who laugh, and that therefore laughter must serve some purpose that is unique to human beings. Although, at different periods in church history, laughter has been treated with suspicion, a modern poet, Patrick Kavanagh (in 'Lough Derg' cited by Hardy & Ford, 1984:73) describes the Resurrection as, 'a laugh freed for ever and ever.'

Laughter is a sign of restoration for those who have been trapped in depression, sadness or fear, and the experience of celebration and festivity is that of liberation for the oppressed community – a sign of restoration and a symbol of hope and new life. Laughter can help to break a negative cycle.

Cox (1970:43) describes laughter as 'hope's last weapon' – but it is a manifestation of celebration that it is hard to ignore in this context, for, as Kuschel (1994:133) writes:

> Christians who laugh are expressing their feeling that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter, though this world need not be despised. Christians who laugh are taking part in God's laughter at his creation and his creatures, and this laughter is a laughter of mercy and friendliness…Christians who laugh are insisting that the stories of the world's sufferings do not have the last word.

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[31] We do know that Jesus had a sense of humour, however: the concept of straining out gnats while swallowing camels, or removing a speck of dust out of someone's eye while not apparently noticing you have a plank of wood in your own eye show the ability to make a people laugh.

6.3b Hospitality and the Gift of Relationship

Yet there are further related signs that are indicators of being-restored community or person. Another of these is the gift of relationship. Here is the notion of welcome epitomised in the Isaiah passage:

And to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him – and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah 58:7)

Just as the meal is central to the life of the restored community, so is the gift of relationship critical to the sharing of that meal with others who do not yet consider themselves a part of that community. So it is one of the signs of restoration. Grogan (1986:323) suggests that social concern is not just to be seen as an isolated episode, but as a way of life for the community of God's people. This means that the restored community will be prepared to accept traditions and behaviour that is not "natural" to it. In other words, it will not be a ghetto isolated from the world around it, but will seek to engage with it, welcoming all, but with a special interest in those whom the world shuns, as the gospels tell us that Christ is present with those who are oppressed, excluded and misunderstood (for example Matthew 21:31; 25:34-45; Luke 7:34).

Jackson (2003:87,90) points out on this theme:

> **Jesus was an inveterate crosser of boundaries – between fishermen and tax collectors, freedom fighters and lawyers, Jews and Samaritans, rich and poor, young and old, men and women … If the hearts of the people are open to the world outside, then all manner and condition of human beings will be drawn to Jesus Christ.**

The offer of hospitality and the gift of relationship, is something that should be freely available within the restored community. It is based upon social opportunity and is developed as one encounters another in community. Swinton (1999b) points out that in society today many do not have the opportunity to develop relationships with those who are "different" (he cites the examples of those with mental illnesses, learning impairments, those with HIV and others) and instead go on to fear them; but this is not the nature of the restored community, where these "wanderers" will instead find shelter. What is more, humans tend to form friendships with those with whom they have regular contact (Hayes 1993:78) – so we tend to like people simply because we see them often.

It is one of the tasks of the restored community to break down the unnecessary social barriers that prevent caring for the poor wanderer and inviting them in. Offering the gift of relationship is another of the key signs of restoration.

Nouwen (1976:64) writes that if there is any concept that is worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential in a serious search for Christian spirituality, it is the concept of hospitality. All strangers carry with them the potential to reveal to us the promise that they carry with them, and both guest and host can bring new life to the other.

Seale (1974:121-122) commenting on the traditions of the Near East writes that generosity and hospitality are true signs of nobility and are indeed synonymous with it in nomadic culture. To feed a guest, the nomad would go without himself.

We come to understand the love of God primarily through the actions of His Body. We understand what it is to be accepted by God, if His Body first accepts us. It is this that makes friendship and hospitality such a vital force in building persons and in building true community. Friendship is the antidote to marginalisation. Moltmann (1978:115) describes it thus:

> Friendship unites affection with respect. In friendship we experience ourselves for what we are, respected and accepted in our own freedom. Through friendship we respect people as people and as individual personalities.

In the project we saw that opening the Parish Centre to the community that it seeks to serve as fundamental to the concept of friendship and hospitality. We sought to see it used by all and for all in the community. (See 2.13ff).

For the anorexic we see this in the opening out of herself into the potential for new relationships. These may well initially be therapeutic in nature, of course; but in another form, it is seen in the recovering anorexic, who allows herself to become pregnant and thus "hospitable" in a new way, as Garrett (1998:77) recounting the diary of Margaret describes:

> I enjoyed all the physical aspects of the pregnancy and I breastfed and I enjoyed that and I felt good about it all. It's great intimacy with another person and it's giving to another person and having to be open about your physicalness. I feel a great deal more sense of at-easeness with my physical person than I did before.

Nakedness speaks of our vulnerability and our need for encouragement and support. A key sign of a restored community is that it should be one where we find encouragement and are built up by virtue of being members of it. Swinton (1997:19) writes:

> We can only understand what it means to love and be loved if we first experience love, and we can only understand what it means to be accepted by God if we are first accepted by God's people; by God's community …This being so, one the primary means of our meeting with God is through personal temporal encounters. The authenticity of the Christian community is a vital starting point for the communication of the gospel to all people.

This being so, then acceptance and belonging are indeed key signs. The restored community must be the place what Buber (1946) called the "place of Theophany" that place where God reveals Himself and His love. It is this that should drive the restored community, and is a manifestation of the symptom of righteousness. The ability to achieve this is rare in a world that is filled with mistrust and fear, and where, as Hanson (1987:511) writes, "Many people feel that another's well-being decreases their own chances of success."

The restored community, patterning its life after the boundless God who supplies every need, cannot be plagued by such anxieties, but has room to give encouragement to grow and more because it is aware that it has

already and is continuing to receive abundantly from God. Love is limitless.

The project sought to symbolise this by identifying a marginalized group within the community and offering friendship to them. Although this did not work out as planned, it lead on to fruitful collaboration and to a long lasting and valued opportunity for young people with learning disabilities throughout Wirral, (see 3.4, 3.7 and Appendix 5).

The anorexic is able to move on to nurture, to sustain positive relationships – with themselves and with others. They become able to integrate the mind/body dualism that pervades the disorder. Garrett (1998:153) quotes Zoe's diary:

> My body feels well. I have strength. I am strong. I'm a normal weight now – no-one would question that; but I'm strong. I'm springy and I've got muscles! I didn't mean to get those muscles but I swim (and I guess that runs in the family). I've learned to respect my body and to give it what it needs. Now I know how to feed it. The more I do this, the more I have faith in my body now. It's looking after itself. I feed it properly.

Yet, as implied by the above quotation, all people have a past – even a cursory examination of the history of the community of Moreton, and the congregation of Christ Church reveals a catalogue of past hurts. Unravelling the causes and the damage done by the behaviour of the patient with anorexia will expose a myriad of hurts. None are innocent. Understanding this must be the first step towards reaching out and reconciliation. This seems an essential behaviour if genuine restoration is to be achieved.

The theme of realisation and repentance has been dealt with at an earlier stage in the model (see 5.6g), but here there is something more. The prologue to John's Gospel characterises an acceptance of the rejection of Christ in terms that mirror almost exactly this phrase in Isaiah: "He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own home, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him ..." (John 1:10-12)

This reaching out to our own people with the aim of reconciliation is a very Christlike action. Walcott Thompson (1995:27) writes, 'Reconciliation includes forgiveness, affirmation, openness, persistence to the point of goodwill, friendship and self-giving love.'

If we accept that all are made in the image of God, then we have an obligation to care for them as God does. The reaching out that we did in our project entailed going beyond the causes of conflict and through the emotions of anger and hurt, opening the way for conversation, and listening and moving towards trusting. It can be seen most clearly in the author's negotiations between the two communities of Moreton and Leasowe (see Chapter 3).

Ultimately, this may open the gate to self-understanding, acceptance of shared blame and mutual readiness to offer and to receive fellowship. It may lead to reconciliation.

At its best, the restored community needs to be a people engaged in reaching out and reconciling people to one another and to God, who seeks always that we should be reconciled to Himself. Reconciliation is not a once for all process in an imperfect world, nor is it taken on lightly. It takes commitment and dedication, time and effort.

Vanier (1979:99) speaks movingly of such a healthy community acting as a magnet to others – of young people being happy to be commit themselves to it, of visitors being happy to be there, and that its essential health can be measured by its presence to God and to others.

6.3c Worship and Blessing

Finally, there is the sign of a community living perfectly at peace with itself and with others, and in absolute harmony with God. The only possible response to manifest blessing such as is described in Isaiah is worship, but such a circumstance as described here is difficult for us imperfect mortals to imagine, and certainly neither Moreton, nor Christ Church, nor Israel have attained it.

> *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rearguard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say; Here am I.*
> (Isaiah 58:8-9)
>
> *The LORD will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*

(Isaiah 58:11)

When God blesses in the Old Testament, it often makes a material difference. Examples can be found in Genesis 24:35, where Abraham's wealth is clearly spoken of as being consequent upon God's blessing and Proverbs 10:22 "The blessing of the Lord makes rich." In the Isaiah passage, while the word itself is not used, the implications seem clear that the restored community will indeed be a place of God's blessing. Indeed, the Old Testament tends not to discriminate between the physical and the spiritual realms, but rather sees God's hand at work in all things. Indeed, the word *shalom* explored earlier in this chapter, is sometimes translated as "prosperity" (for example in Numbers 6:24-26). Even creation is blessed by God – but this is usually in the context of human well-being. In Isaiah 58, however the blessing is described in terms of healing and being "like" a well watered garden, bearing in mind all the time that this was spoken to a community and not to an individual.

Grűneberg (2003:8-9) argues that while in the Old Testament, blessing is linked with material prosperity, in the New Testament blessing has somehow become spiritualised: The life that we will have has become far more significant than anything that can happen to us now. As Paul writes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). But the ideal remains in the New Testament of a prosperous life (1 Corinthians 15) shared with the rest of creation (Romans 8:19) – just not

yet. People who are blessed may well be facing hardship, but can look forward to God restoring them (Matthew 5:3-12).

Here, in the realm of blessing, we find the restored community as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. For example, it has been noted throughout that Jesus did not ignore the need people had for food, but that food could represent something much more meaningful than just another meal.

The proper response to blessing is worship. Worship is therefore a sign and marker of restoration. At its simplest, it is the recognition that there is much to be thankful for, and is a reaching outside of the individual in gratitude. As a community, worship is a 'wholing' activity, as Wilson (1988:217) writes, an activity that helps a community towards restoration, by giving itself to God and to a purpose beyond itself. It is about "giving" and therefore about recovery (see Chapter 5). The formal project phase concluded, fittingly, with a service of thanksgiving and commitment to which all who had participated in any way, including secular agencies and those from neighbouring communities were invited. (See Appendix 7) – and, as always, food was served, as a way of celebrating our community.

The Lord will strengthen your frame seems an especially appropriate place of blessing for the patient with anorexia – in that as Motyer (1999:363) writes:

We are not told what satisfaction the Lord will give, but when and where He will give it – when everything seems bleak, when we are vulnerable. In such a time He will strengthen your frame, give durability in the face of hard demands.

Or perhaps it is as suitable a blessing for Christ Church, or for Moreton, or for the people of Isaiah's time for whom it was first written.

6.4 Food and Salvation

Returning finally to a central metaphor for the whole thesis, and recognising that food can represent so much more than simply another meal for the patient with anorexia, the post-exilic community, the congregation of Christ Church, or the community of Moreton, I turn to the central event of Christian worship and attempt to reinterpret it in the light of the discoveries made by the Site Team in our tentative exploration of what a restored community may look like.

Language to do with food and meals are inextricably linked for Christians with the Communion service. We gather around the table of the Lord, and it is He who invites us. It is laid out in readiness and cleared away afterwards. Each participates by eating and drinking; and we are invited to 'feed on Him in our hearts by faith and with thanksgiving.' (Common Worship Holy Communion Service)

One of the most helpful rediscoveries of the past fifty years in liturgy is that the Eucharist is a meal (Hughes 2002:14). This much seems obvious from reading the gospel narratives, but what this suggests is that meal-fellowship

lies at the heart of Christian Communion. Various aspects of this have emerged in thinking of Communion-as-meal.

First, the events surrounding the institution of the Eucharist at the time known as the Last Supper, need to be placed in context with all the other fellowship meals of Jesus described by the gospel writers, both before and after the resurrection. These seem to fall into two broad types: the first of these is one where Jesus is depicted eating with sinners (and is derided by the religious authorities), which is usually shown as an exemplar of the breadth of God's grace, because in Jewish culture, a shared meal is seen as a sign of solidarity and friendship (Lloyd 1986:4). The second type belongs to the miracle stories, and seems to demonstrate God's abundant blessing, a theme John 6 makes explicit. It is this type of meal that seems to have been related with Communion by the early Church as resonances of it can be seen in Mark 6:41 and John 6.

Power (1992:295) observes how communities express their desires and aspirations by gathering at the table:

> At the first level of meaning, there is the common significance of bread and wine, expressing the essential urges of hunger and thirst … Produced from grain sown in the field and from the grapes of the vine pressed and crushed, the recall the unending struggle between life and death. Signifying nourishment and refreshment, they also call to mind their opposites of famine and drought. Their dependence of seasonal cycles brings humanity into the larger cosmic reality.

Then he goes on to introduce the relationship between the meal and social and institutional aspects of human life (1992:295)

> The bread and the wine relate to social, economic and cultural realities. Their production belongs to an inter-subjective and organised human

society. The needs of the many are met only if there is social cohesion. Furthermore, blessed bread at table puts all present in mind of the abundance or want experienced by those who gather … Church gatherings are faced by their ritual with issues of human need and justice.

Finally, he describes how this sharing of a meal involves sharing in a community of mutual service and non-discrimination (1992:295-6):

Coming to the significance drawn from the nature of the community that gathers, the sharing of bread and wine takes on the characteristics of Christian assembly. It belongs to the bonding of believers is common identity, in mutual service, in charity and in hope.

Gorringe (1997:5) helpfully in this context describes Communion as a sign – a clothing of words in flesh, as it were. We seek as humans to make things significant – rings, flowers, monuments and so forth. The Bible is full of them, even creation itself (Romans 1:20). A sign is not the thing itself; it points beyond to something else, something far greater. It is easy for us to understand this: If I were to throw my wedding ring at my husband, I would be doing something far more significant than merely tossing a small piece metal of moderate financial worth in his direction!

Equally, Gorringe points out that Jesus used meals as a sign of redemption. He never hedged the possibility of redemption with 'ifs' and 'buts'. For example, he did not tell Zacchaeus that he would eat with him only if he gave the money he had stolen back. Instead Jesus first invited himself for a meal and thus enabled repentance (Luke 19:5-9). This mirrors God's grace, which always precedes and anticipates our response. Jesus never placed conditions on sharing a meal with Him. So, then, the order from the text: First, the meal, then repentance and finally membership of the new community. So many exclude themselves from Communion because they do not feel worthy, and

we exclude so many because they do not know the "right" words and have not been through the "right" rituals. How typical of Jesus to turn our values on their head! This is precisely what God proposes in the Isaiah passage.

Lelwica (1999:37) describes the meals that Jesus participates in as the practice of liberation and the pursuit of wholeness. She uses them as a descriptor of the of the subversive message and ministry of Jesus, especially His empowering connections to people who were in one way or another poor, vulnerable, socially outcast and/or deemed inferior by the prevailing status quo – to inspire them in their work for social justice and to help them deal with their own everyday anxieties and sorrows.

Just as Communion presents us with a challenge about participation, so it presents us with a challenge to commitment. The bread and the wine challenge us to commit ourselves to the work of the Kingdom. When we eat while others starve, we show contempt for the church and humiliate those who have nothing (1 Corinthians 11:22). Communion is not merely personal, but a community experience. McKenna (1997:118) writes of this:

> As Christians we must reflect Christ. United as the Body of Christ, in community support, we can start transforming the world where we live, with the little we have, in the love, grace and power of the Spirit…. Eucharist, the breaking and sharing of the word, bread and wine in community is our life, our example to the world. Our worship of God, our way of giving thanks "through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus" is for the world's salvation. The ethical demands of Eucharist mirror the demands of Christian life, of Jesus' values and work in the world.

Even as we celebrate Communion, the call to justice remains.

The entirety of the communion liturgy reflects the restoration phase of the model with the confession bringing to mind the realisation and seeking help phases of the model (see 5.7g, 5.7h), the liturgy of the Word the seeking help phase of the model (see 5.7i), the communion itself reflecting the increased self-worth (5.7j) ability to be (5.7k) and the celebratory aspects of the model, and the dismissal about being renewed in the power to give to others (5.7l). In short, it calls us to be a restored community.

So, within the restored community, even as we celebrate Communion, there are a series of aspects of life and belief that must be held in balance:

1. To receive and to act.

It remains essential to rely on the grace of God as both an individual and as a community in communion, but that does not negate the need to act against the injustice that surrounds us. The restored community must remain open to those who are outside of it, especially those who are most in need of friendship and the hospitality that the restored community is in a unique position to offer. It must be inviting as well as building.

2. To be holy and to be homely.

The restored community remains a place where God dwells and a people that belong to Him, but also a place that welcomes the stranger to sit and eat with them. It must be a place where people find acceptance and a place where they can feel at home. It must be a place that is both healthy and healing.

3. To consecrate and to celebrate.

The restored community must be a place that is aware that all things come from God, and that all people are made in His image, but this must include joy, friendship, laughter and genuine warmth.

4. To be matter and to be spirit.

The restored community needs to acknowledge both needs in itself and in others. We need both bread and "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matt:4:4) In Jesus, and in the communion service, we can see both.

To quote Grenfell (2006:384):

> As Christians our food is vitally important in its material substance; it fulfils a symbolic role in the Eucharist, but its very symbolism depends upon it maintaining its connection to the very real body of the crucified Christ and to the broken bodies of those who receive it … Christianity is not about perfect communities – but about human realities and flaws.

There is something very powerful about writing this. There is an elliptical path here. The call to justice and to participation is reasserting itself. Restoration is not passive, but active. It is not only the end of this process, but the beginning of something new. The path described in the thesis is not a once for all process, nor is it a necessary progression. It is possible both to avert the crisis and to fail to move along towards restoration itself. Having said that, there are new horizons that begin to open up as restoration approaches and it is possible to glimpse something of what they may be.

That "something new" is ultimately the fulfilment of the hope with which the chapter opened. Bultmann's (1957:23) understanding of eschatology is helpful in pointing towards what is meant here. Rather than the traditional understanding of eschatology as referring to the end of all things, Bultmann uses it to refer to that existential moment when an individual chooses to

orientate themselves towards God rather than towards the things of this world at the outset of Christian faith – and for subsequent moments of crisis when a Christian has to choose between this world and beyond. So, either we can choose the appeal of this world and the appeal of introspection, or we can choose the appeal of hope and the recovery of the other - when the appeal of the "beyond" (as he refers to it) is seen as stronger than all the appeal of the world. For Bultmann, of course, the chief eschatological moment is that of the Crucifixion.

6.5 <u>Conclusion</u>

Restoration is not an end point, nor one that can ever be reached. The model is much more fluid than it at first appeared, especially in its latter stages – which are, as has been stressed throughout, much more tentative. It is something to be glimpsed and sought, offered and accepted. It is a point that we know to exist but if we ever think we have reached it, we would be deceiving ourselves in pride, and so become unable to offer genuinely anything to the other, and truly celebrate. Restoration demands humility! The path is elliptical and paradoxical, but not hopeless, as the model can be used to highlight signs of growth and movement towards (rather than achievement of) restoration.

The whole structure of the thesis has pointed towards an eschatological conclusion; but this may not be the eschatology with which the Site Team would at first have concluded, given its predominately conservative evangelical nature. However, Bultmann, influenced by existentialist

philosophy understood the notion of growth and development (albeit of the individual) and it is this understanding, which fits so well with the diagnostic model developed in the thesis. Bultmann derived his theology of eschatology amid the devastated community of post World War Two Germany: in a nation struggling to come to terms with both physical and emotional defeat, and collective guilt as the horrors of the Holocaust became more widely known. There are, then, historical contextual parallels of fragmentation that make this eschatology particularly appealing, as we have striven to overcome our guilt and sense of emotional defeat in our own context, and our horror as we understood what it meant for us to be described as the "anorexic bride." As we faced an existential crisis, an existential eschatology is undeniably appropriate.

This means that eschatology must be a present concern as well as a future hope – and this has been a concern of the whole thesis: that what we do in our own community really does matter in the present and in some way in eternity as well.

Hallelujah

For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

And His bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen bright and clean was given to her to wear.

Then the angel said to me:

"Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the

Lamb!'"

(Revelation 19:6-7)

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Healing boils down to meaning and the transformation of experience

John Pilch (2000:35)

This thesis explores the history of four threads – that of the post-exilic community of Trito-Isaiah, that of a composite patient with anorexia, that of the community of Moreton in Wirral, and that of Christ Church, the Parish Church of Moreton. It discerns a similarity in process and stressors and sees a likeness in recovery; seeing the signs and symptoms both of sickness and of healing. It finds a wealth and richness within that discernment process that was unexpected.

Working collaboratively with other laity enabled all involved in the project to develop in their respective ministries and for significant personal growth to occur in those involved as the members of the Site Team (see 3.7); for example one member went on to develop a drop-in service for people experiencing mental health difficulties, another to run the Seaman's Mission in her native Falkland Islands, a third is now in ordained ministry. The examination of the context was important foundational material for the development of the Merseyfest Project in 2005 (see Chapter Two and Appendix Nine).

As I write this four years after the Ministry Project, there remain significant traces of it in the life of Christ Church and in the Wirral more widely: The Big Event Weekend has become an annual event, with the Art Exhibition continuing to draw the community of Moreton together: The Family Friends Youth Club became an outstanding success, eventually outgowing Christ Church's facilities and moving to

Woodchurch Methodist Church in 2007. It now attracts around fifty young people with disabilities each week.

But, having come this far, there is an important question that needs to be asked in concluding a piece of work such as this. How useful is such a diagnostic model, this "diagnostic theology" based on the signs and symptoms of a disease, interwoven with scripture, in the life of a church or a community?

The answer to this depends largely on how well it has been evidenced in this work. It came as something of a surprise as the work unfolded just how well the spheres were able to be fitted together and could be evidenced from the respective four 'case histories' given. The thesis offers an insight into the life and evolution of one community and one church within it – and the thesis ends largely on a note of them overcoming the difficulties that they have faced. The insights of the Team seem to have contributed hugely to that process (for example, the journals kept by Betty and Lynn). In that sense, the action research project was effective.

There may be other churches and other communities that may benefit from the processes that we have found; indeed, this diagnostic model may be helpful to them. The model includes the "early warning signs" that a community is under pressure – such as when it is experiencing periods of rapid growth (5.6a) and the pressure to assimilate large

numbers of new people rapidly, and the ensuing sense of powerlessness (5.6b) that results from a pace of change with which folk feel uncomfortable and unable to control. The diagnostic model goes on to delineate how that process becomes pathological (5.6c) as it becomes introspective (5.6d) and ego-centred, which results in a fundamental loss of self-worth (5.6e). Ultimately, this leads to fragmentation (5.6f) of the community (or church or individual). The turning point is reached when there is a realisation (5.6g) of the peril that faces them and they reach out for help (5.6h-i) in recognition that they can no longer help themselves. This results in a gradual recovery of self-worth (5.6j) and a renewed sense of self, (5.6k), which enables healthy relationships with others (5.6l), and a final restoration into a renewed form (5.6m). While it may start out seeming that there is no hope – the signs and symptoms of restoration (Chapter 6) offer positive things to seek out as markers for those who need them. This in particular may be helpful to those in ministry as it discerns a process with signposts, and warns of pitfalls that can be avoided with wisdom. I am tempted to wish that we had had that wisdom – but hindsight is always blessed with perfect vision.

Certainly, the use of the medical model of discerning sign and symptoms both in the dis-ease process of the breakdown of community and church and also in the process of restoration is one that seems to provide a helpful shorthand method that does not readily appear in

other literature, and not one that I have ever seen applied to a biblical text.[32] However Pilch (2000:24) writes:

> **"Interdisciplinary specialists point out that the best interdisciplinary co-operation is often carried out in the mind of a single researcher, an expert in one field who borrows eclectically from other disciplines and creatively integrates a variety of insights."**

Perhaps this is an example of what he describes.

Lelwica (1999:37) questions the modern division between "religious" and "secular" reality, a question that lies beneath much of this work (see Chapter One, for example), arguing that what makes a symbol religious is not its inherent holiness, but its function in orientating people's quest for salvation by providing shared structures of meaning that designate what is most valuable and true.

Approaching a biblical text with a new insight has led to a new application of that text – as has been demonstrated. It is certainly one that could be applied to other texts to see what emerges. However, diagnosis demands thoroughness, and I believe that this thoroughness would need to be applied to any other attempt to replicate the same "diagnostic" approach. After all, in clinical practice, an accurate diagnosis is only reached if one is as thorough as is possible! However, I make no claims to "knowing completely".

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[32] A brief synopsis of the model was presented as a paper at the Urban Theology Collective at St. Deiniol's Library, Harwarden in December 2005 and "The Signs and Symptoms of Restoration" in 2006. Both were well received.

I must also make the point that this is not about disease–cure, but rather about sickness–healing, an insight drawn from the field of medical anthropology as much as from theology (see both Pilch 2000 and Garrett 1998). Healing being a much broader concept than mere "cure" as it involves body, mind and spirit. In a simple example, a wound on the face can be cured, but the self-image damaged as a consequence of that wound (even though the wound itself is cured) may well still be damaged. For the wound to be healed – both must be addressed. This is why it is truer to say Jesus healed, than that he cured. Healing may also be about that which cannot be cured, of course. This is best epitomised by the hospice movement and the concept of a "good death". According to the Archbishop's Council (2000:156):

> The hospice movement is not limited by the 'tyranny of cure'. Hospice both affirms life and recognises dying as a normal process. It seeks neither to hasten nor to postpone death. The care of the dying and the ministry of healing are but different aspects of the one ministry. Both centre on bringing the love of God to where it is needed for each and every person.

In searching recent theological literature in the field of eating disorders (see Chapter Four) I was struck by the relative lack of theological reflection in this field, despite the relative prevalence of writing about eating disorders in society generally.

It would be interesting to undertake further research of this type, using eating disorders as a theme, perhaps reflecting upon obesity in an affluent parish, where perhaps they had been in receipt of a large legacy (there are numerous biblical passages concerning wealth, consumption and complacency – perhaps Amos 6:1-7, for example, upon which one

could build) or upon bulimia, perhaps where there had been frequent changes of incumbent over a short period of time. Using the same approach in preaching is certainly possible (see Appendix 8).

So, as with all research, there are many questions outstanding. The project, as with all action research, had only an "official" ending, in that I ceased to record everything. But its influence can still be felt and seen as I write now, four years later. There is so much more that could be tried – to apply the "signs and symptoms" method to other biblical passages and to other situations (perhaps as I have suggested above, or in other ways), to see if the "Anorexia model" is helpful in other communities and churches (i.e. whether it can be generalised), to reflect on other eating disorders (or other dis-eases) theologically in the light of our society, and to recognise more systematically than we do now the positive things about our churches and our communities. And, as ever, to listen carefully to what God may be saying to us all in the middle of this.

However, at the end of it all, there are grounds for hope, and there is much to be encouraged by. From the research, we have found that there is a path forward from anorexia to celebration – from sickness to health in the Parish Church and the community of Moreton, and we can see the signs and experience the symptoms of recovery, and that we may, at last, be moving in the right direction – towards restoration.

Appendix 1

Project Design Diagram

Project Design Diagram

Moreton is a divided settlement of 20000 people with an internalised poor self-image and no corporate structure to represent it to itself or others

1. To facilitate the emergence of intersectorial collaboration within the community	2. To develop awareness within the residents of the Parish of Moreton of their potential as a whole community	3. To empower the community to find its own voice
1a: By Identifying the various Groups operating within the Parish • **Through breaking down Moreton into smaller areas** • **Through a site team member approaching every place within that area where people may gather** • **Through collection of data on all activities within that small sector**		
1b: By providing a directory of community resources • **Through collation of the information gathered at 1a** • **Through the production of a written document (directory) containing this information.** • **Through the distribution of this document at all community gathering points (library, clinics, churches etc.)** • **Through the annual updating of the directory**		
1c: By developing a format for the exchange of information and the sharing of resources • **Through the co-option onto the team of suitable expertise** • **Through the development of a website devoted to Moreton as a community** • **Through the three monthly up dating of the website (See 1b.)**		
2a: By providing occasion for community gatherings • **Through the provision of a community barbeque** • **Through the staging of local history event** • **Through staging of exhibition involving all art groups operating in Moreton**		
2b: By providing a neutral space for the residents of Moreton to begin to discover community • **Through critical examination of current usage of Parish Centre** • **Through communicating with other community organisations** • **Through enhanced usage of Parish Centre**		
2c: By reflecting biblically on notions of community and the wholeness, and the role of the Church as the bringer of hope. • **Through the writing of a series of 10 Bible studies** • **Through the use of the studies throughout all small group meeting over a period of three months** • **Through preaching on community and relationships at each service by all members of the preaching team**		
3a: By opening opportunity for the gathering of community within the most deprived areas of the Parish of Moreton • **Through negotiation and discussion with all parties involved** • **Through the provision of a monthly act of worship within the Sandbrook estate** • **Through the provision of a social event for people with learning disabilities**		
3b: By providing occasion for Moreton to celebrate as a whole community • **Through the provision of a community celebratory weekend** • **Through the provision of a special service inviting all the groups operating in Moreton to attend** • **Through the provision of a celebration meal**		

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for Directory

Name of Venue _____

Address _____

Name of Contact _____

Telephone & e-mail address _____

Name of collector _____

Groups Meeting – please indicate day and morning/afternoon/evening

(continue overleaf if needed)

Would this venue mind me contacting them periodically to see if

anything has changed? Yes/No

For Collectors ONLY (Where 1 in "not at all" and 5 is "very much")

Did you find the venue welcoming	1	2	3	4	5
Was the contact keen on the directory	1	2	3	4	5
Was the same information visible at the					
Venue (could you have found this out					
Without talking to a contact?)	1	2	3	4	5
How easy was it to visit this venue?	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3

Bible Studies

I was watching a television programme about houses built on the edges of cliffs – and how slowly they were falling into the sea. It occurs to me that life can be a bit like that – unstable – jobs disappear, friends move away, or we lose touch – even churches can splinter and divide.

According to Paul, our Christian community has been built for us with strong and lasting materials. Initially, the first Christians did not share religious or cultural values – the Jews and the Gentiles were worlds apart – and one of the earliest things that happened was that the Jewish Christians decided that the new Gentile Christians did not have to undergo circumcision (in some sense becoming a Jew before they could become a Christian). See Acts 15:1-21. Yet, despite these fundamental differences, the Christian church continued to grow.

Have you ever belonged to a group that has not lived up to its promises? Why do you think this could have been? How has this experience affect your future involvement with groups or organisations?

How do you think Paul felt about Christ and the Church?

What was the relationship between Jews and Gentiles like before Christ?

What differences threaten the unity of Christ Church?

Explain what Paul meant by a 'dividing wall of hostility?'

Christ Himself is 'our peace'. How is this?

How do the 'dividing walls' keep people from hearing the gospel in Moreton?

What barriers stood in the way of you putting your faith in Christ, and how did God overcome them?

Paul describes Christians as 'fellow-citizens' and members of God's household' (family) – in what ways is this true?

What construction materials make up the building Paul describes in verses 20-22?

If the Apostles and Prophets represent the New and the Old Testaments in verse 20 – why are the Scriptures so important in our Christian community?

Verse 22 identifies the real inhabitant of the building. How does this affect your attitude towards the Church?

In your relationship with Christ Church – in what ways are you a vital building block in this dwelling place of god that is under construction?

Points for Prayer

- **Pray that Christ Church will grow into the kind of spiritual temple that Paul talks about**

- **Pray that your own involvement with further that growth**

- **Pray that the Lord will show you how you can best 'fit in' to the building that He is creating here**

- **Pray that we can appreciate the value of everyone in Christ Church**

Creating a Christian Community

2. Everyone's Involved

1 Corinthians 12

Have you ever met a 'prima donna'? When I was younger, I was a bit like that! I trained as a singer – and soon it was no longer 'good enough' to sing in a choir – I had to be the soloist! For many years this ruined my enjoyment of the sheer joy and fun that is to be found in being part of a group. Today, I never sing alone – I wouldn't want to fall into that trap again.

The church in Corinth was a collection of 'soloists' who needed to learn to 'sing in harmony'. They had an awful list of problems – strife, immorality and even turning up for the Lord's Supper drunk! Paul paints fur us here a picture of a church where everyone has a part and where the parts fit together in perfect harmony.

What abilities or gifts do you most appreciate in each other? Try to focus on character qualities such as hospitality, encouragement or compassion. What gifts or abilities that you have been given do you most enjoy using?

What is Paul's central message to the church in Corinth?

When have we at Christ Church needed the same sort of advice?

What was life like for the Corinthians before they became believers? What was it like for them afterwards? (Verses 1-3)

Given that all gifts come from the same source – what should be the result? (Verses 4-7)

What do you think may be factors in this not always being the outcome?

How do each of the gifts mentioned in verses 8-10 contribute to the unity of the Church?

Do you think the metaphor of the Church being like a human body is appropriate?

We should all be encouraged by the truth about gifts in verse 18. In what ways is this true for you?

According to Paul, how can we avoid divisions at Christ Church? (Verses 21-25)

Look again at those verses – In what ways have we failed to give honour to the weaker parts of the Body of Christ?

How can we 'give honour' to the 'weaker parts' of the Body at Christ Church practically?

Focus on verses 27-31: What are your spiritual gifts?

How will you seek the greater gifts mentioned in verse 31?

<u>Points for Prayer</u>

- **Ask God's forgiveness for the way we treat one another**

- **Ask for His help in using your gifts for the benefit of others**

- **Thank God for the gifts of the other members in the group**

- **Ask that we will use our gifts to strengthen community at Christ Church**

- **Ask that we may be given opportunity in the next week to use our gifts in the specific service of others**

	Creating a Christian Community
	3. Everyone's Invited
	Philemon

I've been a part of Christ Church for nine and a half years. A lot has happened in that time, but I want to go back to when I first walked through the doors. We'd moved here from Widnes and we didn't know anyone. I started coming to the 6.30 service – and for six weeks nobody spoke to me. It was as if I wasn't there! Everyone seemed to know each other, and it felt like all the other people there were at a party to which I hadn't received an invitation! In those days, I was a 'new' Christian and it was this that kept me coming… but what if I had not yet become a Christian? I wonder if I would then have persevered.

The fellowship of believers is intended to be a place of welcome, healing, forgiveness and equality. In this short letter, Paul urges Philemon and his church to welcome back into their membership a runaway slave called Onesimus.

Have you ever felt like an outsider? Have you ever felt anxious about coming to Christ Church? Have there been times when you haven't felt like a part of things?

What does Paul hope to accomplish by writing to Philemon?

Paul can often sound authoritative, how would you describe the tone of this letter?

Think of a time when you were expected to include someone you saw as 'undesirable'. How did you feel?

How does Paul encourage the readers of this letter? (Verses 1-7)

What appeal does he make to them? (Verses 8-11)

'Onesimus' means 'useful' – what play does Paul make on his name? Why do you think Paul makes this pun in what is, after all, a serious letter?
What changes are implied in Onesimus' life? (Verses 10-12)

Despite these changes, why was Onesimus such an unlikely person to be accepted in the church?

How does Paul build the case for reconciliation? (Verses 12-22)

What sorts of people are unlikely candidates to be accepted at Christ Church?

How does Paul use his own standing to further the case for Onesimus? (Especially verses 17-18)

How can you stand up for those whom Christ Church may overlook or even reject?

Points for Prayer

- **For those who needs to feel included in Christ Church and in your group. Try to be specific**

- **Pray that you will use the opportunity of Sunday service to get to know someone you have overlooked**

- **Pray for the opportunity to reach out to someone who is not yet a part of Christ Church, but who needs to find a welcome here**

Creating a Christian Community

4. We Gather Together

Psalm 100

How many times have you heard people say, "Well, I can be a Christian without coming to Church!" I'm sure I would be quite wealthy by now if I had £1 for each time I've heard that phrase. It's a common notion is society today – worship, even faith itself, is a private matter – personal, individual.

Certainly worship must come from one's own heart and anyone can pray or praise God in solitude. But, the Bible teaches that God is pleased by worship that occurs together, in community. Every family has a traditional place of gathering – the dinner table, or around the Christmas tree, perhaps. In our house, it is often the living room after the children's television programmes have finished, where we discuss the day, its successes and its difficulties, and we make plans for the evening or the next day.

The Bible teaches us that the family of God is not different – we must meet – we must gather together. Psalm 100 describes a gathering for worship. Describe a worship service that was special for you – get beyond 'style' and say why it touched you so deeply. What aspects of our gathering together are especially important to you?

What evidence is there in the Psalm that encourages group, rather than personal worship?

Who or what encourages you to come together with other believers to worship?

What is the focus of the Psalm?

What are the worshippers urged to do? Look for specific examples.

The 'gates' and the 'courts' refer to the Temple in Jerusalem. Why do you think it is important to have a special place to worship together?
Fro what reasons are we to, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise"? (Verses 4-5)

Why are thanks and praise essential parts of worship?

How can worship together help our personal worship when we don't feel especially thankful or full of praise?

Why do you think some people avoid coming to church?

The Psalms are really songs – How do the songs that we sing together tell of God's love and faithfulness?

What story of God's love and faithfulness can you share?

What opportunities do you have this week to join in corporate worship?

How will you take advantage of them?

Points for Prayer

- **Thank God for the worship we enjoy together at Christ Church**

- **Pray for all those who lead worship in our church**

- **Pray that our experience of worship will be marked by joy and dedication to Christ**

- **Pray that Christ Church will be protected from strife or anything that distracts from or interferes with our worship together**

Try writing a psalm of your own praising God for what He has done at Christ Church. Perhaps you could share them with one another for mutual encouragement and praise together….

Creating a Christian Community

5. A Community Commissioned

Luke 10:1-20

Evangelism conjures up many images for me – the chap on the street corner with his placard, the television evangelists of America, even big crusades at which a "celebrity" calls folk forward! Come to think of it, evangelism is a word I prefer to avoid. I'll leave all that to Pauline and Ken (our Parish Evangelists) – after all, they've been <u>trained</u> to do evangelism, and I haven't. I'm not "good" at evangelism, and that makes me feel a bit guilty!!

What words or phrases come to your mind when you think of evangelism? Why may you hesitate to share your faith with someone?

Few people think of evangelism as a community activity. In the New Testament, however, it seems always to have been done in groups of at least two! Luke 9:1-6 gives an account of Jesus commissioning His community to share their faith. Later He sent out a larger group of followers on a similar mission….

What are the appealing and not so appealing features of the work Jesus gave the seventy two to do?

When have you been given a job by the Lord that has both blessings and dangers?

Why do you think they were sent out in pairs? (Verse 1)

How do you account for Jesus telling them not to take anything with them? (Verse 4)

How do these cautions still apply today to believers want to carry out Jesus' mission?

Consider the responsibilities given to Christians in verse 16. How should that encourage us? How should it humble us?

What was the response of the 72 to their completed mission? (Verse 17)
What did Jesus say was the nature of their mission? (Verses 18-19)

Jesus warns against spiritual arrogance (verse 20). How might an active Christian fall into that trap?

How does Christ Church reach out to others in active witness?

How can we better work together to carry out evangelism?

What role do you see yourself playing in the evangelistic life of Christ Church?

Points for Prayer

- **Pray for people who need to come to faith in Christ**

- **Pray that we will encourage one another in the work of evangelism**

- **Pray for opportunities for Christ Church to witness to the people of Moreton**

- **Pray for the courage and wisdom to make the most of those opportunities**

- **Pray for the opportunity for your group to be a positive witness to others**

Creating a Christian Community

6. Going in through the Servant's Door

Matthew 25:31-46

Christ Church is full of opportunities to serve! It all too often seems like there are more things to do than there are people to do them! Sometimes, however, the opportunity to serve can look like an obligation – Only last week someone asked me to do something with an air of desperation because they really could not find anybody else to do it! In contrast, we usually jump at the opportunity to have fun. Ironically perhaps, nothing builds true community like selfless service together. It builds bonds between people like nothing else can.

In the last week of Jesus' life, He came to Jerusalem. Sitting on the Mount of Olives, in view of the Temple, He talked about His future return and how Christians should behave in the interim. Then, in this parable, He painted a vivid picture of future judgement.

What is the most meaningful act of service you or your family have ever received? Which do you find the most rewarding – serving or being served? Why?

What contrasts are made throughout this passage?

In Jesus' story, what is the setting?

On what basis are the sheep and the goats separated from one another? (Verses 34-36)

How do you feel about the division of the sheep and the goats?

As you picture yourself on that day, what group do you think you will be in, and why?

What do the services described in verses 35-36 have in common?

Why do you think the folk on the right are surprised by what He says? (Verses 37-39)

It is possible to read this story and conclude that we must earn salvation through what we do. How do you respond to this interpretation?

In what sense is Jesus hungry, thirsty, sick and in prison? (Verses 40-45)

What would be the effect for you of seeing the face of Jesus in the faces of people needing help?

What does this passage say to you about the priority of serving others at Christ Church?

What practical changes can you think of both personally and at Christ Church as a whole that will make service a higher priority?

Points for Prayer

- **Prayer that God will give each of us the heart of a servant**

- **Pray for opportunities to serve others, not only this week, but long term**

- **Pray that Christ Church will have more and more opportunities to serve others**

- **Pray that God will show you the best way for you to serve our Christian community here at Christ Church**
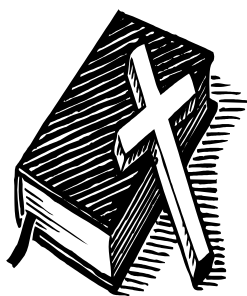
Creating A Christian Community

7. And They'll Know We Are Christians?

John 13:1-7 & 34-35

Love – the greatest thing in heaven and on earth – has been reduced to nothing in our society today. Society remains obsessed by the idea of love – we've made it a 'god' in its own right, we've given it a rose pink tinge, we've made it trivial and we've even reduced it to a symbol to stick on the back windscreen of cars. But the Bible tells us the love is really something radically different from the way our society sees it. The biblical view of love liberates us from the whims of popular culture.

The scene is the Last Supper. Jesus is about to die and He knows it. He has tried for perhaps the better part of three years to tell His disciples, but they don't want to hear it. Indeed, at the very time when they should have been at their most united, the old argument breaks out about who is the greatest among them (Luke 22.24). Jesus takes radical action to teach them about love.

What message does society teach about love? What message does the Bible give?

What filled Jesus thoughts as this scene opens? (Verses 1-3)

Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Describe Jesus' actions in verses 4-6 form your perspective.

How would you have reacted to verses 4 and 5?

Why did Peter object so strongly? (Verses 6-8)

What had Peter realised to make him respond as he did in verse 9?

If you were sitting next to Peter, what might you say and do when Jesus kneels to wash your feet?
How did Jesus intend for the disciples to follow His example? (Verses 12-17)

What should be a Christian standard of love? (Verse 34)

How will demonstrating the love affect the disciples' standing in the world? (Verse 35)

What does this tell us about the world's version of love?

What 'foot washing' have members of Christ Church performed for one another recently?

How can you do some 'foot washing' for another member of Christ Church in the next week?

<u>Points for prayer</u>

- **Pray that God will increase real love among the members of Christ Church**

- **Pray that outsiders will recognise without doubt that we are Christ's followers**

- **Pray for opportunities to do some 'foot washing'**

- **Pray that there is no act of service that will be seen to be beneath any one of us**

- **Pray that this passage will be in our minds when opportunities to love one another practically open up to us**

It is a strange and sometimes difficult thing getting to know a group of people. Most recently, I suppose, my studies in Sheffield made me realise that. We gather from all parts of the country – complete strangers – but over the time that we have spent together, we have shared facts about ourselves and our home communities and now we often talk about feelings. The seclusion of being away together seems to bring down barriers, encourages honesty and builds a community. Our Christian community at Christ Church should share that transparency – and it may take stress to bring that about.

The Book of Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a city and a community after a generation of captivity and exile. Ezra, the Priest, begins to read the Book of the Law to the assembled people. After the Feast of the Tabernacles, the people gathered together to confess their sins.

Which group of people do you find it easiest to be open with? Why? Do you find it helpful to confess your mistakes to another person?

What was the mood of this assembly?

How did the Israelites prepare for confession? (Verses 1-2)

How does the idea of public confession affect you?

How did the Israelites use their time at their confessional gathering? (Verses 2-5)

The reading of the Law was followed by confession and worship (verse 3). Why do both make sense as a response to hearing the Word of God?

The Levites were the priests of Israel. How can leaders at Christ Church be involved in helping our Christian community in confession?

Nehemiah 9 shows people confession sin <u>with</u> each other. James writes about confessing sin <u>to</u> each other – a more difficult and humbling challenge. What point does James make about trouble and happiness in verses 13-14?

How are confession and corporate prayer connected? (Verses 14-16)

What examples of righteous prayer does James give us? (Verses 17-18)

How does James stress the urgency of our accountability to one another? (Verses 19-20)

What helpful guidelines does James give us for when, how and what we should confess to others?

In what ways do you need to become more transparent with your fellow believers?

Points for prayer

- **Pray for courage to confess your sins honestly and promptly before God**

- **Pray that we may be more honest with one another about our struggles with sin**

- **Pray that our confessions may never be inappropriate or self-serving**

- **Pray for each other in our struggles with sin**

- **Thank God for His mercy and for the sacrifice of Christ for us**

Creating A Christian Community

9. Confrontation and Restoration

Matthew 18:15-35

There is a tale I read recently about a father who had fallen out with his son. It hurt him deeply that they were no longer speaking, so, eventually he placed an advert in the local paper. It read "Son – All is forgiven. Meet me outside the Town Hall at 7.30pm on Saturday." Seventy five young men turned up!

How sad it is that some broken relationships never seem to be repaired. I've seen it so often in my work: Grandparents who never get to see their grandchildren; children who never see their fathers; lost friendships. It's true too that churches are not immune. Maybe we have not learned how to lovingly handle conflict, reconciliation and forgiveness.

How do you feel after an argument with a friend? How do you handle conflict?

Even when Jesus' followers were still few in number they still fell out with one another and had questions about how they could get along.

In general, what sort of situation among Christians is Jesus talking about?

Have you ever experienced this type of situation?

What wisdom is there in confronting the offender alone? (Verse 15)

What might be added by involving one or two other people? (Verse 16)

To what additional levels of confrontation should we proceed? Why? (Verse 17)

Consider a time when you confronted someone about a wrong. How did your experience compare with verses 15-17?

How do verses 18-20 affirm the reconciling power of praying together?

Peter's question prompted Jesus to tell a parable. What is the sequence of events in the story?

Ten thousand Talents would be millions of pounds! (Verse 24). Why do you think Jesus uses such a staggering total?

How is it possible, do you think, for the forgiven man to turn so quickly on his fellow servant, and show him no mercy?

In what ways are you like the angry servant in verse 28?

How can we at Christ Church apply the wisdom of this passage to any conflict we may face?

What steps will you take to put this passage into action?

Points for prayer

- **Pray to be reminded of all the people you need to forgive**

- **Pray for them**

- **Ask God to help you to show them the same mercy Christ has shown you**

- **Pray that we may be wise as a Church in our dealings with conflict**

- **Pray for the leadership team, for the PCC, for the Prayer Groups, for the music group, for the Children's Team and for any other groups in the Church where conflicts can easily arise**

- **Thank God for His Word and all we can learn from it**

As you may know, I've not been so well since the beginning of the year and there have been times when I've not been able to get to Church. I've missed both the services and the people. One thing that has helped are all those people who have telephoned and called in – but especially those folk who made sure that Graham and the children were alright while I was in hospital. There are many different types of healing, I think, and all of the above have helped me enormously – I'd like to say a heartfelt "thank you" to the people concerned.

Let's take a look in this final week at some of the ways in which Christ Church can be a haven for healing.

How do you feel when you have to depend on other people?

In the king's community, the citizens are protected, loved and healed. Ezekiel here offers a prophetic warning against forsaking that task.

Describe the situation is Israel according to these verses.

What were the five responsibilities that the leaders of Israel had failed to carry out? (Verses 4-5)

What were the tragic results of that failure? (Verses 1-8)

Consider a Church where the leaders do carry out the responsibilities of verses 4-5. What difference would that make to the life of the Church?

How did the Lord react to the shepherds' behaviour? (Verses 7-10)

How many times does the word "I" appear in verses 11-16? What does that tell you about God?

What else do we learn about God from His words in those verses?

Although the Lord steps in, it is clear from verses 1-8 that He desires His appointed leaders to do their jobs. What are your God given responsibilities at Christ Church?

When and why are you sometimes tempted to "slack off" in your responsibilities to our Christian community here?

How can we encourage each other to take our responsibilities to the weak more seriously?

In what way can you address one or more of the responsibilities in verse 5?

How can you help Christ Church carry out each of these tasks?

Points for prayer

- **Ask God to show you the weak, the wounded and the lost**

- **Ask Him to move you to positive action**

- **Thank him for times in your life when others have stepped in to help you**

- **Pray for all in Christ Church involved in pastoral care**

- **Pray that Christ Church may truly become a haven for healing**

Appendix 4

Bible Study Evaluation Questionnaire

Evaluation Questionnaire 'Creating a Christian Community'

Please enter a figure in the box provided for each Bible Study, marking it from 1-10, where 1 rates as "totally unhelpful" and 10 rates as "the most helpful this I have ever encountered in this subject". Do feel free to add written comments about each week if you wish. It would be particularly helpful to have some feedback about the course as a whole. If, for some reason, your group did not use a particular week, please enter an X in the relevant box. This questionnaire is anonymous, so do please be honest! Thank you for your help.

Number of Bible Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a) How relevant was this study to your group?										
b) How did you find it related to the passage of scripture?										
c) Was this study about the right length for your group?										
d) Was this study appropriate for your group?										
e) How did you find the questions posed?										
f) Were the stories opening the studies useful to you?										
g) Were the questions asked helpful?										
h) Were your group challenged to think?										
i) Were your group challenged to pray?										
j) Were your group challenged to act?										

Please write any additional comments here. Identify individual bible studies by number and continue overleaf if needed. Please leave completed questionnaires in the Parish Office or in my pigeonhole in Church. Thank you once again – Lesley

Appendix 5

Photographs of Event for Children with Learning Disabilities

The Church at the heart of
Moreton with Moreton at its heart

DISCO

Disco and Social Evening

17th April 2004

6.00pm-9.00pm

Christ Church Centre

Christ Church Moreton

Parish Centre
Upton Road
Moreton

Parish Office: 604 0049

Everyone enjoyed themselves

There was a free "bar" with lemonade, cola and as many biscuits, crisps and rolls and sweets as could be eaten – some people took advantage.

It was nice to have the opportunity to try out new things without being pushed out of the way.

Appendix 6

Questionnaires for Data Collection
Big Event Weekend

<u>Evaluation Questionnaire Big Event Weekend</u>
Friday/Saturday/Sunday (Circle)

Male/Female
Do you live in Moreton?   **Yes/No**
Do you consider yourself to be a member of Christ Church?   **Yes/No**
What made you come to this event?

Are you enjoying yourself?   **Yes/No**

What are the good things?

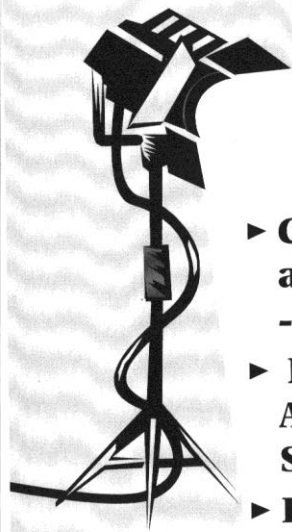**Are there things we could improve on?**

Would you come to a similar event in the future?   **Yes/No**

How do you feel about Moreton as a community?

Appendix 7

Photographs Big Event Weekend

The Big Event
Fri 21st- Sun 23rd May
Christ Church Moreton

► Cheese and Wine and Art Exhibiton - Friday 7.00pm
► Barbeque and Activities - Saturday
► Free Celebration Service and Lunch - Sunday 10.45am

Be a part of it

This poster went out in either A4 of A5 size (as fliers) to shops, the library, community centres and so forth. Despite assurances that it would be displayed, very few were. Advertising proved to be a real issue for the Big Event weekend and has been subsequently for anything that Christ Church has done.
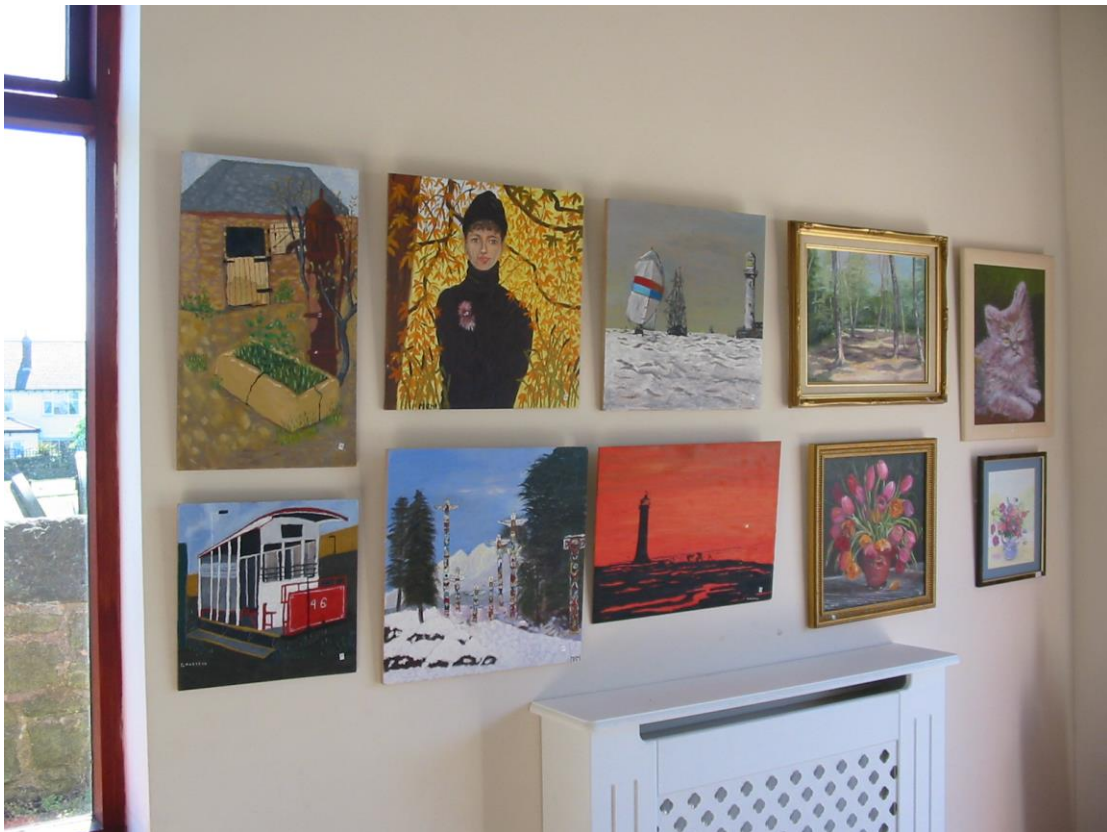
THE BIG EVENT 2004
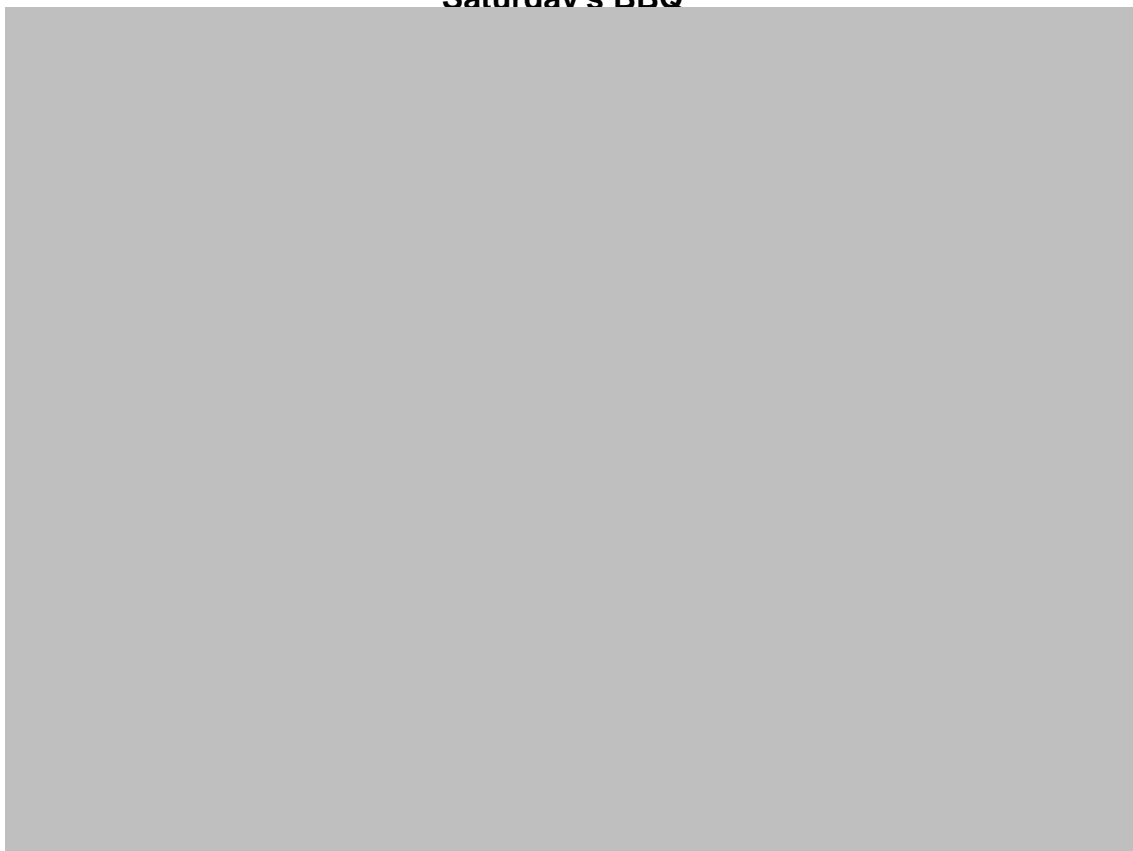
Christ Church Parish Centre
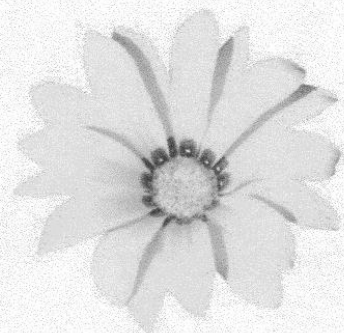
My thanks to Mr. Eddie Fitzgerald for this photographic record

The Friday night Art Exhibition

Saturday's BBQ

Everyone seemed to be having fun….
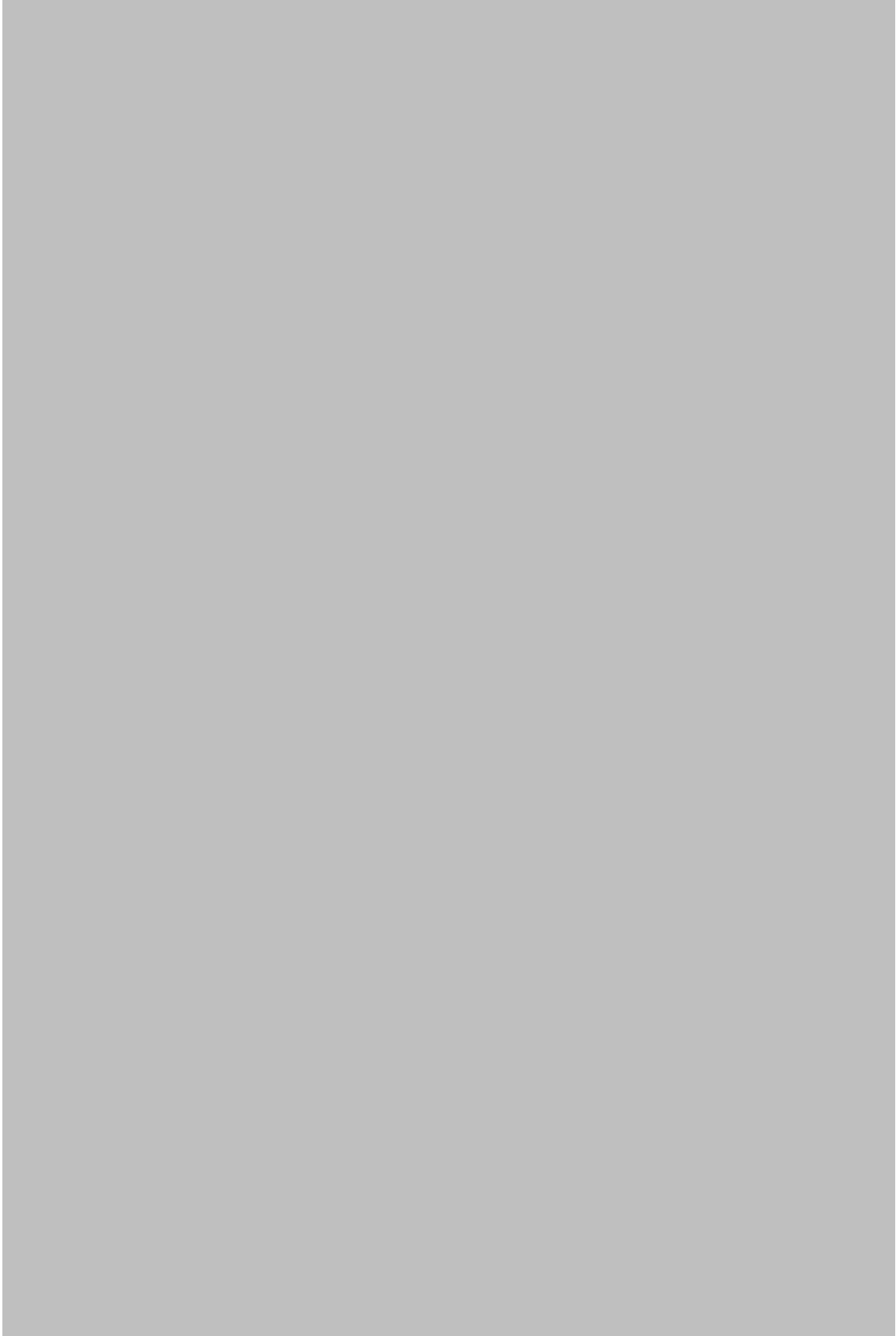
And there was plenty for people to do.
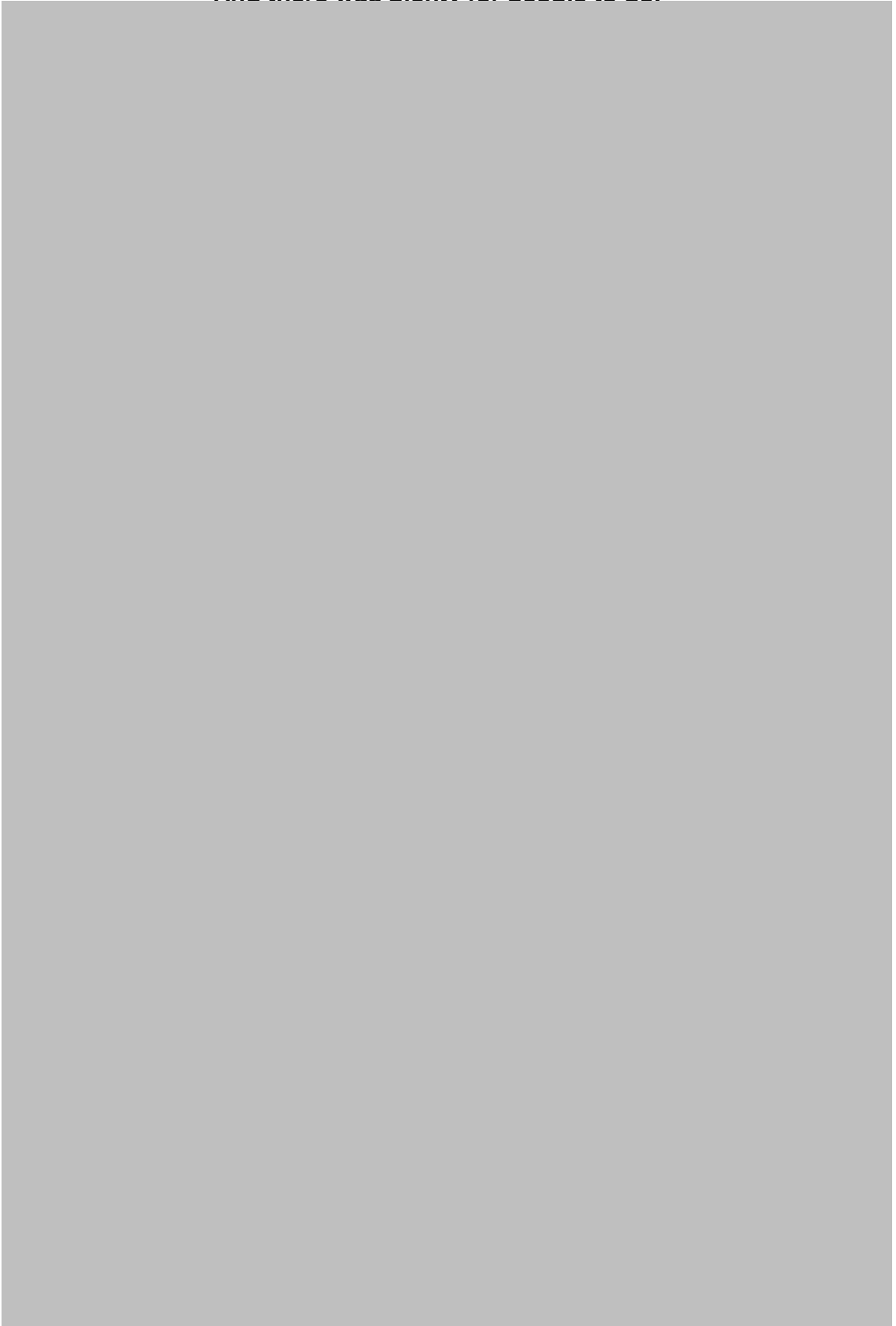
Sunday Celebration Service

and, of course, there was food…..

Welcome to our service of celebration for our community

Moreton reflects Your face, O God

In touches of kindness and in the smile of friends

Moreton sounds with Your voice, O God

In calls for new justice and laughter in the streets

Moreton breathes with Your life, O God

In its green spaces and new hope in the people

So we can thank God together for our community

Lord God, our Maker and our Redeemer, this is Your town and we are Your people: come among us and save us.

We have willfully misused Your gifts of creation; Lord, be merciful:
Forgive us our sin

We have seen the ill-treatment of others and have not gone to their aid; Lord, be merciful:
Forgive us our sin

We have condoned evil and dishonesty and failed to strive for justice: Lord, be merciful:
Forgive us our sin

We have heard the good news of Christ, but have failed to share it with others; Lord be merciful:
Forgive us our sin

We have not loved You with our whole hearts, nor our neighbours as ourselves; Lord, be merciful:
Forgive us our sin
Amen

Absolution

In the City of God, all are forgiven and all are called to share in the building of a new heaven and a new earth. This is the promise that is given to us in Christ: the forgiveness of our sins and a part to play in the building of His kingdom.

Amen.

Blessing

Go in peace and in brokenness discover wholeness, in the presence of many find unity, and among all this discover the presence of God. And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us and in this town.
Amen

Appendix 8

The Site Team

This piece of work would not have been possible without the significant contribution of the Site Team.

The Site Team members are acknowledged and thanked by name at the outset to this work and their contributions feature at significant points.

The Site Team met in total fourteen times. Their meetings began before the official "project phase" (which ran from January until May 2004) – commencing at the beginning of October 2002.

As explained in Chapter 1, the selection was done to achieve as representative a picture as possible of both the community (based on the area of Moreton an individual lived in) and of the congregation.

Fourteen people were invited to the first meeting, of whom eight attended (see 3.8), which focused upon the "joys and sorrows" exercises which were to prove central to our thinking and reflection in the coming meetings.

Given that the life of the Site Team extended over the course of seventeen months, life intervenes and the number eventually settled down to around six people who attended regularly. Indeed, following meetings three and four, when most of the biblical work was done, it became increasingly hard to re-join the group as, in particular here, something happened that bonded us as a Team in a very particular way

– something I have attempted to recapture in my detailed account of these meetings at 2.8.

As we struggled to go into more depth and understand how this might begin to hold together, I produced some written notes for the team on the psychological significance of food and the effect of anorexia for to help us to think. I began to link this to one or two very obvious themes around food in the New Testament.

This was something that the Site Team found quite challenging to take on board given the strongly conservative evangelical nature of the church, but began to see how our conclusions might colour and shape what could be called "practical Christianity". In other words, how what we were discovering in scripture could be taken and acted out. Here I summarise a process that took maybe three meetings to work through

The urge to return to introspection did not entirely leave the Site Team, however. At 5.6 evidence can be seen of another Site Team meeting further on in the process where the Team felt they had to identify their sins in order to move forward. It is referred to at 2.8 but explored at length here.

Given the nature of the Church, it is unsurprising, upon reflection, that the one task that the Site Team really struggled with was Goal setting. Christ Church had remarkably little experience with social action of any

kind and tended to operate in isolation from the community it was designed to serve. That does not mean that people from the community were not welcomed – they were. It simply means that Christ Church generally did not involve themselves with the community except on their own terms (such as the provision of funeral services etc.).

This part of the work took a lot longer than I had anticipated. People simply did not comprehend any need for it! In the end, we decided to imagine that we had just moved into Moreton and knew nothing about it. So, we had to go and find out. This led us towards Goal 1. What could we offer as a church? Well, we could fund and distribute a directory. Maybe we could find someone who would help us set up a website….

As is recorded in the thesis, it was not just me who felt relieved when this part of the work came to an end!

And from our learning here, which was the first piece of practical work we undertook together, so the rest of our goals began to firm up. It did result in some changes (for example we learned that there were no local history groups in Moreton) – but lots of Art Groups.

From January until May the Site Team meeting were taken up with the "nuts and bolts" of organising and arranging who was going to do what when and where, as we had a lot of different events to sort out and each had to run smoothly.

We did sneak in a post-event meal together after everything was supposed to be finished! It seemed appropriate.

As far as the consequent theology is concerned, the work is mine alone, although informed by the Site Team discussions, as described. I cannot imagine this work without the Site Team – it would certainly look very different, and may have had different themes.

It is also impossible to make a split as to who did how much. Is recalling a prophecy a more significant contribution than walking into a strange place to collect data? Is talking to a stranger a greater contribution than knowing a passage of scripture? I do not know. I suppose it depends upon who is judging. This work set out to be collaborative at its heart – and certainly I believe it achieved that.

Appendix 9

Sermon using Illness Metaphor

Christ Church Moreton 30th September 2007 10.45 am

Luke 12:13-21

Acquisition and Generosity

Heavenly Father, you delight in giving to your children, make us worthy, wise and generous stewards of all that you give us, so that we may live our lives to the glory of your name. Amen.

Just lately, I've been forced into watching rather more in the way of daytime TV than I'm used to. I have to tell you that I've developed a rather unhealthy interest in programmes like "homes under the hammer" and "a place by the sea" – and I've picked up a fair amount about renovating houses, planning consents, building regulations, Grade II listed buildings and how to buy property in auctions in strange places like Stoke on Trent – and I can only say that because my husband comes from there!

However, one thing has struck me more than anything else – some, well most, of the people featured have an awful lot of these houses. One day not so long back, one chap had just bought his 39th property, another had bought two houses at the same auction, a third had bought a small bungalow (his twentieth property) with plans to demolish it and build a new bigger house on the plot of land……..

Just how many homes do we need? How hard is it for our young people to get a foot on the housing ladder these days?

I suppose what I'm seeing is a symptom of an illness that is inbred in our society. I'm going to call it the illness of acquisition – or acquisitionitis - just for the time being.

The presenter of "Homes under the Hammer" asked the young property owner with 39 houses what their goal was. His reply was to become a property millionaire by the time he was 35 years old. I wanted to ask, "Then what?"

We've heard our reading from Luke's gospel this morning and we've seen what Jesus has had to say about acquisitionitis.

Right from childhood we are urged by society to acquire – well – "stuff". When I was a health visitor, I used to tell parents that a trip to Asda or Tesco was not a needful requirement for a child's psychological or social development – and I meant it!

Mostly, it was because, as any parent can tell you, if a child sees toys or sweets that are very cleverly marketed and packaged and put on shelves at a height to attract toddlers – guess what? The toddler will have an acute bout of acquisitionitis. This can lead to terrible stress for the parent, who often has to give in, which only ultimately makes the illness worse…..

And, guess what? We never really grow up! We simply become more sophisticated about it. We have our "collections" – our "little" indulgences. We have "retail therapy", our "nest egg" – all seemingly harmless words for that same illness – acquisition. And believe me, I'm speaking as someone who suffers from periodic bouts of it myself!

So, let's look a little more closely at the illness of acquisition, and at the effects of it on our lives. At the outset, it's important to say that Jesus does not say "beware of owning material things". People have often misquoted the bible and said that money is the root of all evil – when in fact the truth is what? "The love of money is the root of all evil" Jesus did say that it is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven – but he did not say that it is wrong to be rich. The nub of the matter is acquisitionitis. It's the illness of acquisition that can turn the blessing of plenty into the desire for more……

The essence of Jesus' message in this morning's reading is that the illness of acquisition, so prevalent in our society, is corrosive. When things take over our lives they corrode our relationships, they corrode the meaning of life and the corrode our soul. Let's be honest, Jesus says, all that glitters is not gold – even when it is gold!

SO – the illness of acquisition corrodes relationships

Jesus is teaching a crowd when a man interrupts. Jesus had just sorted a conflict with the Pharisees and is now speaking to his followers about the conflicts that they will face and the peace that they can have no matter what happens to them: "Do not fear those who can harm the body but cannot harm the soul." And then, out of nowhere, this man in the crowd pipes up: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Huh, what does this have to do with *anything!!*

As a matter of fact, Jesus takes to opportunity to use this man's illness of acquisition to talk about something that **can** harm the soul. The man's relationship with is brother is obviously seriously damaged because of material possessions.

Yes- we're all heard about it, even if we haven't experienced it. A parent dies and the children argue. It needn't be money – it can be anything at all, a piece of furniture, photographs goodness knows what….The illness of acquisition destroys relationships!

Jesus actually never settles the dispute. Instead he issues a warning. Acquisitionitis is like a drug that will dull your senses about the real meaning of life. What you own will become more important than people. The man who interrupted Jesus was completely unaware of how inappropriate his interruption was because he was in the grip of the illness of acquisition.

All of this leads me on to say that the illness of acquisition destroys the real meaning of life. So many products these days have "points" attached so that you save up and get more "stuff" – apparently for free! Macdonald's Monopoly gave away free meals and you collected bits off the monopoly board to win prizes: "MMMM I'm loving it!" – still, you know what they say – every little helps.

In modern terms, Jesus' parable has a slogan: "get stuff and more stuff and party till you drop" Sorry, but isn't that how life is these days? It's all really superficial and gripped by the illness of acquisition? It doesn't only threaten the meaning of life, it can actually be life threatening: how many young people are robbed and mugged because they have fashionable trainers or the latest mobile phone?

How do you feel about that? Jesus parable is a distinct warning that aquisitionitis can lead to a point where life's meaning is reduced to material things. The driving force of living becomes a search for "more stuff" – the next pay rise, the 40th property. It breaks one of the 10 commandments actually: "Thou shalt have none other Gods before me" – idolising "stuff" is putting "stuff" before God…..so now what?

Well, if I could tell you that before next week two people here would meet God face to face, but I don't know who they are, would it make anyone stop and think?

Sometimes we all hear something that makes us reassess our lives. It may be that we lose someone we love, often it is the death of a parent. Sometimes we, or someone we love, are diagnosed with a life threatening illness. It brings us up short. It makes us ask ourselves what it is that is important to us.

It isn't "stuff".

The man in the story Jesus tells gets the shock of his life when God tells him that he will die that night. Just when he needed spiritual substance, he finds he has only material stuff.

Is it time for all of us to look at how badly we have been affected by the illness of acquisition?

So, is there a cure?

Yes, praise God, there is! Again and again, Jesus tells us that we need to get our priorities straight and once we do, things fall into place beautifully.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

As we celebrate God wonderful generosity towards us his children at harvest, so we would do well to remember that the cure for the illness of acquisition is generosity in the same spirit that God gives to us.

James writes: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Let's see what applying a dose of God's cure, a generous spirit, will do to the illness of acquisition that faces both us and our society today!

Firstly, if we are generous in our relationships with one another, there would be far less friction. I'm only guessing here, but I daresay this does not only apply to material things! Picture the scene now: A parent has died and two siblings would both like the same piece of furniture and the same piece of pottery. It becomes so much easier for one to take each, doesn't it? With no bitterness or feuding, relationships are strengthened, not shattered.

Secondly, if, instead of hoarding "stuff" we use our resources in the service of others, life begins to take on more shape and much more meaning. I'm wondering now if we can afford *not* to give – not just out of thankfulness for what we've been given, but because the very act of sharing opens our lives out into contact with others and gives our lives a meaning that the illness of acquisition robs from it.

Thirdly, generosity is part of the very nature of God himself. The illness of acquisition is part of the very thing that in the beginning separated mankind from God, and when Jesus gave Himself for us, He opened up the way for us to be cured of that illness for good. We have to be willing to be cured. We have to want more to be generous givers than to be ill with acquisition. It's

going to feel strange at first, I'm sure, but with God's grace we can all get there. We're worth it.

He's promised us that when we let go of the illness of acquisition we'll never go without, so why should we cling onto it?

He delights in us, so let's be free to delight in Him!

Amen.

Appendix 10

Merseyfest Project Proposal

merseyfest MF

MY MERSEYSIDE MY MERSEYFEST

PROJECT PROPOSAL FORM

Organisation/Church: Moreton Churches Merseyfest Network

Contact: **Revd. Simon Rea**

Please outline the needs you have identified in your community:

Substantial recent research has taken place within the community of Moreton (MA & PhD theses by network committee member, copies available on request). The research shows that Moreton has a poor self-image and no corporate identity to represent it to itself or others. This is because it has expended rapidly; because the geography of the town divides it into four, and because of the political system, which splits Moreton into two wards. The situation has been made worse recently by the siting of a new up-market housing development against the expressed wishes of local people and the closure of 10 town centre shops over the last three months.

To maximise the potential for *community benefit* the proposed project is situated in the centre of Moreton, at a location that is visited by most of the town, within an EU designated, UK Government recognised regeneration area. This creates a project that will be *highly visible* to the general public and has *high potential for community involvement.*

Where will the project take place? **(Full address and map required if different from above)**

The Project involves the regeneration of an area bounded by and including the Youth Club and the Library on its north/south axis and by the Adult Training Centre to the east. The western border in defined by Pasture Road. The site is within easy walking distance of Moreton railway station and several bus stops

What do you intend to do? Outline your project proposal.

The project involves the regeneration of the proposed area – to paint and restore railings, woodwork etc. and to tidy and plant the green areas. Subsidiary activities (eg. Face painting, puppets) could also accompany this both at the front and the large grassed area at the back. The proposed evening events (BBQ on Tuesday and town fiesta on Friday) naturally integrate into the project.

The project will help in giving Moreton a sense of community and civic pride, which is an identified problem. It will do this by showing that Moreton is loved (through the Merseyfest volunteers) and that Moreton can thus help itself (through the local church network input). The project is also highly visible and of psychological benefit and so we believe it meets exactly the criteria set out by Merseyfest. The project will offer the people from the local church network and the Merseyfest volunteers the opportunity to work alongside people with various disabilities (both cognitive and physical) from the Adult Training Centre, thus empowering both groups in different ways. The evangelistic impact of local churches working together will be considerable.

Volunteers will be involved in the environmental clear up (removing litter, chewing gum etc.); regeneration (eg. Stripping and painting window frames, woodwork, metal work etc.); gardening; setting up town fiesta (stalls, sideshows, BBQ etc); evening BBQ and other related tasks.

Protective and all other equipment needed will be provided and a trained first aider will be on site at all times. Risk assessments will be undertaken as required.

Return completed form to Mike Kerry,

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