

**Thesis**

**submitted to**

**Charles Sturt University**

**for**

**The Degree of Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

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**Adelaide Anglicans and the Gospels:**

**A mixed-method inquiry through the lens of  
transformative Gospel literacy**

**Date of submission: February 2018**



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## **Certificate of Authorship**

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis.

Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses."

Date: 3 February 2018

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge with deep gratitude my supervisor the Reverend Dr Gillies Ambler. Not only did he read and critique my work but made time to meet with me regularly and was a constant source of encouragement and suggestions when the going was tough.

I acknowledge my wife Wendy for her unfailing support not only for putting up with the countless hours I spent in the study, but also for her encouragement and her specific help in checking and correcting the mechanical transcriptions of the interviews recorded for the project.

I particularly wish to acknowledge the one hundred and thirty-five lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide without whose response the project would not have seen the light of day.

My thanks to the Anglican Parishes of All Saints Colonel Light Gardens and St Francis of Assisi Edwardstown (together now the Parish of St Francis of Assisi Clarence Gardens) for their generous provision of time and resources to conduct the research.

My thanks to Dr Robert (Bob) Dixon of the University of Divinity who critiqued the thesis most usefully and provided statistical, conceptual and structural advice which proved invaluable.

Thanks also to Mss Kate Ordon, Elizabeth Bleby, Janet Munro and Jane Pitman, senior lay women who read the thesis and offered feedback and insight; to Dr Darmawan Igusti of the University of Adelaide for assistance with recoding in SPSS; to Mrs Wendy Davis (retired) of the Adelaide Theological Library for assistance with providing reference material; and finally also to Mrs Ottley Chesterfield who painstakingly read and corrected for style and grammar, noting that both the expression and layout of the project are fully my responsibility.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores and analyses what a sample of Adelaide Anglican laity know about the content of the Gospels, how they understand and interpret the Gospels and the difference the Gospels make to their own lives and their Christian influence in the lives of others. The thesis originated in my observation as an Anglican priest in the Province of South Australia for over thirty years of a seeming lack of life-giving reflection on the Gospels and a resulting lack of transformative impact of the Gospels in the lives of lay Anglicans.

The thesis reflects an ‘ordinary theology’ approach as it seeks to explore and understand lay engagement with, knowledge of, and use of the Gospels. It adopts a mixed method design based on questionnaire and interview. The design is weighted towards the quantitative survey by self-administered questionnaire with an interview phase complementing and supplementing the primary quantitative results.

A literature review revealed an almost complete lack of survey work in relation to Gospel literacy or lay engagement with the Gospels. Analysis of literature on previous survey work in biblical knowledge and the absence of any suitable questionnaires on the Gospels led to the development of a quantitative data collection questionnaire. Guidance for the content of the questionnaire was provided by a definition of transformative Gospel literacy which included knowledge of Gospel content, the ability to interpret that content and the capacity to apply the interpreted content in life and in relation to offering the Jesus story to non-Christians. This definition was itself derived from reflection on academic literature around biblical/Gospel literacy and analysis of the idea of transformation from academic, confessional and scriptural perspectives.

The resulting data questions were extensively explained, validated and tested with the aim of providing both a transparent survey instrument with possible wider applicability and a significant methodology for developing a useful questionnaire. In addition, and on the basis of grouping data questions, a number of unique indices were developed to gain deeper insight into what was known of the identity, teaching and mission of Jesus as understood by lay Anglicans, and to investigate the engagement with and influence of the Gospels in lay Anglican lives. A sample of 135 respondents was obtained and the resulting research data was processed using SPSS. The quantitative investigation was supplemented by a qualitative follow-up of which the results were brought into relationship with the quantitative findings in the final chapter.

Apart from providing a snapshot of the knowledge and understanding of the Gospels in the Diocese of Adelaide, the project produced results relevant to practical ministry. Findings included that greater knowledge of the Gospels was associated with greater application of the Gospels to daily life and significant issues affecting their lives. One significant and suggestive result was that laity who used electronic devices to engage with the Gospels were consistently more knowledgeable because of that engagement. A slim majority of the Diocese indicated that they interpreted the Gospels from a less traditional framework. The division between traditional and less traditional interpreters was clearly associated with churchmanship.

Findings indicated that lay members were not in the habit of recalling Gospel content, of reflecting on the Gospel content or considering its meaning for their lives. Many respondents appeared to be reluctant to discuss their Gospel knowledge, understanding or commitment with others, or able to articulate the basic story of Jesus. A majority felt underconfident to answer questions about the Gospels from family, friends or enquirers. A majority also indicated that the Gospels could play a greater part in their lives, and this was supported by significant gaps in lay knowledge of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels.

Feedback has indicated that completion of the quantitative questionnaire and reading of the completed thesis have both provided challenging and potentially transformative experiences in their own right. The project thus contributes to both practical and academic knowledge through the exploration and analysis of the largely unexplored area of lay engagement with the Gospels. As such I hope that it will provide outcomes for those concerned with education and discipleship in the Diocese of Adelaide, and hopefully will inspire others to investigate this neglected but increasingly important area of knowledge.

## List of Abbreviations

ABKT	Assessment of Bible Knowledge Test
a	agree
as	agree strongly
a/as	combination of categories agree and agree strongly
a/as/nad	combination of agree/agree strongly and neither agree nor disagree
BiLC	Bible in the Life of the Church Project
CODEC	the CODEC Research Centre for Digital Theology at Durham University
DD	Prefix identifying discipleship data questions
d	disagree
df	degrees of freedom
ds	disagree strongly
d/ds	combination of disagree and disagree strongly
d/ds/nad	combination of disagree/strongly disagree and neither agree nor disagree
nad	neither agree nor disagree
GDI	Gospels and Discipleship Index
GEI	Gospel Engagement Index
GII	Gospels and Issues Index
GKI	Gospel Knowledge Index
GLI	Gospels and Life Index
KD	Prefix identifying knowledge data questions
MLD	Prefix identifying meaning and language data questions
N	number in sample
NCD	Natural Church Development
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p	probability
PD	Prefix identifying personal profile data questions
RSE	Relative Standard Error
SBCT	Standardized Bible Content Test
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview of the project

This thesis will investigate the knowledge and understanding of the Gospels<sup>1</sup>, and the impact of that knowledge and understanding, on the lives of Anglican lay people in the Diocese of Adelaide in South Australia.<sup>2</sup> Gospel knowledge here refers to knowledge of the content of the Gospels by which readers come to know and follow Jesus. Gospel understanding refers to how what is known about the content is interpreted and yields meaning which shapes Christian lives.<sup>3</sup> The impact of that knowledge will be investigated according to what transformation that knowledge and understanding brings in their own Christian lives and the extent to which their active discipleship<sup>4</sup> brings transformation within their various communities. The project will also investigate respondents' assessment of their engagement with Jesus and the Gospel story, and whether and in what ways they believe it could be more powerful or transformative.

### The context of the proposed research

As an Anglican priest in various South Australian rural and city contexts for thirty years, I have encountered repeated patterns of disengagement between the Gospels and the life

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the words 'Gospel' and 'Gospels' are used to refer substantively to the four Gospels and adjectivally to qualify a noun as being related to the four Gospels: e.g., the phrase 'Gospel literacy' refers to literacy in the content and understanding of the four Gospels. 'Gospel story' refers to the story contained in the four Gospels and not to the good news in general (gospel) proclaimed in the New Testament. The latter use will be designated where intended using the word 'gospel'.

<sup>2</sup> The composition of the laity of the Diocese is not self-evident. It could refer for instance to self-identified Anglicans (e.g., those who identify as Anglican in the Census), church-attending Anglicans, those who attend Anglican churches, all baptised Anglicans or those who play some sort of more active role. For this project the laity, despite its moment-to-moment fluidity, is taken to mean those who are validly recorded on parish rolls and are thus attending church at least on a minimal basis.

<sup>3</sup> The Parable of the Sower at Matthew 13.3 – 9 and the interpretation, presumably from the early church, at Matthew 13.18 – 23 is a good example of both the distinction between content and interpretation and the derivation of meaning from content.

<sup>4</sup> The word 'discipleship' is used in this thesis to denote the very limited idea of verbal interaction. It is a convenient term which is readily understood in the sense of 'reaching out' to influence, in this case with respect to the Gospels. For a helpful summary of the complexity and detail of the term see R. L. Walton, "Ordinary Discipleship", in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed., J. Astley and L.J. Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 179.

of discipleship in many people I have pastored. This disengagement has included an observed lack of knowledge of the Gospels, inability to understand much of the Gospels except at a literal level, and a lack of transformed lives based on that knowledge and understanding.

The life and the message of Jesus are central to Christian commitment and practice. His relevance in any real and formative sense, other than as a good man who might inspire a reasonable person to live a good life, rather than the sacrificial and counter-cultural life that Jesus himself lived, has arguably been lost as far as I have noted in my extensive parish experience. My observation is that many people struggle to engage with Biblical, and particularly, Gospel content. That is, they seem to have only a superficial knowledge of the people, stories and flow of the Biblical and Gospel texts. This lack of transforming knowledge is evident in both comments offered and questions asked in many parish contexts. Many parishioners struggle to find ways of bringing faith in Jesus portrayed in the Gospels into an intentional and transformed orientation to life and a capacity to share their Christian convictions with family, friends and community connections. Whilst there could be many reasons contributing to this situation, I believe one important reason is that many cradle Anglicans have been brought up and schooled in the things of the church rather than in following Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Felten and Proctor note in the American context (although it is not too difficult to imagine a similar statement relating to other contexts):

...many churches have warped Jesus' life-transforming call to 'follow me' into a smorgasbord of methods for achieving wealth, health, and victory in a few painless and mindlessly easy steps.<sup>6</sup>

For all committed Christians, Scripture is the fundamental and essential source of knowledge of many dimensions of the *Missio Dei*, including the Christian story of salvation and Jesus the Messiah. Whilst the creeds may provide statements of Christian belief and some ontological understanding of Jesus' relationship to God, it is the Gospel story that provides the foundational requirements for following Jesus and living a Jesus-centred

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<sup>5</sup> This contrast, for example, is indicated in the difference between the creed and one's baptismal promises. The former is a church-originated statement of correct belief, the latter an action plan for following Jesus, arising from the Gospels. Most Anglicans can recite the former with a little help; my experience is that very few can list the four simple baptismal promises at all, viz, I turn to Christ, I repent of my sins, I reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust, I renounce Satan and all the works of evil. It has been my pastoral practice to challenge and encourage members to say their baptismal promises often if not daily.

<sup>6</sup> D. Felten and J. Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 4.

life. Clines recognizes this in one of his recommendations for the use of the Bible (Gospels) in the Church:

The church needs some new language for speaking about the Bible. It needs a language of function rather than ontology. It needs to be conceiving the Bible [Gospels] as an agent of human transformation rather than as a rule-book.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to Bible reading practices, Dr Village poses the significant question: “Is Biblical knowledge essential, or merely helpful, for ordinary Christians?”<sup>8</sup> I would maintain that Gospel knowledge is essential if the Christian is to be an active and committed follower of Jesus (i.e. disciple) rather than primarily a ‘member’ of the Church. In a more focused way, Ann Christie writes:

Only by becoming familiar with the Gospel stories, sayings and actions can Christians begin to learn what Jesus’ model of loving is. If there is no engagement with the Gospels, then the principle of love loses the radicality Jesus brought to it. Following the Golden Rule – do to others as you would have them do to you – is not the same as modelling one’s life on the radical ethic of Jesus and his pattern of self-giving love.<sup>9</sup>

Equally the traditions of the Church which have developed through its history offer, at their best, helpful contextual examples of and insights into living the Christian or Jesus-centred life, but these are not primary material. It is also true that the Bible can be read in many ways<sup>10</sup> including for its devotional and mystical knowledge of God. Many read the Bible for daily insight without having or needing cognitive knowledge of the content, formation and detailed meaning of the Biblical text. Read only at this level or in this way, however, I suspect the Gospel story leads infrequently to the transformation of life which it could and should but rather to a ‘daily wisdom for living’ modus operandi. R.R. Meyers notes, “The earliest metaphors of the gospel speak of discipleship as transformation through an alternative community and the reversal of conventional wisdom.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> D.J.A. Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press Limited, 2005), 91. Clines offers ten significantly helpful ‘Thoughts on the Use of the Bible in the Church’.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Village, *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics*. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007), 4.

<sup>9</sup> A. Christie, “Jesus as Exemplar”, in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. J. Astley and L.J. Francis, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 79.

<sup>10</sup> Examples would include reading for comfort in the face of distress and reading for guidance in difficult situations. See G. Jenks and J. H. Ellens, *The Once and Future Bible: An Introduction to the Bible for Religious Progressives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 32-34, for further examples.

<sup>11</sup> R.R. Myers, *Saving Jesus from the Church: How to Stop Worshipping Christ and Start Following Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 14.

This lack of knowledge and consequent lack of understanding of the story in the Gospels seems to be linked to the ways in which they are interpreted. One of my concerns, for example, is my observation that many Anglicans still see and read the Gospel narratives as quite literal and factual accounts of Jesus' life<sup>12</sup> with little or no understanding of the interpretive and other-than-literal meaning dimensions of these documents.<sup>13</sup> I have even been seriously accused by a priest colleague of undermining simple faith by portraying the Gospels as other than literal pictures.<sup>14</sup>

Another of my concerns for the faithful following of the Gospels in living a truly Christian life is illustrated by the way that I have seen more than a few congregational Anglicans accord with a questionable activity or attitude in society when it preserves their own sense of personal comfort. There is all too often a lack of committed appreciation that Christians are the very ones who are expected to behave otherwise. Jesus is a radical and counter cultural figure who issues a challenge to not only live according to certain tenets but also to challenge the status-quo where there is injustice or wrong-doing.<sup>15</sup> Understood this way it is important for genuine followers of Jesus to show other members of their community and society a different possibility for life and living. Indeed many Anglicans, in my experience, have been happy to relapse into social conformity in the face of controversy or confrontation.<sup>16</sup> In her Church of England context Ann Christie notes a similar effect in

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<sup>12</sup>A. Village, *The Bible and Lay People*, 70. As he develops a typology of literalism Andrew Village comments that "... literalism is the 'default' position of those who have a church background but little education." A literal understanding of Biblical stories is also held by most Americans. See "Most Take Bible Stories Literally," *Christian Century* 121, no. 5 (2004). See, however, David Walker, "The Religious Beliefs and Attitudes of Rural Anglican Churchgoers: Weekly and Occasional Attendees," *Rural Theology* 8, no. 2 (2011): 169 where he "...suggests strongly that biblical literalism is a minority position among both frequent and infrequent Anglican churchgoers."

<sup>13</sup> One extreme example was the fundamental disillusionment, and recriminatory words, including a threat of resignation, of a long-term member (and leading office holder) of a rural congregation on the basis of a very basic presentation of the redactional nature of the Gospels.

<sup>14</sup> Village, *The Bible and Lay People*, 73, where he points to the acute dilemma of the trained minister seeking to minister to congregations with no background in Biblical scholarship.

<sup>15</sup> C. Ashton and J. Nicholls, *A Faith Worth Sharing? A Church Worth Joining?* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 31. Referring to the Church of England, the author writes, "The Church, instead of being fashioned according to the standards given by Christ, has allowed itself to be formed by prevailing secular influences." and "As a Church we need to be very clear that our main business is to be the kind of community through which people can always find Christ, which challenges its members to true discipleship..."

<sup>16</sup> Felten and Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions*, 213, citing Thomas Merton, "The great tragedy of our age is the fact that there are so many godless Christians. Christians, that is, whose religion is a matter of pure conformity and expediency."

the ‘culturally accommodated’ version of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> She attributes this effect to laity not paying much attention to the text because they already think they know what the Bible (Gospels) teaches already and thus don’t use the Gospels self-consciously to inform personal spirituality. For Christie, this contributes to the failure to make connections between their own story and the story of Jesus. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this if the attender is simply interested in the communal aspects of church-going and its social activities.<sup>18</sup> But if this is where the commitment finishes then the Gospel is not being lived out by those who aspire to discipleship. An example of such limitations is the researcher’s repeated observation of the reversion to prejudice and emotion in even simple discussions of unsettled questions such as those of euthanasia and gay marriage. It is disappointing to witness again and again a lack of discipline and awareness in bringing Jesus to difficult life and personal/interpersonal situations, and vice-versa. In terms of challenging the status quo, as a religious reformer Jesus was primarily focused on the needs and situations of those persons and institutions who were not living in God’s sight or not leading the life that he believed they could be.

A further observation of this phenomenon is the reluctance many Anglicans have in offering even simple testimony to their faith.<sup>19</sup> I have rarely heard lay Anglicans make statements in public about what they believe, why they believe it and what difference it makes to everyday life and living. Writing in the Australian Anglican context Caroline Miley states, “Marked lack of enthusiasm for spreading the Gospel is a conspicuous feature of the Anglican church...”<sup>20</sup> There may be complex reasons for this lack, including the natural reticence which many Anglicans seem to have. Could that reluctance, be due, at least in part, to the apparent difficulty many have in addressing difficult questions in even a

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<sup>17</sup> A. Christie, *Ordinary Christology: Who do You Say I Am? Answers from the Pews* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012), 178-179.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note the ‘Adelaide Assembly’ which seeks to cater to people on exactly this basis of a communal Sunday morning gathering centred on music and speakers and social activity without any religious content. Their charter is:

The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation that celebrates life. Our motto: live better, help often, wonder more. Our mission: to help everyone find and fulfil their full potential.

Our vision: a godless congregation in every town, city and village that wants one.

<http://adelaide.sundayassembly.com/about/>. Accessed November 12, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Ashton and Nicholls, *A Faith Worth Sharing*, 31. “The Church, perhaps especially the Church of England, must face the fact that it has failed to proclaim the Gospel.”

<sup>20</sup> C. Miley, *The Suicidal Church: Can the Anglican Church be Saved?* (Sydney: Pluto Press Australia, 2002), 110.

basic way because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the story and person of Jesus who is, or should be, central to their faith?

The Bible is the prime source and major yardstick by which what is claimed to be Christian can be tested. That is, knowledge and understanding of the Gospel story in its context, content and meaning is crucial for Christian identity, formation and activity in personal life and the wider world. Lives are transformed through relationship with the living presence of Jesus founded on the Spirit, a presence which is necessarily mediated and assisted through knowledge of and engagement with the Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

Regarding a perceived lack of lay Gospel literacy, I have become aware of a growing interest in the state of lay literacy in many churches. I have consequently become aware of the lack of an explanation of what constitutes Gospel literacy, and also the lack of any empirical data on lay Bible/Gospel literacy, especially in the Australian context. In this project, I will respond to significant gaps in knowledge about and understanding of these issues, seeking to define transformative Gospel literacy and using this definition to explore via survey and interview the knowledge, understanding and application of the Gospels to lay lives in the Diocese of Adelaide.

## **The proposed research**

An examination of literature related to the knowledge, understanding and application of the Gospels by lay people reveals significant gaps in what is known and understood about the issues above. As will emerge in Chapter 3, I have been unable to locate:

- any empirical studies which seek to gauge knowledge of the content of the Gospels.
- any survey instruments which are designed to assess lay knowledge of the content of the Gospels.
- any definition of Gospel literacy. Many explanations of Biblical literacy, however, offer insight into this gap.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> As I deal with many references to 'Biblical literacy' I will indicate my belief that the use of that term by other author(s) includes particularly Gospel literacy by including the word Gospel(s) in brackets, and in square brackets where the inclusion is in a quotation. This preserves the integrity, intention and context of the original but indicates my extended or particularized understanding of the reference as being valid for my purposes in relation to Gospels.

- any studies in the Australian context which examine discipleship in relation to demographic factors or knowledge and understanding of the Gospels.
- any survey instruments investigating the state of discipleship in the Australian context.

In the absence of any significant literature from the Australian context, a review of relevant material from the Church of England and churches in the USA will provide in Chapter 3 a broad picture of engagement with Scripture in a western context.

A number of Anglican sources indicate a lack of serious Biblical knowledge and understanding among Anglican lay people.<sup>22</sup> In the wider context, the Report of the Anglican Communion ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project (BiLC) (titled ‘Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery’) clearly acknowledges the current lack of Biblical (Gospel) literacy.<sup>23</sup>

In the Australian context, Anglican Primate Archbishop Phillip Aspinall in his Brisbane Synod Presidential Address of 2012 made a major statement on the place of the Bible in the life of the Anglican Church and individual Anglicans. He identifies Biblical use and application as being a particular area of weakness in this statement:

Across over 50 parishes, the two NCD questions that emerge with the lowest score time and time again concern the Bible:

- The Bible is a powerful guide for me in the decisions of everyday life (Q.72); and
- I enjoy reading the Bible on my own (Q.84).<sup>24</sup>

In a highly relevant reference to this project Archbishop Aspinall stated in his Foreword to Jenks and Ellen’s recent book:

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<sup>22</sup> I need to make it clear that Anglican laity by and large are a warm, generous, loving and wonderful group of people who it has been a privilege to know and have as major contributors to my life. The single and narrow topic of this thesis is not about Anglican laity in general but about their engagement with the Gospels.

<sup>23</sup> Report on the ‘Bible in the Life of the Church Project’ titled *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery*. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/Bible/docs/pdf/FULL.pdf>. Accessed on August 25, 2013. In his forward to the report Rowan Williams, until recently Archbishop of Canterbury, commented:

Sadly, many churches will acknowledge that their people do not have the habit of familiarity with the Bible that they need, or that their Bible reading is restricted to the bits they like and know already. One of the things that I personally hope this project will help us develop in the Communion is a wider and fuller Biblical [Gospel] literacy.

<sup>24</sup> P. Aspinall, *Presidential Address to Synod 2012*. <http://anglicanbrisbane.org.au/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2012/10/Synod-Presidential-Address1.pdf>, Accessed on September 24, 2013. NCD stands for Natural Church Development.

Few Anglicans in Brisbane have any depth of knowledge of the Bible; few read or study the Bible [Gospels] regularly; and most of us have little sense of encountering the reality of God in and through Scripture. Consequently, few Anglicans can speak passionately about their experience of God or feel comfortable speaking about their faith with others.<sup>25</sup>

Archbishop Aspinall's Synod Presidential Report and the Report of the Anglican Communion with its concern about the future of Bible engagement taken together highlight the need for active interest in the state of Gospel knowledge and understanding and encouragement in discipleship amongst the laity.

With the decline of mainline churches<sup>26</sup> I believe discipleship and following Jesus will wax, in much the way that it did in the earliest years of the Jesus movement, as our accustomed institutional church structures wane.<sup>27</sup> Anglican priest Kenneth Leech says that “a renewed spirituality must be a Kingdom spirituality, a spirituality of the fulfilment of God’s transforming work in human history. In this spirituality, the figure of Jesus will be central and there will be a need to follow his teaching and to enter into his vision.”<sup>28</sup> The same belief stood behind the ‘Jesus: All about Life’<sup>29</sup> campaign, which was based on the observation that whilst the churches were declining, interest in Jesus – what he did, what he stood for and what he offered – was not.<sup>30</sup> This increasing movement towards following Jesus<sup>31</sup> will I believe be Bible/Gospel centred, and a focus on leading people towards a

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<sup>25</sup> Jenks and Ellens, *The Once and Future Bible*, Foreword.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Mackay, *Beyond Belief* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2016), Kindle Edition. 121-125. “Although 61 percent of Australians ... still tick ‘Christian’ in the national census, only about 15 percent attend church once a month or more often, and regular weekly attenders are down to about 8 percent of the population... Those figures need to be put in the context of a steady rise in the number of people reporting ‘no religion’ in the census, now standing at 22 percent of Australians.”

<sup>27</sup> Jenks and Ellens, *The Once and Future Bible*, 193-194. They present a credible but brief outline of a future shape of the church.

<sup>28</sup> K. Leech, *The Eye of the Storm: Spiritual Resources for the Pursuit of Justice* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> P. Downey and Salier. B, *Jesus: All About Life*, (Bible Society NSW, 2009). The campaign sought to bring the message of the Gospel to the Australian community using the media as the catalyst for city-wide evangelistic ministry with the local church as the delivery point. The challenge was to present articles of Christian faith as powerful truths, without implying that they are either unique or exclusive, providing non-threatening encouragement and constructive facilitation for personal interactions between non-Christians and Christians. <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/jesus-all-about-life> Accessed October 3, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/jesus-all-about-life>. Accessed October 10, 2016. Bible Society NSW carried out research which revealed that “Christianity is widely rejected by most non-Christians as an anachronistic and undesirably rigid set of doctrines, while the Church is widely regarded as an old-fashioned organisation that is guilty of failing to live up to its own ideals of tolerance, forgiveness and humility.”

<sup>31</sup> This claim is made in the sense of the clearly decreasing numbers of church-attending Anglicans in the Diocesan and Australian Anglican context and the evidence for a greater number who directly or indirectly

mature and competent knowledge and understanding of the Gospels will become more and more important over time.

A starting point for serious engagement with the Gospels is the discovery of what is known of the content and interpretation of the Gospels, and what influence the Gospels are actually exercising in Anglican lives in the Adelaide Diocese. This thesis sets out to contribute to that starting point. It is a descriptive and exploratory thesis which tests no proposition but seeks only to paint a picture of Gospel knowledge and engagement in the Diocese of Adelaide. This exploration and description will be guided by the notion of transformative Gospel literacy. This ‘lens’ will provide the basis for developing, selecting and justifying the data questions<sup>32</sup> to explore the Research Questions. This task of discovery thus calls for:

- a clear explanation of Gospel literacy and the development of a definition and explanation of transformative Gospel literacy.
- the development of fully documented quantitative data questions rigorously derived from this definition.
- the development of a quantitative research instrument based on those data questions to determine what is known and understood about the Gospels and the state of discipleship.
- the development of a qualitative research instrument to complement and supplement the quantitative survey.

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still own the Christian philosophy which Jesus expounded. Hugh McKay in his book *Beyond Belief* states this situation as:

“...there is a growing band of ‘cultural Christians’, too – people who observe the Christian festivals, sign up, broadly speaking, to Christian values, **admire Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet, teacher and exemplar** (emphasis added), send their children to Christian schools, but profess no faith in a supernatural God. They may well describe their Christianity as a philosophy rather than a religion.” Mackay, Hugh. *Beyond Belief* (Kindle Locations 2452-2455). Pan Macmillan Australia. Kindle Edition. This conviction is echoed strongly in the recent book by S.C. Devenish, *Ordinary Saints: Lessons in the Art of Giving Away Your Life* (Cascade Books, 2017), 2, where Devenish writes “...the ‘Way’ of Jesus is now itself in need of revitalization. The parable of the healing water illustrates how Christianity’s life-giving gospel began to lose its strength when it became swallowed up by big-R institutional religion.”

<sup>32</sup> The term ‘data questions’ will be used consistently to distinguish the questionnaire items from the Research Questions and to remind the reader that these are the questions which are designed to yield raw data for analysis.

## **The basic research questions**

Through the lens of transformative Gospel literacy and based on queries arising from my personal ministry experience in the Diocese, the project will investigate and evaluate the knowledge and understanding of Jesus and the Gospels by a representative group of lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide in the early 21st Century. It will also gauge the impact of their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels on their own Christian lives and their lives of discipleship.

The four Research Questions are:<sup>33</sup>

1. What do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the content of the Gospels?
2. How do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels?
3. In what way does their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels make a difference in their own lives?
4. In what way do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference in the lives of others?

In differentiating between knowledge and understanding of the NT and Gospels I intend to determine what is known of the written content (which I am calling knowledge) of the material and after that in what ways the story told in the Gospels is comprehended (which I am calling understanding).<sup>34</sup>

## **Research design and methodology**

I intend to obtain information required to answer the Research Questions by employing a cross sectional research design using a mixed methods approach based on quantitative

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<sup>33</sup> The capitalized 'Research Questions' is used from this point on to denote the particular research questions which are the subject of this investigation. Research questions as a general category is denoted as 'research questions'.

<sup>34</sup> I understand that most if not all lay Anglicans can read the words of the Gospel. It is well known, however, that children can be taught to interpret and articulate the sounds related to marks on a page but have no idea of what they mean as a sentence or thought structure. I am reminded of the Comprehension Question on the Year 12 English Expression paper which I sat in 1964, which was expressly included to check that the student could assign value to individual words and also assign meaning to the various formations of words including clauses, sentences, paragraphs and passages.

survey and qualitative interview techniques.<sup>35</sup> The basic instruments will be a sixty-nine-item questionnaire in four sections, and an eight-question interview. The fundamental aim of using a mixed methods strategy is that the data from both approaches will illuminate each other and consequently paint a picture of significant breadth and depth, not just breadth which might be obtained by quantitative survey or depth which might be obtained by qualitative interview.<sup>36</sup>

I anticipate making descriptive and analytical statements and assessments in Chapters 6, 7 and 9 based on the questionnaire and interview data. In the final chapter I will collect, relate and evaluate the quantitative and qualitative findings and indicate areas for both further research and for consideration towards action by the Diocese. The essence of the project is exploration, description and analysis leading to possible direction for further action.

## **Key components of the project**

The project will be presented in ten chapters including the introductory chapter.

1. Chapter 2 will present a review of academic and other literature relating to transformation and Gospel literacy leading to the development of the key concept of transformative Gospel literacy which underpins the project. This definition will be later used to provide a basis for developing questions for the quantitative and qualitative questionnaires to explore the Research Questions and in the last chapter for providing some assessment of the Gospel literacy of lay Anglicans in Adelaide.
2. Chapter 3 will present a review of empirical and survey material which might be illustrative for and helpful to the project. The tasks required to investigate each Research Question will determine what literature will be reviewed. The basic Research Questions outlined in Chapter 1 will be stated in more detail with the tasks required for the investigation indicating the relevant literature to be explored.

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<sup>35</sup> The research design and methodology is explained and justified in Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup> J. W. Creswell, and V. L. P. Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2011), 9.

3. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and mixed-method design which is used to investigate the Research Questions. The design of the enquiry is described and justified and the theory for the conduct of the survey and interviews described.
4. Following on from the proposed definition of transformative Gospel literacy, Chapter 5 describes the development of a comprehensive quantitative survey instrument addressing the four Research Questions. Four sections are developed, and reasons are offered for the inclusion of each question. The questions are further grouped into six unique indices related to Gospel knowledge and discipleship. These indices are described and explained and allow a more detailed view of the univariate data and wider contingency analysis.
5. Chapter 6 describes the analysis of results of the quantitative survey in relation to Research Questions 1 and 2. This includes univariate analysis of the survey data and bivariate analysis to discern factors which affect Gospel knowledge and understanding. It also contains the development of a Gospel Knowledge Index which yields some indication of the state of knowledge of the content of the Gospels by the sample of lay Adelaide Anglicans. In respect of Research Question 2, a further index is developed based on more traditional or less traditional understanding of the Gospels.
6. Chapter 7 describes the analysis of results in relation to Research Questions 3 and 4. This analysis includes description of the state of Gospel engagement and discipleship within the Diocese of Adelaide, and exploration of the factors which affect the part played by the Gospels in their lives and their discipleship.
7. Chapter 8 includes the reasoning behind and derivation of the qualitative interview questions which are based on the four Research Questions and particular findings from the quantitative survey. The administration of the interviews is described.
8. Chapter 9 contains the analysis of responses to the qualitative interview questions and the relating of this analysis to the Research Questions and quantitative results.
9. The concluding chapter (Chapter 10) will provide a summary of the project, outline conclusions and relate the outcomes of the project to the reasons for the re-

search nominated in Chapter 1. This chapter will include the highlighting of particular findings of interest and suggest further possibilities for research and investigation.

## **The value of the project**

My comprehensive survey of empirical literature will reveal a failure to discover any significant research of lay knowledge and understanding of the Gospels and their role in lived Christian lives within the Australian context. Consequently, this thesis will seek to address these gaps with the following initial contributions, which include:

- insights into how the Gospels are known, understood and applied by a representative group of Australian Anglicans,
- a contribution to the tapestry which the Report of the ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Anglican Communion Project entitled *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery* is seeking to weave. That is, this thesis will offer one micro project and its detail to complement the global ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project (BiLC) by offering insights into a particular Diocese which might be instructive for other Dioceses and churches.
- the development of an initial rigorous notion of transformative Gospel literacy derived from analysis of scripture, confessional documents and academic writing in the area.
- the development and validation of survey and interview instruments which may be of assistance to other researchers of lay Gospel knowledge and understanding. These could then facilitate further work in this important area of Christian life, living and engagement in Australian society and an increasingly pluralistic world.
- information about Gospel usage and significance in the lives of Adelaide Anglicans to further Diocesan educational initiatives and so assist in the increasing post-Christendom focus on following Jesus rather than ‘doing church’.

- a contribution to the emerging challenge of ordinary theology to conduct empirical investigation into lay belief and practice, and employment of the tools of social science to the investigation of lived Christian experience.<sup>37</sup>

Successful completion of this thesis will be of academic interest to a range of researchers and institutions concerned with the concept of Gospel literacy and the place of the Gospels and the story of Jesus in the life of Christians. I hope it will offer encouragement for the Diocese of Adelaide and similar Anglican dioceses to further explore discipleship initiatives.

Before addressing the four Research Questions, however, I need to:

- develop and explain the notion of transformative Gospel literacy which provides the lens through which the Research Questions are addressed and the literacy of Anglican laity in Adelaide explored.
- explore what empirical and survey work has been done in this area previously.
- outline and justify a methodology foundational for the construction/development of the two questionnaires and for the analysis used to achieve insight into the Research Questions.

To these tasks I now turn in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

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<sup>37</sup> J. Astley, “The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology,” in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed J. Astley and L.J. Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 4, where Astley writes:

“...empirical studies which report either rich qualitative data derived from small samples, or more representative analyses based on quantitative data from larger populations. We must welcome this work; the church needs much more of it.”

This need is further underwritten in the same volume at page 180 where Ann Christie writes “...without further empirical work it is difficult to know how the story of Jesus does impact on ordinary believers’ attitudes, values and behaviour.” and on page 187, where Roger Walton writes “There is a need to tackle ordinary discipleship more ‘head on’, and explore some of the questions about belief and practice with ordinary disciples at greater length and in greater depth.”

## CHAPTER 2

### TRANSFORMATIVE GOSPEL LITERACY

#### **Introduction**

Before outlining and justifying a methodology and developing the instruments for gaining relevant information comes the need to explain and develop the theoretical background and key concepts which will guide the practical aspects of the project. It is also necessary to develop key definitions and survey key literature relevant to Gospel literacy. This chapter sets out to examine the two key concepts of transformation and Gospel literacy.

Firstly, I will explore transformation as a primary aim<sup>38</sup> of Biblical and Gospel literacy and establish an Anglican and Diocesan context. This task necessitates explanation of the notion of transformation, an examination of the Gospel background of transformation and its place in Anglican lay lives. Secondly, of key importance is the concept of Gospel Literacy.<sup>39</sup> An examination of Gospel literacy will include the notion of literacy and a review of academic examination of Bible and Gospel literacy. From these two explorations, I will develop a concept of transformative Gospel literacy which will provide a guide for developing the data questions and for comments on the state of Gospel literacy in the Diocese.

#### **Transformation**

An important aim of this thesis captured in Research Questions 3 and 4 is to probe whether or not respondents' knowledge and understanding of the Gospels makes a difference in their own lives and, through them, in the lives of others. Have the Gospels made a difference to them? Do the Gospels affect their daily lives and decision-making? Do they bring the Gospels into the lives of others in significant ways? Traditionally these activities/changes/differences have been referred to as transformation. It is an aim of this

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph V. Crockett, "Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective That Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as They Engage Scripture Texts," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (2005): 99, where he states that the primary goal of Scripture engagement is deliberative thought and continuous pledges of allegiance.

<sup>39</sup> Whilst much has been written on Biblical literacy, very little has been found directly written on Gospel literacy. The Gospels are generally taken as a genre within the Bible or New Testament

project to examine transformation in the lives of lay Adelaide Anglicans through their Gospel experience.

## **Background to transformation**

Transformation in its most basic sense is simply change whether in form, appearance, nature, or character, from one state to another. Transformation of the human creature is, however, a complex matter. There are many possible dimensions of transformation and many factors which play a part in any transformational movement. It is acknowledged that psychological, spiritual, intellectual, emotional and social factors will play their part in any personal transformation. Questions arise as to what actually constitutes a transformative movement and how transformation is detected and assessed. In relation to factors leading to transformation, the Gospels are only part of a complex whole. For the purpose of this project, transformation in general is taken as the change of attitude or belief (which may be demonstrated by action or activity) leading to a changed or different way of living. It will be consistent with the teachings and example of Jesus shown in the Gospels, notwithstanding the ever-present smaller and larger shortfalls associated with our human behaviour. In concrete terms, whilst transformation cannot be defined, in the context of living the Christian life it can be characterized as including one or more of:

- movement from the values of the world associated with power, wealth, personal success to the values of the Kingdom associated with service, sacrifice and the neighbour.
- growth in agapaic love, care and compassion.
- willingness to trust increasingly in God's care and growth, resolving to follow Jesus through sacrifice and suffering.

Change can be rapid or slow, partial or complete. In the New Testament context radical transformation as pictured in Chapter 21 of Revelation can be related to the whole entity and take place instantaneously – the apocalyptic hope of massive change for the better and specially in the face of overwhelming threat. Gradual change, the paradigm of change more associated in a Biblical sense with the urgings of the OT prophets, is the more com-

mon way of change for human beings in their lives. In this thesis, the focus is on transformation in people's lived daily lives.<sup>40</sup> In asking appropriate 'transformational' questions (questions seeking to ascertain some aspect of change associated with Jesus and/or the Gospels in lay Anglicans' lives), it may be possible to ascertain in what ways and measures respondents associate aspects of change in their lives because of the Gospels. I would assert that this is a practical way to make any assessment of personal transformation given that a fully ethnographic approach would always leave open the question of which factors might have brought about any observed change. The genuineness, permanence and detail of such self-acknowledged change, however, will remain beyond this questionnaire based exploration.

Transformation is at least one if not the prime motif of Jesus' ministry. Jesus comes proclaiming the Kingdom of God, which is essentially a different way of being and behaving which stands in direct contrast to the usual motivations such as greed and fear which motivate so much human behaviour in our world. That is, Jesus comes proclaiming the need to change, to live and behave in a different way, which is to turn to God, to live a truly and fully human life. The proclamation is symbolized directly in the transforming activity which the Gospel writers portray being carried out by Jesus. Jesus preaches change or transformation in, for example, the parables in general and of the Kingdom in particular. A classic example is the parable of the leaven found in Luke 13.20 and Matthew 13.33:

To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.

Here the leaven or yeast, which is small in quantity, acts on the much greater three measures of meal to change that meal into something useful and desirable. The Kingdom is likened to the agent of change, which is the leaven and, at a deeper suggestive level, as an outcome by which the transformed meal becomes a loaf.

But it is pre-eminently in his healing, exorcising, miracles and restoration to life that Jesus is visibly seen as God's transforming power. The lives of the possessed and the sick are quite literally transformed. A powerful example of this transformation is found in the

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<sup>40</sup> The theological reality of transformation at baptism in which a baptized person is moved from being not a member of the body of Christ/not in receipt of the Spirit into being a member/a recipient of the Spirit, is acknowledged, but this project is not seeking to explore other than transformation in the practical or lived Christian life.

healing of the leper.<sup>41</sup> At the immediate level the leper is freed from the physical disfigurement and discomfort of leprosy. But the real depth of transformation is the instant change from radical exclusion from life with non-afflicted persons to inclusion in the religious, social and economic life of the Israelite society in which they found themselves. The same can be said of the exorcisms and even at this great distance in time our hearts go out to a madman living in chains in a cemetery. We can rejoice at a figure now no longer living in restraint, no longer living in a place of the dead and now able to join his community and live the fullness (albeit in the shadow of sin) of God's intention for him.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the miracle of the raising of the widow's son in the story of the Widow of Nain epitomises transformation – from death to life; from all that denies God's presence to all that affirms God's magnanimity.<sup>43</sup> No matter how the story is read, whether literally, symbolically or metaphorically it is by any account a story of radical transformation brought about by Jesus.

The centrality of transformation in Christ is witnessed in the first layer of the New Testament in Paul's writings. Paul uses the verb μεταμορφωω in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2 and specifically relates it to the Christian life in the latter reference:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Understood in the context of the verse is that the renewal of the mind is the change which takes place in accord with the oral witness to Jesus and for later generations the teaching offered by the Gospels and indeed the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels. The 'new life' referred to by Paul is none other than the outcome and ongoing reality of this transformation and is a constant and important focus for Paul's exhortation to his addressees.

Of the use of the verb μεταμορφωω Behm writes in TDNT:<sup>44</sup>

As regards believers, transformation begins already in this life... this is not mystical deification but the reattainment of the divine likeness. It does not take place by rituals but by the ministry of the Spirit. It is not for an elite few but for all Christians. It is not just a hope for the future but begins already with the coming of the Spirit as a deposit. It carries

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<sup>41</sup> Luke 5: 12-16.

<sup>42</sup> Mark 5: 1–20, particularly v 19.

<sup>43</sup> Luke 7: 11–17.

<sup>44</sup> G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, and G.W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 609.

with it an imperative (Rom. 12:2). Set in the new aeon, Christians must reshape their conduct in accordance with it. This takes place as their minds and wills are renewed by the Spirit.

What takes place in the minds and wills being renewed by the Spirit is the ‘how’ and is well put in an unpublished article by Dallas Willard.<sup>45</sup> Using the analogues of learning a language and the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve steps program, Willard discerns a pattern of personal transformation which centres on vision, intention and means. The vision is that of our life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus brought the vision - Jesus is the vision. The importance and relevance of this analysis for this project is that the vision is mediated necessarily through the Gospels. This is not to suggest that personal/spiritual transformation is principally about ‘knowing’ the Gospels, although for some that will no doubt be true. But the deeper truth is that one must engage with the Gospels to engage the vision, in whatever way, for themselves. Likewise, the intention is founded in trusting Jesus and his teachings, and again engagement with the Gospels is a necessary step. Willard makes it clear that personal transformation is based in engaging with Christ which means, for us, engaging with the Gospels through the mediation of the Spirit. It needs to be said that personal transformation can take place, using Willard’s paradigm of vision, intention and means, under other visions than that offered by Christ. We are focused in this thesis on Christ/Spirit inspired transformation claimed by those who are Christian, in this case lay Anglicans in a particular Diocese.

A helpful Biblical view of transformation in Christian practice is offered by Felten and Proctor-Murphy.

Both being ‘born again’ and being ‘saved’ suggest one-time, static achievements. But the first disciples were called the people on ‘the Way,’ suggesting just the opposite: transformation, transition, and change – a dynamic way of life.<sup>46</sup>

This view is directly supported in the Anglican Communion document ‘Anglicans in Mission’. The Report states:

The first Christians were called ‘followers of the Way’. They were a transforming force in apostolic times. Their concern was not only to ‘talk the talk’, but to ‘walk the walk’. Transformation in this light means action to establish conditions where wholeness of life may be enjoyed.

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<sup>45</sup> D. Willard, “Living a Transformed Life Adequate to our Calling” (Unpublished: Prepared for the Augustine Group, 2005). <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119>, Accessed May 20, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Felten and Procter-Murphy, *Living the Questions*, 215.

While the word ‘development’ might suggest that communities can reach a satisfactory level of growth, ‘transformation’ suggests that growth does not end – that it continues until “*the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ*” (Revelation 11:15).

<sup>47</sup>

Whilst transformation can be understood theologically in a number of ways including the traditional view expressed of being born again, this project starts from a dynamic this-worldly perspective, that “transformative spirituality is about the positive transformation of our lives, our relationships and our way of being in the world.”<sup>48</sup> In my view Jesus was primarily interested in helping people to lead progressively more truly and fully human God-centred lives today and tomorrow – lives lived towards, and finally in, the Kingdom - rather than achieving a particular status or state, whether in this life or another. Marcus Borg captures the idea well:

The emerging paradigm sees the Christian life as a life of relationship and transformation. Being Christian is not about meeting requirements for a future reward in an afterlife, and not very much about believing. Rather, the Christian life is about a relationship with God that transforms life in the present.<sup>49</sup>

Anglican lay people in the Diocese of Adelaide engage with the Gospels presumably to live a particular sort of life – the life modelled in the Gospels which leads to peace, love, joy, meaning and fulfilment. They do not engage with the Gospels or Bible (or Church for that matter) for simple enjoyment like one would with a novel or for general interest as one might with a non-fiction work of any sort, but rather for an outcome which we characterize as transformation – moving from something less to something more: living life more fully and authentically as against living for worldly goals without intrinsic meaning which do not meet the needs of our spiritual. And for any individual to engage with the transformative figure and power of Jesus, no matter what their own individual and unique context and characteristics might be, they must engage with the Gospels.

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<sup>47</sup> ANGLICANS IN MISSION: A TRANSFORMING JOURNEY: Report of MISSIO, the Mission Commission of the Anglican Communion, 1999, 6. [www.anglicancommunion.org/media/108028/MISSIO-Anglicans-in-Mission-1999.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/108028/MISSIO-Anglicans-in-Mission-1999.pdf). Accessed October 15, 2106.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>49</sup> M. J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2004), 14.

The importance of transformation as a key ingredient of Anglican thought and practice is clearly shown in the ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project and its supporting documents.<sup>50</sup> The project centres on transformation:

This project..., is an attempt to let the churches of the Communion reflect on the ways in which they actually use the Bible – how they read it, whom they read it with, what they bring to the reading, what their experience is of transformation.<sup>51</sup>

The following representative quotations, set in context, are among over twenty-five uses of the word ‘transform’ and its cognates:

From the Foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury:

...Anglicans have consistently given Scripture the supreme role of deciding the limits of what can and must be believed; and they have tried to listen to Scripture in the expectation of being converted and transformed by the Spirit whose action underlies the words on the page.

...the living God, whose eternal Word became flesh to reconcile us to the Father and transform us by his Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

In footnote 5 on page 8, which outlines the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, the communal dimension of transformation is made clear in the fourth of the Marks: [4] To seek to transform unjust structures of society.

From the reflections of the South African Regional Group we hear of the external and internal dimensions of transformation:

Some groups tried to move from Bible study to action directly (*over the environment*) but for most it was more like a ‘transformation of consciousness’ which might or might not lead to action in the longer term.<sup>53</sup>

The methodology of this Group was based on Contextual Bible Study (CBS) which is itself predicated on the outcome of transformation and always has transformation as its end-goal.<sup>54</sup> In a different group – the North American Regional Group – an interesting

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<sup>50</sup> In the main ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Report and the two major supporting documents – ‘What the Anglican Communion has said about the Bible 1 and 2’ – the word transform with cognates appears 26 times. In all the literature produced in conjunction with the project transform or cognates appear, on simple portable document format search, well over 100 times, although not all refer to the transformation of people, institutions or structures.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Bible in the Life of the Church.,’ 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Bible in the Life of the Church,’ 16.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 17-18. CBS is defined as an interactive study of Biblical texts that brings the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into dialogue for the sake of transformation.

observation was that despite considerable interpretive differences all groups which met could “testify to the transformative power of engagement with the Biblical (Gospel) text.”<sup>55</sup> From the same group an individual summative response said:

Scripture is God’s Word and has transforming power in people’s lives. We need to keep encouraging Anglicans to read and study the Bible (Gospels).<sup>56</sup>

In these examples, practical engagement with the Bible is clearly seen to lead to transformation in one way or another. It was interesting to note in the Australian Regional Report that discussion was limited to the use and place of the Bible in different theological persuasions, and no mention of outcomes, action or transformation was in evidence. Given the stated aim of the BiLC Report to gauge the experience of transformation through Bible engagement throughout the Communion, there is clearly scope for investigation of the transformative power of Bible engagement in the Australian context.

Further evidence of the Anglican focus on Scripture and transformation is found in many official and semi-official Anglican Communion documents. A useful example is found in the Anglican Communion covenant, Section One, paragraph 1.2.5

...Biblical texts are received, read and interpreted faithfully, respectfully, comprehensively and coherently, with the expectation that Scripture continues to illuminate and transform the Church and its members, and through them, individuals, cultures and societies.<sup>57</sup>

The BiLC Project Steering Group offered, in summary, seven principles derived from the body of the Study.<sup>58</sup> In elaboration of the sixth we hear:

The Bible reveals the truth about our journey and the power of the Spirit guides us as we deepen our understanding and let it transform our lives over time.<sup>59</sup>

Principle 7 itself reads:

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>57</sup> The full text of the Anglican Communion Covenant can be found at: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm>. Accessed May 2016.

<sup>58</sup> “What the Anglican Communion has said about the Bible 2: Themes and Principles”. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/254164/2-Themes-Principles.pdf>. Accessed May 3, 2016. This document, along with its partner document “What the Anglican Communion has said about the Bible 1: Extracts.” provides comprehensive and historical overview of both direct and derived Anglican pronouncements on the place and use of Scripture in the Anglican Communion.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 8.

We listen to the Scriptures with open hearts and attentive minds accepting their authority for our lives and expecting that we will be transformed and renewed by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the challenge and importance of transformation in Anglicanism is noticeably emphasized in the Anglican Communion document *MISSIO*.<sup>61</sup> The document contains over seventy references to ‘transform’ and its cognates, and a section titled ‘Mission as Transformation’. While it is more concerned with transformation of institutions, communities, society, nations and the created order<sup>62</sup>, there is clear acknowledgement that personal transformation is important albeit not the whole of transformation.

Diverse Anglican liturgical formularies contain scattered references to transformation, especially in collects. The connection between transformation and the future is, however, clearly referenced within a national Diocese. At a local level, Ken Morgan, Anglican priest and coordinator of Parish Renewal for the Diocese of Melbourne in Australia, writes:

The most fundamental aspect of making the Word of God fully known is to be personally transformed by it: the first task of mission is to faithfully be our ‘new selves...’<sup>63</sup>

Transformation on the basis of the Gospels and under the guidance of the Spirit is a foundational aspect of Anglicanism that cannot be doubted. Research Question 3 seeks to respond to this conviction that transformation is fundamental to genuinely Anglican being and living by asking whether the Gospels make a difference or bring change in respondents’ lives.

### **Transformation in this thesis**

For this project, transformation is understood as change in either character, attitudes or activities towards that which is more Gospel or Christ-centred. It will be gauged through respondents’ self-assessment via questionnaire and self-disclosure in interview as to whether or not the Gospels have played a significant part in change in their lives, and specifically whether the following are, or are not, in evidence:

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> *ANGLICANS IN MISSION: A TRANSFORMING JOURNEY*. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ken Morgan, “Credible witness to Christ depends on our own transformation,” *The Melbourne Anglican*, June 2016, 6.

- awareness of Jesus in daily life and/or the ordinary events of life,
- acknowledgment of Jesus as an important influence in shaping character and attitudes,
- a Jesus-centred perspective when making decisions which have moral or ethical implications,
- awareness of following Jesus' teachings as portrayed in the Gospels,
- whether they could be leading more Jesus-centred lives.

A final and focusing word on transformation is in order. As he laments the modern American inability to speak the language of faith, David Nienhuis pointedly comments that Biblical (Gospel) literacy programs need to do more than produce *informed quoters* - they need to produce *transformed readers*.<sup>64</sup> In a specifically Anglican context a similar sentiment is found in a statement from Extracts from 2008 Communion, Conflict and Hope<sup>65</sup> - "...the Commission highlights the Bible's role in transforming lives rather than in providing information."

## **Gospel literacy**

Biblical literacy and Gospel literacy are not synonymous terms. Both involve direct knowledge of content and similar engagement with the documents, but the scope of the literacy is quite different. One important aspect of any consideration of Biblical literacy is the genre of the book or passage in the Bible being considered. The genre plays a crucial role in interpreting any given passage. Gospel literacy is a subset of Biblical literacy where the single genre of Gospel is a given, albeit that genre may be both understood and read in quite different ways.

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<sup>64</sup> David R. Nienhuis, "The Problem of Evangelical Biblical Illiteracy: A View from the Classroom," *Modern Reformation* 19, no. 1 (2010). <http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=1110&var3=authorbio&var4=AutRes&var5=400>. Accessed September 3, 2014.

<sup>65</sup> The Kuala Lumpur Report of the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission [Part III *Sustaining Communion*. Sections 62-73]. [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/iatdc/docs/communion\\_conflict\\_&\\_hope.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/iatdc/docs/communion_conflict_&_hope.pdf) Accessed April 5, 2015.

## Background to Biblical (Gospel)<sup>66</sup> literacy

It is helpful to begin a background exploration of Gospel literacy with some comments about the current state of Gospel literacy, the problems perceived and their consequences for Gospel literacy, together with an examination of various definitions and descriptions offered in the literature. On that basis, I will proceed to offer a working description of transformative Gospel literacy on which to base the practical aspects of the project.

There are a number of writers who have examined the state of Biblical literacy in recent articles. Albeit mostly from the American context,<sup>67</sup> both cultural commonality and theoretical points may invite reflection. In an article discussing the Bible reading statistics from the National Study of Christian Attitudes and Behaviours, the author reflects, and perhaps sounds a warning, on the distinction between reading and really reading:

... I find that most people don't know the basic plot and storyline of the Bible... let alone the specific arguments of the various books... People can read the Bible daily but only as a devotional book - just dipping into familiar texts day after day, but still not really knowing the Book.<sup>68</sup>

Whilst reading the Bible (Gospels) for devotional or other non-cognitive reasons such as comfort and solace is entirely valid, this form of reading by itself does not lead to what might reasonably be called 'Gospel literacy'. One might come to know certain passages or groups of passages well, but Gospel literacy implies at the very least some sort of overarching knowledge and understanding of the four Gospels as a composite whole, as well as the four considered individually and the story and stories they tell.

People are also being offered other ways of reading short de-contextualized Bible passages. Murray Hogg looks at the impact of new technology on Biblical literacy and concludes that new technology can lead us to read Scripture badly.<sup>69</sup> He is not against new technology but traces unintended consequences from historical instances including the invention of the codex, the printing press, data projection of hymns and services and the computerised concordance. His central thrust is that the Bible (Gospels) is essentially

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<sup>66</sup> It is appropriate to remind the reader that the term (Gospel) included after Biblical indicates my belief that comments made about the Bible are also applicable to the Gospels in the nominated instances.

<sup>67</sup> No significant Australian studies of either Biblical or Gospel literacy were located in the literature search.

<sup>68</sup> Sam O'Neal, "American Christians and Bible Reading," *Your Church* 55, no. 3 (2009): 7.

<sup>69</sup> M. Hogg, "Reading Scripture Badly: The Technological Threat to Biblical Literacy." A paper presented at Queen's College, University of Melbourne, October 30, 2010. [http://www.iscast.org/journal/opinion/Hogg\\_M\\_2012-02\\_Reading\\_Scripture\\_badly.pdf](http://www.iscast.org/journal/opinion/Hogg_M_2012-02_Reading_Scripture_badly.pdf). Accessed March 24, 2014.

narrative and story and modern electronics works in short 'bites' leaving many with a knowledge of bits and pieces but no real idea of the overall narrative.

The Bible [Gospels] is a piece of prolonged writing; as people lose the capability to engage with prolonged writing so they lose the capability to engage with the Bible.<sup>70</sup>

David R. Nienhuis, lamenting poor and declining Biblical literacy among confessing Christians, and lamenting the inability of his Christian university students to correctly order four events from the NT (only 32% of students were able to correctly sequence Jesus' baptism, Peter's denial of Jesus, the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost and John's vision on Patmos) comments:

These students may know isolated Bible trivia...but their struggle to locate key stories and their inability to place those stories in the Bible's larger plotline, betrays a serious lack of *intimacy* (author's italics) with the text.<sup>71</sup>

Nienhuis goes on to survey the various cultural, educational and sociological factors which he believes underlie this increasing Biblical illiteracy before concluding his article by asking what actually comprises Biblical literacy and observing that an agreed-upon definition is itself part of the problem. His answer is instructive.

...it involves a more detailed understanding of the Bible's actual content. This requires: (1) schooling in the substance of the entire Biblical story in all its literary diversity; ... and (3) instruction in the complex theological task of interpreting Scripture in the light of the tradition of the church and the experience of the saints.<sup>72</sup>

A significant contrast is an article by Donna Schaper,<sup>73</sup> a practising Christian minister, offering ways to teach the Bible to promote Biblical literacy. Her recommended method to promote Gospel literacy is 'a ten-session course on ten fundamental Scriptures'. In reality she offers a series of short Scriptures which provide insight into living and practicing the Christian way. The limited scope of the article in relation to content and interpretation highlights the need for a clear understanding of what Biblical literacy is actually about and what it means to be Biblically literate. The valuable insight here, however, concerns the relationship between Gospel literacy and practical/applied Christian living.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>71</sup> David R Nienhuis, "The Problem of Evangelical Biblical Illiteracy."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Schaper, Donna, "Pastor as Teacher: Biblical Literacy as a Parishwide Asset," *Clergy Journal* 85, no. 5 (2009): 15-17.

As in the literal understanding of linguistic literacy, one is not assessed as literate until one can use language to achieve one or more of the many ends which result from knowing the language. Any genuine life-changing vision or commitment issues in outcomes which are visible in the life affected. That is, one might have an excellent cognitive grip of the Gospels, their overview and their detail, but still be not literate in a significant sense. One of the aims of this thesis is to examine the outcomes of Gospel commitment and activity in the lives of lay Anglicans and thus make an assessment of how Gospel literate they are in these terms.

Cynthia Rigby<sup>74</sup> explores in interview the growing Biblical illiteracy in many churches, offering over-extended lives, confusion about the authority of the Bible and “people actually not knowing what it says, never mind getting to the point of being able to interpret what it says” as reasons for this state of affairs. Rigby believes that many Christians don’t know how to think about the Bible’s (Gospel’s) authority and don’t have a clear sense of why they’re reading Scripture or what direct benefit it has in their lives of faith. She comments:

... it seems to me that those who are claiming the Bible as the final authority tend toward proof-texting, and those who say the Bible isn’t authoritative tend towards not referencing the Bible at all. Neither of those extremes is useful. Both are manifestations of Biblical illiteracy.<sup>75</sup>

A helpful and comprehensive article examining Biblical literacy as the foundation of a Biblically based spirituality in an Anglican context is that by John Grayston in the Anglican Theological Journal *Anvil*.<sup>76</sup> Although oriented towards evangelicals and personal experience, it offers a catalogue of causes<sup>77</sup> of decline which are generally applicable, and

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<sup>74</sup> Cynthia L Rigby, "Biblical Literacy and Christian Faith," *Insights* 124, no. 1 (2008): 13-16.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> John Grayston, "The Bible and Spirituality: The Decline in Biblical Literacy among Evangelicals and the Future of the Quiet Time," *Anvil* 19, no. 2 (2002): 99-107.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101. As causes for decline in regard for, and reading of, the Bible Grayston lists:

- The undermining of credibility in the idea that issues of modern scholarship and their popularization in diverse media have served to question the trustworthiness of the Bible.
- The undermining of authority by modern relativism, the reduction of truth to largely personal experience and the meaning of texts as ultimately reader dependent and reader-determined.
- The decrease in relevance given the perception of an ancient text and modern questions, and preaching which often struggles to connect the text to the world.
- Changing lifestyles and use of technology leading to a decline in reading in general.
- Cultural change which has seen the Bible marginalized in public debate and in the educational system, diminishing both confidence and knowledge.

a credible outline of why we read the Bible and why it is important. In relation to the latter, Grayston offers three reasons:

- For the moral *transformation* (my italics) of the individual brought about by conviction and self-understanding by the creative power of God through Scripture.
- To build the relationship with God and encounter the author of Scripture.
- To gain understanding of what is believed so that in a world of conflicting ideas the Christian can give a reasoned defence and description of their convictions.<sup>78</sup>

Both the causes which he outlines and the reasons for reading the Bible offer significant food for thought in relation to the ‘what and why’ of Gospel illiteracy, and offers helpful material for reflecting on what questions might illuminate Biblical/Gospel literacy in the Diocese of Adelaide.

The Report of the North Yorkshire Dales Biblical Literacy Project also offers its own insight into the importance of Scripture and the reasons for declining<sup>79</sup> levels of Biblical literacy. The Report contained an overview of the importance of Scripture for five general and five particular reasons. Heading the latter list was the statement that “the Bible [Gospels] is our major witness to Jesus, his life and significance. The Bible [Gospels] not only provides biographical information about Christianity’s founder but, more importantly, grapples with Jesus’ significance for *life, the world and faith* (my italics).”<sup>80</sup> The last of the particular reasons is that “the Bible [Gospels] has the power to transform us.”<sup>81</sup>

From an American context, Reese also offers reasons for decline in Biblical literacy and why Biblical literacy is important. The reasons he offers for the decline in Biblical literacy include a shift to a narrative, story-telling type of sermon, rise of mega churches with a lack of emphasis on teaching doctrine, the negative influence of technology and the decline of substantive preaching. Along with the previous writers, Reese also offers several

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>79</sup> Wood, “Let the Bible Live”, 16-17, where he offers as reasons for decline:

1. Changes to the religious education curriculum in our education system.
2. Changing patterns of literacy in a digital age, not least the storage of information on the web rather than in one’s head!
3. The decline of Christian Sunday schools and uniformed Christian organisations.
4. The decline in expository and exegetical preaching in the Church.
5. The decline in habits of daily devotion and Bible reading among believers.
6. A culture of anti-learning and anti-intellectualism within the Church.
7. Information overload in society at large.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 10.

reasons why Biblical literacy is important. He argues that “before one can practise Christian discipleship one must know the Scriptures.”<sup>82</sup> He suggests a strong positive correlation between moral reasoning and Bible knowledge, and the need for Bible knowledge to include belief in Jesus as the Messiah. The response to that belief is the living of a faithful Christian life.

Over and above the knowledge of the facts and data offered by the Bible and Gospels is the complex act of understanding, making meaning of and applying that understanding in appropriate ways. There are few ‘theoretical’ texts on lay hermeneutics, but one non-empirical book which does bear those words in its subtitle and might serve as a starting point for a survey of key issues and concerns is by Perry Yoder.<sup>83</sup> Yoder surveys a number of issues which might well prompt questions for surveys about ways the Bible is misread; the difficulties arising in relation to language and its use; the various factors affecting personal perspective and background from which any interpreter must work; and key issues including authority, canon, inspiration and the Christocentric interpretation of the OT.

As Yoder notes, difficulties arise because words themselves do not have meaning but are used to express or convey meaning. Not only can words and combinations of words have different meanings read at face value, but combinations of words can have meanings in different ways. An important area of language for interpretation is the distinction between language used referentially or figuratively/symbolically.<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Ashton provides insight into the most common problem in religious interpretation: that of metaphors misunderstood because they are interpreted literally. She asserts that

... problems occur when metaphor is not recognized as being such. For literal interpretation of figurative writing removes from the metaphor the power it possesses to convey insights and, even more seriously, leads to misunderstandings which, ... are extremely difficult to open up to discussion and further reflection.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Reese, “An Assessment of Bible Knowledge,” 11.

<sup>83</sup> P. B. Yoder, *Toward Understanding the Bible: Hermeneutics for Lay People*. (New York: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> This distinction is drawn in relation to lay interpretation rather than in relation to the Gospels themselves. It is clear that whether, and the degree to which, Gospel language is referential may depend on one’s assessment of the genre of the Gospels themselves. See Richard Bauckham, “The Gospels as Histories: What Sort of History Are They?,” <http://richardbauckham.co.uk/index.php?page=unpublished-lectures>. Accessed July 19, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Ashton, “Interpreting Images: An Investigation of the Problem of Literalism in Language Use and Religious Thinking,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 41, no. 4 (1993): 381-92.

Whilst Ashton's focus is the education of children, she is rightly aware that adults who now misread and misunderstand metaphor and symbols do so as a result of their experience as children. She provides analysis of the image of God as father (an important image developed in the Gospels) as leading to an anthropomorphism which becomes increasingly untenable with age to the point of rejection. She rightly points also to the metaphor of Jesus as Son of God as a metaphor which has been literalized, or even 'metaphysicalized', and for which the rich imagery of the relationship of a Jewish father to his son has been lost. The interest here is not what is metaphor or other but what happens when metaphor is misread, which I for one have witnessed many times in parish contexts. Consequently, I will be seeking to probe the understanding of metaphor in the questionnaire to be developed in the next Chapter.

Brian McLaren is one of a number of scholars seeking new directions for Christian life and living. He is a credible well-published evangelical author who tackles ten key questions facing Christianity which, in his assessment, need to be re-worked for any sort of useful and relevant future. Not surprisingly the Bible features strongly with questions about both the nature and use of the Bible. Yet again we find an author claiming inadequate knowledge of the whole Bible:

Many people read the Bible as a series of disconnected quotes and episodes - yielding maxims, rules, formulas, anecdotes, propositions and wise sayings. They have little or no sense of the larger story into which the statements fit and in which their meaning took shape.<sup>86</sup>

Further questions on which he writes chapters, and which again will raise questions that might be useful in assessing the literacy of ordinary readers, include:

- The authority question: How should the Bible be understood?
- The gospel question: What is the gospel?

His conclusion to Chapter 7 is that a new and more mature and responsible approach to the Bible is required. For the purpose of this project McLaren provides what might be viewed as a meta-narrative of the Gospel story as a fulfilment of the three prime narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures - a new Genesis, a new exodus and a new kingdom.<sup>87</sup> Whilst the idea of the 'overarching story of the Bible' is much a feature in discussion of Biblical

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<sup>86</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010), 24.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-187.

literacy in terms of making sense of the parts in terms of the whole, so a discussion of Gospel literacy needs a meta-narrative to provide coherence to the discrete parts of the Gospel story. That is not to say that McLaren's meta-narrative is correct or the only one possible, but it at least provides a starting point for examination.

## **Description and definition of Gospel literacy**

Gospel literacy is neither an obvious or simple matter and needs both clarification and delineation.<sup>88</sup> Whilst the metaphor of 'literacy' suggests knowledge or understanding of the subject, this can change depending on the purpose at hand, the person involved and the actual subject under consideration.<sup>89</sup> For instance, Gospel literacy for a professor of New Testament would be quite different from what might be expected of a lay person in an Anglican Diocese. It is important that a clear concept of Gospel literacy is developed to guide the project into its investigative phase. A helpful way to explore the notion of Gospel literacy is to describe and analyse the work of others.

In the first instance, it is worth noting both what Gospel literacy is not, and the idea of Gospel illiteracy. Gospel literacy is emphatically not the knowing of a large number of 'Gospel facts' simply as unconnected facts which are learned in list fashion. Successfully answering a questionnaire of 100 lesser known Gospel details does not guarantee either a confessional, missional or academic knowledge of the Gospels or anything other than knowledge of the facts correctly answered. At the most basic level, any literacy involves being able to read (that is, being able to decode the written marks on the page) and to make sense (that is, to derive meaning from the decoded writing).<sup>90</sup> In this context the distinction between 'Bible (Gospel) knowledge' and Biblical (Gospel) literacy needs to be mentioned.<sup>91</sup> The Standardized Biblical Content Test is an American instrument which

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<sup>88</sup> Wood, "Let the Bible Live", 11, acknowledges that it is hard to define Biblical (Gospel) literacy. He goes on to acknowledge a "dearth of material exploring Biblical literacy itself, its nature and character or definition."

<sup>89</sup> UNESCO, "Education for All Global Monitoring Report," (UNESCO, 2006)., 150, where the metaphorical use of the word 'literacy' is elaborated. <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2006/literacy-life#sthash.e3Zt2Lmr.dpbs>. Accessed February 16, 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Grayston, "The Bible and Spirituality," 76, describes 'functional illiteracy' as ignorance of the fundamentals of a particular area or having a minimum of an expected standard of competence regarding some skill or body of information.

<sup>91</sup> Reese, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge," 6. Reese states his definition of Bible Knowledge as: "Bible Knowledge is an individual's general recognition of key Bible facts, not necessarily Bible meaning. (For this study Bible literacy, Biblical literacy and Bible knowledge will be used synonymously.)" He

appears in various studies<sup>92</sup> and is used to ‘provide users with an accurate and useful measure of Bible knowledge.’ The test focuses on factual information rather than doctrinal beliefs, religious orthodoxy and the like. It comprises 150 questions from both New and Old Testaments as stand-alone facts. The study cited draws the following conclusion:

Evidently, gaining more knowledge about the Bible is associated with seeing the Bible as less of a ‘law-giver’ and more of a ‘principle-giver’.<sup>93</sup>

This conclusion suggests an element of interpretation and an implicit claim to a Biblical literacy (a making sense of the Bible) which is more than a simple knowledge of facts. The point is that we need to remain aware that Gospel literacy – any sort of literacy for that matter – is more than a simple knowledge of the facts.

Gospel literacy is equally emphatically not about adopting other people’s ideas and interpretations of the Gospels as one’s own. Those interpretations will be based on a unique context and a unique set of assumptions and filters which may be close to what I believe but will not and cannot be the same. The implication of this is that each of us must do our own appropriating of the story, which is another good reason why good preaching seeks to recount the story of Jesus accurately. This stricture does not disqualify a person from reading and becoming familiar with other people’s interpretations or ideas. It may even be an important part of Gospel literacy to actually know what others have said or how they have interpreted. The meaning of the Gospel passage for me, however, needs to be personal and to take account of my unique context and my location in my journey. Gospel illiteracy is a harder idea but suggests that, even if the Gospels can be read and many facts are known, they are not understood in a coherent way which leads to some sort of understanding and presumably outcome consistent with the Gospel story.

As I now turn to the investigations of others seeking insight into what might constitute Gospel literacy some initial comments are in order. A minimalist starting point in an investigation of Gospel literacy would accept that Gospel literacy is related to and dependent on knowledge of the content of the Gospels. Basic content knowledge of the Gospels comes initially from simply reading them. The more a given individual reads the Gospels

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seems to understand that Bible literacy and Bible knowledge are different but proceeds to use the terms interchangeably, which provides a warning about the need to ascertain what any particular author means in their use of the term.

<sup>92</sup> Daniel Nelson, "Bible Knowledge and Moral Judgment: Knowing Scripture and Using Ethical Reasoning," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 13, no. 1 (2004), provides an example.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

the more he or she will come to know the content. The more they come to know the content the more likely they are to make sense of that content and the better chance they will have to become in some sense Gospel literate. That is, Gospel literacy for an individual comes first and foremost from reading (and studying) the Gospels - "Biblical literacy is simply about the dynamic process of helping people to engage more and more with the Bible"<sup>94</sup> - a statement which would also pertain to the Gospels. Moving more towards definition, from the same source we read that "Biblical [Gospel] literacy might also be defined in terms of increasing fluency with the Bible [Gospels] and increasing competence in handling them, as well as the growing ability to share Scripture [the Gospels] with others."<sup>95</sup> Whilst the term 'fluency' needs definition or explanation, this description suggests both appreciation of different understandings of a passage and the capacity to share the Gospel with others as markers of Gospel literacy.

A more comprehensive insight into Biblical literacy is offered by Dr Larry Perkins,<sup>96</sup> which seems to me to be equally applicable to that part of the Bible known as Gospel. He states:

'Biblical Literacy' describes the ability and motivation of people to read the Bible with sufficient understanding so that they can explain its basic meaning, and the knowledge and use of resources that enable them to discern the basic meaning of a Biblical text. It includes the ability to apply this discerned meaning, i.e. Biblical wisdom, to contemporary life.

Apart from the required dimension for some sort of understanding to constitute Gospel literacy, Perkins incorporates the ideas of use of resources and the ability to apply to life. Further, in his recognition of Scripture (Gospel) engagement as part of a Spiritual community spanning geography and time, he comments that while ecclesial tradition is respected, Biblical principles have priority in defining contemporary understanding of the Gospel. That is, whilst there are differences in understanding between confessions, a useful description of Gospel literacy will recognize that "Scriptures define and evaluate our traditions."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Wood, "Let the Bible Live", 11.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>96</sup> Larry Perkins, "What Is Biblical Literacy and Why Is It Important?," Northwest Baptist Seminary, <http://biblicalliteracy.nbseminary.ca/what-is-biblical-literacy-and-why-is-it-important/>. Accessed May 12, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2.

In a later article<sup>98</sup> Perkins asks, “How do we define and measure gospel literacy and why is it important to develop this within a local church?” Although he is using ‘Gospel’ in the sense of ‘the good news’ rather than the four Gospels, to the extent that the good news is the story of Jesus and is founded on and centred in the Gospels, his answer is worth consideration. Perkins writes:

Thus, a simple definition of Gospel literacy might be:

...knowing the content of the ‘good news’ and being able to enrich this understanding with self-directed Bible study.

However, Gospel literacy is more than knowing, it is a knowing that results in the integration of Gospel-based principles in all of life. So, fleshing out this definition we might say that:

...it is motivating people and developing their capacity to define and articulate the ‘good news’ ... with sufficient understanding so that they can apply that meaning to generate personal and corporate life-changing discipleship and explain its basic meaning to other people.<sup>99</sup>

He is consistent in the two articles in his emphasis on the use of resources in the idea of self-directed study. Noticeable elements in this more elaborate delineation of Gospel literacy are explaining the basics of Gospel meaning to other people and the capacity to contextualize their understanding of the Gospels and the principles contained in everyday life.

Nienhuis is another from the American scene who offers useful insights into the general questions surrounding Gospel literacy.<sup>100</sup> His insights include:

- “... a merely cognitive level of Biblical [Gospel] literacy does not automatically result in the formation of Christian character.”<sup>101</sup> Apart from lack of content knowledge, the lack of ability to place events in context and to locate key incidents also betray lack of intimacy with the texts.
- a significant part of literacy requires articulacy which comes from talking about faith and practising the vocabularies, grammar, stories and key messages of faith.

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<sup>98</sup> Larry Perkins, “The Nature and Importance of Gospel Literacy in the Local Church,” Northwest Baptist Seminary. <http://Biblicalliteracy.nbseminary.ca/gospel-literacy-in-the-local-church/>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>100</sup> Nienhuis, “The Problem of Evangelical Biblical Literacy.”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 4.

He goes on to acknowledge that coming to an agreed-upon definition of Biblical (Gospel) literacy is itself part of the problem. As he tries to outline the fundamentals, he points to comprehensive rather than selective (doctrinally relevant) coverage, to interpretation in the light of the tradition and the task to empower Christians to take up the spiritual discipline of reading Scripture and so become transformed hearers.

Australian educator Barbara Fisher is concerned with teaching Biblical literacy in a school context. She takes the following as a definition of Biblical literacy:

Biblical literacy is more than Biblical knowledge. One definition that elaborates this concept is found in the Lutheran Bible Ministries Mission Statement.

- *The foundation of Biblical literacy is factual knowledge - knowing all the people, places, events and teachings in the Bible.*
- *A second and higher level is that of assent - accepting this knowledge as truth, and believing that the Bible is the word of God.*
- *The third and highest level is knowing the God of their Bible personally through a life changing commitment (Lutheran Bible Ministries, 2002).<sup>102</sup>*

Apart from the first dot point which would indicate that Gospel literacy is founded on factual knowledge of the Gospels, the remainder sounds much more like confessional language. In relation to dot point 1, the ‘teachings of the Gospels’ are reduced to the same status as people’s identities and place names which seems questionable to me. All that might be accepted as ‘teachings’ have value through interpretation and application. That is, teachings are not factual knowledge in the sense meant. Indeed, it is difficult to see how factual knowledge can be accepted as ‘truth’, and the third dot point seems to me to indicate an outcome of Biblical or Gospel literacy. Transformation is a desired outcome of Biblical or Gospel literacy, but one can be seemingly Gospel-literate without necessarily being transformed. Indeed, this is a significant part of the problem which gives rise to this very project: people who know and understand the Gospels in some depth but for whom the Gospels seems to make little difference to their lives.

From the Catholic tradition, Singer and Towns explain Biblical literacy from a functional and catechetical point of view.<sup>103</sup> They start by describing the Biblically (Gospel) literate

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<sup>102</sup> B. Fisher, "Promoting Biblical Literacy in the Elementary Classroom," (2005). [http://research.avondale.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=edu\\_papers](http://research.avondale.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=edu_papers). Accessed March 20, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> B. Singer-Towns, *Biblical Literacy Made Easy: A Practical Guide for Catechists, Teachers, and Youth Ministers* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2008), 9.

adult as one who is comfortable in reading and using the Bible (Gospels). This is elaborated as meaning:

- “He or she knows how the books of the Bible are arranged and how to quickly and easily locate a specific book or passage.”<sup>104</sup> How this might translate for Gospel literacy I am not sure, except that it might point to ‘knowing one’s way around the Gospels as the story of Jesus and each Gospel as a particular take on that story’.
- “This person has a solid understanding of the Biblical story of salvation history.”<sup>105</sup> Perhaps in relation to the Gospels this might be taken as having a clear understanding of how the Gospel story is part, and a climactic part, of God’s overarching story of salvation.
- “This Biblically literate adult understands that any book or passage from the Scriptures must be understood in its proper context. When reading the Bible, this person considers things like the literary genre, the culture of the time, the original author’s intended message and how the passage is understood in the Church’s tradition.”<sup>106</sup> In respect of the Gospels this might mean that the Gospels must be understood as cultural and historical documents written for a purpose and interpreted as such, and the different types of narrative understood with integrity.

As part of a catechetical program the third point is understandable, but outside an intentional and systematic teaching effort I would wonder whether it is realistic to have the average Anglican lay adult consider all these factors, and whether it is not more realistic to expect the preacher to provide what is needed or the reader to use an appropriate resource.

Bill Kynes<sup>107</sup> is another who rejects quoting Bible verses to support doctrine as a valid use of the Bible (Gospels).

Biblical [Gospel] literacy is more than just being able to recite the Ten Commandments, ... or list the 12 apostles. It is more than being able to point to favourite verses that provide strength or solace... it is the ability to read the Bible [Gospels] with understanding of what it is about and to profit from the life and truth that flows from it as the Word of God... it is the ability to use the Bible [Gospels] well for the purpose for which

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>107</sup> W. Kynes, “In the Light of the Gospel: Becoming competent Bible readers,” *EFCA Today*, Fall 2012. <https://www.efcatoday.org/story/light-gospel>. Accessed June 14, 2013.

it has been given – to lead us to a redemptive and transforming relationship with God as he has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Kynes' definition focuses on 'reading with understanding' and 'using well', although what these might mean may need to be explored.

As a final example in this catalogue of views on Biblical (Gospel) literacy, the work of Ivy Jo Kirtdoll<sup>108</sup> has something new to offer. After examining literacy as a general concept and establishing its importance she writes:

'Biblical [Gospel] literacy is taken in this project to mean a level of competent knowledge in the retaining and using of Biblical facts derived from reading the Scripture [Gospel] and other Biblical [Gospel] resources for oneself for the purpose of discipleship... it is the capacity to read and decipher Biblical [Gospel] texts and to present such content in ordinary oral discourse and existential praxis.'<sup>109</sup>

Kirtdoll relates the purpose of Biblical literacy directly to discipleship and to presenting the Gospels in daily life, both in word and deed. There is also an emphasis on reading 'for oneself' which is taken to mean personal engagement rather than taking someone else's interpretation or ideas as one's own.

Other ideas which have been suggested by Wood as possible components of Biblical and by extension Gospel literacy include:<sup>110</sup>

- increasing fluency, which refers to both knowing your way around it and the ability to increasingly articulate presumably the meaning and demand of the Gospels for both oneself and for others.
- increasing competence in reading and handling it (appreciating different ways of reading).
- a growing ability to share Scripture with others.
- knowledge of a set number of Bible (Gospel) stories or themes, which might indicate a primary concern with knowledge.
- 'marks of Biblical literacy', in that a Biblically literate person is one who:
  - has good knowledge of the outline of the Bible (of the content of the Gospels).
  - has good knowledge of key Bible (Gospel) stories.
  - has good knowledge of key Bible (Gospel) characters.
  - can recognize Biblical (Gospel) quotes and sayings.

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<sup>108</sup> Ivy Jo Kirtdoll, "Biblical Literacy: Bridging the Gap between Pulpit and Pew through Discipleship Training" DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Ohio, 1988.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>110</sup> Wood, "Let the Bible Live," 12.

- can relate the Bible (Gospels) to today.

All of these suggestions are aspects of Gospel literacy which will both contribute to and be included in the comprehensive definition of Gospel literacy which this thesis aims to develop.

## **Gospel literacy for this project**

It is clear that Gospel literacy is not a simple notion and that both narrow and wider definitions are possible. Reviewing the previous section of this chapter yields the following considerations which might play a part in shaping a definition or explanation of Gospel literacy.<sup>111</sup> There is a need to:

- engage cognitively with the Gospels and become familiar with significant content, as against using the Gospels either non-cognitively or at second-hand.
- use resources to deepen and expand one's understanding of the Gospels.
- appreciate the narrative and theological structure of the Gospels.
- understand why there are four Gospels and the basic differences they display.
- appreciate the place of the Gospels in salvation history.
- interpret and/or assign basic meaning to the various units of Gospel story, including the need to appreciate figurative and idiomatic use of language.
- understand that there are quite different ways to understand much of the material in the Gospels.
- apply the Gospels to social, ethical and global issues.
- apply the Gospels to one's daily ethical decision making and daily life.
- articulate the Gospels to others, especially in the face of confusion about the Jesus figure and unreasonable conflicting pictures of the Gospel story.

These considerations can be condensed into three broad categories. Thus, to take a comprehensive approach to describing Gospel literacy we might say that there is the need:

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<sup>111</sup> These factors incidentally form a very helpful checklist to both assess any existing Gospel educational resources and/or to develop new resources for the purpose of encouraging, enabling, and empowering Anglican laity to pursue their own Gospel literacy and resulting discipleship potential.

1. to know the Gospels: what they are, including; their context and background, their place in salvation history and the whole Biblical story, their content and in particular the story, stories and teaching of the Gospels.
2. to understand the Gospels: including how to find meaning, decipher Gospel language in all its complexity and how the Gospels can be variously interpreted.
3. to apply the Gospels: both in one's own life and issues, and to bring the Gospels into the lives of others for their benefit and transformation.

From these three condensed categories deemed necessary for developing a useful Gospel literacy, I would venture a definition of transformative Gospel literacy as:

A **transformative Gospel literacy** includes substantial knowledge of the content of the Gospels, including the background, basic differences between them, the overall narrative and separate stories and the teachings of the Gospels. It is also able to make meaning of this content and the place of the Gospel story in salvation history, appreciate the figurative and idiomatic use of language and understand that the Gospels can be interpreted in different ways. Finally, it will result in a basic ability to apply the Gospels to social, community and global issues, and to one's own personal issues, behaviour and daily decision making in a transformative way, and enable the disciple to both articulate the Gospel story and stories and respond to simple, basic questions about the Gospels.<sup>112</sup>

Using this comprehensive definition of transformative Gospel literacy as a lens, the task then is to develop with justification survey instruments which provide useful and appropriate means for investigating the four Research Questions. A quantitative questionnaire will be developed in Chapter 5 and a qualitative questionnaire in Chapter 8. Before doing that work, however, I will investigate empirical and survey work done by others related to my Research Questions in Chapter 3, and outline and justify a methodology for the conduct of the cross-sectional study in Chapter 4.

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<sup>112</sup> For ease of recall, a shorter definition of transformative Gospel literacy might read:

A **transformative Gospel literacy** includes:

- a) knowing the Gospel story, stories and teachings;
- b) making meaning of the story, stories and teachings;
- c) applying the story, stories and teachings in one's own life, and bringing them to the lives of others

## CHAPTER 3

### A REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL/SURVEY LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Having clarified technical terms and established a working definition of transformative Gospel literacy required for the investigation the next step is to look at previous work in this field. As a practical project which is based on survey it is important to investigate and appreciate what others have done empirically in relation to my area of enquiry and specifically in relation to my four Research Questions.

The literature to be reviewed for this project either in book or electronic form is neither obvious nor plentiful. An initial Internet search on the use and understanding of the Gospels confirms that it is difficult to locate relevant research material. David Clines, writing in 2005 in an English context, states:

So, it is very surprising that no one seems to be very interested in the public of Bible buyers and Bible readers. I can find no studies at all of what people in this country think about the Bible, how they understand it, what they think of its truth or otherwise, if and how they use it.<sup>113</sup>

Although not speaking of the Gospels specifically or lay Anglicans in particular, the statement is indicative of a lack of both interest and research into non-academic engagement with the Bible and presumably the Gospels. In lieu of obvious relevant literature, the investigation of empirical/survey literature will be guided by the tasks required to answer each Research Question. To that end each basic Research Question outlined in Chapter 1 will be elaborated in more detail with the tasks required for the investigation to thus provide the framework within which the literature that is relevant will be searched and investigated.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, 55.

<sup>114</sup> Non-empirical tasks need to be achieved to enable pursuit of the Research Questions. Whilst this literature review is centred on the empirical and survey-based literature associated directly with the Research Questions, relevant non-empirical literature on biblical (Gospel) literacy and transformation is considered to have been examined in Chapter 2 where the notion of transformative Gospel literacy was developed.

Despite extensive searching no surveys or studies of biblical or Gospel literacy commissioned by or published in an Australian Anglican Church or a Diocese have been discovered.<sup>115</sup> There are, however studies, which have investigated lay Anglican use, knowledge and understanding of the Bible in other contexts, including one recent Communion-wide study.<sup>116</sup> There are also a few studies which have probed Biblical knowledge and understanding within non-Anglican churches, notably in the American context where there is evidence of real concern about the state of Biblical (Gospel) knowledge both within the churches and within that society at large.

### **Empirical/survey literature - First research question**

The first Research Question (What do ordinary lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the gospels?) is concerned to determine the knowledge of the content of the gospels of lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide. The focus will be on their knowledge of major features of the Jesus story which are necessary to understand the person and work of Jesus and Jesus' place in the story of God's plan of salvation. This knowledge is seen as fundamental and necessary for the development of genuine and thoughtful Christian discipleship.

This knowledge might be termed 'Gospel content': that is, the written content which is prior to and the basis of any process or act of interpretation. That Jesus had twelve disciples, for example, is a detail of Gospel content or statement communicated in the Gospels. Why twelve or what that might mean is a matter for interpretation based on the knowledge of the content of the Gospels. These Gospel 'facts' are the first step or phase of what I am calling Gospel literacy.

According to the approach chosen for the project, the primary task required is the development of two questionnaires. It is therefore appropriate to review literature on existing Biblical/Gospel content questionnaires. Two aspects for particular attention are the basis for question selection and validation. Whilst there is little direct research material on knowledge of content of the Gospels in the Australian or Anglican context, there are several theses from American churches which have attempted to develop an understanding

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<sup>115</sup> Both Anglican and other churches websites were investigated and searched for statements about the Bible/Gospels and their place and use in daily life.

<sup>116</sup> "Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery: Report of the Anglican Communion "Bible in the Life of the Church" Project," (2012). This is a major document on the Bible (and the Gospels) in Anglicanism.

of Biblical literacy, Bible knowledge and Bible facts. In addition, there are a number of articles and studies from various sources which are worthy of mention. I will examine each category of material under the following appropriate headings.

## Theses

Ken Gourlay<sup>117</sup> is one author of a doctoral thesis from an American university which investigates Biblical literacy within the Christian assembly. The purpose of his thesis was to examine Biblical literacy among adult Southern Baptists and to investigate factors which might influence that literacy or lack thereof. He cites several American authorities highlighting the critical state not only of Biblical literacy of the general population but more importantly the lack of Biblical literacy of churchgoers.<sup>118</sup> Gourlay adopts a quantitative survey approach to answer his first research question: "What is the level of Biblical literacy among Southern Baptist adult Sunday School participants?"<sup>119</sup> Whilst he does explain how he uses the term Biblical literacy<sup>120</sup> and understands the term as a metaphor, he offers little or no justification or validation for the instrument used or survey questions which he employs. He notes simply that an 'expert panel'<sup>121</sup> has been asked whether the survey questions sufficiently address the issues of basic Bible knowledge.<sup>122</sup>

A further but earlier American thesis by Jerry D Clark sought to examine the association between religiosity and Biblical literacy.<sup>123</sup> The first of three research questions was: 'To what extent are selected samples of American adults biblically literate?' He achieved this by administering a questionnaire to both randomly selected religious and non-religious groups. In this case, the religious groupings contained several mainline denominations

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<sup>117</sup> Kenneth Howard Gourlay, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge among Adult Southern Baptist Sunday School Participants" Ed. D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, North Carolina, 2010.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 6. The term 'Sunday School' in this context means instruction for adults which occurs on Sunday.

<sup>120</sup> On its home ground in linguistics, literacy refers to the ability to use a language - to read and to write it, to manipulate its vocabulary, grammar and syntax. In this sense, Biblical literacy refers to the ability to understand and use in one's day-to-day life the basic building blocks of Biblical traditions - its key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, character, metaphors, and narratives. – Gourlay, citing Prothero, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152. Bryman notes the use of persons with expertise in the field to judge face validity of questions, but not an instrument as such.

<sup>122</sup> Kenneth Howard Gourlay, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge among Adult Southern Baptist Sunday School Participants," 153.

<sup>123</sup> Jerry Dean Clark, "The Association between Bible Literacy and Religiosity" PhD diss., University of North Texas, Denton, 1991.

rather than just one, including a table showing Bible literacy for 70 Episcopalian participants with comparison to other groups. The survey instrument by which literacy was assessed was not available, but comments on literacy and the instruments were offered. The definition of Biblical literacy offered was – “the familiarity and/or ability that enables one to read a short, simple passage in the Bible and answer questions about it.”<sup>124</sup> The instrument is described as the Standardized Bible Content Test<sup>125</sup> and was developed for use in Bible Colleges. Whilst he has offered comments on the reliability and validity of the test, he seems to offer no justification or argument as to why this test based on Bible content is suitable for testing Biblical literacy. Further, he reveals in his discussion that 60% of questions were answered incorrectly. The result of 40% of questions correctly answered may leave open the question of whether the people sampled had poor knowledge or whether the test questions were inappropriate.

Michael Reese, from the Churches of Christ tradition in USA, has written a thesis on the state of Biblical knowledge and literacy among a particular group of churchgoers.<sup>126</sup> The purpose of the study was to determine the level of Bible knowledge among adult adherents of Churches of Christ in West Virginia. Whilst he acknowledges that discipleship consists of more than merely knowing Bible content, the study is restricted to assessing Bible knowledge and not the meaning, understanding or application of that knowledge.<sup>127</sup> He appears to me to confuse the issues by stating that he will use Bible knowledge, Bible literacy and Biblical literacy synonymously.<sup>128</sup>

The researcher sets out using a descriptive quantitative research design to assess Bible knowledge using the Assessment of Bible Knowledge Test (ABKT) which is to be developed by the researcher himself and comprises a series of seventy five OT and one hundred

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 53–54. The test was developed by the American Association of Bible Colleges (1980). Clark comments that some items are easy enough for incoming freshmen to answer and others are difficult enough to challenge graduating seniors. The test was designed to measure a person’s level of factual Biblical knowledge and thus provide a general assessment of one’s familiarity with the Bible. The test contains straight-forward factual knowledge questions... The test has 150 items in a multiple-choice format with five answer choices per item.

<sup>126</sup> Michael P. Reese, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge of Churches of Christ in West Virginia and Related Variables" Ed. D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, North Carolina, 2010.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 6.

and ten NT fill-in-the-blank questions.<sup>129</sup> Nothing is mentioned about the questions themselves - where they have come from, why they were chosen rather than other similar or equivalent questions, and what makes them a suitable base for estimating Bible knowledge. I was unable to find a statement of what constitutes Bible knowledge. There is, however, a brief one-page description of the 'Formation of the Test Instrument' which disclosed, without detail, a pilot study to deal with ambiguous or improperly worded questions. It also included a reliability test and a validity check via an expert panel which "had experience in education, research and survey design as well as Bible class teaching experiences."<sup>130</sup>

These brief reviews raise a number of points for consideration in constructing and conducting the quantitative investigation in particular. None of the theses reviewed focused on Gospel knowledge as such, and none of the instruments available for perusal seemed to be suitable for the task of discerning knowledge of Gospel content. Key questions which might need to be considered include: 'What constitutes basic Gospel knowledge?'; 'What questions are required to test Gospel knowledge?'; 'How can I validate questions?' and 'Are the chosen questions at an appropriate level for lay Anglicans to yield meaningful results?' A major aim of this project therefore is the need to at least offer a transparent, argued and validated basis for the questions and the resulting instrument used. A transparent and fully explained instrument would potentially provide a basis for critique and consequent refinement or development of further instruments for this purpose.

## Other Sources

The only other sources detected offering information on knowledge of Bible (Gospel) content were national Bible Society studies. The State of the Bible 2015 is the American Bible Society survey-based report on various aspects of how the Bible is perceived and used by adults in the USA.<sup>131</sup> One significant result in respect of Research Question 1

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<sup>129</sup> The instrument is found in Appendix 1 at page 194 of the thesis. A typical OT question is:

5) Who was the king of Salem?

a) Melchizedek                      b) Hezekiah                      c) Herod                      d) David

and a typical NT (Gospel) question:

78) Jesus said our treasures should be stored (laid up) where?

a) Heart                      b) Heaven                      c) Church                      d) Mansions

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>131</sup> American Bible Society, "The State of the Bible, 2015," (New York: American Bible Society, 2015). Accessed on February 12, 2016. <http://www.americanBible.org/uploads/content/state-of-the-Bible-data->

included that 60% of the surveyed Protestants self-assessed as either highly or moderately knowledgeable of (the content of) the Bible,<sup>132</sup> which might provide a figure for comparative comment on my own findings.

‘Taking the Pulse’ was a comprehensive multi-denominational Bible Society study undertaken in the UK.<sup>133</sup> reflecting the views of more than 3,000 church leaders and members and specifically claimed as suitable for researchers. There is some doubt, however, about its rigorous suitability for research as it is devoid of date, authorship or the ability to access any methodological data. Two relevant survey results for Non-Leaders indicated that:

- only 14% of non-leaders are ‘very confident’ and 51% ‘fairly confident’ in their knowledge of (the content of) the Bible.
- 79% of non-leaders think it is important that they know the Bible well.

No other significant essays or articles offering further insights on testing of knowledge of the content of the Gospels were detected. Those theses and articles surveyed provide initial insight into the considerations needed to develop satisfactory investigative data questions in respect of Research Question 1.

## **Empirical/survey literature - Second research question**

The second research question asked: How do ordinary lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels? The focus in this question is on how lay Anglicans make sense of and derive meaning from the Gospels and would include consideration of:

- a. how lay Anglicans understand the status of the Gospels? Their understanding of how and why the Gospels were written directly affects questions of authority, inerrancy and meaning. This understanding in turn affects how each individual derives meaning from the text.

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[analysis-american-bible-society-2015.pdf](#). One notable feature is that for a number of factors the figures for the last 5 years are provided making an assessment of movement in the population easy to grasp.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>133</sup> Communicate Research Ltd, (ComRes) "Taking the Pulse: Is the Bible Alive and Well in the Church Today? A Survey of Congregation Members and Church Leaders" (Swindon: Bible Society, 2008). <http://www.Biblesociety.org.uk/about-Bible-society/our-work/taking-the-pulse/>. Accessed December 5, 2013. I attempted to contact the Bible Society for further information but received no reply to an email sent in December 2013.

- b. how they deal with the question of interpreting whether language is figurative or literal, metaphorical or historical, prescriptive or descriptive? The understanding and meaning of many passages often hinges on how language and certain images are understood.
- c. how they interpret the message and meaning of Jesus and the Gospel story? There are significantly different ways of understanding the Gospels as literature; what they mean and how they have meaning. A well-known example would be the contrast between the so-called 'traditional paradigm' and the 'emerging paradigm' articulated by Marcus Borg and others.<sup>134</sup> These different understandings can lead to quite different visions or versions of the nature of discipleship and the shape of the Christian life.

The task in respect of this very complex Research Question 2 is to develop a set of questions which give insight into how lay people approach these concerns. Pertinent literature would therefore include previous empirical work on how lay people have understood the status of the Gospels, how they have dealt with the uncertainties of language in the Gospels and whether they lean to a more traditional or less traditional way of understanding the Gospels. One significant thesis and a number of articles, studies and reports based on survey results were found to be relevant to this Research Question. These will be discussed and critiqued in the following sections.

## **Thesis**

Dr Village has written a book and a number of articles based on the survey data and findings of his Ph.D. thesis entitled “Biblical Interpretation among Church of England Lay People.”<sup>135</sup> Dr Village did not seek to determine Biblical or Gospel literacy as a notion in its own right nor has he, to my knowledge, sought to determine knowledge of Bible or Gospel content by Anglican lay people. His interest has been in exploring how Church of

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<sup>134</sup> See Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 6–15, where a traditional paradigm of understanding the Bible is characterized as: the Bible seen as a divine product; the Bible emphasized as a literal-factual book; the Bible as revealing doctrine and morals; faith as belief and the Christian life emphasis as what to believe or do to be saved in the afterlife being central. This is compared with an emerging paradigm for understanding the Bible characterized as: the Bible seen as a human response to God; the Bible emphasized as historical and metaphorical and more concerned with meaning; the Bible as sacramental and the Christian life emphasis as transformation in this life through relationship with God being central.

<sup>135</sup> A. Village, "Biblical Interpretation among Church of England Lay People" PhD diss., Bristol University, Bristol, 2003.

England laity understand and interpret the Bible, and major factors which might affect that interpretation.

His most recent article in 2013 entitled “The Bible and Ordinary Readers”<sup>136</sup> provides a convenient summary of key parameters which he has discerned as shaping ordinary reading. Two of the three parameters he discerned provide a basis for insight into his work and for relating his work to this thesis.

1. Bible Beliefs: Liberalism and Conservatism. Dr Village developed and validated a twelve-point Bible scale comprising a variety of items related to the truth, inerrancy and authority of the Bible. He claims that the Bible scale measures conservative-liberal belief about the Bible and that it assesses the nature of belief about the Bible and the way that belief is held. Whilst attitudes to and beliefs about the Bible are distinct from knowledge of and comprehension of the Bible, it is clear that attitudes and beliefs are among factors which will determine knowledge and particularly interpretation of the Bible. He identifies key beliefs in doctrinal terms about the Bible as being its inspiration, its inerrancy and its authority.
2. Biblical Literalism. The question of Biblical literalism and how language and imagery are understood is both an important component of the second research question and how the Bible is understood. Dr Village nominates several factors he asserts are important.<sup>137</sup> He notes that assessment of literalism on the basis of asking a single question is inadequate and thus he develops questions over a range of events.<sup>138</sup> Using the same dataset he developed a literalism scale of ten questions for which he demonstrated high internal reliability. The demographics he nominates which might relate to literalism spanned churchmanship, gender, age and educational level and were included in the questionnaire.

Albeit Dr Village has surveyed a similar area but with a different goal than that proposed for this thesis, his four-part questionnaire contains tested questions and validated scales

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<sup>136</sup> A. Village, "The Bible and Ordinary Readers." in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. J. Astley and L. J. Francis, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 127-136

<sup>137</sup> Andrew Village, "Factors Shaping Biblical Literalism: A Study among Anglican Laity," *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 26, no. 1 (2005): 29-38.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-38

which offer significant insight into how Gospel knowledge and understanding might be probed.

### **Other sources**

An important study previously mentioned is the ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project (BiLC) which is titled “Deep Engagement: Fresh Discovery.”<sup>139</sup> The study is characterised as:

... an attempt to let the churches of the Communion reflect on the ways in which they [ordinary Anglican lay people] actually use the Bible - how they read it, whom they read it with, what they bring to the reading, *what their experience is of transformation* (emphasis added). ...it is an attempt to share ... what people want to say about the importance of the Bible. ...it will help us to develop in the Communion a wider and fuller Biblical literacy.<sup>140</sup>

The BiLC Project is a singularly rich undertaking of some six hundred and seventy pages, commissioned by the Anglican Consultative Council, published in 2012 and comprising major investigations and numerous additional papers and studies.

Among other aims it sought to draw together many existing empirical studies which explored how ‘ordinary Anglicans’ in different cultural and geographic locations view and understand the Bible. The Project made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approaches included participant-observation, participatory research and case studies, but not to my knowledge any interview strategy. The quantitative section used a survey administered online or via the Internet to collect demographic information, ask questions about frequency of Bible use, investigate the Bible’s perceived relevance to respondents, and questions about interpretation. The methodology was based on engagement with a few core scripture passages related to two of the five ‘Marks of

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<sup>139</sup> "Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery: Report of the Anglican Communion “Bible in the Life of the Church” Project." 2012. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/Bible/.../FULL.pdf>. The Report comprises five major sections: Section 1: Methodology and broad conclusions from the regional groups: Section 2: Regional Reflections: Section 3: Other work undertaken by the Project, which included an analysis of all that the Anglican Communion had said in its official documents about the place of Scripture in its life, and an empirical study of how ‘ordinary Anglicans’ view the Bible: Section 4: Resources, Exercises, study courses, case studies and other ideas, and Section 5: Reflections on the project by an ‘Anglican Outsider’.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., Foreword.

Mission'<sup>141</sup> by Anglican groups located in different situations and in different parts of the world.

Sections 1 and 3 of the Report are of value to the current project. The Regional Reports, while pointing to a diversity of interpretation of given passages within the Anglican Communion, provide insight into questions to help ascertain how Adelaide lay Anglicans use the Bible. The Reflection submitted by the North American Regional Group, for example, included a list of Biblical interpretation issues<sup>142</sup> which provide natural starting points for questions about how lay people interpret and apply a passage of scripture.

Section 3 of the BiLC Project is of direct relevance to this project. It reported the process, methodology and results of an empirical study of how 'ordinary Anglicans' view the Bible. This study was similar to the previous work of Dr Village mentioned above and largely the same instruments and questions were employed, albeit to a larger and more diverse sample. The BiLC Report together with Dr Village's work provide valuable insights into quantitative investigations as to how lay Anglicans read the Bible and some factors that shape and influence their reading and their understanding of the Bible. Whilst all of this material relates to the Bible as a whole, much of Dr Village's work and BiLC can be seen to pertain in some measure to the Gospels.

"Taking the Pulse", the Bible Society study undertaken in the UK, offered findings in relation to non-leaders that:

- 78% of church goers believe the Bible is divinely inspired.
- 34% believe that it is free from error.<sup>143</sup>

Because of the unknowns of the sample and methodology of the study, these figures can be accepted as indicative only.

In relation to understanding the Bible (Gospels), The State of the Bible 2015 from the American Bible Society offered interesting insight into whether the Bible (Gospels) were

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<sup>141</sup> The Five Marks of Mission are an important statement on mission which expresses the Anglican Communion's common commitment to, and understanding of, God's holistic/integral mission. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>, Accessed February 3, 2017.

<sup>142</sup> "Bible in the Life of the Church," 2012, 22. The North American Report was titled 'Transformed by the Bible – but by many routes' and included the three issues:

- The contested place of received interpretations of Biblical texts in Christian tradition.
- The implications of multiple levels of meaning in the Biblical text, rather than simply one.
- The need to read Scripture to challenge our perspectives, not just to affirm them.

<sup>143</sup> ComRes, "Taking the Pulse," 3.

seen as the literal (actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word) or inspired (no errors, some verses symbolic) Word of God. The most common belief among practicing Protestants included:

- 38% believed the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word,
- 50% believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, having no errors but some verses symbolic,
- 9% believe it might have historical or factual errors.<sup>144</sup>

These results offer insight into how the Bible is understood as a document and how American Protestants interpret and use it. Whilst it would be incorrect to make comparisons between American Protestants and Australian Anglicans the results, to the extent that they might be indicative of Gospel engagement as well Bible engagement, do indicate broad areas and categories of possible investigation and comparison. The results quoted provide insight into pertinent question areas and topics for the quantitative instrument on which this project will substantially depend.

Further significant surveys were those conducted in 2013 by the Church Times in UK and the National Church Life Survey<sup>145</sup> (NCLS) conducted in Australia in 2011. Neither survey was directly interested in knowledge of the content of the Bible, but both asked several questions about Bible beliefs and attitudes which are part of understanding the background and differences in the Biblical interpretation aspect of Biblical (Gospel) literacy. In the Church Times Survey, Dr Village's tested scale probing liberal versus conservative beliefs was again deployed and again found to be predictive of 'Bible related' behaviours such as frequency of reading and literalism as they relate to interpretation of the Biblical text.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey, carried out in over 5,000 local parishes and congregations from more than 20 denominations, provided a snapshot of Australian church life. The NCLS method uses multiple questionnaire form variants to collect data on a wide range of topics from church attenders. Form C had a section on 'religious knowledge' which asked four questions (78 - 81) on factual knowledge of the Bible. The only New Testament question was 'Who wrote the book of Acts?' for which Matthew,

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<sup>144</sup> American Bible Society, "The State of the Bible 2015," 65.

<sup>145</sup> The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) in Australia is a nation-wide multi-denominational five yearly inventory of church life in Australia. Websites <http://ncls.org.au> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Church\\_Life\\_Survey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Church_Life_Survey), provide detail of the scope and content of the project.

Mark, Luke, Paul and John were offered as choices, along with ‘Don’t Know’. Form J had a specific question on the respondents ‘view of the Bible’, offering seven alternative answers regarding the status of the Bible. These alternatives provided insight about how the authority of scripture could be explored. There were insufficient respondents to Forms C and J from among Adelaide Anglicans to form a representative sample, so no results for those questions can be reported for Adelaide Anglicans.<sup>146</sup>

Another similar Project is “Let the Bible Live”, the Report of the North Yorkshire Dales Biblical Literacy Project. A key stated aim for this practical project designed to promote Biblical literacy in the Yorkshire Dales was to research the literacy levels in a typical rural circuit and communities.<sup>147</sup> The methodology was based on questionnaire and interview using the same National Bible Literacy Survey administered by CODEC (see below) in 2008. The survey concerned the use of the Bible, its significance in the respondents’ lives and their attitudes to the Bible. Questions were also asked about Biblical characters and stories. Although it was a community based survey, 79% of respondents self-designated as practicing Christians. One finding relevant to Research Question 2 was that “many people had a good grasp of the basic story of Christ’s cross and resurrection. Yet knowledge of other New Testament stories was being lost, not least the parables.”<sup>148</sup> It needs to be remembered, however, that this survey relates to a particular community and not to any particular group of laities, Anglican or otherwise.

The CODEC Research Project<sup>149</sup> also used the National Bible Literacy Survey in its stated aim to explore the area of Biblical literacy in a media-dominated culture. The project used professional market researchers to conduct a survey via face-to-face interview with ordinary people randomly selected from all ages, all classes, backgrounds and religious and cultural traditions at nine locations in England and Wales.<sup>150</sup> Key results included:

- the Bible had been an important part of many people’s education and upbringing,

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<sup>146</sup> In email conversation dated 7/02/14 with Dr Claudia Mollidor, NCLS researcher.

<sup>147</sup> Wood, “Let the Bible Live”, 3.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. The results quoted are in fact ‘headline findings’ of the National Biblical Literacy Survey 2008 which are owned by the “Let the Bible Live” project as ‘Overall the findings supported the earlier results of the 2008 national survey’. The full results of the ‘Let the Bible Live’ project were located at Appendix 2 of the report to which I tried to gain access via email contact but was unsuccessful. See page 16 of the Report for major conclusions.

<sup>149</sup> P. Phillips, “The Codec Research Project.” *Epworth Review* (May 2011). Details of the CODEC Research Centre located at St John’s College, Durham University, can be found at [www.dur.ac.uk/codec/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/codec/).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

- the Bible is read by only a small minority of the public with only a few more thinking it remains significant to them,
- Bible knowledge was often associated with the visual arts, especially films and ‘shows’, and
- the lack of knowledge of central New Testament stories including the parables of the Sower, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, and the stilling of the Storm, was ‘staggering’.

The Survey also investigated who reads the Bible and why, and what puts people off reading the Bible. Both questions yielded responses which were assessed as deserving of more detailed research<sup>151</sup> with the latter an important consideration for inclusion in the quantitative survey.

David Clines sought to survey lay understanding and comprehension of the Bible. His students surveyed a wide range of mainline and other churches with a checklist of questions which themselves are interesting although not asked of the lay attendees. He asserts;

...Biblical scholarship and Biblical criticism have had no significant effect on the reading and interpretation of the Bible in the churches... I can only conclude that Biblical criticism is perceived as irrelevant to the church.<sup>152</sup>

Not only do these two assertions present a research challenge, but Clines also asserts that “the church and its people are in possession of an entirely false picture of the connection of the Bible to historical actuality.”<sup>153</sup> It is this statement of what is known or not known by implication about the historicity of the Gospels and how the Gospels both came into being and gained their authority which I believe affects how the Gospels are understood and therefore interpreted. My original intention for Research Question 2 was to include investigative questions exploring these factors. These proposed questions, however, lengthened the questionnaire unacceptably and so had to be excluded. I do think however that the questions surrounding the historical development of the Gospels, including how they came into being, why they were written and how they gained canonical authority, significantly affect how the Gospels are seen and understood. As such, these factors would benefit from further research and it is my belief that useful basic instruction around these factors would add significant maturity and realism to how many lay Anglicans perceive the Gospels.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>152</sup> Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, 86-87.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 88.

A further comprehensive survey carried out in Britain is a more rigorous work with its focus on both Bible reading habits and attitudes to, and understanding of, the Bible.<sup>154</sup> Although dated, the survey covered a number of relevant factors. These included:

- the use of the Bible corporately in church and individually,
- understanding of and attitude towards the Bible in relation to historical, scientific, theological and ethical accuracy, and
- their understanding of the relevance of the Bible today and their understanding of the Bible as a whole.

The survey questions used were not provided in the article. The authors reached several conclusions:

- that many highly committed Anglicans found it difficult to identify or articulate their own attitudes to the Bible.
- the majority of regular Anglican worshippers have lost the habit of Bible reading.
- any regular thirty-minute television programme is given a greater time commitment by most of these churchgoers than the foundation document of the Christian faith.
- nearly 30% of the total sample thought that the Bible was not very relevant or were uncertain what to think about it.
- many Anglicans have no consistent understanding of the Bible.<sup>155</sup>

Particularly helpful were suggestions why these conclusions eventuated. The authors contended that it would be interesting to test by further research the possibility that in Anglicanism the emphasis is placed elsewhere than on the Bible.

### **Empirical/survey literature - Third research question**

The third research question is concerned to investigate the way that lay persons' understanding of Jesus and the Gospels makes a significant difference to the way they live. Key concerns to be investigated include:

- a. how lay Adelaide Anglicans use the Gospels in their daily life or lives in general.
- b. whether and in what ways their understanding of Jesus and the Gospels makes a significant difference to the way they live.

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<sup>154</sup> E. Fisher, J. Astley, and C. Wilcox. "A Survey of Bible Reading Practice and Attitudes to the Bible among Anglican Congregations," *The Contours of Christian Education* (1992): 382-95.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

- c. whether and in what ways they seek to bring their understanding of Jesus to the issues of society and world.
- d. whether and how they believe that they could live more Jesus-centred lives.

Literature of interest will thus include attempts to investigate the place and effect of the Gospels in lay lives. So far as the former is concerned, I have been unable to find any survey material which bears directly on the place and application of the Gospels in lay lives. There are, however, studies on how the Bible impinges on the lives of lay Christians. 'Taking the Pulse', the Bible Society study undertaken in the UK, offers some insights into the place of the Bible in the lives of those who responded.

- 35% of non-leaders claim to read the Bible daily and 25% several times a week.
- the Bible is 'frequently' used for private devotions (56%).
- the majority use the Bible 'frequently' or 'sometimes' to shape their decisions (63%).
- 57% of non-leaders believe the Bible should shape their daily life 'a great deal'.
- 39% of non-leaders remember the Bible affecting a decision they made in the past week.

In the quantitative survey for non-leaders, Topic Four is entitled 'Bible Literacy and Application'<sup>156</sup> the following results are reported:

- Churchgoers want to be encouraged to read and study the Bible... yet they also realise that along with lack of free time, their own lack of commitment is the single biggest obstacle to engaging more with it.
- Christians would also like to more consistently apply Biblical principles to their day-to-day decision making.
- ... a wish for a broader understanding of the Bible's main themes rather than learning texts by rote.

Albeit a flawed report and some of the figures being a little surprising, it does provide insight into what questions were assessed as important and might therefore be considered in forming data questions in relation to Research Question 3.

In terms of survey results on how the Bible impinges on the Christian life of American Protestants, the State of the Bible 2015 offers some insights:

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<sup>156</sup> ComRes. "Taking the Pulse," 12.

- 85% believed that the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life,<sup>157</sup>
- 95% read the Bible to either come closer to God, seek direction, solve a problem, or seek comfort,<sup>158</sup>
- 62% gave significant thought and 33% some thought as to how the Bible might apply to their life.<sup>159</sup>

The “Let the Bible Live” Report offered two items relevant to this Research Question:

- only 18% opened the Bible weekly, and only 7% daily – and this despite the 70% affiliation.
- Bible reading was seen to be the preserve of older people, the holy or experts. Many respondents thought that the Bible needed an expert to help interpret it.<sup>160</sup>

It also asked participants questions about lack of Biblical (Gospel) engagement today.<sup>161</sup>

These assessments may not reflect the Australian experience of Bible engagement but, again, they do indicate areas of concern and potential investigation.

Whilst much theology has been written on justification and sanctification through knowing Jesus, I have found no literature which links the Gospels with personal transformation empirically through either quantitative or qualitative survey. This is not so, however, for the Bible.

Empirical investigation of transformation was found in two forms in the literature: as work illustrating either a movement in values or as growth in living a genuinely Christian life. The first involved a ‘before and after’ experimental design seeking to establish personal growth or transformation through a teaching or learning process. The second entailed a survey including direct and/or indirect questions investigating self-assessment of the

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<sup>157</sup> American Bible Society, "The State of the Bible 2015," 34.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>160</sup> Wood, “Let the Bible Live,” 3.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. The principal reasons offered were that:

- the Bible has been discredited by science. There is a credibility gap between the truth of science and the truth of the scriptures.
- the Bible is difficult to understand. Reading the Bible is like visiting a foreign land.
- the Bible is boring.
- the Bible is irrelevant to modern-day issues and concerns.
- the Bible needs an expert to help in its understanding.
- the Bible is only important for the holy, church leaders and students of theology.

transformative value of knowing Jesus (i.e., being familiar with the Gospels as they convey the story and person of Jesus) in the lives of a significant sample.

### **Theses related to transformation**

A recent thesis by Jeffrey Kennedy is pertinent to this project.<sup>162</sup> It adopts the ‘before and after’ approach. The research question was, “Will participants in a Biblical curriculum experience a marked improvement in their knowledge, understanding and personal proficiency with the Biblical text?”<sup>163</sup> Whilst he found this to be the case, of interest is his emphasis on knowledge, understanding and presumably appropriate and competent application. His methodology developed ‘a before and after Biblical knowledge test’ and ‘a before and after Biblical literacy questionnaire’ in which participants self-assessed their experience and presumably the effectiveness of the curriculum using Likert items. The knowledge test included sixty two questions which covered: basic facts about the nature of Scripture (ten questions), knowledge of basic interpretive procedures (five questions), basic themes in the Bible (three questions) and basic knowledge of the contents of Scripture (forty-four questions).<sup>164</sup> Kennedy found the greatest improvement in the basic knowledge area, and as a result stresses both the importance of Bible knowledge as a prerequisite for discipleship.<sup>165</sup> This test structure with its clear inclusions provides significant insight into which components might comprise a comprehensive Gospel literacy test. Whilst the test is included in an Appendix, it is important to note, however, that he does not justify or validate either the questions or the structure. Failure to carry out these tasks again leaves a critical reader with questions about whether and how the structure and content are satisfactory.

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<sup>162</sup>J. S. Kennedy, "The Challenge of Biblical Literacy: Establishing a Standard of Proficiency for Disciples at Eastpoint Church" DMin diss., Biola University, California, 2014, 25.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 9. – “obeying Jesus presupposes that the disciple knows his teachings and is able to interact with them in a meaningful way.”

A more direct and exhaustive approach is contained in the thesis by Brad Waggoner.<sup>166</sup> He establishes five categories of measurable functional discipleship characteristics<sup>167</sup> and goes on to analyse and elaborate each category to describe the disciple exhaustively. Amongst the thirty or so measurable characteristics describing discipleship, the following were noted. A disciple is one who:<sup>168</sup>

- possesses a desire and willingness to learn.
- has conviction regarding the necessity of living in accordance to Biblical principles and guidelines.
- possesses a lifestyle depicted by intentional compliance with the moral teachings of the Bible and a practice of adapting attitudes and actions in accordance with Biblical standards.
- actively seeks to promote social justice and righteousness in society as well as to individuals.
- publicly identifies with Christ and the church when provided an opportunity.
- seeks and takes advantage of opportunities to share the Gospel with others.

From his measurable characteristics, Waggoner went on to develop, test and validate a Likert scale based instrument for testing discipleship. His study is exhaustive and the list of functional characteristics, particularly those noted above, provide valuable guidance for the development of discipleship questions in this project.

### **Empirical/survey literature - Fourth research question**

The fourth Research Questions asked, ‘In what way do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference to the lives of others?’ As followers of Jesus there is a prima facie expectation that, in whatever way is possible or appropriate, the active Christian will bring the good news to others around him or her. Key concerns include:

- a. whether the Gospels inform personal impetus towards bringing/offering the good news of the Gospels to those around them.
- b. whether they think that they could be doing more in respect of bringing the Gospel story to others.

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<sup>166</sup> B.J. Waggoner, “The Development of an Instrument for Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base of Southern Baptist Churches” DMin diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, 1991.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 66. These categories were: attitudes, conduct/behaviour, relational/social, ministry involvement/skills, doctrine/beliefs.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 67 – 81.

- c. whether deepening their knowledge of the Gospels might enable them to offer the Gospels to others more confidently and effectively.

The task is again to devise questions seeking information about these concerns, and the literature of interest would include attempts to investigate these questions empirically. It is worth noting that while there are many theses and studies directly related to discipleship, it is discipleship that is the centre of enquiry rather than the Gospels or how the Gospels relate to discipleship.

Waggoner, in his development of a validated questionnaire to investigate discipleship, deploys six such questions. He subjects his questions to an intensive survey by two panels of experts in a transparent and fully explained procedure which results in his questions being prima facie of good quality.<sup>169</sup> Although he does not actually administer the questionnaire the questions are worth noting. From his preliminary questionnaire, the questions of interest included:<sup>170</sup>

- question 7, “I talk with other people about my faith.”
- question 33, “It is my personal responsibility to share the gospel message with non-Christians around my life.”
- question 40, “I know how to clearly explain the gospel to another person without relying on an evangelistic tract.”
- question 43, “Christians should be about the work of telling others about Jesus.”
- question 94, “I have shared with someone how to become a Christian.”
- question 137, “I have tried directly to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ.”

Another questionnaire relevant to my thesis is the ‘Omega Discipleship *Self-Evaluation Questionnaire*.’<sup>171</sup> The questionnaire contains six sections seeking to provide an assessment of ‘where the subject is as a follower of Jesus’. The last section is entitled ‘Witness’ and comprises five challenges, including:

- I have tried to reach out to at least one non-Christian person over the last month.

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<sup>169</sup>Waggoner, “The Development of an Instrument,” 182.

<sup>170</sup> It should be noted that:

- these questions did not vary significantly from the two subsequent pilot questionnaires by which he subjected the questionnaire to rigorous validity testing.
- he is not talking about the Gospels as the four books, but does refer to the figure of Jesus regularly.

<sup>171</sup> “Omega Discipleship Self-Evaluation Questionnaire.” <http://www.omega-discipleship.com/pdf/DISCIPLESHP%20-%20Self%20Questionnaire.pdf>. Accessed July 27, 2016.

- I have been able to share my faith with a non-Christian in some way over the past month.
- Over the last month, I have helped to influence, encourage, disciple, mentor or train at least one other person to follow Jesus more fully.

All of these questions are indicative but do not address concerns b. and c. above which are directly related to the Gospels and to my observations of Anglicans in South Australia. They are about discipleship whereas my interest is in the Gospels and how they might bear on or relate to discipleship. The two sub-questions above at b. and c. (p 56) are not to my knowledge addressed in the literature but are important questions to answer in relation to lay commitment to bringing the good news of the Gospels to others. As such I believe that they highlight a gap in the practical matter of discerning whether the Gospels could be playing a larger part in reaching out to non-Christian people.

### **Summary of findings**

Apart from Dr Village's work on the factors which influence how lay Anglicans understand and make sense of the Bible, there appears to be little empirical or survey work done in the area of Biblical literacy. There was no empirical or survey data found on Gospel knowledge or understanding, and nothing found in relation to an Australian or Anglican context.

Particular findings which contribute to shaping this project include a lack of:

- any definition of Biblical or Gospel literacy that is widely acknowledged and/or has been used to structure or validate empirical investigation.
- any set or sets of justified data questions or instruments to gauge knowledge of Gospel content.
- any instruments or sets of questions designed to probe the actual lay understanding of the Gospels (rather than the underlying attitudes).
- any studies investigating the influence of Gospel knowledge and understanding on both personal transformation and lay discipleship.

Considering the lens of transformative Gospel literacy<sup>172</sup> in its abbreviated form of knowing, understanding and applying the Gospels, minimal empirical research material in any of these three areas of interest has been detected. No general principles or formative keys

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<sup>172</sup> See pages 37-38 above.

for the derivation of instruments have been discovered, and no 'lens' through which to view question selection or validation.

It seems from the review of empirical studies that little research has focused on the Gospels and their unique role in shaping the life and practice of lay Christians. Much more has been devoted to various studies of the Bible as a whole including assessments of Biblical knowledge and understanding, and the part the Bible has played in formation and discipleship. All the works selected and reviewed above, however, provide useful insights into the projected empirical investigation of the place of the Gospels in lay Anglican lives. The next step in the project is the description of how the investigation is to be conducted. It is appropriate, therefore, to now turn to an explanation of the method to be used in this investigation.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I discovered a paucity of empirical and survey research literature focusing on Gospel knowledge and understanding and their particular and unique role in shaping the lives and practice of lay Christians. In response to this finding, the basic aim of this project is therefore to conduct an empirical investigation designed to explore, describe, analyse, and report<sup>173</sup> what Anglican lay people in the Diocese of Adelaide know about the Gospels, how they understand them in the sense of making meaning and interpreting, and how that knowledge and understanding affects their own lives and their discipleship.

The strategy is thus exploratory and descriptive, requiring me to develop an appropriate methodology to acquire sufficient data to investigate and hopefully answer the four Research Questions outlined in Chapter 1 and explained more fully in Chapter 3 (pages 40, 44, 52 and 56 respectively). This chapter outlines the theoretical considerations for the conduct of the practical investigation. The application and specifics of this theory for this project is detailed in Chapter 6 for the quantitative investigation and Chapter 8 for the qualitative investigation.

#### **Design**

##### **Initial considerations**

The research design is the framework within which data collection and analysis take place. There are basically three research designs which I need to consider in searching for an appropriate methodology. In very simplified terms for distinguishing the broad differences, these designs include:

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<sup>173</sup> I had also originally intended to make suggestions/recommendations about measures which could be taken to boost literacy. However, as the project unfolded it became evident that it would be simply outside the scope or possibility for a thesis of this length. It became clear that my thesis would do well to establish a 'state of play' and leave it to others to develop strategies for tackling shortfalls in Gospel literacy and the remedies for discovered shortfalls on active discipleship.

1. A **quantitative** design. Quantitative research emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data. It is marked by a deductive approach which looks to either test or to establish a position by moving from the general data to particular conclusions or results. It is also marked in its adoption of the practices and norms of natural science and its positivistic<sup>174</sup> approach to the world, and its view of social reality as an external, objective reality.
2. A **qualitative** design. Qualitative research on the other hand emphasises the use of words and non-quantified description. It is marked by an inductive approach to the relationship between research and theory which is more inclined to examine particular data in search of theoretical connections. It rejects the practices and norms of the natural sciences in favour of an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret<sup>175</sup> their social world. It also views social reality as a constantly changing reality created by the individuals inhabiting the particular context.<sup>176</sup>
3. A **mixed-method** design. As the name implies, this design is a combination of the first two. That is, a set of quantitative data and qualitative data both contribute to the outcome of an investigation. Because of the significant fundamental differences between them the mixed-method design poses both difficulties and challenges in implementation. These include the weighting and sequencing of the two sets of data and the matter of bringing them into a valid relationship. It does, however, offer advantages and the facility to integrate in an appropriate way data from complex research questions which might either require, or benefit from, both types of enquiry.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 13, where positivism is explained as involving data gained by the senses to generate hypotheses which can be tested through value-free enquiry. However, see Ingrid Storm, "Researching Religion Using Quantitative Methods," <https://www.kent.ac.uk/religionmethods/documents/Researching%20religion%20using%20quantitative%20data.pdf>, page 2, where she states that, "It is an unfortunate, but influential myth that all quantitative social research is based on a positivist approach... the approach labelled critical realism is probably the most common in quantitative research on religion. It holds that there is an external reality and that knowledge about it can be approximated through research..." Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, where interpretivism is explained as emphasizing the subjective meaning of social reality.

<sup>176</sup> Village, *The Bible and Lay People*, 7, where he usefully compares and contrasts qualitative and quantitative methods in the context of the study of religion.

<sup>177</sup> Storm, "Researching Religion Using Quantitative Methods," 3, where she indicates that mixed methods may be better used for achieving complementarity, contextualization and elaboration rather than corroboration of results.

The methodology (including the design and data collection methods) for this project is dictated by the nature of the population to be investigated and the nature and complexity of the Research Questions as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. It is clear that the Research Questions need to establish factual quantitative evidence which can be scored to produce results from which conclusions can be drawn. It is also clear that the investigation would significantly benefit from gaining information as to how participants personally view their actions and activities in respect of their knowledge of and relationship with the Gospels.<sup>178</sup> That is, I assess that data is needed from both modes of investigation; therefore, two sets of data are envisaged.

1. The first set is required to derive numerical statistical data for quantitative analysis including crosstabulation from a sufficiently large sample of the population. The information gained will result in a wider picture or snapshot of the Diocese in relation to Gospel knowledge and understanding, and in relation to the part faith plays in respondents' lives and their discipleship.
2. The second set is required to obtain in-depth individual narrative detail from a small sample of the population who took part in the initial survey to gain deeper insight into the Research Questions without closed-question constraint. It also enables lay church members to enhance the project through their own unique understanding which might well not emerge in a quantitative-only survey.

Given this plan a mixed-method design based on a questionnaire to obtain quantitative data and an interview to obtain the qualitative data is deemed to be the most suitable design for the project. The large and dispersed nature of the population to be sampled means that the most manageable and economic approach is to administer a cross-sectional survey by self-administered questionnaire for the first set of data, and to administer an interview in respect of the second set.

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<sup>178</sup> J. Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2002), 98, where the author states – “Where qualitative research adopts what has been described as an ‘inner perspective’ on the phenomena being studied, quantitative research facilitates an ‘outer perspective. I believe that each has its own contribution to make in the study of ordinary theology.”

## Mixed-method research

### Mixed-method design fundamentals

Mixed-method research is defined as:

...research design in which the inquirer or investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of study.<sup>179</sup>

The fundamental advantage of this approach is that the combination of the qualitative and quantitative findings provides a better understanding of research problems than either method used alone.

The mixed-method design involves philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry which need to be stated. The basis of mixed-method research approach I have chosen to adopt is a pragmatic approach. This methodology<sup>180</sup> is driven by the research questions being asked and the best way to answer them.<sup>181</sup> This empirical methodology is more suited to my thesis than alternative epistemological and ontological approaches. Patrick White, among others, points out that the focus of these debates about various ontologies and epistemologies can be misplaced and unproductive. He goes on to state that:

starting by figuring out their ontological and epistemological position is likely to confuse and distract inexperienced researchers and is not something I would recommend ..... some very successful researchers believe that such debates can be ignored completely with no negative consequences for the quality of research output.<sup>182</sup>

Creswell notes characteristics of the pragmatic approach as including:<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> John W. Creswell, "Mixed Methods Research" in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods: A-L; Vol. 2, M-Z Index*, ed. L.M. Given (New York: SAGE Publications, 2008), 526.

<sup>180</sup> There are different patterns of use of the words method and methodology. Here 'methodology' refers to the framework of philosophical assumptions, design (plan of action) and methods of collecting, analysing and mixing data. See J. W. Creswell and V.L.P. Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2011), 5.

<sup>181</sup> P. White, *Developing Research Questions: A Guide for Social Scientists* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 91, where he agrees that "the questions being asked determine the appropriate research architecture, strategy and tactics to be used - not tradition, authority, experts, paradigms or schools of thought."

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 92 – 93.

<sup>183</sup> J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2009), 10-11.

- not being committed exclusively to any one system of philosophy or reality in that a researcher is able to draw from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions to understand and to derive knowledge about the problem or question in view.
- the assertion that there is an external world independent of the mind, however we might know that, and a world within the mind.
- researchers having a freedom of choice in relation to methods, techniques and procedures as they are seen to best meet their needs and purposes. In mixing methods, however, the researcher needs to establish a purpose for their mixing and a rationale about why the qualitative and quantitative need to be mixed in the first place.

This project's focus is exploration and description, borrowing pragmatically from quite different worldviews. In the first instance, it clearly borrows from an interpretivist understanding<sup>184</sup> of the social reality of Biblical adherence. In this worldview, we are interested in how the participants see the conduct, meaning and purpose of their religious commitment within their social and historical context. The third and fourth Research Questions seek to shed light on how the participants see the Gospels affecting and shaping their Christian lives, and how they see their discipleship activity in relation to others. The basic assumption here is that the generation of meaning is always social, arising in and coming out of interaction with human community.

In the second instance, however, I seek also to investigate and report empirical data about the knowledge and understanding of the content of the Gospels by lay Anglicans. Research Questions 1 and 2 are concerned with assessing correct and incorrect answers to knowledge of the content of the Gospels, and to scoring responses related to matters of interpretation. That is, the project requires the collection and analysis of quantitative data which entails assumptions from the positivistic worldview.<sup>185</sup> Noting that the research does not set out to justify any particular or existing hypothesis or to establish direct causal relationships, the research will seek to investigate and report key concepts, knowledge and behaviours, and to establish and explain associations which might be found to exist among them.<sup>186</sup> The key assumption is that the matters for enquiry can, in fact, be validly investigated and reported on the basis of quantitative evidence.

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<sup>184</sup>Creswell, *Research Design*, 15-16, offers a brief description and summary of the Interpretivist worldview.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>186</sup> Many would consider the presence of these aims as constitutive of quantitative method in that without one or more of these there is a question as to the nature of the method. In this project, it is the process of obtaining and analysing the data using quantitative techniques, albeit closed-ended questions. These are

## Mixed-method design classifications

Mixed-method design can be classified in a number of ways.<sup>187</sup> These systems are based on the relative weighting and sequencing of the quantitative and qualitative components, and the way the separate results are mixed or brought together. The weighting of the two approaches depends on a number of factors including the emphasis of the research and size of the population of interest. In this project, the primacy is located with the collection of quantitative data, with the qualitative data complementing and supplementing that data. The sequencing depends on the aim of the researcher and whether he or she is trying to elaborate one approach with the use of the other. For this project, the qualitative serves several purposes including clarifying and deepening the quantitative findings. Therefore, the sequencing has the quantitative collection preceding the qualitative data collection.

Thus, this project with its exploratory/descriptive emphasis and a large, geographically dispersed population requiring a sizeable sample, the weighting and sequencing points to a quantitative-led investigation. This mixed-method design is best described as a Sequential Explanatory Strategy in that the qualitative will supplement the quantitative. This approach is “characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results.”<sup>188</sup> This design offers a number of useful advantages, including:

- ease of implementation which makes it manageable for a single researcher as data is collected sequentially.
- each method off-setting limitations of the other. In particular, the quantitative survey will provide a ‘width’ of data which ensures a population wide insight or answer to each of the Research Questions. The qualitative interview will

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more concerned with what might be thought of as matters or judgements reflecting peoples’ interpretations, social constructions and/or beliefs. That is, quantitative techniques are being used to summarize and manipulate what could be more naturally thought of as qualitative data.

<sup>187</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 607, notes two different systems of classification, whilst Creswell, *Research Design*, 206, lists a number of alternative strategies and notes up to a dozen classification systems drawn from different disciplines.

<sup>188</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 211.

provide a ‘depth’ of data which ensures individual and unique narrative voices are heard on each Question, over and above the numerical/analytical data. The design provides for comprehensiveness and completeness.

- allowing clarification or investigation of issues/points-of-interest/particular detail, which might arise from quantitative responses, including the clarification of contradictory results.
- improving the utility of the usefulness of the findings.

The main disadvantages in using this design include the amount of time needed to implement the two phases of the research and the decision which might be required as to whether the participants for the qualitative phase are drawn from the sample or the population.<sup>189</sup> These disadvantages were assessed as non-operative for this particular project. The basic strategy is to provide a comprehensive overview of what is known by Adelaide laity about the content of the Gospels, how they understand the Gospels and what difference the Gospels make in their own lives and the lives of others using participants from the sample only.

### **Mixed-method treatment of results**

A major consideration in mixed-method methodology concerns the mixing of prima facie quite different data types. In this design, data can be brought together or mixed by:

- merging, which requires the integration of the two sets of data usually requiring the transformation of one set into a compatible form with the other.
- embedding, which happens at the design level rather than at the data level.
- connecting, where the two datasets are brought into relationship on the basis of specifying research questions or selecting participants.

The merging of data would be a possibility in this project, but is seen to require unnecessary effort since the questions giving rise to the two datasets are closely connected in their origin. As opposed to merging or embedding the data, I will connect<sup>190</sup> the two datasets by bringing quantitative and qualitative results together on completion of analysis as separate sets related to the Research Questions. That is, all data questions are derived from

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<sup>189</sup> Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting*, 74.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

the Research Questions. The actual content to be brought together will comprise the inferences and conclusions drawn from the numerical data with the complementary and supplementary narrative evidence from the interview data. That is, there is no question of combining numerical with non-numerical data as such, and no need to quantitize qualitative data. Thus, the narrative evidence will illuminate the inferences, conclusions and insights drawn from examination of the statistical treatment of the quantitative data and vice-versa. This will take place in the final chapter. Whilst the combining of qualitative and quantitative results can be contentious for mixed-methods research, I anticipate that the intentional and structured complementarity of the two datasets will enable an easy integration of results in a summary chapter.

## **Method**

The research method refers to the techniques used for data collection. For this project both quantitative and qualitative data are needed.

### **Quantitative data**

#### **Collection of quantitative data**

There are a number of methods for collecting quantitative data, including observation, interview and survey, and a number of techniques pertinent to each method. Since the starting point is the target population of the lay members of the Diocese of Adelaide, an appropriate method for collecting data for this project is by cross-sectional survey using a self-administered questionnaire. Given the wide dispersal of the target population there is no question of using interview or observation techniques for gathering large-scale quantitative data. There are significant advantages to the self-completion or self-administered questionnaire, including economy and speed of administration, convenience for the participants and absence of interviewer effects and variability. The first three advantages are particularly enhanced with the use of the internet. There are, however, also some disadvantages, including the limitations of closed-answer questions, greater risk of missing data and the restriction of a limited number of questions. I also need to be aware of any response biases which might emerge. This might arise for a number of reasons: for instance, because some don't like answering questionnaires or even some feel they are too old! These disadvantages are, however, not insurmountable, and the limitation posed by

closed-answer questions is partly offset in the design which includes open-ended questions in the second phase.

Whilst a number of quantitative test instruments were found relating to the Bible as a whole, none was detected relating solely to the Gospels, knowledge or use of them or attitudes to the Gospels. In the absence of a suitable existing instrument, I have therefore elected to construct my own instrument. The development of this instrument is examined in Chapter 5. Apart from the need to bear in mind specific rules for constructing questions which are covered in detail in major texts,<sup>191</sup> a very helpful rule of thumb is to put oneself in the position of the respondent in trying to answer the questions developed.

### **Details of quantitative data**

The data questions will be seeking quantifiable data including data from nominal variables (e.g., from multiple choice questions), ordinal variables (e.g., how many times a week the respondent reads the Gospel), interval variables (e.g., age of respondent) and dichotomous variables (e.g., is the respondent male or female?). In relation to ordinal variables, the Likert scale is the most common and easiest scale used.<sup>192</sup> In this project it is used with five steps including a ‘neither agree nor disagree’ step. Noting that Likert scaled attitude indicators can be combined into an index,<sup>193</sup> it is my intention to measure certain characteristics of the population using groups of questions taken together to form indices.<sup>194</sup> These specialized measures will be used to grapple with complex aspects of the Research Questions which cannot be measured using a single question. For example, discipleship is a complex activity which in this context can usefully be approached using a number of questions to probe the many aspects involved. That is, particular aspects of discipleship can be probed and analysed/reported using single questions but ‘discipleship’ as a complex notion cannot. Important considerations include ensuring the questions making up the index are consistent in contributing to the construct, and that each question itself has ‘face validity’. It is also desirable that each part of the construct be measured with more than one indicator although, in a diverse project such as the present undertaking

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<sup>191</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 239. Also W.L. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2011), 268.

<sup>192</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods*. 268. A scale is defined as “a measure in which a researcher captures the direction, level or potency of a variable construct.”

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 192, where an index is defined as “a combination of items into a single numerical score.”

where questions are at a premium, this may not be possible. A logical way to incorporate indices is to devise the indices prior to construction of the questionnaire and incorporate the questions making up the index into the questionnaire. The proviso is that the questions so selected must also be able to provide required information apart from their contribution to the index.

### **Population and sampling**

The nature of the population to be investigated is an important determinant of both design and method. The population under consideration in this project is the lay membership of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. If possible the detail of any sampled population needs to be carefully specified in the interests of replicability in the future and for other possible comparisons. Simple random sampling and cluster sampling with the parish as the cluster unit are both possibilities but rejected on the basis of complexity. The simplest and most direct sampling process for this particular project seems to be simple invitation to all members of the population seeking as large a sample as possible. It was deemed impossible to make a random selection from each of the parish units making up the Diocese.<sup>195</sup> In addition, this invitation process minimizes a number of difficulties including ‘non-response’, obtaining lists from multiple sub-groups and randomizing a complex population.

Whilst this method of sampling is not random, it can hopefully lead to a representative sample in the sense that the greater majority of the population has an equal theoretical possibility of participating.<sup>196</sup> That is, most members in the defined population will have had the opportunity to become aware of the survey and to participate. I nevertheless acknowledge that surveys conducted on this basis can attract persons in a non-random way and that I need to be alert for any responses which seem to be clearly atypical of a population characteristic.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> A random sample is one where each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. This definition requires accurate knowledge of the population and a means to ensure that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. In the case of the Diocese of Adelaide, all the actual members of the population are not known and there is no means of ensuring equal possibility of selection even if the population was known.

<sup>196</sup> As with any large-scale survey, due to absence, accident, forgetfulness or apathy some will not be potential participants.

<sup>197</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 219. This problem is also discussed as ‘response bias’ in Creswell, *Research Design*, 151.

In the absence of any Diocesan data relevant to the demographic factors nominated in this project, a convincing representativeness cannot be claimed, albeit I would hope that 135 respondees are in some measure a cross-section of Diocesan laity.<sup>198</sup> Inference from sample association to that association being true for the population is at best limited to the extent that the sample can be seen or accepted as representative of the population. Clearly no precise measure could be assigned to the likelihood of a sample association being a valid association for the population. Given the doubt inherent in the sampling process and the impossibility of rigorously checking representativeness for any of the personal characteristics chosen for analysis, it is incumbent on me to offer the results to follow with reservation and caution advised as to their applicability to the population of the whole Diocese.

The optimum sample size is affected by the homogeneity of the population and the kind of analysis to be used. In principle, the more heterogenous a population the greater the sample needed to cover the variations within the population.<sup>199</sup> The laity of the Diocese of Adelaide are, in relation to their Gospel activity, rated as a relatively homogenous population and so a particularly large sample is not needed in this respect. One measure in relation to the adequacy of the size of the sample is the statistical power of the sample. Statistical power is the likelihood that a study will detect an effect (an outcome, a result, a reaction, a change in Y brought about by a change in X) when there is an effect there to be detected. If statistical power is high, the probability of making a Type II error (rejecting the null hypothesis  $H_0$ ), or concluding there is no effect when, in fact, there is one, goes down. Statistical power is affected chiefly by the size of the effect and the size of the sample used to detect it. Bigger effects are easier to detect than smaller effects, while large samples offer greater test sensitivity than small samples.

A 'Power Calculation for Chi-Square Test' engine was located and relevant variables were inserted to calculate the power of the Chi Squared tests used.<sup>200</sup> The sample size is constant at 135 (the number of returns received). The degrees of freedom ranged from 1

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<sup>198</sup> The sample size is small in relation to the whole population. The attempt to obtain a larger sample was thorough (including writing to each parish, providing posters, making the process as easy and flexible as possible both online and offline and engaging the Archbishop of Adelaide's written support in his monthly *Ad Clerums*). Every attempt was made to obtain the largest sample possible, which at say 3 lay persons from each parish would have been over 200. However, in this endeavour one was entirely in the hands of parish clergy and leaders, and nearly a quarter of parishes did not respond.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>200</sup> The test is found at [https://www.anzmtg.org/stats/Power Calculator/PowerChiSquare](https://www.anzmtg.org/stats/Power%20Calculator/PowerChiSquare)

to 4 as can be seen by inspection of the tables included in the thesis. The effect size ( $w$ ) values of 0.1, 0.3 and 0.5 represent small, medium and large effect sizes respectively. The significance level was 0.05 throughout the project.

Statistical Test	Sample Size	Power	Degrees of Freedom	Effect size	Significance Level
Chi-Square	135.000	0.9999	1	0.5	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.9998	2	0.5	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.9994	3	0.5	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.999	4	0.5	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.9365	1	0.3	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.8872	2	0.3	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.8452	3	0.3	0.05
Chi-Square	135.000	0.808	4	0.3	0.05

The lowest probability is 81% of detecting a medium effect in a table with four degrees of freedom, which means that a test based on these variables, when conducted repeatedly over time, is likely to produce a statistically significant result 8 times out of 10. The likelihood of detecting large effects remained above 99% for all tests conducted in the thesis. The project was not concerned with ‘small’ or marginal effects such as medical research might be.

In relation to the kind of analysis to be conducted, the fundamental criterion for this project is that the sample is sufficient to provide meaningful numbers in most if not all the cells of a contingency table. The smallest table is 2 x 2 and larger tables envisaged would be up to 4 x 5. With minimum acceptable cell counts of 5<sup>201</sup>, the sample therefore would theoretically need to be significantly over one hundred members of the population.

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<sup>201</sup> See Appendix 2 for explanation of required cell counts to ensure validity of tables.

## Reliability and validity of data

Reliability and validity of the questions and measures used are important for the credibility and usefulness of the findings. Reliability refers to the stability of data questions used – that is, does the question result in the same answer after a lapse of time? Stability can be investigated using the test-retest method. For this project, such investigation was considered to be beyond reasonable need and effective use of available time. The instrument is a unique first attempt and thus part of an initial exploration of both approach and process. If the instrument was to be further used or developed, then a demonstration of reliability would be appropriate.

The further question of reliability is whether the data questions, combined into indices to operationalize a construct, yield consistent results. This reliability is determined using a split-half method where the data questions so combined are divided into random halves and checked to give the same result. This process is refined in the statistical measure known as Cronbach's Alpha<sup>202</sup>, a measure which will be applied to and interpreted with respect to the indices developed and used in this project.

Whilst there are a number of validity measurements which can be obtained, for the purpose of this project it is 'face validity' which is important. Face validity concerns whether the measure apparently reflects the content of the concept in question.<sup>203</sup> That is, do measures such as score aggregates (e.g. the aggregation of those questions which will measure participants' knowledge of the content of the Gospels) really reflect what they purport to measure? Does discrimination based on different answers to a question really indicate significant difference (e.g., do the questions in the questionnaire probing interpretation really indicate whether a person is more or less traditional in their understanding of the Gospels)? In relation to indices it is also important to ensure that every item in the index has face validity.<sup>204</sup> Face validity is established by critical feedback from experts and from pilot studies of the questionnaire. It is again however important for the reader to judge whether or not or to what extent a particular measure actually reflects the concept it is claimed to do.

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<sup>202</sup> See Ch 6 where the measure is used and explained.

<sup>203</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 152.

<sup>204</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 192.

## Processing of data

For quantitative analysis, the resulting data is usually entered into an appropriate statistical package<sup>205</sup>, coded and recoded as required, examined and reported on descriptively using univariate analysis and for patterns of association using bivariate analysis. Missing data needs to be dealt with or explained for any quantitative analysis. In relation to the bivariate crosstabulation/contingency analysis which is to be used in this project, the researcher needs to be able to accurately determine row, column and cell totals. That is, so long as both single missing values and strings of missing data in the dataset can be located and allowed for<sup>206</sup>, then missing data, provided it is random, does not present a problem for the statistical integrity of the project.

A final and important step in the development and proving of survey instruments and associated analysis techniques is the conduct of one or more pilot studies seeking feedback from a number of trial respondents. This process allows the detection of low value questions, the checking of comprehension of questions and determination of the adequacy of instructions in the instrument.<sup>207</sup> This process ideally involves:

- the administration of the questionnaire to participants who are members of the population with a detailed follow-up feedback and suggestions session.
- the entry of the data into the statistical package with trial manipulation of the data to discern whether the questions can be coded/recoded, aggregated, averaged, and grouped, or whether modifications need to be made.

Successful uptake of the questionnaire depends in part on advertising and awareness-raising often in the form of a notice-board poster or population wide communication channel such as a weekly bulletin. The distribution of the questionnaire could be carried out in a number of ways, including via a website, via email and in hard copy. There are a number of advantages in receiving electronic responses to the questionnaire, the main ones being economy, speed, coverage and easier entry of data already in electronic form.<sup>208</sup> Given the older demographic of the Diocese, however, not offering access to the

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<sup>205</sup> There are several possible statistical programs which could be used. For this project, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v22) was selected for its ease of use and its coverage of required statistical functions.

<sup>206</sup> The process for dealing with missing data is explained on P 95.

<sup>207</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 247.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 632.

questionnaire via hard-copy via mail might well result in sampling bias by precluding responses from a significant number of the population.

## **Qualitative data**

### **Collection of qualitative data**

There are a number of possible qualitative data collection techniques available to researchers. These include observation, interviews, documents and other physical materials.<sup>209</sup> Given that observation is not appropriate, it seems clear that interview is the most satisfactory method of obtaining the data. The other alternative of asking people to write narrative responses is seen as unattractive and lacking flexibility of response. There are a number of different types of interview, including unstructured,<sup>210</sup> semi-structured, focus group and interviews conducted via phone and internet. The semi-structured interview has advantages in being broadly directional but with the flexibility to clarify and elaborate points of interest. Given the sample to be considered and the design aim of obtaining particular further personal/narrative information from some of the participants in the quantitative phase of the project, the semi-structured interview is the most appropriate data collection method. Consistent with the Sequential Explanatory Method such further information will seek to clarify, elaborate and further explore quantitative outcomes through complementary and supplementary questions derived from the Research Questions and the quantitative results. Questions are administered according to an interview protocol including fixed questions designed to ensure consistency over the interviews.<sup>211</sup>

In the selected mixed-method design sampling is purposive in that participants are selected on the basis of their relevance to the questions being investigated. They may be from the population at large or selected from the sample used in the quantitative phase of the data collection. Within the qualitative sample frame of those available for interview a selection is made to provide representation across criteria of significance. That is, a qualitative sample is selected from those available taking into account significant differences among those available. A common technique is to select from the original sample, a technique which is adopted in this project.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 179-180.

<sup>210</sup> The unstructured interview is usually conversational and without a schedule of questions.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>212</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 375, where he describes exactly the scenario adopted in this project.

## Reliability and validity of data

There are two major approaches to qualitative reliability and validity. The first seeks to adapt the appropriate quantitative expressions – thus, external reliability refers to replication and internal reliability to whether what is seen and heard would be agreed by two or more observers. It is recognized that strict replication cannot take place, but that sufficient similarity might be present to allow comparison between qualitative undertakings. Similarly, for internal and external validity, the latter referring to the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings. One key technique is respondent validation where the participants are provided with an account of the findings for their corroboration or otherwise.

Alternative criteria for assessing the ideas of reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research centre on the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity. In relation to the former, key indicators include:<sup>213</sup>

- credibility, which parallels internal validity in that there is a good match between researcher's ideas and the theoretical notions they develop.
- transferability, which parallels external validity referring to the extent to which findings can be generalized across social settings.
- dependability, which parallels reliability and rests on complete records being kept of all phases of the research.
- confirmability, which is concerned with the good faith of the researcher in not allowing personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct or findings of the research.

Whilst the essential elements of each is clear, the assessment of these characteristics is open to interpretation and it is not possible to make unequivocal or objective claims in respect to these characteristics for this project. That is, it is for a reader to make up their own mind on this matter. In the modern scenario of interviewing, trustworthiness is enhanced in the relatively easier recording and literal transcription of interviews which can presumably be retained and made available in the face of serious doubt about the reliability or validity of the research.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 377-379.

## **Ethical considerations**

The final matter for consideration in relation to both the quantitative and qualitative data are the ethical issues in data collection and interpretation. Whilst there are a number of key areas of ethical concern including those of harm to participants, deception, privacy and anonymity, data protection and consent, the nature of the projected research and the subject matter of the investigation do not give rise to major ethical concerns. Given compliance with Charles Sturt University ethics regulations, for this project significant issues include:

- the privacy or anonymity of participants. This can be provided by a number of means including simply soliciting unidentified responses, or a ‘post-box’ or cut-out if the identities of the participants might need to be known for possible further investigation. The promise of anonymity can also be an important encouragement for participants to answer questions without fear, and the mechanism of providing anonymity should be made clear to participants.
- the protection and correct handling and disposal of data and analysis.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have investigated the background for the conduct of the project. With due consideration, I have selected a pragmatic methodological basis for the undertaking. In addition, I have established a design to undertake investigation of the Research Questions and the method by which this will be achieved, including consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the design and method chosen. The design is mixed-method with sequentially primary quantitative data followed and augmented by qualitative data.

The theory and practice of the methods for obtaining both the quantitative and qualitative data have been discussed and key questions have been considered including reliability and validity of the two methods; the technique for mixing the two datasets; the nature and influence of the population; sampling including inability to obtain a random sample, and size of the sample; and the development and legitimation of indices and ethical concerns. In addition, problems have been confronted, including the need to develop a suitable in-

strument and the complexity of the sampling process for the quantitative survey; the possibility of response bias; and the complexity of assessing the reliability and validity of the qualitative work.

With a solid methodological base in place the next task is the development of the quantitative survey instrument with the guidance of the ‘transformative Gospel literacy’ lens developed in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

## Introduction

The aims for the questionnaire are clear – in terms of the Research Questions, the questionnaire needs to enable exploration of:

- what lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the Gospels.
- how they understand and make sense of the Gospels.
- whether their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels transform or make a difference in their own lives.
- whether their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels enable and equip them to bring transformation to the lives of others.

The development of the questionnaire was complex and resulted in an original 147 questions being reduced to a final 69<sup>214</sup> questions under strict consideration of the Research Questions and the lens of transformative Gospel literacy. It was clear that answering 147 questions might be asking too much time or goodwill from volunteers, or any group for that matter.

In an attempt to maximise the data available from the remaining questions, the idea of creating indices involving groups of questions became attractive. I could see some consolidated areas of investigation which could not be examined in single questions, so I developed data questions which, when taken together, could yield broader perspectives. These questions were particularly associated with the Gospels in the lives of respondents

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<sup>214</sup> An original 36 questions contained in a section titled ‘What you believe about the Bible and Gospels as documents’ was eventually trimmed to two questions about the inspiration of the Gospels.

Thirty-four questions testing knowledge of the content of the Gospels was reduced to 22 by eliminating questions which were seen as duplicating retained questions in a substantial way

Twenty-seven questions asked to investigate respondents’ understanding of meaning and language were reduced to 7 questions.

Thirty-seven questions in a section entitled ‘How the Gospels play a part in your life’ were reduced to 24 questions in the final Section 2 of the questionnaire entitled ‘Exploring the part the Gospels play in my life’.

and Gospel knowledge, and the questions were in part designed with these indices<sup>215</sup> in mind. The resulting questions were distributed throughout the question bank to maximize independence.

Using the lens of transformative Gospel literacy which I developed in chapter 2 as a guide, the Research Questions will be answered in data questions covering three broad categories.

1. Knowing the Gospels (Research Question 1), issuing in data questions covering:
  - the identity of Jesus seen through the titles he is called, the actions he performs and his relationship with his Father in heaven.
  - the mission of Jesus as he pictured it himself and as he is pictured passing it on to the church.
  - the teaching of Jesus both in parabolic and story form and, particularly in Matthew's Gospel, given as instruction about daily life and its problems.
  - important events and figures, such as the Transfiguration and Resurrection, and significant people such as Moses and Mary Magdalene who give the narrative meaning and relate it to the Old Testament and the overall picture of salvation history.
2. Understanding and making sense of the Gospels (Research Question 2), issuing in data questions covering:
  - an ability to at least choose between different interpretations of given events or actions.
  - whether Adelaide Anglicans are more or less traditional in understanding and interpretation.
  - an awareness that language is complex, can be used idiomatically and can be interpreted figuratively or literally in many instances.
3. Applying the Gospels (Research Questions 3 and 4), issuing in data questions covering:

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<sup>215</sup> These indices are basic attempts to maximize the yield of the survey questions and I have qualified them with appropriate caveats in the following work as simple and exploratory first attempts in an uninvestigated field.

- Whether the lives of Adelaide Anglicans are transformed in bringing the Gospels to the many social, personal and ethical issues they face, as well as to their character and behaviour in their daily lives.
- Whether they are able and actually do make a difference in other lives by bringing Jesus and the Gospel story to those around them.

To this end, I have chosen to build a questionnaire in four sections.

1. Section 1 will seek basic personal and demographic data including personal and church-related activities, attitudes and background. These responses are needed for a number of reasons, including:
  - the provision of a demographic overview of the laity of the Diocese, and
  - relating findings in the other three sections to these activities, attitudes and personal background for a deeper understanding of patterns of Gospel engagement and influence.
2. Section 2 will seek to probe respondents' attitudes and activities in relation to transformation in their own lives and bringing change to others' lives. These responses will explore answers to Research Questions 3 and 4.
3. Section 3 will seek to establish what is known or not known about the content of the Gospels. These responses will provide an analysis of Research Question 1.
4. Section 4 will seek, in response to Research Question 2, to probe how different respondents interpret the language and make sense of Gospel content, and whether respondents understand and interpret the Gospels in a more or less traditional framework.

Each of sections 2, 3 and 4 will yield raw univariate data<sup>216</sup> capable of producing a picture or snapshot of the status of these questions in the Diocese at this time. The greater aim of the project, however, is to seek insight into the factors and relationships shaping the picture. To this end the picture will be deepened and widened by using bivariate contingency analysis of responses both within and between the four sections and their derivative indices to help understand the various factors at play in the attitudes and activities surveyed. Thus, the quantitative survey questionnaire has been structured to provide a breadth of data:

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<sup>216</sup> The raw data for Section 1 is found in pictorial form in Appendix 7.

- allowing a snapshot cross-sectional view of the state of knowledge and understanding of the Gospels for a significant sample of the lay population of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide.
- allowing contingency analysis between demographic factors and the state of knowledge and understanding of the Gospels.
- allowing contingency analysis between demographic factors and discipleship data, and
- allowing contingency analysis between knowledge and understanding of the Gospels and discipleship data.

The order of the sections was chosen with the aim of making the questionnaire as user-friendly as possible. The easiest material to answer was placed first, the most difficult (personally challenging) second and two relatively straightforward sections placed in Sections 3 and 4.<sup>217</sup>

## **Section 1- Personal data**

The first section consists of fourteen questions; three related to church-going, four related to Gospel engagement habits, three related to educational/formation background, and finally questions on birth, age, age when baptised and gender. The questions were presented as requiring either a graded response usually ranging from ‘never’ to ‘regularly/every day’ or a choice between distinct, mostly mutually-exclusive, possibilities. All were treated as nominal variables.

This section was placed first to provide a relatively non-demanding lead-in to the other sections. Questions 1 and 2 were included suspecting that both churchmanship and church attendance frequency would be significant factors in contingency analysis. Question 3 was included simply to fill out the snapshot of the Diocese at this time.

Questions 4, 5 and 6 were included as significant items which again were assessed as possibly being important factors in Gospel engagement and discipleship activity. Question 9 (How often do you interact with the Gospels electronically) was included on the

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<sup>217</sup> The questionnaire is found in Appendix 1.

basis of general interest and the reported American trend.<sup>218</sup> In question 8 diocesan members were asked to explore whether religious influence during upbringing might be significant in relation to Gospel knowledge, attitudes and activities. Questions 10 and 11 sought to establish general and church-oriented educational background of respondents, again to help build a picture of the Diocese and as possible factors influencing attitudes and knowledge. It is my intention to carry out contingency analysis which will reveal whether these factors affecting Gospel attitudes and activities were assessed correctly or not.

## **Section 2 – Discipleship data**

Section 2 consists of 18 Likert scale questions (Section 2.1) and a further 6 multi-choice and open-ended questions (Section 2.2). Appendix 3 – Explanation and Coding of Section 2 - shows all the questions with columns displaying why each question was asked, initial/possible inferences for either agreement or disagreement and how each data question relates to the Research Questions. The Likert questions were structured around a five-point scale to investigate attitudes to and experience with the Gospels in the lives of respondents.<sup>219</sup> Many questions in this section were potentially confronting or challenging, asking respondents to acknowledge self-assessed shortcomings, such as Question 10 – ‘I could be doing more to follow Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels.’ Questions were asked in such a way as to invite both disagreement and agreement for positive and negative attitude, indications and experiences.

The questions in Section 2.2 were asked to investigate in more detail a number of key questions:

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<sup>218</sup> American Bible Society, “State of the Bible,” 2015, 20. The State of the Bible reports of the American Bible Society for 2013, 2014 and 2015 have been tracking the increasing use of electronic devices to engage with the Bible. In 2015 the following comments were made, albeit in relation to the Bible as a whole. “The use of digital formats continues to increase. Half of all Bible readers say they used the Internet on a computer to read Bible content (50%); 40% searched their smartphone or cell phone to find Bible content or Bible verses; and 35% downloaded or used a Bible app on their smartphone.”

<sup>219</sup> The middle category in a Likert Scale allows respondents to avoid either expressing an extreme opinion or taking a stand on a controversial issue. The idea of an even numbered Likert Scale is rejected for this project in that it is felt that respondents should be able to express a genuine ‘neither agree nor disagree’, albeit the choice might allow some to escape expressing a less-than-good self-assessment on some questions. <https://achilleaskostoulas.com/2013/09/09/four-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-likert-scales/> Accessed October 18, 2016.

- ‘What stands in the way of respondents reading the Gospels more often is that...’ Whilst lack of time would be a clearly expected result, it seemed important to check if there were other significant factors.
- ‘Helpful uses of the Gospels for me include....’ The offered alternatives sought to challenge respondents to think about exactly how they used the Gospels, knowledge of which might be helpful in shaping future Gospel engagement strategies.
- ‘I think the Gospels can help us in our understanding of the issues involved and the shaping of our attitudes to... (various ethical questions)’. The question was asked to gauge whether laity related the Gospels strongly or otherwise to ethical questions of concern.
- ‘I understand a contemporary disciple to be one who....’ sought to investigate whether respondents held traditional views and whether they held a pro-active view of discipleship as outreaching.
- ‘The Gospels make a difference in my life by....’ offered respondents the opportunity to indicate up to five other ways that the Gospels might make a difference in their lives. The question was again asked to build the picture of the part played by the Gospels in the lives of lay people in the diocese and look for any significant areas which might serve as a focus for future Gospel-awareness building initiatives.

Each of these questions included an invitation to make a nil response or to further clarify their ideas.

Whilst the responses to 23 of the 24 questions in this section helped to build a comprehensive picture of lay Gospel attitudes and experience, the Likert scale questions offered a further degree of analytical possibility in the grouping of particular questions to form four indices. Firstly, the indices as descriptive univariate data gave a broader picture of Gospel engagement, Gospel influence in respondents’ lives and living, Gospel influence in discipleship and Gospel influence in relation to issues engagement. They serve the purpose of ordering groups of related questions to provide a more comprehensive view of the data.

Secondly, they offer the possibility of more complex contingency analysis with other factors which might affect the particular focus being expressed in the index. It would not only be an enormous task but, ultimately, without meaning, to run contingency analysis on all 18 Likert questions and, say, a respondent’s churchmanship as determined in the

profile data at Section 1 question 2. If all Likert questions were run against all Section 1 questions, there would be potentially 18 x 14 individual results which I believe could not be meaningfully analysed. With an index expressing the overall perspective of a number of questions, however, then this sort of index-based analysis becomes not only possible but also meaningful to the extent that the indices chosen reflect important Gospel activities and attitudes, and potentially lead to practical outcomes.

The indices thus offer insight into more complex aspects of lay interaction with the Gospels which could not necessarily be reflected in a single question. They have been constructed by grouping questions in the survey which offered information about the areas of Gospel engagement and how their interaction with the Gospels affected their daily life, discipleship and approach to issues. Whilst weighting of the various items making up each index could have been considered, I believe that it is beyond the limits of the project to investigate and justify what sorts of weightings might be applied and for what reasons. The simple additive scale with its disclosure of all questions is transparent and open to full understanding by any reader as at least a basic indication of the particular aspect of Gospel interaction being examined. Given that some factors may well be more important than others in determining the scores for any particular construct and thus deserve a weighting, the limitations of such simple unweighted additive scales need to be acknowledged. These simple indices are a basic attempt to derive further information from the data set. No claim is made for these indices and summative figures as rigorous statistical analysis; they are simply offered as helping to provide an overview of the data which each reader can use according to their best judgement. As with any statistically based evidence, the reader needs to make their own assessment of the value or otherwise of the information offered.

### **Gospel Engagement Index**

The most complex index developed was the Gospel Engagement Index (GEI) which was structured to investigate Research Question 3a (p. 52) – how do lay Adelaide Anglicans use or engage with the Gospels in their daily life or lives in general? The questions were included to ask:

- whether respondents read and use the Gospels regularly,
- whether they use the Gospels for reflection on issues and important questions which might arise for them,
- whether their reading contributes to their awareness of Jesus in daily life,

- whether their reading and the resulting knowledge of Jesus, in whatever way, actually lead to Jesus playing a significant role in shaping character and attitudes, and
- whether they feel that the Gospels might play a more prominent part in their lives. If so, what stands in the way of their reading the Gospels more often.

In order to explore these questions, the index incorporated Section 2 questions 1, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 19.<sup>220</sup> The focus was on the use made of the Gospels. It was designed to investigate the respondents' involvement with the Gospels with all questions related to respondent's reading of or reflection on the Gospels.

### **Gospels and Life Index**

The Gospels and Life Index (GLI) was structured to investigate the related Research Question 3b (p. 52) which sought to gain some insight into the difference Jesus and the Gospels make to the way respondents live. The focus of this index was concerned with the awareness and experience of Jesus and the Gospel picture of Jesus in each person's daily life. The questions were concerned to determine:

- did respondents find the figure of Jesus helpful when responding to a wide range of issues or when they needed help?
- were respondents aware or not of Jesus in their daily lives?
- did respondents find the Jesus story/Gospels relevant to their daily decision making?
- did they think Jesus played a significant part in shaping their character and attitudes?
- what did respondents believe were helpful uses of the Gospels for them, and how did the Gospels make a difference in their lives?

The index included eight items – questions 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 20 and 23.

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<sup>220</sup> Questions from Section 2.2 (i.e. non-Likert scale questions 19 - 24) have also been included in these indices. The way these have been adapted to render a Likert compatible score for inclusion is explained in Chapter 6 at the appropriate place for each Index.

## **Gospels and Discipleship<sup>221</sup> Index**

This Index (GDI) attempted to investigate Research Question 4 – respondents’ awareness of and commitment to bringing the good news to others and thus making a difference in the lives of those around them. Important aspects of this inquiry sought to ascertain whether they were actually doing this and whether they did it as well as they believed they could and should. The assessment was limited to verbal outreach or witness and the questions centred around their experiences or otherwise of speaking about Jesus and their confidence to do so. The index included six questions – questions 2, 9, 12, 15, 16 and 22 which explored:

- whether respondents actually talked or chatted about their Gospel knowledge or their experience of following Jesus and whether they felt they could be doing more in this respect,
- whether greater knowledge of the Gospels/Jesus would lead to greater confidence in sharing the story and their experience of it with friends, and
- how they understood what it meant to be a contemporary disciple.

## **Gospels and Issues Index**

The Gospels and Issues Index (GII) was developed to assess the extent to which lay Anglicans relate their Gospel knowledge and commitment to both general and particular issues. Questions sought to explore whether the Gospels played a part in assessment both of significant personal ethical issues and in relation to wider issues. The questions selected were 3, 5, 12 and 21.

These four indices are an initial attempt to investigate complex behaviour related to the Gospels and, as a first attempt, are very much a work in progress. Further thought may well allow the development of more complex and numerous indices for a more extensive investigation of Gospel activity and relationship.

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<sup>221</sup> The reader is reminded of the limited and particular use of the word ‘discipleship’ explained in Chapter 1. It is worth noting however that the index explained here is a more detailed investigation of two of the ‘Features of Mature Christians’ (i.e., a comprehensive discipleship profile) offered by Walton and the index is thus located and contextualized as part of a greater understanding of discipleship. See R. L Walton, “Ordinary Discipleship,” in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church* ed. Astley and Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 186.

## Section 3 – Knowledge data

Section 3 comprised 22 questions<sup>222</sup> which were designed to answer Research Question 1 and to test the Gospel knowledge of respondents in accord with the concept of literacy developed in Chapter 2. The questions all offered three choices and an alternative of ‘don’t know’, which respondents were encouraged to select rather than simply guess if they did not know the answer. The questions were centred on Jesus but also intentionally tested knowledge of places, Old Testament connections and Gospel events closely associated with Jesus and his ministry.

Types of questions seen in other questionnaires which were rated as trivial or obscure in terms of Gospel literacy were excluded.<sup>223</sup> Questions were graded from easy (e.g., question 2 – how long did Jesus spend fasting in the wilderness – a figure which most lectionary-based Anglicans sing about at least once a year in the well-known hymn ‘Forty days and forty nights’) to more difficult (e.g., question 21 which tested whether respondents had a deeper knowledge of the contents of the parables and were able to identify significant content within the parable.) The basis for inclusion of each question is found at Appendix 4 – Explanation and Coding of Section 3. The Appendix shows:

- the question,
- why the question was asked, in relation to the value of the question for Gospel literacy,
- the relevance of the question to change/transformation for the reader, and
- how the question might relate to daily life of a lay member of the Diocese.

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<sup>222</sup> The questions for Section 3 need to avoid testing less important detail of the Gospel story but rather key points which reveal, with the mediation of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus is and what he does/offers. That is, different questions might be validly chosen to investigate Gospel knowledge, but whatever questions are chosen they need to be directed towards the same end if we are to talk about ‘transformative Gospel literacy’.

<sup>223</sup> An example from the 2006 Presbyterian (USA) Bible Content Examination found at <http://www.whitneyhq.com/biblecontent/>. Accessed November 30, 2012, was:

72. According to the Gospel of Luke, who was the mother of John the Baptist?

- a. Anna
- b. Elizabeth
- c. Joanna
- d. Martha

Whilst not a trivial question, it is not rated as an important question in relation to knowing and relating to Jesus.

As with Section 2, the questions asked in this section provided three foci which offered groupings not only to present a more comprehensive overview of the univariate descriptive data but also a basis for contingency analysis, thus seeking to find relationships between these foci and other factors which might lead to insight about lay knowledge of Jesus. These three foci were Jesus' Identity, Jesus' Teaching and Jesus' Mission.

### **Jesus' Identity Index**

Knowing Jesus' identity in relation to God his Father, to the Old Testament and to those around him is crucial for an understanding Jesus in our own lives. The Jesus who is just a good man or a gifted prophet is a quite different figure, presumably exercising a quite different influence, from the Jesus who is genuinely accepted as 'Son of God', however that might be understood. There are many moments in the Gospels where the writers seek to establish or underpin Jesus' identity, often by raising questions like, 'Who is this?' or including titles for him at significant moments or events in the story. Some of the deepest controversies centre on disputes about who Jesus is and what authority he has. Without an understanding of Jesus as more than a wonder-worker, misguided social reformer or gifted healer then a genuine relationship with Jesus and the resulting transformation of the self is not possible. Section 3 questions 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18 and 20 were developed to cast light on this focus.

### **Jesus' Teaching Index**

The transforming relationship with the Jesus who is still alive in the Spirit is crucial to the lived Christian life. As Jesus taught his own disciples and the crowds about his Father and his characteristics, so contemporary disciples listen to Jesus' teaching as portrayed in the Gospels. As they did, so we too need teaching and instruction on coming into relationship with God, being with God and behaving as God wants us to behave and act. Knowledge of Jesus' teaching as portrayed in the Gospels, in the understanding of the writers, is critical because of our limitations and weakness, and our regular need for guidance. Section 3 questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 15, 19 and 21 provided significant insight into a respondent's knowledge of Jesus' teaching and instruction.

### **Jesus' Mission Index**

An important sequence for authentic Christian discipleship comes with understanding what Jesus was doing, why he was doing it (Jesus' mission) and what that means for us. We are unable to understand a pro-active discipleship role without understanding and

responding to both Jesus' example of saving works and his instructions to his followers on reaching out to others. Albeit with a small and limited question bank, Section 3 questions 9, 14 and 20 are the questions directly related to a respondent's understanding of Jesus' mission.

With each of the three aspects of Jesus person and work outlined above, it is easy to imagine a more detailed examination. While beyond the scope of this Project in this initial foray into a novel methodology, part of the aim and hope of this project is that it might lead to further and more elaborate investigation of what is known by any body of laity, and how what is known affects the lived Christian lives.

## **Section 4 – Meaning and language data**

The final section of the questionnaire contained nine questions and was designed to explore how respondents understood and interpreted, or made sense of, the Gospel account of Jesus and his works. This section therefore sought to offer insight on Research Question 2. In essence, I sought to establish whether the respondents understood the Gospels within a more or less traditional paradigm, and whether they leaned more to literal or figurative interpretation of language and pictorial description. The question of how anyone understands and interprets is, of course, a complex question which cannot be resolved with answers to nine questions.<sup>224</sup> I believe it is possible and important, however, to obtain an indication of how lay people view the Gospels both as documents themselves and the content/story they tell.

Questions 1 and 3 were concerned with the nature of the Gospels. Questions 4, and 5 were concerned with the interpretation of Jesus' words and actions as depicted by the Gospel writers. Questions 2 and 7 investigated historicity and language. Questions 6 and 8 were concerned to probe lay understanding of two key Gospel images which were important in Jesus' preaching and teaching. Three alternatives were offered for each question, together with the invitation to offer other interpretations than those included. Each set of three alternatives was structured in such a way that one was clearly traditional and one clearly less traditional. The questions are included at Appendix 5 where they are listed in a table showing:

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<sup>224</sup> See David J. Cranmer and Brian E. Eck, "God Said It : Psychology and Biblical Interpretation, How Text and Reader Interact through the Glass Darkly," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 22, no. 3 (1994), for an excellent overview of the various personal, cultural and textual factors which need to be considered to "develop an accurate understanding of how to read and apply the Scriptures correctly."

- the question,
- why the question was asked,
- the inference of the response to each alternative to each question, and
- the coding in relation to whether the alternative is ‘more traditional’ or ‘less traditional’

While there are a number of recent and contemporary writers expounding a modern approach to the interpretation of the Gospels<sup>225</sup>, one particularly clear and helpful insight into an alternative (other than traditional) understanding of the New Testament/Gospels is provided by the works of Marcus Borg. Borg rejects a ‘traditional paradigm’ or understanding and proposes an ‘emergent paradigm’ for interpreting the Gospels/Bible. In an attempt to restrict this phase of the project to the simplest categories possible I am adopting the term ‘less traditional’ rather than employing Borg’s more complex concept of ‘emergent’. Borg has written a number of articles and books which are relevant and helpful to this project and which examine both a different understanding of the nature of the Bible and of its function and role in the Christian life.<sup>226</sup> In the most recent of his books and after an examination of the nature of faith, Borg takes up the question of the Bible as an historical product. He identifies the characteristics of a traditional paradigm of understanding the Bible as including:

- the Bible seen as a divine product,
- the Bible emphasized as a literal-factual book,
- the Bible as revealing doctrine and morals,
- faith as belief,
- Christian life emphasis as the afterlife, and
- what to believe or do to be saved being central.

This is compared to an emerging paradigm for understanding the Bible characterized as:

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<sup>225</sup> Examples would include Brian McLaren, John Dominic Crossan, John Spong and Gregory Jenks.

<sup>226</sup> Marcus J. Borg, "Different Ways of Looking at the Bible," *BR (Washington, D.C.)* 8, no. 4 (1992): 7, 13., and "Faith and Scholarship: How Can I Be a Christian and Say the Things I Say? . . . The Truth of Christianity Does Not Depend on the Literal Truth or Historical Infallibility of the Bible," *BR (Washington, D.C.)* 9, no. 4 (1993): 9, 54-55.

M.J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

- the Bible seen as a human response to God,
- the Bible emphasized as historical and metaphorical yet more concerned with meaning,
- the Bible as sacramental, and
- the Christian life emphasis as transformation in this life through relationship with God being central.<sup>227</sup>

Questions in Section 4 are designed to differentiate between equivalent concepts in the above two lists and reveal whether lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide lean to a more or less traditional understanding of the Gospels.<sup>228</sup>

## Reliability and validity

A pilot survey (see below for details) provided initial insight into considerations of reliability and validity. The participants indicated a range of queries after completing the test, on the basis of which changes to the questions and framework of the questionnaire were made. In respect of the exhaustive editorial process undertaken in developing the questionnaire, the queries raised in the pilot study and the content of Appendices 3, 4 and 5, I

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<sup>227</sup> Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 6-15.

<sup>228</sup> A. Village, "Biblical Interpretation among Church of England Lay People" PhD diss., Bristol University, 2003, 54-55. Paradigms for interpreting the Bible (Gospels) can be characterized in a number of ways and focus on a number of different characteristics of each. In a Church of England context, Andrew Village took the following two lists derived from his pilot studies of lay people as indicators of the differences between conservative (more traditional) and liberal (less traditional) beliefs:

Conservative beliefs include:

1. The Bible is the inspired word of God, authoritative to the life of believers, which contains sufficient and exclusive truth for salvation. It gives a true account of events as recorded. Passages have a meaning that is universally true and clearly evident, especially to those who have faith.
2. Rejection of divorce, homosexuality, sex before marriage and abortion, as right ways to behave.
3. Rejection of other religions as giving access to God or salvation.
4. Belief in miraculous healing as a direct action of God, and in the efficacy of healing prayer.

Liberal beliefs include:

1. The Bible is inspired truth about God, important in the life of believers, but not necessarily authoritative in all matters. It contains a mixture of literal and symbolic truth and some human errors. What the Bible means may depend on who is reading it. Its truth stands alongside truth about God from other religions.
2. Acceptance of divorce, homosexuality, sex before marriage and possibly abortion as desirable, unavoidable or morally neutral behaviours.
3. Acceptance of the validity of other belief systems, especially other religions.
4. Scepticism about divine intervention in healing, but belief in the positive value of prayer for the believer.

believe that “face validity”<sup>229</sup> was explored and established for the questions in Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the instrument.

For practical reasons related to time lapse and the limitations of a single researcher, it was not possible to test the stability<sup>230</sup> of Sections 2 and 4 of the questionnaire in a meaningful way. If the measures being employed in this project were to be further used, however, then an estimate of stability would be needed to ensure that the questions were being understood in the same way by other sample frames. In relation to the unique indices which were developed, these were tested for internal reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha<sup>231</sup>, a calculation of all possible split-half reliability coefficients. Whilst there are varying views as to satisfactory values for this indicator, 0.70 seems to be an acceptable figure.<sup>232</sup> Consequently I will disclose the Cronbach value for each of the indices so that readers can make their own assessment.

Perhaps the biggest issue related to validity was whether participants were actually able to separate their attitudes, actions and beliefs about the Gospels from their attitudes, actions and beliefs about the Bible as a whole. One technique I employed to offset this possibility was to position the figure of Jesus, and the phrase ‘the Jesus story’ prominently in the questions. Again, for further exploration of this subject, it is not hard to imagine a rigorous process which might test the extent to which this ‘cross-over’ does in fact take place. Even if on the odd occasion the respondent is thinking of the Bible rather than the Gospels, however, I believe because of the way the questions are asked that the effect would not be statistically significant.

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<sup>229</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 152, where he defines face validity as “establishing that the measure apparently reflects the content of the concept in question.”

<sup>230</sup> Stability is a measure of reliability referring to the likelihood of obtaining the same answers to the questions after a lapse of time. This is called the ‘test re-test’ method and gives an estimate of whether the questions lead to consistent responses.

<sup>231</sup> Cronbach’s Alpha is a measure of the internal consistency among a group of test items and the extent to which a set of items measures a single unidimensional latent construct – that is, measures some common characteristic or quality which underlies and is common in part to each of the items. The test is based on multiple inter-correlations taken over the set of items with the value of Alpha over 0.7 being rated as acceptable. It should be noted however that the test is not definitive (see section titled ‘Internal Consistency’ at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cronbach%27s\\_alpha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cronbach%27s_alpha) Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and is indicative only. The test is offered here on that basis only, and the reader should in fact consider each of the items and whether they are seen to be related to the construct in whatever way that is indicated.

<sup>232</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 150–151, where Bryman notes “it is usually expected that a result of 0.80 and above implies an acceptable level of internal reliability.” In the same place, he cites others as saying ‘0.70 is a satisfactory level’ and ‘a minimum level of 0.60 is good.’

## Conduct of the pilot survey

The aim of the pilot survey, which was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee<sup>233</sup>, was to test the questionnaire and to test the entry and analysis of data in SPSS.

The pilot survey was conducted in a single parish only rather than two or more parishes because there was nothing further to gain in terms of a pilot study. One particular parish was chosen before others because it was a representative ‘middle of the road’ parish which I believed offered a cross-section of the Adelaide Anglican community. Fourteen people filled out the survey form with the quickest to complete taking fifteen minutes and the slowest taking thirty-two minutes. The average age of participants was 75 which indicates the ageing in many parishes consistent with the ageing population.

When all had finished the survey, the following areas were explored to gain feedback on the questions, the format, the language and participant satisfaction with the questionnaire:

1. the understanding of instructions was tested for each section by asking whether anyone had any problems with how to answer the questions;
2. the clarity of questions was checked by asking if anyone had trouble understanding any particular question or was confused by what was meant;
3. the presence of difficult/unanswered questions was checked by asking if there were any questions which one or more participants were unable to answer;
4. the possible overuse of the ‘other’ option for any given question was checked by asking whether participants needed to use the category, ‘other’, a significant number of times;
5. that questions can and do seek to detect genuine difference was checked by asking whether any participants had trouble deciding on an answer because two or more possibilities were too similar to make a clear choice;
6. the suitability of questions in section 3 as a reasonable test of Gospel knowledge was checked by asking whether section 3 was thought to be too hard or too easy as a test of Gospel knowledge;
7. the user friendliness of the questionnaire was checked by asking whether the questionnaire overall was easy and/or enjoyable to complete; and

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<sup>233</sup> Approval received from Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee February 14, 2015.

8. the satisfaction of participants in terms of testing/displaying their knowledge or testing/exploring their discipleship was also ascertained by direct question.

The participants were also asked whether they would respond to a follow up interview if that would help the research, and if so how their willingness/unwillingness might be best ascertained and whether they would have objections to being identified by a third party for this purpose if needed.

Participants indicated:

- two inconsistencies where the word 'Bible' had been used instead of 'Gospel'.
- one question which was confusing in that it could be read as offering two questions which could be answered quite differently.
- a significant difficulty understanding the method offered for answering Likert scale questions.
- no problems understanding instructions.
- a general level of satisfaction, with some feeling challenged by the questions in Section 2 of the survey, and most feeling that Section 3 was a fair test of Gospel knowledge.
- that a simple yes/no option in a final question on the questionnaire would be acceptable as a method for ascertaining who might be willing to participate in a further phase of the project.

The appropriate corrections and alterations were made prior to the circulation of the survey questionnaire. Some of the participants indicated that the experience of the questionnaire had itself been a challenging and helpful exercise providing transformative impetus for their own journeys.

The initial entry of data into SPSS revealed some unanticipated complexities in the entry of questions offering multiple responses. These were, however, overcome and the data questions were found to be satisfactory for the entry and manipulation of data.

## Conduct of the survey

The survey questionnaire was conducted between May and August 2015. The population being surveyed was the lay membership of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. The number of members of the Diocese was ascertained to be 10660.<sup>234</sup> I appreciate that there may be other measures such as the number who indicated Anglican on the Census return. Given that the project is focused on active and committed Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide and that the sample was drawn exclusively from this constituency, however, this figure seems to be the appropriate one to take. For the quantitative survey, a sample from this population was sought of such size that valid contingency analysis would allow possible inferences to be made about the population. A random sample of 135 respondents was obtained.

The survey was extensively publicized both electronically and in hard copy to all parishes in the Diocese and a period of two months set aside during which lay Anglicans could respond to either an electronic version of the questionnaire or a hard copy. The electronic copy was made available through the Diocesan website and the hard copy on request to a third party. The questionnaire responses were anonymous and were allocated a record number on receipt by a third party. Responses were received from persons in 43 of the 65 parishes in the Diocese. These responses were entered in raw form into SPSS within which they were variously aggregated, averaged, grouped and recoded for both univariate and bivariate analysis.

A number of respondents did not answer all of the 69 questions in the survey instrument. Some of the omissions appeared to be oversight. One respondent did not answer any questions in Section 2, and five others did not answer some of the questions. Seven respondents did not answer any of Section 3 and there were a few single questions overlooked by others. Eight respondents failed to answer any questions in Section 4 with two other respondents failing to answer one question each. The questionnaires returned with sections not answered were retained as they all had some value in other sections. All these non-responses were consistently coded in SPSS to register as missing values. The missing

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<sup>234</sup> This figure ascertained from the Diocesan Registrar as average weekly attendance at Anglican Churches in the Diocese as indicated in Diocesan Accounts 2016. From anecdotal evidence the figure seemed high, and an attempt was made to obtain a more detailed breakdown of parish figures, but it turned out that this figure was unavailable.

values were taken into account in all computations.<sup>235</sup> My assessment is that, due to the nature of the contingency analysis on which the bivariate analysis was based, the missing values did not compromise the validity of the results. On the basis of this comprehensive overview of the conduct of the quantitative survey completed between May and July 2015 I now turn to the analysis of results.

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<sup>235</sup>Computations were carried out using listwise deletion to manage missing values in one of the two variables being processed. In list wise deletion a case is dropped from an analysis because it has a missing value in at least one of the specified variables. The analysis is only run on cases which have a complete set of data.

## CHAPTER 6

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS 1 -

### KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPELS

#### Introduction

The Questionnaire<sup>236</sup>, comprising sections on demographics, discipleship, Gospel knowledge and Gospel understanding, was administered in 2015 after a pilot test carried out in an ‘ordinary’ parish in the Diocese of Adelaide. The results were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and were reworked<sup>237</sup> in order to provide the basis for analysis of the results. It is to this task of analysis that I now turn.

#### Overview of the quantitative analysis

The descriptive analysis in Chapter 6 will consist of both univariate and bivariate components. These will seek to explore and present a picture of Gospel knowledge, interpretation and lived experience, and the demographic factors, attitudes and activities on the part of lay members of the Diocese of Adelaide (Research Questions 1 and 2) related to that knowledge, understanding and lived experience. Results and analysis will be presented for the questions in each section as well as for the indices derived from groups of questions. The bivariate analysis will seek to deepen the insights into these results. Chapter 7 will consist of univariate and bivariate crosstabulation analysis in a dynamic exploration of Research Questions 3 and 4) - the theme of transformation in respondents’ lives.

For ease of reference, the data will be denoted as follows<sup>238</sup>:

- **PD** - Data (answers to questions) from Section 1 of the Questionnaire which is Profile Data,
- **DD** - Data from Section 2 which is Discipleship Data,
- **KD** - Data from Section 3 which is Knowledge Data, and

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<sup>236</sup> The Questionnaire is found in Appendix 1.

<sup>237</sup> The original seventy variable columns became 218 columns after the various ‘binnings’ of variables, generation of indices and entry of multiple choice questions. The terms ‘binning’ and ‘re-binning’ are synonymous with ‘recoding’ but are assessed as more suggestive of the multiple possibilities for the recoding of any given set of figures.

<sup>238</sup> Questions in each section will be coded for their section and number. For instance, the seventh question in Section 2 (I experience the Gospel figure of Jesus as helpful on particular issues) would be denoted as DD7.

- **MLD** - Data from Section 4 which is data concerning meaning and language.

Whilst this method of presenting data might appear complex and confusing to some readers, it was found to be the most satisfactory way of presenting the detail required. For this reason, I would suggest to the reader that having to hand a separate copy of Appendix 1 (the Questionnaire) and a list of the above acronyms might be found helpful.

Apart from the dichotomous data of gender and interval data of age, the data consists entirely of nominal (categorical) and ordinal data. Both these latter classes of data are amenable to analysis as univariate data by frequency table and as bivariate data by contingency table and the  $\chi^2$  test for association, given basic qualifiers.<sup>239</sup>

Eighteen questions in Section 2 were Likert items. There was some evidence of central tendency bias<sup>240</sup>, but none of acquiescence bias<sup>241</sup> in the patterns of responses or social desirability bias, which was assessed as not relevant to the subject matter of the Likert items. Noting that Likert items using the same scale considered as ordinal data can be ‘summed’ to produce a summative picture<sup>242</sup>, in section 2 a number of summative indices<sup>243</sup> have been produced based on a combination of Likert items and multiple response items scored to allow combination with Likert scores. The items nominated for each index were subjected to the Alpha reliability test provided by SPSS. No claim is made for these indices and summative figures as rigorous statistical analysis; they are simply offered as helping to develop an overview of the data which each reader can use according to their best judgement.

### **Univariate analysis**

Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Questionnaire have been designed to provide insight into the Research Questions through univariate analysis of individual questions and of groups of questions within each section.

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<sup>239</sup> See Appendix 2 for explanation of both the  $\chi^2$  test and the qualifiers.

<sup>240</sup> Central tendency is the tendency to score close to the centre and avoid having strong or extreme opinions specially on topics seen as controversial. This tendency was dealt with in the ‘binning’ or recoding procedures.

<sup>241</sup> This bias refers to the tendency of some people to consistently agree or disagree with a set of questions or items.

<sup>242</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 198.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191, where Neuman offers a distinction between indices and scales. The ‘indices’ in this project were not called scales because they were not based on strictly interval data and because other non-Likert data items subjectively scored to correspond to the Likert item scoring schedule were incorporated with the Likert items.

This will be achieved through illustrative frequency tables together with appropriate commentary on responses to the individual questions and groups of questions in each Section of the Questionnaire.

### **Bivariate analysis**

Bivariate analysis is an essential component of the project designed to provide deeper appreciation of all the Research questions. The aim of bivariate analysis was to look for relationships between both individual and grouped items which clarified and elaborated the univariate analysis results to provide a more comprehensive picture of the Gospels in the Diocese. The question being asked of each result was – ‘What further relational information could I offer to maximize a reader’s understanding of that result?’ A note of caution is, however, appropriate. Ingrid Storm notes,

Even after testing for significance using a statistical test, there is still no guarantee that we know what the finding means. A typical situation in bivariate analysis is that we are left wondering whether a statistically significant relationship is a direct association between two variables or is due to some other influence.<sup>245</sup>

Within the parameters and possibility of this project it is not possible to carry out investigation for indirect influence. It is important, however, to remind the reader that this possibility needs to be borne in mind in relation to any associations discovered. In addition, consideration of indirect influence would be highly desirable for any associations which merited further action or follow-up.

This analysis was undertaken using SPSS and in particular the crosstabulation feature and the  $\chi^2$  test which enables the researcher to establish whether, on the basis of a sample from a given population, two nominal/ordinal variables are likely to be dependent or independent within that population (in this case the lay members of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide). To ensure maximum retention of structural information where possible, each comparison was cross tabulated for both raw and variously reduced data on both axes.<sup>246</sup> The focus was on those possible relationships/associations which seem to yield, in my judgement, significant information.<sup>247</sup> Negative results (no statistically significant association

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<sup>245</sup> Storm, “Researching Religion Using Quantitative Methods,” 8.

<sup>246</sup> See Appendix 2 for a more detailed explanation and example of how the data was reworked to locate an association at its greatest degree of discrimination. The fundamental aim was to systematically ensure that a valid  $\chi^2$  test was detected with the maximum information intact.

<sup>247</sup> An example which needs explanation is related to DD19 – DD22. These multi-choice questions were reduced to Likert type scores in a particular way which allowed incorporation into the indices developed

found in valid test) will not be reported unless particularly significant or they clearly run counter to a reasonably expected result.

## **Descriptive analysis of survey data<sup>248</sup>**

The Profile Data is presented pictorially at Appendix 8. Given that the Research Questions are the prime focus of the project the Profile Data is not of primary interest in and of itself, and the composition of the sample receives comment when appropriate. The descriptive analysis is offered for each Research Question.

### **What do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the content of the Gospels?**

The first Research Question seeks to investigate, through the first focus (knowledge) of the lens of transformative Gospel literacy, what ordinary lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the Gospels. Gospel knowledge is seen as basic and essential to a Gospel literacy necessary for a transforming knowledge of/relationship with Jesus with the potential to change lives.<sup>249</sup> I have not seen either a method or a compelling attempt to probe the Gospel knowledge or literacy of an Anglican group, and believe such an investigation is not only overdue but a necessity for the future health of the church and particularly Anglicans who seek to follow the teachings and example of Jesus. Section Three of the questionnaire was designed to provide a basic measure and assessment of this knowledge. The basis of selection, rationale and cohesion of these questions has been offered in Chapter 5 and Appendix 4. It is worth noting, however, that other equally useful and valid sets of questions could have been asked. Most respondents answered all questions with very few resorting to alternative (d) – ‘don’t know’.

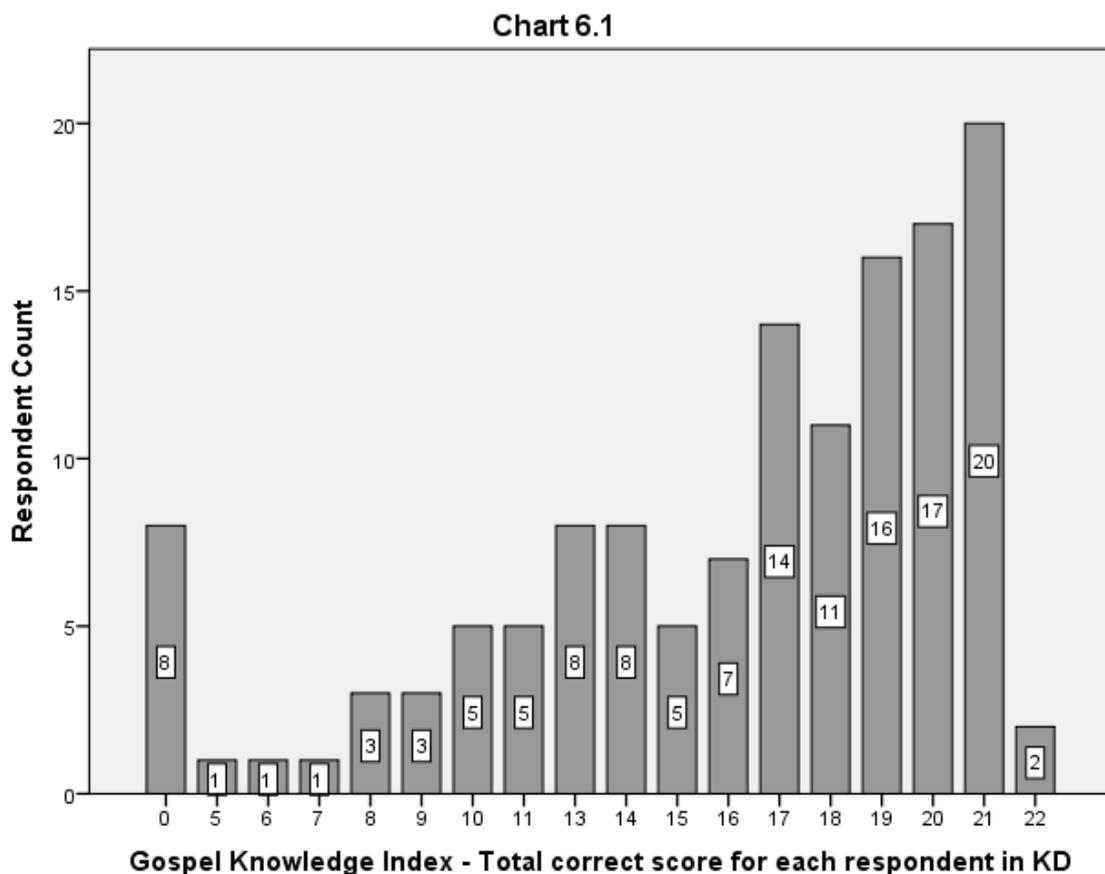
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around Section 2 questions (GEI, GLI, GDI and GII) but rendered them unusable when it came to testing relationships between these indices and results from DD19 – DD22 which were not included in a particular index. To recode them for suitability would have meant considerable work for presumably little result, and was not undertaken.

<sup>248</sup> There is significant survey-based material about the use of and attitudes to the Bible available, particularly for the contextually similar English Church, from authors such as Astley and Francis, Clines and Village. Whilst there is a temptation to make comparisons, and notwithstanding that these all relate to the Bible rather than the Gospels, it is important to note the significant methodological difficulty of comparing material resulting from even slightly different questions. That is, if comparisons were to be made then the only safe comparison would be based on the same question administered in the different scenarios. Ingrid Storm, "Researching Religion Using Quantitative Methods," 5, notes that "... slight differences in language and administration of the questionnaire could potentially have an impact on the results."

<sup>249</sup> Astley and Francis, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 79–80.

## Gospel Knowledge Index



The prime statistic of interest is the score obtained for all answers to KD1 – KD22, which has been denoted as the Gospel Knowledge Index (GKI). This Index is computed by totalling the correct answers to the questions. Thus, the perfect score is 22. Whilst only 2 out of the 127 valid responses scored the maximum of 22, 92 scored 15 or more – that is, nearly three quarters of respondents were able to answer two thirds of the questions correctly. The eight scores of zero comprise seven respondents who did not answer this section of the questionnaire, and one who answered one question only and was incorrect in that answer.

To the very limited extent that any comparison can be made, this figure of 72% is of an order with the 60% reported by the American Bible Society and the 65% reported by the UK Bible Society as confident in their knowledge of the Bible (not Gospels) as outlined in Chapter 2. It does seem reasonable to contend that a majority of Adelaide lay Anglicans seem to know enough about the Gospels to obtain a basic understanding of the Gospel story and its import for their lives. In relation to the comprehensive definition of transformative Gospel literacy developed in Chapter 2, and within the framework and limitations of the testing tool, it seems that a majority of lay Adelaide Anglicans have a basis

for developing a transformative Gospel literacy.<sup>250</sup> Further quantitative testing could refine this result, as will further qualitative testing in Chapter 8.

Not surprisingly crosstabulation analysis showed a number of relationships between scores on the Gospel Knowledge Index and items from both PD and DD.<sup>251</sup> To the extent that Discipleship Data (DD) will be examined in detail in Chapter 7, it is sufficient for the purpose of painting a picture of Gospel knowledge in the Diocese to limit this enquiry to any broad or comprehensive relationship between KD and DD. Examination of Appendix 7 discloses associations between Gospel Knowledge and PD4 (frequency of reading the Gospels by oneself), PD6 (use of resources to study the Gospels), PD9 (interaction with the Gospels using electronic devices) and PD 11 (level of theological or Biblical studies undertaken). With two exceptions, this is also true, as would be expected, for indices derived from KD – i.e., for Jesus’ identity, Jesus teaching and Jesus mission.

It is useful at this point to explain an association analysis in some detail. Whilst the associations between Gospel knowledge and PD4 and PD6 are intuitively evident (and, to the extent that the sample is representative, highly likely to apply to the population as a whole), that for PD9 needs explanation.

**Table 6.1 - Crosstabulation PD9 v GKI**

		Gospel Knowledge Index binned into four, 1 = 5-9, 2 = 10-13, 3 = 14-18, 4 = 19-22				Total
		1	2	3	4	
PD9 – use of electronic devices to read or study the Gospels, binned into two, 1= never/ occasionally 2= often/regularly	1 Count	8	17	37	35	97
	Expected Count	6.9	13.7	34.4	42.0	97.0
	Adjusted Residual	.9	1.9	1.1	-3.0	
	2 Count	1	1	8	20	30
	Expected Count	2.1	4.3	10.6	13.0	30.0
	Adjusted Residual	-.9	-1.9	-1.1	3.0	
Total	Count	9	18	45	55	127
	Expected Count	9.0	18.0	45.0	55.0	127.0

<sup>250</sup> Refer to the definition of transformative Gospel literacy at page 41 above, which was developed both as a guide for developing data questions and as the benchmark for making comments on the Gospel literacy of Adelaide laity.

<sup>251</sup> Appendix 7 shows a complete overview of the bivariate crosstabulation analysis which was carried out. This table shows where valid tests were detected, and the parameters associated with each test. From the Appendix, it can be noted that the indices and groupings derived from Section 3 (KD) of the questionnaire show relationships with PD, DD and the indices derived from DD, and MLD. To the extent that this present chapter is concerned to paint a picture of what Adelaide lay Anglicans know about the Gospels and how they interpret and understand them, the relationships between KD and DD and derived indices will be left for examination in Chapter 7.

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.838 <sup>a</sup>	3	.020
Likelihood Ratio	10.631	3	.014
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.109	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	127		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.13.

The test is valid – there are 25% or less cells with an expected count of less than 5 and the value of p at 0.02 is less than the cut-off value of 0.05.<sup>252</sup> According to the parameters set it is valid to claim an association between the two variables for

the sample and very likely for the population sampled in this table. It is important to note that the two variables were tested in a range of values for each.<sup>253</sup> Most tests were invalid because there were too many cells with expected counts below 5. And while the 2 x 3 table rendered a valid test with only 1 cell below the expected count of 5, the 2 x 4 table above preserved potentially more information whilst remaining valid even though 2 cells had expected counts less than 5.

The adjusted residuals<sup>254</sup> help show where the association is most pronounced. Looking at the highest level of Gospel knowledge (score 19 – 22 in column 4 above) the adjusted residuals of  $\pm 3.0$  indicate that these cells were major contributors to the association. Those who had a high level of Gospel knowledge and used electronic devices never or occasionally were significantly less than expected. Conversely those who had a high level of Gospel knowledge and used electronic devices to engage with the Gospels often or regularly were significantly more than expected than if there was no relationship between the two variables. The inference is that regular or frequent use of electronic devices to engage with the Gospels may well lead to greater Gospel knowledge for a greater number of the population. There will of course be those who have a high Gospel knowledge for various other reasons and without using electronic devices. There will also be those who use electronic devices regularly who do not achieve the highest level of Gospel knowledge. But the association shows that all things being equal, using electronic devices

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<sup>252</sup> See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the p value of 0.05.

<sup>253</sup> See Appendix 2 for an explanation of ‘binning’ or recoding

<sup>254</sup> See Appendix 2 for an explanation of adjusted residuals.

to engage the Gospels may well indicate for this population a significantly higher Gospel knowledge index.<sup>255</sup>

An important caveat needs to be explained at this point. The crosstabulation test establishes association only, not the causality or direction of dependency within the association. Whilst intuitively it seems reasonable to conclude that frequent or regular use of electronic devices leads to greater Gospel knowledge, it could be that greater knowledge of the Gospels leads to the frequent or regular use of electronic devices to engage with the Gospels. For many associations, the direction of any causality is either evident or made clear because of other factors which are known. For some associations, however, there may be significant doubt about which way the dependency operates, and further testing may well be needed to clarify.

Resolving this question is important for putting any findings into action. If the association was in one direction, action to teach and encourage people to use electronic devices with a view to improve Gospel knowledge would be suggested. Alternatively, improving Gospel knowledge in the population to increase use of electronic devices might be indicated. It seems most likely to be the use of electronic devices enable greater engagement with the Gospels which actually leads to greater Gospel knowledge.<sup>256</sup> Thus, an empirically based finding of this project which might be both novel and significant is that effort should be put into encouraging the people of the Diocese in the use of electronic engagement with the Gospels.

Examination of the valid  $\chi^2$  tests for PD4, PD6 and PD11 yield similar results. The tables are included below<sup>257</sup> without the  $\chi^2$  test validity test panel which is supplied routinely in SPSS. In each case the value of the  $\chi^2$  test can be seen in Appendix 7, together with the dimensions of table yielding the p value.

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<sup>255</sup> American Bible Society, "The State of the Bible, 2015," 20. The figures for electronic engagement in America are summarized: "Half of all Bible readers say they used the Internet on a computer to read Bible content (50%); 40% searched their smartphone or cell phone to find Bible content or Bible verses; and 35% downloaded or used a Bible app on their smartphone." This does not refer to the Gospels as such but can probably be taken as an indication of Gospel engagement.

<sup>256</sup> Using Google, the search term 'Gospel' brought up 227,000,000 hits, and using 'Four Gospels' brought up 1,190,000 hits. Even allowing for the more marginal expressions which will no doubt be found, it is clear that there is a huge amount of material concerning the Gospels to be found on the web.

<sup>257</sup> Albeit cumbersome, it seems helpful to include the Adjusted Residuals for each crosstabulation so that the significant differences between actual and expected counts can be easily located and related to the  $\alpha$  value of 0.05.

**Table 6.2 – Crosstabulation PD4 v GKI**

			Gospel Knowledge Index binned into three, 1= 6-10, 2=11-16, 3=17-22			Total
			1	2	3	
PD4 I read the Gospels by myself - binned into 1 = rarely/occasionally, 2 = monthly, 3 = weekly or more	1	Count	12	13	23	48
		Expected Count	5.3	12.5	30.2	48.0
		Adjusted Residual	3.9	.2	-2.7	
	2	Count	1	2	12	15
		Expected Count	1.7	3.9	9.4	15.0
		Adjusted Residual	-.6	-1.2	1.5	
	3	Count	1	18	45	64
		Expected Count	7.1	16.6	40.3	64.0
		Adjusted Residual	-3.4	.6	1.7	
Total	Count	14	33	80	127	
	Expected Count	14.0	33.0	80.0	127.0	

For these two variables, the 2 x 4 table (i.e. PD 4 binned into 2 and GKI binned into 4) also presented a valid  $\chi^2$  test but the 3 x 3 table was rated as preserving a greater discrimination. That is, it was more important from the results' point of view to preserve the detail of PD than to preserve the detail of GKI in four divisions as against three. An examination of the adjusted residuals again indicates the strength of association in the various cells. In this table, those who read the Gospels rarely/occasionally by themselves have a significantly higher than expected low Gospel knowledge, and those who read weekly or more have a significantly lower count on low Gospel knowledge. That is, there is a clear association between the frequency of Gospel reading and having a high or low Gospel knowledge count. The adjusted residual for high Gospel knowledge (column 3) indicates clearly that those who read little are significantly less than what would have been expected. The corresponding cell, however, does not show a significant value for those who read weekly or more. That is, within the parameters set for this project and for this population, I cannot say that those who read the Gospels weekly or more have a significantly greater knowledge of the Gospels than would have been expected if there had been no relationship between the two variables.

**Table 6.3 – Crosstabulation PD6 v GKI**

		Gospel Knowledge Index binned into four, 1=5-9, 2=10-13, 3=14-18, 4=19-22				Total	
		1	2	3	4		
PD6 - In the last 3 years I have used resources to study the Gospels, binned into	1	Count	8	15	29	25	77
		Expected Count	5.5	10.9	27.3	33.3	77.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.8	2.1	.7	-3.1	
1 = never/sometimes 2 = regularly/much of time	2	Count	1	3	16	30	50
		Expected Count	3.5	7.1	17.7	21.7	50.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.8	-2.1	-.7	3.1	
Total		Count	9	18	45	55	127
		Expected Count	9.0	18.0	45.0	55.0	127.0

Given a valid  $\chi^2$  test with  $p = .006$ , it can be clearly seen that those who use Gospel resources never/sometimes are significantly less represented in the highest level of Gospel knowledge, and those who use them regularly or much of the time are significantly more represented. The implication is equally clear – the use of Gospel resources for a significant number in this sample leads to greater knowledge of the Gospels in terms of the content of the inventory used in this project. Although this outcome is both intuitively and anecdotally expected, this result places the association and implied relationship on an empirical footing, and should lead to an examination of what can be done to encourage and maximize the use of Gospel resources for this population. This process is fully in line with the valuation of empirical study as espoused in Ordinary Theology.<sup>258</sup>

**Table 6.4 – Crosstabulation PD11 v GKI**

		Gospel Knowledge Index into four, 1 = 5-9, 2 = 10-13, 3 = 14-18, 4 = 19-22				Total	
		1	2	3	4		
PD11 – I have undertaken theological or biblical studies binned into	1	Count	8	16	28	19	71
		Expected Count	5.1	10.1	24.8	31.0	71.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.0	3.0	1.2	-4.3	
1 = no formal or school program 2 = church or diocesan courses	2	Count	1	2	12	21	36
		Expected Count	2.6	5.1	12.6	15.7	36.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.2	-1.8	-.2	2.1	
3 = University course	3	Count	0	0	4	15	19
		Expected Count	1.4	2.7	6.6	8.3	19.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.3	-1.9	-1.4	3.4	
Total		Count	9	18	44	55	126
		Expected Count	9.0	18.0	44.0	55.0	126.0

<sup>258</sup> Astley and Francis, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*,” 4, where Astley notes that “the great value of more in-depth study through research interviews and questionnaires is that it allows us both to validate the anecdotal, and to explore behind it.”

This table achieves maximum discrimination and is valid because, although there are three cells with expected counts less than 5, these amount to no more than 25% of the total cells. This result establishes on an empirical basis that those who have undertaken no religious studies, or school-based programs only, are very significantly under-represented in the highest level of Gospel knowledge (column 4) and vice versa. It seems reasonable to assume the direction of the association is from study to knowledge (rather than higher Gospel knowledge leading to the desire to undertake theological studies, although of course for some in the population this might be true) and that the more we can encourage people to engage in either church/diocesan courses or University courses then the greater for a significant number will be their knowledge of the Gospels. It is important to note that the association does not predict universal outcomes, but only positive outcomes for significant numbers.

**Table 6.5 – Crosstabulation PD2 v GKI**

		Gospel Knowledge Index into three, 1=6-10, 2=11-16, 3=17-22			Total	
		1	2	3		
PD2- the style of church I attend would be, binned into 1 = word/teaching oriented 2 = no particular emphasis or tradition 3 = Communion/ceremony focused (leaving out charismatic and other)	1	Count	2	7	30	39
		Expected Count	4.2	10.5	24.3	39.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.4	-1.6	2.3	
	2	Count	2	7	14	23
		Expected Count	2.5	6.2	14.3	23.0
		Adjusted Residual	-.3	.4	-.2	
	3	Count	9	19	32	60
		Expected Count	6.4	16.2	37.4	60.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.5	1.1	-2.0	
Total		Count	13	33	76	122
		Expected Count	13.0	33.0	76.0	122.0

Before turning to an examination of the grouped and individual questions in KD, an opportunity is offered to briefly explore the idea and significance of linear association. Whilst there is no Pearson  $\chi^2$  association for PD2 (churchmanship) there is a clear linear-by-linear  $\chi^2$  test result ( $p = 0.018$ ).

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.149 <sup>a</sup>	4	.188
Likelihood Ratio	6.382	4	.172
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.640	1	.018
N of Valid Cases	122		

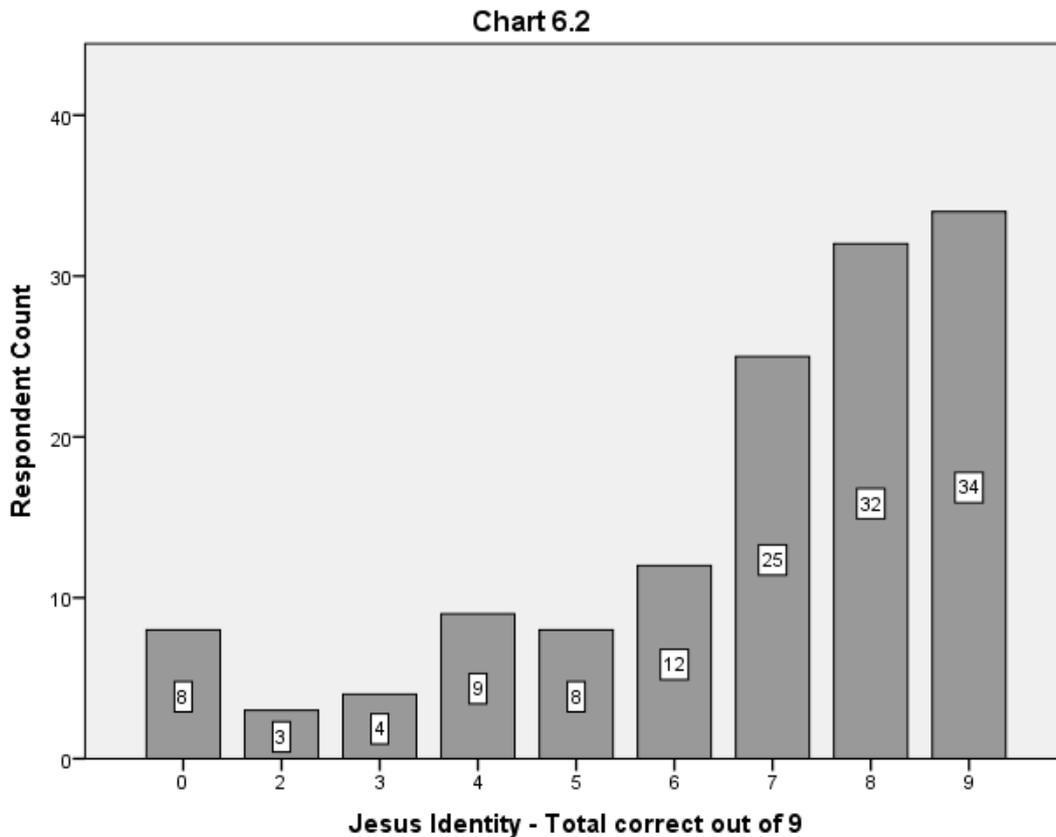
a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.45.

What can be seen here is that the  $\chi^2$  test is not valid. Whilst the number of cells is within limits, the value of  $p = 0.188$  falls outside our

set value of 0.05. That is, I cannot claim an association between the two variables on the basis of 95% probability. There is, however, a valid linear-by-linear relationship. This is clearly seen by reading the adjusted residuals down each column from top to bottom. Each set of three read this way moves in one direction from either greater to lesser or vice-versa. That is, they are in a general linear order. Thus, whilst there is no association within the parameters we have set, there is clearly a linear progression about the results which suggests the conclusion that Gospel knowledge seems to be significantly higher for those in the word/teaching orientation and lower for those in the Communion/ceremony orientation. That is, the adjusted residuals + 2.3 and – 2.0 have something significant to say about the relationship between churchmanship and Gospel knowledge even though they do not contribute to a dependency within the terms defined. If there were no valid linear by linear relationship, then the two seemingly significant residuals would not be significant. The fact that this situation may be due to many other factors is not important in this analysis. What is established is that within this sample and within the parameters of the inventory tested we can say that there appears to be a pattern of Gospel knowledge which is reflected in a systematic way in relationship to churchmanship. Further, more focused research on this association might lead to further insights about why this is the case and whether practices in the more word-oriented churches have something to offer the wider population.

Most of the questions in KD were oriented to probing respondent's knowledge of the identity, mission and teaching of Jesus and can be reasonably grouped in these three categories to gain an overall indication of what is known about these crucial aspects of Jesus' person and work. Whilst each category can be seen as inter-penetrating the other two, all the questions (except 3, 8 and 22) were allocated to the one category where they seemed to most naturally fall or have the greatest indicative meaning. The groupings were scored on a simple tally basis (right = 1 and wrong = 0). The particulars of the separate questions will be dealt with under the three group headings.

## Jesus' Identity Index



Knowing Jesus identity in relation to God his Father, to the Old Testament and to those around him is I believe crucial to understanding the import of Jesus for our own lives. The Jesus who is just a good man or a gifted prophet is a quite different figure, presumably exercising a quite different influence, to the Jesus who is genuinely accepted as ‘Son of God’, however that might be understood. KD1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18 and 20 were seen as casting light on Jesus’ identity. Just over one half of the sample scored 8 or 9 out of the possible 9, with only 20% scoring 5 or less. The lowest score by a respondent was 2, and the zero scores showing above reflect one or more missing values from the eight questions on the part of 8 respondents.

**Table 6.6 Scores for KD Questions reflecting on Jesus' Identity<sup>259</sup>**

Key findings include:

- For KD1 (According to the Gospels when Jesus was baptized a key feature of the event was...) more than a quarter of respondents could not identify the voice from heaven as the key feature. Are other key moments revolving around audition and 'God's voice' missed or not understood for their direct witness to Jesus' relationship to God and thus his identity?

		Responses	
		Correct	Incorrect or Don't know
Questions from Section 3	KD1	89	38
	KD2	125	2
	KD10	117	9
	KD11	82	45
	KD12	108	19
	KD16	95	32
	KD17	115	10
	KD18	94	32
	KD20	81	44

- For KD11 (what title was Jesus NOT called in the Gospels) over one third of respondents could not identify the title 'Son of Mary' (alternatives were 'Son of Man' and 'Messiah') as being a title Jesus is not known by in the NT. Are Adelaide Anglicans able to adequately describe Jesus, given that people either intentionally or otherwise attach all sorts of names and thus implied descriptions to the figure of Jesus?
- For KD16 over a quarter did not know that the title 'Christ' means 'anointed one' (alternatives offered were 'exalted teacher' and 'beloved by God').
- For KD18, just over a quarter were unaware that the moment of recognition in the Emmaus story comes with the breaking of the bread. Do Adelaide Anglicans 'meet Christ' in the Eucharist, or is something else happening?

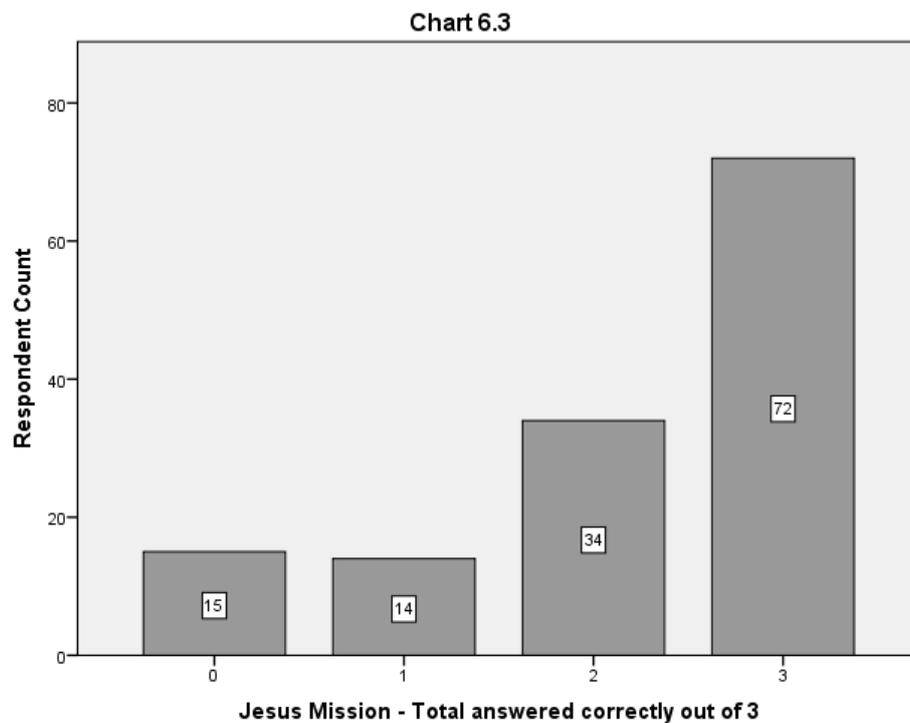
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<sup>259</sup> The individual scores for each of the items making up the index are shown and a number of the more significant will be briefly explored.

As was the case for GKI, crosstabulation analysis in respect of Jesus' identity showed that how often the Gospels are read, how often Gospel study resources are used and the level of theological studies undertaken, all showed potential population-wide dependency in valid  $\chi^2$  tests.<sup>260</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that the direction of the relationship is from the activity to knowledge of Jesus' identity rather than the other way. Concerning the apparent lack of an association with PD9, which might have been expected for a derived index, the p value was in fact 0.058 which was just outside the cut-off value.

Whilst these results might seem to be self-evident and common in anecdotal discussion, what is reported analytically in this project moves anecdote and intuition to an empirical basis, albeit limited by the scope of the questions, the representativeness of the sample and valid only for the laity of the Diocese of Adelaide.

### Jesus' Mission Index



Albeit a small and limited question bank,<sup>261</sup> KD9, 14 and 20 are the questions seen as most directly indicating respondents' understanding of Jesus' mission. Over half the sample cor-

rectly answered all three questions with fourteen participants scoring one out of the three. This result suggests that at least one third of lay Anglicans in Adelaide might not possess

<sup>260</sup> See Appendix 7.

<sup>261</sup> The total number of questions had to be limited in this initial and exploratory survey due to the amount of time and effort respondents could be expected to give to a questionnaire. It is clear that for any particular concern, such as Jesus' mission, a further and more detailed set of questions could be developed for a more focused and specific investigation.

a comprehensive view of the Christian mission, still viewing mission in the traditional understanding as referring to ‘them over there’.

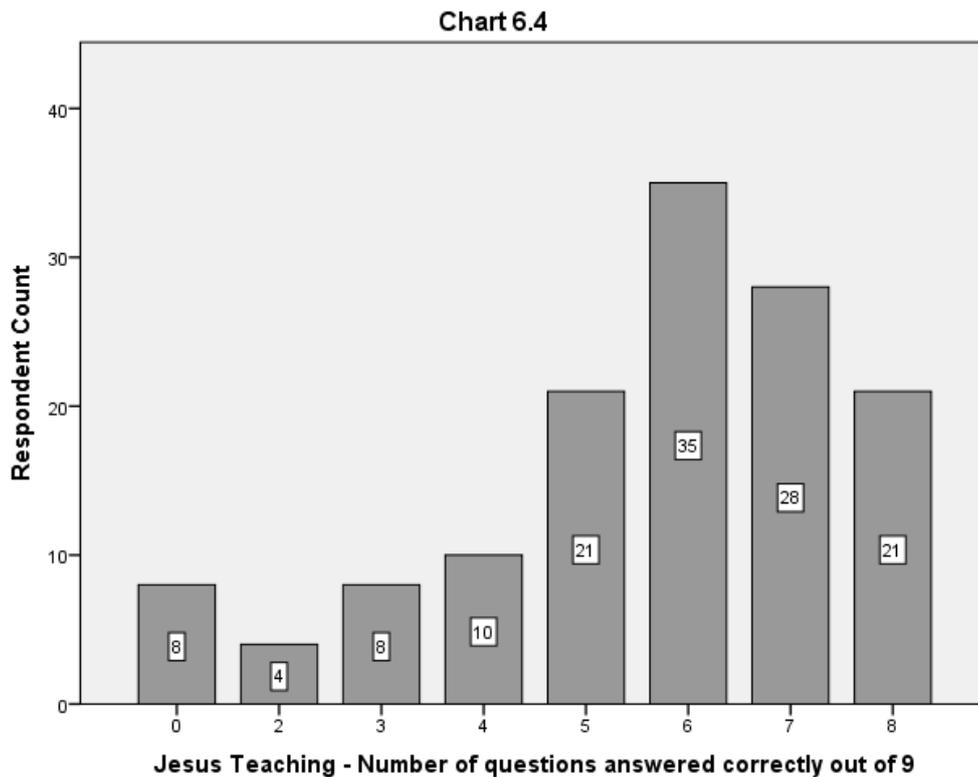
**Table 6.7 Scores for KD Questions reflecting on Jesus’ Mission**

		Responses	
		Correct	Incorrect or Don’t know
Questions from Section 3	KD9	116	11
	KD14	104	22
	KD20	81	44

Over 90% were able to identify Matthew’s mission command in Chapter 28, but only 64% identified the paradigmatic mission self-proclamation of Jesus in Luke 4 which was tested at KD20. This might suggest that more understand mission as being told what to do (whether by Jesus or the church) and fewer understand mission as following Jesus and doing what he did.

Cross-tabulation analysis, even on this very limited interrogation of mission understanding, yielded similar results as for the previous index. How often the Gospels are read and Gospel study resources are used suggest that a greater knowledge of mission comes with greater engagement with the Gospels (rather than vice-versa).

**Jesus’ Teaching Index**



KD4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 15, 19 and 21 were seen as giving significant insight into respondents' knowledge of Jesus' teaching and instruction. Only 49 out of 127 scored 7 or 8 for their knowledge of Jesus' teaching. These results suggest a possible need for focused instruction on key teachings of Jesus to enable people to lead more faithful lives and to be more confident in outreach.

**Table 6.8 Scores for KD Questions reflecting on Jesus' Teaching**

Key findings included:

- For KD4 (Jesus said that when you pray you should...) over a quarter were unable to identify Jesus instruction on prayer given in Matthew's Gospel, which suggests lack of knowledge of an important aspect of Jesus' ministry and instruction for discipleship practice.
- With two exceptions, however, all knew that Jesus commanded his followers to love their enemies (KD5).

		Responses	
		Correct	Incorrect or Don't know
Questions from Section 2	KD4	91	35
	KD5	125	2
	KD6	98	28
	KD7	111	13
	KD13	69	57
	KD15	97	29
	KD19	115	11
	KD21	51	73

- In response to KD6 a little under a quarter indicated not knowing Jesus' warning on how to distinguish a false prophet. It is important to know that discrimination is required on the basis of the actual outcomes that any particular claim produces.<sup>262</sup>
- For KD13 only just over half the sample could identify the conciliation instruction to take up an issue with the other person by oneself in the first instance. This result suggests a significant lacuna in knowledge of the first step to settle conflict within a Christian community.

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<sup>262</sup> I wonder if the same quarter of respondents would have trouble discriminating Islamic State as inconsistent with basic Islamic teaching on the basis of their actions and the outcomes of their activity!

- Finally, over one half of the sample could not associate the statement ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink ....’ with the parable of the sheep and the goats (alternatives offered were ‘the prodigal son’ and ‘the rich man and Lazarus’). This might suggest a serious lack of understanding of the consequences (the sorting of the sheep and the goats) of not responding to the needy and disadvantaged.

While inspection of Appendix 7 shows that a number of DD questions associated with GKI and its derived indices, the indices derived from DD (Gospel Engagement Index, Gospels and Life Index, Gospels and Discipleship Index and Gospels and Issues Index) showed only one association with GKI.

**Table 6.9 – Crosstabulation GKI v GII**

		Gospel and Issues Index binned into 1 = 7-11, 2 = 12-16, 3 = 17-20			Total	
		1	2	3		
Gospel Knowledge Index binned into three, 1 = 6-10, 2 = 11-16, 3 = 17-22	1	Count	3	8	3	14
		Expected Count	.9	6.5	6.6	14.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.4	.9	-2.0	
	2	Count	2	17	12	31
		Expected Count	2.0	14.4	14.6	31.0
		Adjusted Residual	.0	1.1	-1.1	
	3	Count	3	32	43	78
		Expected Count	5.1	36.1	36.8	78.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.6	-1.6	2.3	
Total	Count	8	57	58	123	
	Expected Count	8.0	57.0	58.0	123.0	

The number of cells with expected counts below 5 is two and the p value 0.034. The association demonstrated as likely for the population is that those who apply their Gospel knowledge to issues are significantly above the expected count for higher Gospel knowledge and significantly below what would have been expected for lesser Gospel knowledge.

This result confirms the intuitive expectation that greater knowledge of the Gospels leads to greater application of the Gospels to life and living. It is of interest, however, that Gospel knowledge so far as it is tested in this project did not show any association with the other three indices. That is, neither engagement with the Gospels, living the Gospels or discipleship based on the Gospels seemed to be in a dependent relationship with an individual respondent’s knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the Gospels. This could indicate that:

- Gospel knowledge is not as important in the practice of Christian living as many might think, or
- that many of Adelaide's laity could be living lives which could be more dependent on their Gospel knowledge.

These indices are untested and untried constructs, however, which need to be treated with care, and it would be doubtful to draw any hard and fast conclusions or determine any courses of action without significant further investigation of just what part Gospel knowledge plays in the lives of this sample and population. This is clearly a complex area of investigation which may well be affected by other significant factors and which needs further research.

Cross-tabulation analysis again supported the established empirical results that engagement with the Gospels in both reading and using resources is clearly associated with greater knowledge of the Gospels: in this case with Jesus' teaching. It is in the area of Jesus' teaching most of all that the response to the questionnaire seems to show significant shortfalls for potential transformation and transformative following of Jesus. If we do not know what we should be doing/how we should be behaving then we will not only be unable to do what Jesus commands in our own lives, but also be unable to demonstrate and so influence others towards Christ.

Before leaving this section, it is important to comment on some areas where association was not found. For instance, Gospel knowledge did not show up as significantly affected by church attendance. No doubt for some, more frequent church attendance might lead to greater knowledge of the Gospels. Whilst people go to church for all sorts of reasons and to meet a multiplicity of needs, I would have expected that the more one goes to church the more one might learn about the Gospels.

Of more interest was that Gospel knowledge as determined and assessed in this project was not influenced in a significant way by tertiary education other than theological or Biblical education. That is, for this sample general education does not show an association with Gospel knowledge.

## **How do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels?**

To further build a comprehensive picture of how the Gospels are known and understood in a particular place and time<sup>263</sup> the second Research Question was designed to investigate, through the second focus of ‘understanding’ provided by the lens of transformative Gospel literacy, how ordinary lay Adelaide Anglicans in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century understand and comprehend the Gospels. The elements of concern outlined in Chapter 2 related to:

1. how the authority and status of the Gospels are viewed.
2. whether language and the pictures painted in language are understood figuratively or literally.
3. how lay Anglicans interpret the message and meaning of Jesus and the Gospel story.

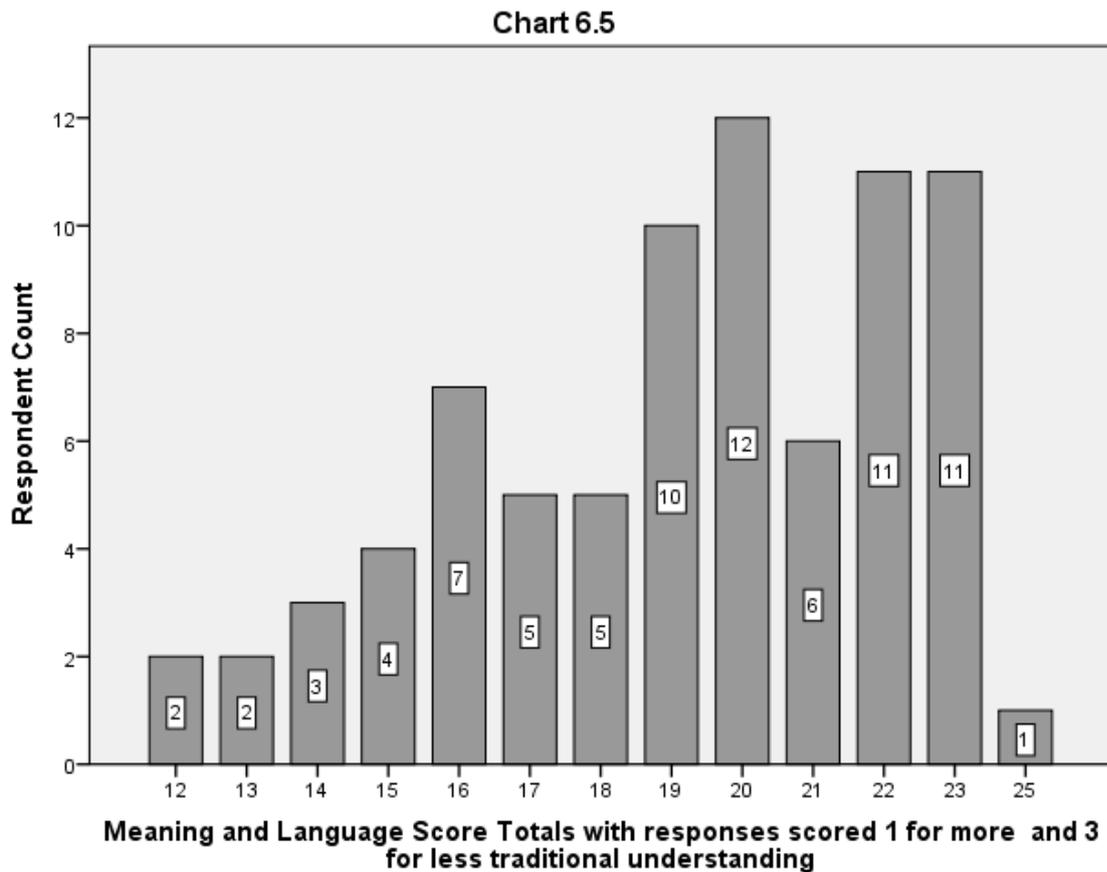
Comments on points 1 and 2 are offered in the analysis of the individual questions below. The individual scores for each alternative to each question are shown at Appendix 5.

In relation to question 3 above, there is an interpretive spectrum ranging from fully traditional and orthodox, expressed in classical and historical terminology, to a less traditional understanding which often understands the language of the Gospel writers to be operating outside a literal and fully historical understanding of all that is portrayed in the Gospels.<sup>264</sup> The nine questions asked in the questionnaire probing these concerns were asked in such a way that, scored and taken together, they provided insight into whether each participant had a more traditional and literal understanding or less traditional understanding of the Gospel accounts.

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<sup>263</sup> Hugh Mackay, *Beyond Belief* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2016), Kindle locations 3151-3154. “Interpretation is everything. We will inevitably interpret the Bible in ways that fit with our existing view of the world, of religion, and of God. An entire community of scholars has been occupied over centuries, trying to determine the ‘meaning’ of this or that passage of Scripture, and this process has been swept by as many fashions and fads as any other academic pursuit.”

<sup>264</sup> This is neatly put by A.N. Wilson, cited in Mackay, *Beyond Belief*: Kindle Location 3155. “The purposes of the Gospels were, of course, to instruct the faithful, and to provide illustrations of preconceived religious ideas about Jesus. They are not objective, still less biographical, accounts, and to extract from them any ‘objective’ saying or truth about some putative ‘historical Jesus’ has been a task which has always ended in failure. We only have the Jesus in whom the evangelists believed, and in whom Paul believed.”



Each answer to each of the nine questions asked was rated for more or less traditional orientation (see Appendix 5) and scored on a scale of 1 to 3, 1 being more traditional and 3 less traditional. The answers for each respondent were scored then aggregated.<sup>265</sup> The number of cases (N) was 79; that is, 79 respondents offered numerical answers to each of the nine questions. The reason for this substantially different number from the sample of 135 respondents was that any answer offered as ‘other’ took that case out of the count as it could not be scored.

Presumably a neutral result would be indicated by a normal distribution centred on the half-way point between 9 and 27, which would be 18. Given the median/mode of 20, the average 19 and the clear skew to the non-traditional end of the diagram, a bias towards less traditional interpretation is evident. It appears that many in the Diocese lean more to non-traditional interpretation as defined by the particular framework of questions used to assess this Research Question.

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<sup>265</sup> The maximum possible score was 27 (3 points each for 9 questions) representing the least traditional position within the framework of the questions offered. The minimum possible score was 9 (1 x 9) representing the most traditional stance again within the constructed framework.

## Meaning and language data questions considered individually

The individual questions also yielded some interesting results which add to the picture above:<sup>266</sup> These results have been included at Appendix 6 as some will be interested in the detail and interpretation of the findings. An outline of these findings includes:

- nearly half (44%) chose the traditional understanding of the Gospels as an eye-witness record of the actual events including the words of Jesus.
- over half of the sample did not acknowledge the Gospel account of the Virgin birth as either non-factual or as an historical (factual) report.
- Just under two thirds selected the person-inspired-by-the-Spirit understanding of the Gospels as documents, and just over one third the God-controlling-by-the-Spirit understanding.
- A significant majority (61%) saw Jesus' healings and exorcisms as concerned with Jesus mission rather than 29% who saw them as demonstrations of his supernatural power over disease, demons and evil.
- Over three quarters of respondents indicated a spiritual understanding of resurrection,
- three quarters saw God's Kingdom as being where God's will is being done.
- less than a quarter opted for the raising of the earthly body of Jesus and close to two thirds opted for the Pauline expression of the mystery which denies restoration of the earthly body but affirms a spiritual body.
- 54% see eternal life as something other than indefinite extension in time

While some insight into Research Question 2 was gained from the literature reviewed, it is not possible to arrive at any direct comparisons between the findings above and relevant material in either 'Taking the Pulse' or 'The State of the Bible 2015'.<sup>267</sup> Not only are phrases such as 'divinely inspired' not defined in most studies (which might mean running the risk of comparing apples with oranges), but there were no clearly defined figures from unambiguously Anglican lay samples. Perhaps the extra-Diocesan utility of my findings on this Question will be as a starting point and possible comparison tool for similar work done in other Anglican lay research projects.

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<sup>266</sup> The numerical results for each option for each question together with the options are at Appendix 5.

<sup>267</sup> See Chapter 2 for the relevant material from both sources.

Examination of Appendix 7 shows that MLD displayed significant associations with PD2 and two items from DD associated with willingness and confidence to speak about Jesus to others. Whilst the latter will be interpreted in Chapter 7, the association with churchmanship is interesting.

**Table 6.10 – Crosstabulation PD2 v MLD**

		Total score on Meaning and Language data binned 1=12-17, 2=18-25		Total
		1	2	
PD2- the style of church I attend would be, binned into 1 = word/teaching oriented 2 = no particular emphasis or tradition 3 = Communion/ceremony focused (leaving out charismatic and other)	1 Count	15	12	27
	Expected Count	7.6	19.4	27.0
	Adjusted Residual	3.9	-3.9	
	2 Count	1	15	16
	Expected Count	4.5	11.5	16.0
	Adjusted Residual	-2.2	2.2	
	3 Count	6	29	35
	Expected Count	9.9	25.1	35.0
	Adjusted Residual	-2.0	2.0	
Total	Count	22	56	78
	Expected Count	22.0	56.0	78.0

The test is valid and the p value of 0.000 suggests a strong association. The table clearly shows that those attending word/teaching oriented churches are significantly more represented in the traditional group 1 (adjusted residual 3.9) and significantly less represented in the less traditional group. By contrast, those attending ceremony/communion oriented churches are significantly less represented as more traditional (adjusted residual -2.0) and significantly more represented in the less traditional category. To the extent that our chosen questions do indeed accurately show more and less traditional positions the word/teaching orientation is associated with a more orthodox and literal interpretive stance.

Of equal if not greater interest is that none of the other factors tested shows a relationship with MLD. That is, a more or less traditional stance to interpretation of the Gospels does not appear to depend on other Gospel factors tested in this project, which suggests that the interpretational stance for members of this sample is shaped by other influences.<sup>268</sup> Neither did MLD show any association with the indices developed from the discipleship

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<sup>268</sup> A clear example of other influences is found in L. J. Francis “Ordinary Readers and Reader Perspectives on Sacred Texts: Drawing on Empirical Theology and Jungian Psychology” in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church* ed. J. Astley and L.J. Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 94, where Francis writes, ... “that individual differences in psychological type preferences predict ways in which sacred text is interpreted.”

data: i.e. the Gospel Engagement Index, Gospels and Life Index, Gospels and Discipleship Index and Gospels and Issues Index. Although MLD did show association with three specific attitudes to discipleship, there seems to be no relationship between respondents' overall interpretive framework and their engagement.

The response to Section 4 of the questionnaire is seen as positive towards the transformative potential of the Gospels. The inclination of over half of the Diocese towards a less traditional understanding of the Gospels, I would argue opens up meaning-making to wider and deeper horizons. Adherence to the pre-modern traditional and more literal understanding of the Gospels seems to be predominant in only a couple of cases, most notably in the continuing traditional understanding of 'eternal life'. In terms of the definition of transformative Gospel literacy developed in Chapter 2, I see basic evidence of:

- the ability to make meaning of the content of the Gospel accounts. The response 'don't know' was not used in response to any question, and over fifty respondents were willing to offer their own interpretation or sense of the questions asked.
- appreciation of the figurative use of language. Over half the sample understood the Gospel story as other than a literal narrative account, and as an example over 70% understood the resurrection as other than literal physical resuscitation.

### **In what way does lay Anglican knowledge and understanding of the Gospels and Jesus make a difference in their own lives?**

The third Research Question offers an important further dimension of understanding in the descriptive picture of lay Adelaide Anglicans and their Gospel interaction. Does the Gospel make a difference in their lived Christian lives, or not? If so, in what ways? Does the Gospel play a significant role in shaping and directing their daily lives and decision-making? To provide as full a picture as possible in the description of lay Anglicans and their life with the Gospels it is necessary to analyse and assess the responses offered to Section 2 of the questionnaire.

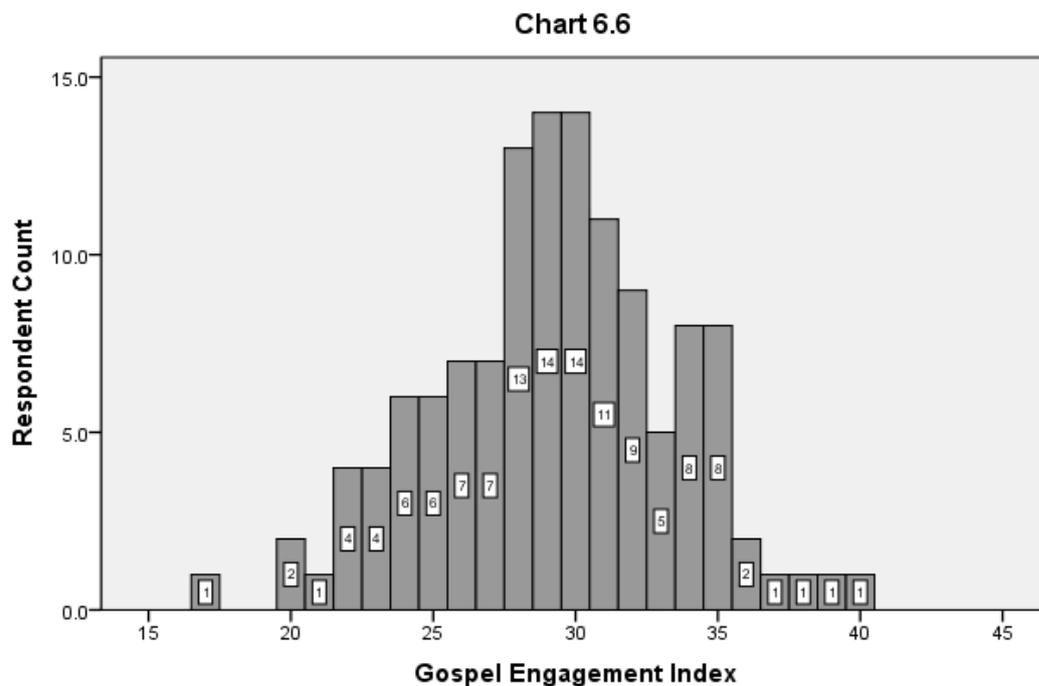
Section 2 of the questionnaire was designed to provide the raw material to approach this Research Question and comprised a series of Likert scaled questions (DD1 – DD18) and five multi-response questions (DD19 – 23). There were some who missed the odd response and four who declined to answer in whole or part but whose questionnaires were retained for their answers to other sections of the survey.

In addition to considering each of the responses to the questions in Section 2 separately this section of the Questionnaire was developed to provide four indices comprised of a combination of related questions from DD to provide four key measures.<sup>269</sup> Three of these measures are (the fourth responded to Research Question 4 below):

- Gospel Engagement Index (GEI)
- Gospels and Life Index (GLI)
- Gospels and Issues Index (GII)

### Gospel Engagement Index

The most complex index developed was the Gospel Engagement Index (GEI) which was structured to investigate Research Question 3a which seeks to examine the part the Gospels play in respondents' lives. Do respondents read and use the Gospels regularly? If so, how and in what ways and for what purposes; if not, why not? The index incorporated DD1, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 19. The focus was on the use made of the Gospels and all questions related to respondents' reading of or reflection on the Gospels with one of the questions asking whether the respondent felt satisfied with the place of the Gospel in their lives, and another inviting respondents to identify what might stand in the way, if anything, of their interacting with the Gospels more often.

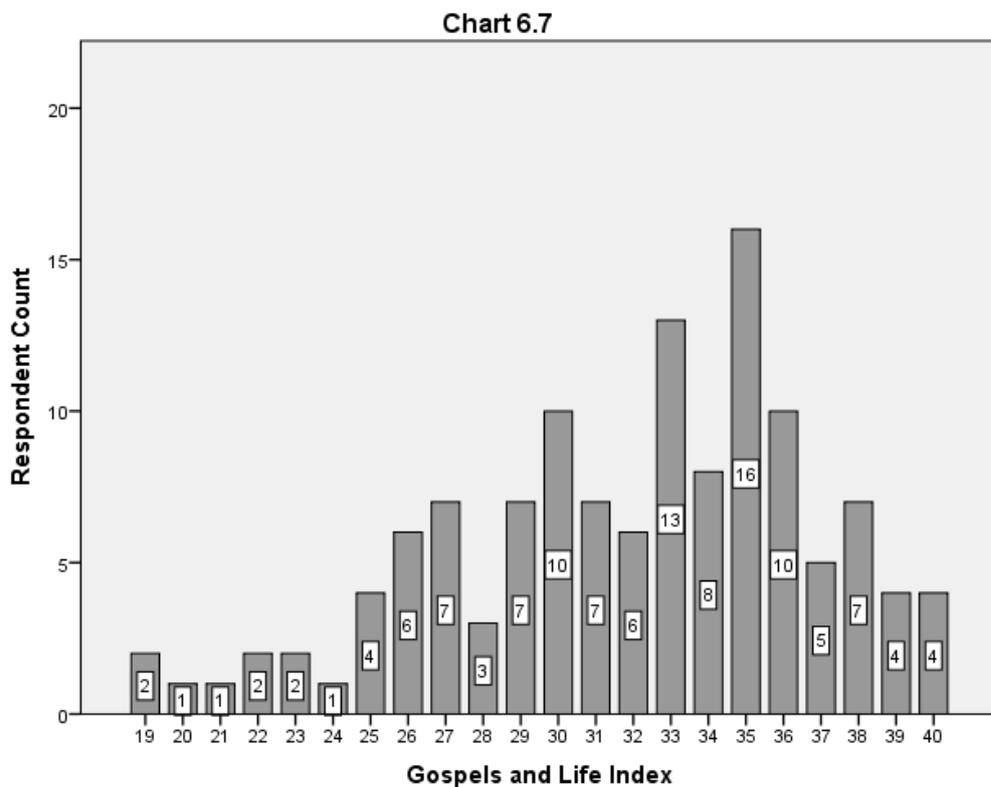


<sup>269</sup> As I suggested above in relation to the four different categories of data, it might be helpful for the reader to list the four indices and their abbreviations on a piece of paper for reference in this and the next chapter.

The maximum score returned was 40 and minimum 17<sup>270</sup>, indicating a substantial range of engagement. The median value was 29.25, which is significantly to the right of the value 24 which would be the mid-point over the entire range. The distribution clearly shows that there is scope for greater engagement for the significant number of respondents towards the left-hand side. The challenge for further research would be to investigate from those respondents what activities or resources would help them towards greater engagement.

With all items included the Cronbach Alpha value was 0.689 which is taken to indicate at least basic internal consistency.

### Gospels and Life Index



The Gospels and Life Index was structured to investigate the related Research Question 3b which sought to gain some insight into the difference Jesus and the Gospels made to the way respondents live. The

<sup>270</sup> The maximum possible score was 40 (8 questions x 5 max score) and minimum score 8 (8 x 1). To include DD19, which was a multi-choice question, it needed to be scored in a Likert compatible manner. Thus, selection of two or more impediments to 'reading the Gospels more often' scored the minimum 1 on the basis that the more items selected might well indicate less transformative potential of the Gospels for the responder. Selection of one reason only scored 3 and item (g) – none of these, scored the maximum of five.

focus of this index was the influence the Gospels had in shaping both attitudes and activities in respondents' lives and was concerned with the awareness and experience of Jesus and the Gospels in daily life.

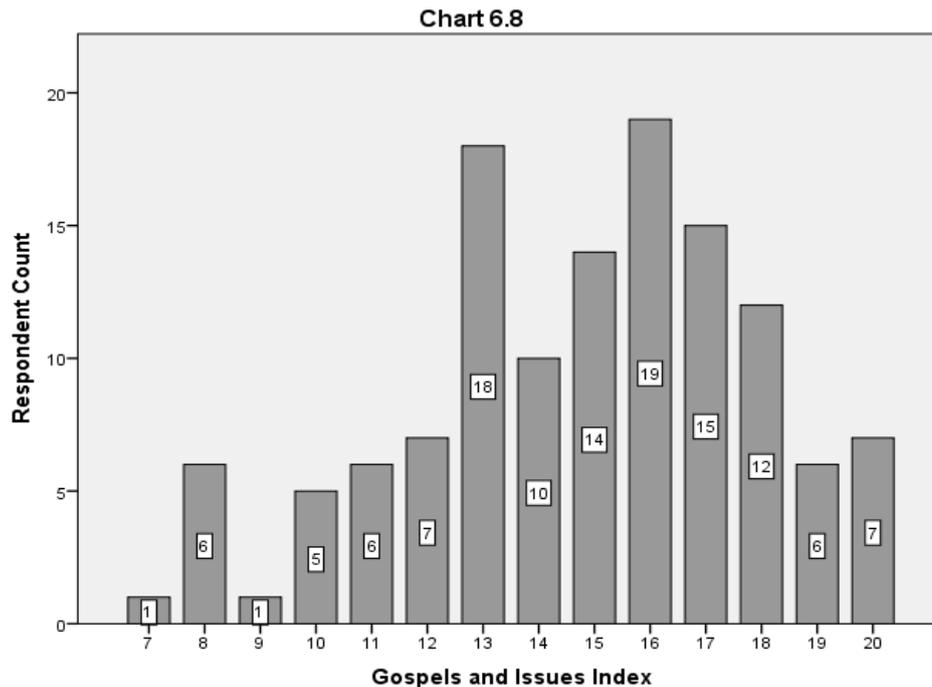
The index included eight items DD3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 20 and 23.<sup>271</sup> Four respondents returned 40 indicating a very significant difference made to their lives. The low score was 19 with a mean of 31.9. Although there are no similar results with which to compare this distribution, the mean of 31.9 would seem to indicate that a significant number of respondents believe that the Gospels play a significant part in their lives.<sup>272</sup> The distribution also indicates, however, that there are a number of committed Anglicans for whom the Gospels could play a larger part. Further research could usefully focus on the detail of how the Gospels might be more central in more Anglican lives. The Cronbach Alpha value of 0.699 indicated basic internal consistency between the items included in the Index.

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<sup>271</sup> DD20 and 23 needed to be Likert scored. For DD20 this was achieved as follows - the selection of four or more helpful uses scored the maximum of 5, 3 scored 4, 2 scored 3 and 1 scored 2. The selection of item (j), indicating no helpful uses, scored minimum 1 on the basis that, even though they might read the Gospels, the transformative potential would seem minimal. For DD23 selection of 4 or more of a) to e) scored 5, selection of 3 scored 4, selection of 2 scored 3, selection of 1 scored 2 and f) scored 1. As with the previous index, the scoring range was from 40 points down to 8.

<sup>272</sup> Russ Rankin, "Lack of Bible Literacy Is Spotlighted," Baptist Press. <http://churchexecutive.com/archives/lack-of-bible-literacy-is-sporlighted>. Accessed June 13, 2014. In the only comment discovered on how reading the Bible affected the lives of church-goers, Rankin notes "only 37 percent of those who attend church regularly say that reading and studying the Bible has made a significant difference in the way they live their lives." Whilst the 'we' he refers to is simply unknown in composition and status, and while he is not talking about the Gospels as such and therefore indicates no basis for comparison, I believe my finding would indicate a higher percentage affected by their Gospel experience.

## Gospels and Issues Index



The Gospels and Issues Index was developed to provide insight into Research Question 3c by assessing the extent to which lay Anglicans relate their

Gospel knowledge and commitment to the world they live in and the issues they face. The questions selected were DD3, 5, 12 and 21.<sup>273</sup>

The maximum score was 20 and the minimum 4. The median value was 15. This result suggests that a significant proportion of respondents believe that they relate their Gospel knowledge to both big and small life decisions and to their stance on particular moral and social issues.

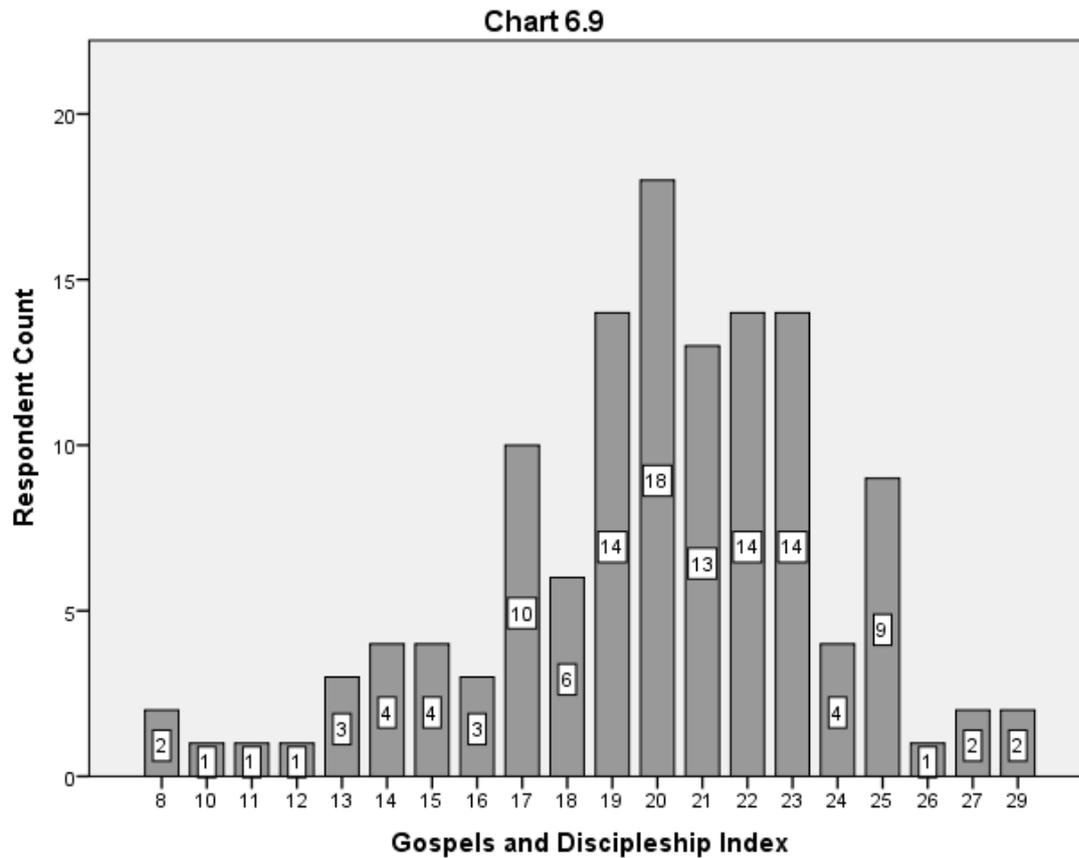
### **In what way do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference in the lives of others?**

The fourth index and key measure based on responses to Section 2 was the Gospels and Discipleship Index.

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<sup>273</sup> DD21 was Likert scored on the basis of four or more indicating a high degree of influence and scoring 5, three items scoring 4, two items scoring three, 1 item scoring 2 and item (g) scoring minimum of 1.

## Gospels and Discipleship Index



This Index was developed in response to Research Question 4 – respondents’ awareness of and commitment to bringing the good news to others, and whether they were actually doing this as well as they believed they could and should.

The scale included six questions - DD2, 9, 12, 15, 16 and 22.<sup>274</sup> The highest score was 29 and the lowest 8 with a mean of 19.98 and Cronbach Alpha value of .696 indicating basic internal consistency. As with the findings from the previous two indices, there is clearly scope for further discipleship development across the activities and attitudes which were investigated. Further research could use similar survey techniques to investigate what inputs and encouragement might be needed to motivate both low scorers to greater effort and to encourage those with higher scores to become even more committed and active.

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<sup>274</sup> DD22 was Likert scored on the following basis - selection of 3 of a) to c) scored 5, selection of 2 scored 4, selection of 1 scored 3, and (d) scores 1. Of the three who indicated (d), none indicated an alternative understanding of discipleship at item (e). With six questions this index scored from 30 as a high score down to 6.

## Section 1 Data – Profile data

Finally, a section of demographic data was taken to enable both descriptive and analytical analysis according to various characteristics of the sample. The questions were designed to provide information concerning interaction with the Gospels, church engagement, religious background and education and basic demographic data in education, age and gender.

Bivariate analysis within the profile data between PD2 (churchmanship) and the other personal information yielded some significant albeit anticipated results. Crosstabulation analysis shows that those who attend churches of the word/teaching orientation are significantly more likely to use electronic engagement with the Gospels, and those attending communion/ceremony-oriented churches are significantly less likely. Significant associations along the same lines were also found between PD2 and PD4 (frequency of reading the Gospels) where those attending a word/teaching oriented church showed a significantly higher frequency of Gospel reading. The same was found for PD2 and PD6 (frequency of use of resources to study the Gospels). There was, however, no association found between churchmanship and either general or theological education as those questions were framed in the questionnaire.

Most questions were answered by all respondents, but two declined to indicate their highest level of education and six declined to indicate their age. Bar charts presenting the Profile data in pictorial form are at Appendix 8. With two exceptions, the results are unremarkable in and of themselves. The two items needing further comment are:

1. One issue relating to validity which appeared concerns the type of person who responds to a questionnaire such as is used in this project. This matter was raised by the response to the question probing education status of respondents (PD 10): of 133 responses, 106 indicated having either a degree/diploma or postgraduate degree. This extraordinary response could be attributed to a number of reasons including the way the questionnaire was promoted and circulated and the fact that people with tertiary education would be more likely to respond to the questionnaire. It is also possible that people might in some cases be indicating qualifications which do not normally rate in these categories. There remains, however, a question about why such a high proportion of relatively highly educated lay Anglicans responded, given that the percentage indicated would almost certainly not be representative of the population. As no data is available to validate or otherwise assess the ‘why’ of this result, the most reasonable conclusion is that responses to

the questionnaire was not representative in relation to this characteristic of the larger population.

Appendix 7 reveals that level of general education exhibited no associations with any of the other measures. Whilst the sample may not be representative in this one respect, extra caution is needed interpreting this result in relation to the population due to there being too few people with lower levels of education in the sample.

2. Over 77% never or only occasionally used electronic devices to interact with the Gospels. This figure was strongly associated with the older age cohort with only one 80-year-old (out of 23) and seven 70-year-olds (out of 34) recording more than occasional use. Of the 14 respondents aged between 24 and 49, however, six (around 40%) indicated nil or occasional use of electronic interaction. Whilst too small a sample to draw any major conclusion, this figure raises questions surrounding alternative forms of engagement with the Gospels in this technological and electronic age.

### **Summary of the descriptive analysis**

A major part of this exploratory and descriptive project is to provide a snapshot of the laity of the Diocese of Adelaide as to what lay Anglicans know about Jesus and the Gospels; how they understand and comprehend the Gospels within the framework offered; and what difference the Gospels make in their lives and the lives of those around them. This has been achieved through the lens of transformative Gospel literacy by reporting the responses to individual questions, and groupings of questions, put to respondents through the questionnaire based on that lens.

Methodologically important and helpful has been the development of indices to provide useful descriptive groupings. In relation to Sections 3 and 4 of the Questionnaire (Research Questions 1 and 2), two major indices were developed:

- The Gospel Knowledge Index, which was an aggregate score for each respondent over the 22 questions asked in Section 3 and provided an overview picture of the content knowledge of the Anglican laity in the Adelaide Diocese. Three further indices based on KD questions provided more detailed foci, each being based on the number of correct answers:
  - Identity Index - a grouping of nine questions from KD which shed light on how each respondent understood the person of Jesus

- Teaching Index – a grouping of eight questions shedding light on what each respondent knew of Jesus’ teaching
- Mission Index – a grouping of three questions probing respondent’s knowledge of Jesus’ mission.
- A scored index of understanding of the Gospels based on assessment of MLD responses as more traditional or less traditional/more progressive understanding.

In relation to Section 2 of the Questionnaire and Research Questions 3 and 4, the following indices were developed to provide focused engagement with the questions.

- The Gospel Engagement Index, comprising eight questions from DD designed to explore how the respondents actually used and engaged with the Gospels,
- Gospels and Life Index, comprising eight questions from DD exploring what difference Jesus and the Gospels made to respondents’ lives,
- Gospels and Discipleship Index, comprising six questions from DD investigating respondents’ awareness of and commitment to bringing the Gospels to others, and
- Gospel Issues Index, comprising four questions seeking to discover the extent to which lay Anglicans relate their Gospel knowledge and commitment to the world they live in and the issues they face.

A number of interesting insights have been discovered.

- Respondents’ knowledge of the Gospels, scored out of 22, revealed that nearly three quarters of respondents were able to answer two thirds of the questions correctly, which was assessed as a basis for transformative Gospel literacy, but with some qualifications.
- There was a good literacy knowledge of Jesus’ identity but there was a significant number who were unable to associate the title ‘Christ’ with anointing, the voice of God with Jesus’ baptism or the moment of recognition in the Emmaus story with the breaking of the bread. These results suggest possible limitations in the average Anglican lay person’s depth of appreciation of Jesus’ identity.
- Over one third of respondents may not have a full appreciation of mission to people within the community as well as to those outside the community.

- The weakest area of Gospel knowledge was in relation to Jesus’ teaching. Between a quarter and a half of respondents could not answer correctly basic questions about Jesus’ teaching which applies to followers of every age.
- In relation to understanding and interpretation of the Gospels, lay Anglicans in Adelaide lean more towards a less traditional understanding of the Gospels, with only the expectation of eternal life as a continuing never-ending life after death remaining as a dominant traditional belief.
- An overwhelming majority acknowledged their awareness of Jesus in their daily lives and the Gospels’ relevance in making both daily and one-off life decisions. It is clear that at a personal level Adelaide Anglicans are committed to their walk with Jesus even if, in certain ways, they are not as well equipped as they might be. In an uncertain future for the Diocese, the equipping and enabling of the laity for both ministry and mission through heightened Gospel engagement will be an important undertaking.<sup>275</sup>
- How often the Gospels were read and how often Gospel resources were used were consistent determinants of Gospel knowledge and literacy. Whilst this result was reasonably expected, the solid empirical grounding really justifies sustained effort in guiding and encouraging people to read the Gospels regularly and use resources. It also provides a rationale for on-going exploration of useful and engaging resources and especially online resources.
- A number of relationships between knowledge of Gospel content and other factors were discovered, including associations with:
  - the use of electronic devices to engage with the Gospels.
  - the level of theological or Biblical studies undertaken.
  - a linear-by-linear relationship between knowledge of Gospel content and the style of church attended.
  - the application of the Gospels to life and living.
- An association between whether respondents understood the Gospel more or less traditionally and the style of church attended.

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<sup>275</sup> It is encouraging to note the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide 2016 Vision Statement which lists at No 1 “Grow competency and confidence in sharing the Gospel” with dot point “Equip our people and communities to better communicate the Gospel.” Although not referring to the Gospels directly it is clear that the shortfall in testimonial outreach has been noted for action. See <https://adelaideanglicans.com/vision-2016/>. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

This description of lay Anglicans' engagement with the Gospels through the lens of transformative Gospel literacy provides a helpful and instructive picture of the place of the Gospels in the life of the Diocese. Univariate analysis has provided the broad-brush strokes of the picture and bivariate analysis filled in some of the detail of that picture. It is hoped that this more detailed picture might be useful in providing insights in relation to developing a renewed passion for the Gospels. Lay empowerment in the strength, knowledge and conviction that does and can only come from the Gospels will be crucial in the post-Christendom church and its energy towards successful and life-changing mission.

This static picture, however, needs further dimensions of exploration to make the most of the picture developed so far. To the extent that any pursuit of the Gospels and the Christian life based on the Gospels is targeted at transformation both of the individual and others, I need now to investigate the dynamic transformative power of the Gospels both in the lives of the respondents and, through them, in the lives of the communities in which they live. Have lives been transformed? Are Adelaide Anglicans open to and aware of transformation in their own lives and are they agents of transformation in the lives of others? This dynamic dimension of the lived Christian experience in the Diocese is arguably the true indicator of the power and hope of the Gospel into the future, and it is to the consideration of this dimension that I now turn.

## CHAPTER 7

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS 2 –

### TRANSFORMATION AND THE GOSPELS

#### **Introduction**

Although the picture of Gospel knowledge and understanding in the Diocese of Adelaide has been painted in the previous chapter, this static picture needs to be supplemented with a dynamic addition. I have provided basic insight into the state of Gospel knowledge, understanding and discipleship of Adelaide Anglicans. It is now important to investigate, in more detail, the central function and purposive meaning of the Gospels in a follower's life – that of transformation. This is the focus of 'application' in our lens of transformative Gospel literacy.

All who follow Jesus, who read the Gospels seriously, do so with the purpose of becoming more truly the person God created them to be and to reach for the authenticity of their humanity modelled in Jesus. The questions to be asked are:

- how do respondents show transformed lives or otherwise?
- are they open to on-going transformation?
- do they bring transformation to others?

The purpose of the following univariate and bivariate analysis is to explore the theme of transformation in lay lives as indicated in the Discipleship Data gained in Section 2 of the questionnaire. I recognize that the Gospels are a part only of the story of Christian transformation in any individual's life,<sup>276</sup> but if Jesus himself, rather than someone else's version of Jesus, is to play a part then the Gospels, our primary source, must be engaged by each follower in some manner. That is, the Gospels are an essential component of genuine

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<sup>276</sup> The discovery of one or more associations between any two variables in no way excludes the notion that one or more other factors may well be involved in the reason for either variable expressing itself as it does. Other factors could easily include personal example, personality traits, organizational influence, travel and educational experience.

transformation as they relate the story of Jesus and provide the opportunity to come to ‘know’ and have faith in Jesus.<sup>277</sup>

The key areas of exploration have been designed to explore transformation/change in respondent’s lives as outlined in Research Questions 3 and 4 in Chapter 1. This exploration investigates two areas.

1. Respondents’ own lived Christian life, including:

- identifying responses which suggest that personal transformation has taken or is taking place and seeking to make associations with Gospel related factors which might have made a contribution. Section 2 Questions DD4, DD5, DD8, DD11 and DD 13 are all questions which answered with agreement in a five-point Likert item might suggest clear, positive change towards a Christ-centred life.<sup>278</sup> I intend to select from these data responses, both examining response patterns within the responses to the data questions and looking for associations with Gospel knowledge or its components, Gospel interpretation and Gospel-related habits or activities disclosed by the respondents.
- identifying responses where personal transformation appears to have not taken place or there is an awareness that further change is needed, and then seeking to look for Gospel factors which might be related to this situation. DD6, DD7, DD10 and DD14 answered with agreement all suggest that the respondent is aware of further scope for transformation in their Christian lives. A similar investigation to that above will be undertaken.

2. Respondents’ activity as an agent of Christian transformation in the lives of others, including:

- identifying respondents who are committed to and believe that they act as agents of Gospel transformation in the lives of others, and looking for associations with Gospel knowledge, interpretation or habits which might help to understand and

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<sup>277</sup> W. Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Towards a New Paradigm in Bible Study*.(Augsburg: Fortress Publishing, 2010), 94, where Wink points out, as he examines the bankruptcy of the Biblical Critical Paradigm, that the Gospel writers wrote “from faith to faith” to evoke or augment faith in their readers.

<sup>278</sup> DD5 provides a good example of how the questions might provide insight. First, unlike many other experiences of bringing commitment to Christ to daily life, voting in political elections was an area which all adult respondents could be expected to have engaged with since voting is universal and compulsory. Second, it is an important area to which to bring Christian values. The act of voting at its best is an expression of what the voter believes about justice and equity and is a quintessential arena for the committed Christian to express their fundamental concern for ‘others’ as against themselves alone.

potentially lead to suggestions for enhancing that activity. DD2 and DD12 answered with agreement would suggest a willingness to reach out with the Gospel in some measure.

- identifying respondents who seem reluctant to actively proclaim the Gospel in an explicit way, looking for Gospel-related factors which might help to understand why not and to suggest possibilities for overcoming this reluctance. DD9, DD15 and DD17 are all questions which answered with agreement would indicate scope to become more active proponents of Gospel transformation in the lives of others.

By cross-tabulating responses to these two key areas of transformation/change in respondents' lives with Gospel knowledge and its derived indices, Gospel interpretation and the disclosed Gospel engagement attitudes and activities of respondents, I hope to discern the nature of the Gospels' influence in these two dimensions of transformation. I hope that such an analysis will offer insight into the part the Gospel plays in the lives of Adelaide lay Anglicans and future directions for Gospel awareness and education.

## Quantitative analysis of Gospel transformation in respondents' lives

### Responses to transformation data questions

A presentation of the basic response patterns gives the initial insight into where the respondents stand in relation to DD4, DD5, DD8, DD11 and DD 13. This is best presented in a table:

**Table 7.1 – Data for Transformation Indicators**

			Responses				
			ds	d	nad	a	as
Items from Section 2	DD4	From my reading of the Gospels, I am often aware of Jesus in my daily life, even in the ordinary events of daily life.	2	2	19	56	55
	DD5	When deciding how to vote in political elections, I try to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective.	9	13	33	54	24
	DD8	Before doing something important, I often stop and reflect on the Gospels	2	23	32	53	22
	DD11	Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels, is someone who shapes my character and attitudes	0	4	9	70	50
	DD13	I find reading the Gospels is really helpful for me when things are difficult.	2	5	36	46	43

The results show a very positive attitude to the Gospels.<sup>279</sup> Well over half of the respondents consistently agree with the five propositions which would indicate that the Gospels play an important part in their lives and that their lives are in some sense transformed by the Gospels. Whilst not direct measures of transformation DD4 and DD11, which ask for a respondent's self-assessment of awareness of Jesus in their daily life and the shaping of a respondent's character and attitude respectively, are indicative of change taking place in respondents' lives. From the 135 respondents four respondents disagreed with DD4 and four disagreed with DD11, with only one disagreeing with both. That respondent, aged 26, was nearly the youngest in the sample.

Although not as significant as general indicators of transformation through the agency of the Gospels, DD5<sup>280</sup> (influence of Gospels in deciding how to vote), DD8 (use of Gospels before doing something important) and DD13 (finding the Gospels helpful when things are difficult) all measured aspects which indicate a degree of transformation. In terms of disagreement or non-agreement DD5 and DD8 show a significant number, 55 and 57 respectively, who either don't bring the Gospels to voting or to making important decisions. Whilst there can be many reasons for these responses, *prima facie* they can be interpreted as evidence of a lack of transformative influence by the Gospels in these dimensions of everyday life. How do we encourage lay people to bring the transformative dimensions Gospels to voting issues and to making important decisions?

It is the 'neither agree or disagree' column, however, which is most interesting. Again, there could be many reasons why a respondent neither agrees or disagrees, but one inference is that over 30 respondents in this column are open to being moved to either disagreement or agreement. The challenge for the Church is not why they are ambivalent but how to help them engage with the Gospels in a more transformative way.

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<sup>279</sup> The column headings are as follows: ds – disagree strongly; d – disagree; nad – neither agree nor disagree; a – agree; as – agree strongly.

<sup>280</sup> The reason for the focus on political voting is twofold. First, unlike many other experiences of bringing commitment to Christ to daily life, it was an area which all adult respondents could be expected to have engaged with since voting is universal and compulsory. Second, it is an important area to which to bring Christian values. The act of voting at its best is an expression of what the voter believes about justice and equity and is a quintessential arena for the committed Christian to express their fundamental concern for 'others' as against themselves alone. I would point out, however, that any person's voting decisions are influenced by many factors other than just their Gospel beliefs.

The next category of data questions are those indicating that personal transformation has not taken place or awareness of the need for further transformation. Again, these are presented via table:<sup>281</sup>

**Table 7.2 – Data for Lack of Transformation Indicators**

			Responses				
			ds	d	na	a	as
Items from Section 2	DD6	The Gospels don't seem to be relevant to my daily decision-making.	60	40	17	11	3
	DD7	If I knew the Gospels more deeply, I would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more faithfully.	2	14	36	49	30
	DD10	I could be doing more to follow Jesus' teachings in the Gospels.	2	3	12	79	35
	DD14	Sometimes I wonder if the Gospels should be more prominent in my life.	3	7	35	68	17

The strong 'agree' responses to DD7 (60%), DD10 (87%) and DD14 (65%) indicate that a clear majority recognise the possibility of further transformation, and by inference an openness to being transformed. Given the high percentages, these responses might well form the basis of helpful question to ask respondents in the qualitative interview phase of the project.

Once again there is a significant number who 'neither agree or disagree'. This raises questions as to how they could be encouraged, empowered or challenged to respond more positively to Jesus and the Gospels. Whether they are unable or unwilling to either agree or disagree, the Church's task is to provide an environment and resources which encourage or foster growth.

DD6 is a reverse phrased question. Thirty-one respondents did not disagree and as a consequence could be interpreted as limiting the power of the Gospels to influence their daily decision-making. Further research would be valuable to find out why the Gospels were

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<sup>281</sup> Each of these tables foreshadows future questionnaires with more questions that would yield more significant and detailed information of members of a diocese or parish. This thesis is exploring in embryonic form ways to gain information.

not relevant to their daily decision making and to explore how they could become more relevant.

### **Associations between Transformation Indicators and Gospel Activities, Attitudes and Knowledge (PD, GK and MLD)**

The spreadsheet in Appendix 7 provides a comprehensive summary of all the contingency tests which were explored. It provides an excellent overview of patterns of association and non-association. It also provides an immediate assessment tool for determining the nature, p value and linear association value of each test.<sup>282</sup> It is to this spreadsheet that I now turn to make comments on both groups of tests and individually interesting associations which analysis has uncovered.

DD4, DD5, DD8, DD11 and DD 13 are the selected indicators which suggest clear positive change towards a Christ-centred life. Not surprisingly PD4 and PD6 show significant association with all these indicators. That is, frequency of reading the Gospels and frequency of the use of resources are related to each of these indicators in such a way that the greater the activity the greater the agreement with the proposition in the discipleship data questions/personal transformation which has taken/is taking place. It is important to note that the  $\chi^2$  test does not convey information about either the strength or direction of the relationship. Each result indicating association needs to be carefully considered before conclusions are drawn. I would suggest that, in general, the direction of causality is from Gospel activity to personal transformation (i.e. PD to DD) rather than personal transformation leading to greater frequency of reading and use of resources (i.e., DD to PD), although this direction cannot be ruled out without further investigation.

Given this consistent association of PD4 and PD6 with every one of the chosen indicators, it is reasonable to claim that the transformative power of the Gospels is evident when Anglicans in this Diocese both read them with greater frequency and utilize resources to engage with the Gospels. Whilst these results would be expected intuitively they now, for this population, find a likely empirical basis. These conclusions therefore represent a reasonable basis for action to encourage reading of the Gospels and the use of aids in making that reading count as proven ingredients of Gospel transformation.

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<sup>282</sup> For each positive result, the validity of the test is verified with 'val chi', the p value disclosed, whether or not linear-by-linear association is present by 'lin assoc' and the status of the variables (i.e., the degree of binning which has been applied) indicated in the dimensions of the contingency table. The smaller the numbers the greater the binning. (i.e., 4x4 table is preserving more discrete information than 3x2)

Three out of the same five indicators exhibit association with PD2 (churchmanship), PD9

**Table 7.3 - Crosstabulation PD2 v DD5**

		DD5 When deciding how to vote in political elections I try to look at issues from a Gospels-centred perspective, binned as 1=ds/d, 2=nad, 3=a/as			Total	
		1	2	3		
PD2- the style of church I attend would be, binned as	1	Count	2	14	25	41
		Expected Count	6.5	10.7	23.9	41.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.3	1.4	.4	
1 word/teaching	2	Count	1	6	17	24
		Expected Count	3.8	6.2	14.0	24.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.7	-.1	1.4	
2 no particular emphasis or tradition	3	Count	17	13	32	62
		Expected Count	9.8	16.1	36.1	62.0
		Adjusted Residual	3.5	-1.3	-1.5	
3 Communion/ceremony focused (leaving out charismatic and other)		Count	20	33	74	127
		Expected Count	20.0	33.0	74.0	127.0
			100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.317 <sup>a</sup>	4	.010
Likelihood Ratio	14.264	4	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.107	1	.024
N of Valid Cases	127		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.78.

(interaction with the Gospels using electronic devices) and PD11 (education in theology or biblical background). These consistent associations suggest that transformation as measured by the chosen indicators is significantly influenced by these particular factors. It is instructive to look at one of these indicators in some detail as an example of the method and reasoning which have been applied.

The contingency table for PD2 v DD5 together with its Chi-Square test has been chosen. The  $\chi^2$  test is valid (only 1 cell has an expected count less than 5) and the value of p for the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test is 0.010, which is < 0.05, the selected cut-off value. Therefore, the test indicates an association for this sample between DD5 and PD2 in the terms defined. It is noticeable that the differences between actual and expected counts in the six right hand cells are not particularly large. They are quite large, however, in two of the left-hand cells. The adjusted residuals for these two cells are -2.3 and +3.5, which indicate that these two

cells are significant contributors to the test statistic. That is, a significantly greater number than expected in the Communion/ceremony-orientated church disagreed with the idea that they tried to look at issues in a political election from a Gospel-centred perspective. Conversely, a significantly smaller number than expected from the word/teaching- oriented church disagreed with the proposition.

Whilst the association does not allow a causal deduction or conclusion, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a person who attends a word/teaching-oriented church is significantly less likely to overlook the Gospels when deciding how to vote on an issue in a political election rather than vice-versa. The point of the adjusted residual is that it points us to a more specific conclusion; in this case it might not be right to conclude that people in a word/teaching-oriented church are more likely to number significantly above the expected count in agreeing that they try to look at political issues from a Gospel-centred perspective.

The influence of PD2, PD9 and PD11, based on similar crosstabulation analysis<sup>283</sup>, revealed that:

- the word/teaching style of churchmanship (as against the communion/worship style) leads to greater transformation in terms of being more aware of Jesus in daily life, less likely to overlook the Gospels in considering issues and finding help in the Gospels when things are difficult.
- those who engaged the Gospels using electronic devices (as against those who did not) showed a greater likelihood of transformation in being more aware of Jesus in daily life, more likely to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective and finding help in the Gospels when things are difficult.
- those with the higher level of theological/Biblical studies (the categories being ‘none/school’, ‘church or diocesan courses’ and ‘university level’) were significantly above expected counts in relation to using the Gospels to look at issues when voting in political elections, stopping to reflect before doing something important and Jesus being someone who shaped their character and attitudes.

Conclusions based on these findings might include that:

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<sup>283</sup> In the process of re-binning to obtain valid tables care was taken to incorporate the ‘nad’ category non-prejudicially depending on whether the emphasis of the question sought agreement or disagreement. See Appendix 2.

- even occasional engagement with the Gospels using electronic devices leads to a greater use of the Gospels in relation to life activities and events.
- it may be worth further exploring specific Gospel courses or engagement opportunities.
- in terms of personal transformation greater effort might be needed to bring awareness of the value of the Gospels to decision making on how to vote in political elections. It may well be that this conclusion extends to decisions relating to issues more widely.

Inspection of Appendix 7 shows that the Teaching Index displays an association with three of the indicators selected to gauge personal transformation. Of particular interest is that the Gospel Knowledge Index from which the Teaching Index was derived showed only one association. That is, knowledge of the Gospels as determined in the GKI did not seem to be a marker of transformation, whereas the teaching component of those questions was for three of the indicators a clearly related factor.

The Teaching Index was binned into three (2 – 4, 5 – 6, 7 – 8) with the results that;

- Of those who scored 7 – 8, significantly more than expected agreed that their reading of the Gospels led to awareness of Jesus in daily life, and significantly less disagreed,
- Of those who scored 7 – 8, significantly more than expected agreed that they tried to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective when voting at a political election, and significantly less disagreed,
- Of those who scored 7 – 8, significantly less than expected disagreed that before doing something important they often stopped and reflected on the Gospels, and of those who scored 2 – 4, significantly less than expected agreed that they stopped to reflect on the Gospels.

To the extent that these three characteristics or activities of the Christian life are indicative of personal growth and transformation, then knowledge of Jesus' teaching, as against Gospel knowledge in general, is an important factor in bringing about this transformation.

In the context of transformation, DD8 (before doing something important I often stop and reflect on the Gospels) showed an association with MLD, although none of the other indicators did so. The conclusion would be that personal transformation under the Gospels and as measured by the five chosen indicators is independent, by and large, of whether one is a less or more traditional interpreter. That is, it seems that personal interpretive

frameworks, whether more traditional or less traditional, do not show much differentiation when analysing their effect on practical Christian living as sampled in indicators DD4, 5, 8, 11 and 13.

**Table 7.4 - Crosstabulation DD8 v MLD**

			MLD score binned into 1=12-17 (more traditional) and 2=18-25 (less traditional)		Total
			1	2	
DD8 Before doing something important I often stop to reflect on the Gospels 1 = ds/d/nad 2 = a/as	1	Count	5	29	34
		Expected Count	9.9	24.1	34.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.5	2.5	
	2	Count	18	27	45
		Expected Count	13.1	31.9	45.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.5	-2.5	
Total		Count	23	56	79
		Expected Count	23.0	56.0	79.0

### Chi Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.004 <sup>a</sup>	1	.014
Continuity Correction	4.841	1	.028
Likelihood Ratio	6.335	1	.012
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.928	1	.015
N of Valid Cases	79		

0 cells have expected count less than 5

What is clear is that, in respect of more traditional interpreters, significantly less than expected (adjusted residual – 2.5) did not agree that they stopped to reflect on the Gospels, and significantly more positively agreed that they did stop, and vice-versa in respect of non-traditional interpreters. If stopping to reflect on the Gospels before doing something important is taken as a marker of transformation, then for this population it would appear that the more traditional interpreters in the population may be more likely to do so. In conjunction with the clear association between PD2 (churchmanship) and MLD ( $p < .001$ ) which relates more traditional or less traditional interpretive frameworks on the basis of churchmanship, the likely implication is that those who come from or have been influenced by a more teaching/word-based churchmanship are more likely to relate the Gospels to significant faith or moral activity.

Significant non-associations which can be clearly seen in the spreadsheet would indicate no population-wide relationships between the indicators and PD7, 8 and 10. The last two

in particular are of interest. It seems that whether or not religion/prayer/Bible reading/church were a part of upbringing they do not appear to be significant indicators for personal transformation in and of themselves. Perhaps the cry of ‘if our children are not brought up in the church then they will not become followers’ is not as valid as it might seem. Of course, for many their religious upbringing will have been important and formative. What is being shown or claimed here is that for this sample of Anglican lay people, there is no significant relationship between religious upbringing and personal transformation at the nominated level of probability based on the questions used. Equally the contingency analysis would indicate that level of academic achievement does not bear on the place of personal transformation in respondents’ lives for this sample. Again, for some it will but most likely not for the population in a way that would allow us to say that academic level of achievement is directly related to personal transformation.

#### **Associations between lack of transformation indicators and Gospel activities, attitudes and knowledge (PD, GK and MLD)**

We turn now to look for evidence about where personal transformation appears to have not taken place or there is an awareness that further change is needed, and for Gospel factors which might be related to this situation. The chosen indicators are DD6, 7, 10 and 14. As noted above in Table 7.2, the raw response data reveals that whilst a small number disagree and a larger number neither agree or disagree, the substantial majority agree (in reverse for DD6) that the Gospels are relevant to daily decision-making and that they are aware that they could be doing more to follow Jesus. Perusal of Appendix 7 reveals few associations between the indicators in questions 6, 7, 10 and 14 and Gospel knowledge, attitudes and activities as sampled in PD.

One indicator of interest is DD6 (The Gospels don’t seem to be relevant to my daily decision-making) which yielded associations with both PD5 and PD6. Crosstabulation analysis showed that:

- ‘those who never read the Gospels with others or in groups’ disagreed significantly less than expected that ‘the Gospels don’t seem to be relevant to their daily decision-making’.
- those who never used study resources were significantly more likely to agree with the proposition that the Gospels don’t seem to be relevant to their daily decision making, and significantly less likely to disagree.

It may well be that sharing of the Gospels with Christian friends has a transformative value for the individual (and this will certainly be true for some), although the association did not show this positive conclusion for the population at large but just the negative stated above. Again, further investigation might lead to a clear conclusion.

Finally, DD6 shows up as one of only two associations between the Gospel Knowledge Index and the array of discipleship data questions chosen as indicative of transformation or otherwise. In addition, there are some interesting associations with DD6 based on the derived measures of Teaching Index, Identity Index and Mission Index.

**Table 7.5 - Crosstabulation GKI v DD6**

			DD6 Gospels don't seem to be relevant to my daily decision making binned into 1=ds/d; 2=nad/a/as		Total
			1	2	
Gospel Knowledge Index binned into three, 1 = 6-10, 2 = 11-16, 3 = 17-22	1	Count	7	7	14
		Expected Count	10.8	3.2	14.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.5	2.5	
	2	Count	22	10	32
		Expected Count	24.6	7.4	32.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.3	1.3	
	3	Count	67	12	79
		Expected Count	60.7	18.3	79.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.8	-2.8	
Total	Count	96	29	125	
	Expected Count	96.0	29.0	125.0	

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.652 <sup>a</sup>	2	.008
Likelihood Ratio	8.957	2	.011
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.556	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	125		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.25.

With the emphasis on those who did not positively disagree, the 'nad' category was included with the 'a/as' group. Those who agreed that the Gospels did not seem relevant to their daily decision making and who scored in the lowest bracket of Gospel knowledge (6 – 10 out of a possible 22) were significantly above the expected count (adjusted residual + 2.5) and likewise those who scored highly but agreed were significantly below the expected (adjusted residual – 2.8). Inspection of the corresponding valid test tables for

Teaching, Identity and Mission Indexes showed exactly the same effect, as might be expected. The inference is that a lack of Gospel transformation as indicated by DD6 is as-

**Table 7.6 – Cross-tabulation DD7 v PD4**

		DD7 If I knew the Gospels more deeply I would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more fully divided into 1=ds/d, 2=nad, 3=a/as			Total	
		1	2	3		
PD4 I read the Gospels by myself: 1 rarely/occasionally, 2 monthly, 3 weekly or more	1	Count	10	18	22	50
		Expected Count	6.2	13.8	30.0	50.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.1	1.7	-2.9	
	2	Count	4	4	7	15
		Expected Count	1.8	4.2	9.0	15.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.8	-.1	-1.1	
	3	Count	2	14	49	65
		Expected Count	8.0	18.0	39.0	65.0
		Adjusted Residual	-3.2	-1.6	3.6	
Total	Count	16	36	78	130	
	Expected Count	16.0	36.0	78.0	130.0	

sociated with a lack of knowledge of the Gospels.

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.699 <sup>a</sup>	4	.002
Likelihood Ratio	17.661	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.706	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	130		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.85.

DD7 was the only other indicator of lack of transformation which showed an association. The association revealed between DD7 and PD4 is instructive. A number of tables tested for this relationship provided valid  $\chi^2$  tests but the binning above was rated as preserving the most information in relevant form. The test is valid, which indicates there is an association or relationship between frequency of Gospel reading by oneself and respondents' assessment that if they knew the Gospels more deeply they would be able to live more Jesus-centred lives. Inspection reveals that among those who read the Gospels only occasionally or rarely, significantly fewer than expected agreed and significantly more than expected disagreed. Similarly, further inspection of the adjusted residuals shows that of those who read the Gospels on a weekly or greater basis, significantly more agreed and

significantly less disagreed with the proposition. This is an interesting result because I would have intuitively expected these results to be quite the reverse. That is, I would have expected those who don't read, except occasionally, would acknowledge a lack of knowledge based on their lesser engagement with the Gospels. This could be a result of many factors including personal attitudes to reading the Gospels, or an institutional stance towards what should be received in terms of knowing about Jesus. It could also simply reflect that those who read the Gospels more often are more aware of their lack of correspondence with Gospel values. This response pattern could benefit from further investigation, especially in relation to transformational potential.

### **Quantitative analysis of respondents' discipleship as agents of Christian transformation**

Having looked at the details of personal transformation contained in the responses to the questionnaire, attention is now focused on identifying respondents who are committed to and believe they act as agents of Gospel transformation in the lives of others. To that end associations will be sought between chosen indicators and Gospel knowledge, interpretation or activities and attitudes which might help to understand and potentially lead to suggestions for enhancing that activity. The indicators chosen to provide some insight into this area are DD2 and 12. There are of course many ways a person can act as an agent of Christian transformation, even specifically in relation to the Gospels. Directly speaking to non-Christian friends about Jesus (DD2) and consciously talking with friends about big issues from a Gospel-centred perspective (DD12), however, are considered representative of the many direct and positive ways of engaging with other non-Christians.

The further aim in this section of the analysis seeks to identify respondents who seem reluctant to actively proclaim the Gospel in an explicit way, and to look for Gospel related factors which might help to understand why not. Section 2 Questions DD9, DD15 and DD17 are all questions which answered with agreement would indicate scope to become more active proponents of Gospel transformation in the lives of others.

#### **Responses to discipleship data questions**

The data to be examined concerning respondents' activities in relation to acting as agents of Christian transformation in the lives of others is presented for initial analysis in the table below. Responses to both DD2 ("I try to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus") and DD9 ("On reflection I think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus") indicated an awareness by nearly 50% and 62% of respondents that they could be

more active in the seemingly simple task of offering even basic testimony to the place of Jesus in their lives.

**Table 7.7 – Data on indicators of respondents’ as agents of transformation**

			Responses				
			ds	d	nad	a	as
Items from Section 2	DD2	I try to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus	6	21	34	55	16
	DD12	When I talk with friends about big issues like asylum seekers and refugees I consciously seek to do so from a Gospel-centred perspective.	4	16	31	48	30
	DD9	On reflection I think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus.	5	13	31	58	24
	DD15	If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends.	11	21	48	39	15
	DD17	Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others.	9	22	35	57	8

Whilst the previous analysis shows a significant commitment to the transformative value of the Gospels, there is a nearly equally significant lack of awareness or willingness, for whatever reason, to bring Jesus to others in a testimonial fashion. In DD17 50% of respondents disclosed ignoring opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others. This is a significant figure in a situation of decline of both knowledge and understanding of the Gospels. The other 50% presumably either engaged with most opportunities or were simply unaware of or unable to recognize the need to respond to such opportunities. On either count, more effort might be needed to increase awareness of and commitment to active promotion of Jesus and his story.

In response to DD15, 40% acknowledged that greater knowledge of the Gospels and Jesus might lead to greater confidence in speaking about them. One third neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposition, however, which could imply that factors other than knowledge of the Gospels and confidence to speak about them are important in the ability and willingness to promote the Jesus’ story. It is difficult to interpret just why so many are ambivalent. The simplest and most obvious interpretation is that some or many of these respondents are simply ‘not sure’ whether knowing more of the Gospels would be helpful. It would certainly be of value to further investigate whether people do ignore

opportunities to act thus or are simply unaware of the need, and if so why and whether other factors such as personality are involved.

Whilst it is both valid and reasonable to claim that we bear witness to Jesus in our actions and the way we lead our lives, the question remains how anyone will identify those actions and life with Jesus if nothing is ever said or indicated to make the association. That is, Anglicans need to take note of the Biblical witness and by implication the imperative to proclaim Jesus by word of mouth. And whilst the mood of the age does not make such activity easy for many lay people, we must find ways to enable and encourage laity to proclaim their Christian identity and the difference Jesus makes in their lives.<sup>284</sup>

### **Associations between discipleship indicators and Gospel activities, attitudes and knowledge (PD, GK and MLD)**

There are two Gospel activities respondents disclosed which show relationship with both DD2 and DD12 – namely PD5 and PD6. PD5 is the one question in section 1 which probes Gospel interaction with others or in groups. For both DD2 and 12, agreement with the respective propositions by those who never read or engaged with the Gospels with others were way below the expected count, and agreement by those who did engage once or twice a week was significantly above (adjusted residual + 2.7 and + 3.1 respectively). These results would seem to indicate that the use of resources in the study of the Gospels and engagement with others in Gospel activity does indeed lead to a greater effort to speak with friends about Jesus and a greater likelihood of discussing issues from a Gospel-centred perspective. Whilst the use of resources seems quite clear, in terms of lay discipleship a further important research question might be what difference it makes to have engaged with the Gospel in a group in terms of confidence and willingness to reach out to others with the Gospels. The challenge of mentoring laity into becoming active proponents of the Gospels and their message both in word and action is clearly a challenge for the post-Christendom church.

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<sup>284</sup> Andrew Bolt, “Hatred of Christianity is a mark of ignorance,” *The Advertiser*, May 19, 2016, 13, where the commentator asked just how many young Australians and young journalists understand what Christianity teaches? The further question is ‘who is going to teach them?’ or at least be a source of accurate information, as against prejudice and misinformation.

Speaking with non-Christian friends about Jesus revealed relationships with PD2, 4, 9 and 11.

**Table 7.8 - Crosstabulation PD2 v DD2**

		DD2- I try to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus binned into 1=ds/d, 2=nad, 3=a/as			Total	
		1	2	3		
PD2 Church tradition: binned into 1 word/teaching	1	Count	2	9	30	41
		Expected Count	8.3	10.6	22.1	41.0
		Adjusted Residual	-3.0	-.7	3.0	
2 no particular tradition	2	Count	3	6	15	24
		Expected Count	4.9	6.2	12.9	24.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.1	-.1	.9	
3 ceremony/Communion (leaving out charismatic and other)	3	Count	21	18	24	63
		Expected Count	12.8	16.2	34.0	63.0
		Adjusted Residual	3.6	.7	-3.5	
Total		Count	26	33	69	128
		Expected Count	26.0	33.0	69.0	128.0

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.290 <sup>a</sup>	4	.002
Likelihood Ratio	18.727	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.505	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	128		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.88.

From Table 7.8 above it can be seen that those from the word/teaching-background are below expected in disagreeing (residual -3.0) that they try to speak with non-Christian friends and likewise above expected in agreement (residual +3.0). Consistent with other results relating churchmanship to Gospel activity, there seems to be little doubt that population wide in the Diocese of Adelaide lay members of word/teaching-oriented churches are more assiduous than others in speaking the Gospel.

In the valid  $\chi^2$  test for PD9 those who never interacted with the Gospels using electronic devices were significantly less likely (adjusted residual - 3.6) to agree that they tried to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus than would have been expected, and those who used the devices regularly were significantly more likely to speak in this way. Population-wide this would indicate that those who use electronic devices to engage with the

Gospels are more likely to reach out to friends with the spoken word.<sup>285</sup> This might be a matter of greater encouragement/confidence due to greater engagement with the Word made possible by the convenience of screen based engagement. It could, however, reflect the idea of speaking as in ‘meaningfully engaging with friends electronically’; for example, by social media interaction such as through Facebook, and perhaps sidestepping the awkwardness some might feel in direct face-to-face engagement.

DD12 (When I talk with friends about big issues I consciously seek to do so from a Gospel-centred perspective) shows a positive association with GKI and correspondingly with the derived Teaching, Identity and Mission indices.

**Table 7.9 - Crosstabulation DD12 v GKI**

			DD12 (talk with friends from Gospel-centred perspective into 1 = ds/d/nad, 2 = a/as)		Total
			1	3	
Gospel Knowledge Index (range 5 – 22) binned into four, 1 = 5-9, 2 = 10-13, 3 = 14-18, 4 = 19-22	1	Count	5	4	9
		Expected Count	3.5	5.5	9.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.1	-1.1	
	2	Count	13	5	18
		Expected Count	6.9	11.1	18.0
		Adjusted Residual	3.2	-3.2	
	3	Count	17	26	43
		Expected Count	16.5	26.5	43.0
		Adjusted Residual	.2	-.2	
	4	Count	13	42	55
		Expected Count	21.1	33.9	55.0
		Adjusted Residual	-3.0	3.0	
Total	Count	48	77	125	
	Expected Count	48.0	77.0	125.0	

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.916 <sup>a</sup>	3	.002
Likelihood Ratio	14.995	3	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.823	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	125		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.46.

<sup>285</sup> I draw this conclusion on the basis of rejecting the idea that those who speak to non-Christian friends about Jesus are on that account more likely to use electronic devices. Whilst not impossible, it seems much more likely to me to operate in the direction explained.

With the emphasis on those who positively agreed with this proposition, the ‘nad’ category was allied to the disagree category. Those who agreed with the proposition and whose Gospel knowledge is high are well above the expected count (adjusted residual + 3.0). Those who disagree or were unable to agree were likewise under-represented at the higher levels of Gospel knowledge and over-represented at the lower levels, compared with expected counts. Unsurprisingly, those who are better equipped with Gospel knowledge, so far as it has been measured in this project, are more likely to interact in discussion from a Gospel perspective.

The final step in our exploration of the role played in bringing the transformative power of the Gospels to others is to explore the willingness or otherwise of respondents to speak to others about Jesus and his power and influence in their own lives. DD9, DD15 and DD17 are all questions which, answered with agreement, would indicate scope to become more active proponents of Gospel transformation in the lives of others. The question raised by the raw data in Table 7.7 above is ‘why do so many find it hard to speak about the figure and story which presumably controls their lives and brings them fulfilment, joy, peace and love?’ The task then is to discover any associations between these discipleship attitudes and any other of the variables we have explored and, where possible, draw conclusions about what in fact does inhibit this activity.

Inspection of the spreadsheet grid in Appendix 7 tabling DD questions against the other three sections shows that both DD9 and DD15 are related to PD2 (churchmanship) and PD4 (frequency of Gospel reading). That is, whether or not a respondent could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus seems to be related to churchmanship and to the frequency of Gospel reading. PD2 v DD9 has been selected to illustrate such relationships in Table 7.10.

The relationship shows significantly greater numbers of those from the word/teaching-oriented churchmanship above the expected agreed that they could be more active (residual + 3.3), and significantly less than expected from the ceremony/Communion-churchmanship agreed with the same. Equally with those who disagreed – only one from the word/teaching-church disagreed that they could be doing more (adjusted residual – 2.5) while 12 (adjusted residual + 2.0) from the ceremony/Communion-oriented church disagreed. There would seem to be a clear difference in attitude as to whether one might or might not be doing more to proclaim the Gospel.

**Table 7.10 – Crosstabulation PD2 v DD9**

			DD9 - On reflection I think I could be more active speaking to others about Jesus, binned into 1=ds/d, 2=nad, 3=a/as			Total
			1	2	3	
PD2- the style of church I attend would be, binned into	1	Count	1	6	33	40
		Expected Count	5.4	9.9	24.6	40.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.5	-1.7	3.3	
1 = word/teaching 2 = no particular orientation	2	Count	4	4	17	25
		Expected Count	3.4	6.2	15.4	25.0
		Adjusted Residual	.4	-1.1	.7	
3 = ceremony/ communion focused	3	Count	12	21	27	60
		Expected Count	8.2	14.9	37.0	60.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.0	2.5	-3.7	
Total	Count	17	31	77	125	
	Expected Count	17.0	31.0	77.0	125.0	

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.070 <sup>a</sup>	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	17.784	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.902	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	125		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.40.

For PD4 those who read the Gospels rarely or occasionally and who disagreed that they could be more active in speaking out were significantly greater than expected and those who read weekly or daily and agreed that they could be more active were significantly above the expected count. Intuitively it might have been expected those who read the Gospels rarely or occasionally would be more conscious of not being as active in speaking to others about Jesus as they might be. This result is reminiscent of the finding for the crosstabulation of PD4 v DD7 at page 145. Whilst some who read rarely may well be more conscious, population-wide, the association indicates the reverse - those who read regularly being more conscious of the need to be more active. There may be an underlying attitude about the place and importance of the Gospels influencing this response. That is, individual lay persons may have either high or low commitment to the Gospels qua Gospels which affects their responses overall.

DD9 and DD15 also both indicated association with MLD. This is particularly interesting as the degree of traditional or less traditional interpretation (measured by MLD) associates with only one other personal transformation indicator in DD8. Accepting the valid  $\chi^2$  test for each of these as indicated in Appendix 7, the two comparable associations are shown below without the  $\chi^2$  test table being included.

**Table 7.11 – Crosstabulation DD9 v MLD**

			DD9 - I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus into 1=ds/d/nad, 2=a/as		Total
			1	2	
Total MLD binned into three, 1 = 12-15 2 = 16-19 3 = 20-25(less traditional)	1	Count	1	10	11
		Expected Count	3.9	7.1	11.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.0	2.0	
	2	Count	7	20	27
		Expected Count	9.7	17.3	27.0
		Adjusted Residual	-1.3	1.3	
	3	Count	20	20	40
		Expected Count	14.4	25.6	40.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.7	-2.7	
Total		Count	28	50	78
		Expected Count	28.0	50.0	78.0

**Table 7.12 – Crosstabulation DD15 v MLD**

			DD15 – If I knew more about the Gospels I would be more confident in sharing the story of Jesus with friends into 1=ds/d/nad, 2=a/as		Total
			1	2	
Total MLD into three, 1 = 12-15 2 = 16-19 3 = 20-25(less traditional) )	1	Count	3	8	11
		Expected Count	6.8	4.2	11.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.6	2.6	
	2	Count	16	11	27
		Expected Count	16.7	10.3	27.0
		Adjusted Residual	-.4	.4	
	3	Count	30	11	41
		Expected Count	25.4	15.6	41.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.1	-2.1	
Total		Count	49	30	79
		Expected Count	49.0	30.0	79.0

In relation to DD9 the adjusted residuals show that significantly fewer than expected of the less traditional interpreters agree with thinking that they could be more active in speaking about Jesus compared with significantly more than expected of the more traditional interpreters. Inspection of the residuals for DD15 show much the same effect. The suggestion is that the more traditional interpreters are more conscientious in actively

speaking about Jesus and relate more to the need for Gospel knowledge in relation to confidence in verbal outreach. The comparable table of association for DD8 similarly shows the same variation in figures. That is, in terms of personal transformation rather than as agents of transformation, the more traditional interpreter agrees significantly more than the less traditional that they stop to consider the Gospels before doing something important. The picture painted by these associations might be seen as the more traditional interpreter, as assessed in this project, having greater awareness and intent in their use of the Gospels.

In relation to DD15 (If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends), those respondents in the word/teaching-orientation who disagreed that they would feel more confident were significantly less than expected (adjusted residual – 2.4) and those people who agreed that greater knowledge of the Gospels would lead to greater confidence in speaking to others about Jesus were significantly more than expected (adjusted residual + 2.4). The value of Pearson’s  $\chi^2$  test was .031 and there were 0 cells with expected count less than 5

Again, the orientation is seen which values Gospel knowledge in support of reaching out.

**Table 7.13 – Crosstabulation DD15 v PD2**

		DD15 If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends, binned into 1=ds/d/nad, 2=a/as		Total	
		1	2		
PD2- the style of church I attend would be, binned into 1 = word/teaching- orientation 2 = no particular emphasis 3 = ceremonial/communion- orientation (leaving out charismatic and other)	1	Count	18	22	40
		Expected Count	24.3	15.7	40.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.4	2.4	
	2	Count	19	6	25
		Expected Count	15.2	9.8	25.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.8	-1.8	
Total	3	Count	40	22	62
		Expected Count	37.6	24.4	62.0
		Adjusted Residual	.9	-.9	
	Count	77	50	127	
	Expected Count	77.0	50.0	127.0	

Similarly, with PD4 – those who read the Gospels by themselves weekly or every day were significantly greater in agreement that if they knew more about the Gospels they would feel more confident in sharing the story of Jesus. In terms of regularity of Gospel reading, this result might again seem counter-intuitive. There could be a number of reasons for this situation, including:

- that those who read rarely don't care as much about the Gospels in the lives of others.
- that those who read regularly understand the potential importance of the Gospels and are keen to be as conscientious as possible about that awareness.
- those who are being transformed by the Gospels, by reading them more regularly, are more open to experience further transformation and come to understand more deeply their obligation to offer the Gospels to others.

There could of course be many other reasons. Whatever the reason(s), it would be useful to explore why those who read regularly need greater knowledge to share the story.

For DD9 (On reflection I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus), the use of Gospel resources and the use of electronic devices for engaging with the Gospels also show an association with willingness and even a sense of obligation towards speaking to others about Jesus. Consistent with the picture above, those who used Gospel resources regularly and agreed that they could be more active in speaking to others were significantly more than expected. Exactly the same was true for those who interacted with the Gospels using electronic devices. The consistent trend of this analysis is that those who were more engaged with or committed to the Gospels considered they could be more active in telling the story of Jesus to others, and that they would have more confidence about sharing the Gospels if they had greater knowledge. In terms of transformation, the more that respondents engage with the Gospels and experience the promised kingdom life the greater is their understanding of its value and their willingness and commitment as they become disciples sharing the story of Jesus.

The association between GKI and DD15 is worthy of consideration.

**Table 7.14 - Crosstabulation GKI v DD15**

		DD15 If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends, binned into 1=ds/d, 2=nad, 3=a/as			Total	
		1	2	3		
Gospel Knowledge Index binned into three, 1 = 6 - 10, 2 = 11 - 16, 3 = 17 - 22	1	Count	3	8	3	14
		Expected Count	3.4	5.0	5.6	14.0
		Adjusted Residual	-.3	1.8	-1.5	
	2	Count	2	14	17	33
		Expected Count	8.1	11.7	13.3	33.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.9	1.0	1.5	
	3	Count	26	23	31	80
		Expected Count	19.5	28.3	32.1	80.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.8	-2.1	-.4	
Total	Count	31	45	51	127	
	Expected Count	31.0	45.0	51.0	127.0	

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.396 <sup>a</sup>	4	.015
Likelihood Ratio	14.094	4	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	.779	1	.378
N of Valid Cases	127		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.42.

The  $\chi^2$  test with a p value of 0.015 shows a clear association, although we note that there is no linear association, indicating that I could expect an irregular pattern in

the adjusted residuals. This 3 x 3 binning preserves the greatest amount of discrete information and in particular obviates the need to allocate the 'nad' category. The cell at value 1 for DD15 and value 3 for GKI which has a residual value of + 2.8 reveals that those in the highest bracket of Gospel knowledge disagreed that they would be more confident sharing the story of Jesus if they knew more about the Gospels in a significantly greater number than would be the case if there was no relationship. Restated, this is the first unambiguous evidence we have discovered that greater Gospel knowledge is associated with confidence in telling the story of Jesus. Whilst we can note from Table 7.7 above that for 54 of the sample this was not true and that there will be other factors which affect anyone's confidence in speaking about Jesus, the point of the analysis is that for the population from which the sample was taken, greater knowledge of the Gospels, as that knowledge is determined in this project, will be accompanied by a higher than expected

level of confidence in speaking the Jesus story.<sup>286</sup> All of which leads to the conclusion that an important factor in helping people reach out with the story through encouragement and confidence-building comes with knowledge of the Gospels' content.

Of interest is that DD17 (Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others), which showed no associations with the various Gospel activities, attitudes, and knowledge that we have investigated, had 65 respondents agree that this was the case for them. Discounting a problem with the sample for this particular characteristic, it is reasonable to conclude that factors outside of the Gospel knowledge, attitudes and activities we have probed may explain this result.

## Summary

What can be said then of the investigation in this section of analysis? Firstly, it is important to note some associations which might have been expected are not in evidence. This might be important to preclude spending time developing resources or strategies which are not based in solid evidence. In particular, PD8 (religion/prayer/Bible-reading/religion was a part of my childhood upbringing) and PD 10 (level of education reached) were two parameters which might have been related to transformation and discipleship, but which have turned out not to be important in the terms specified in this project.

### **Personal transformation in respondent's lives (Research Question 3)**

My investigation above of some Gospel-related factors which bear on personal transformation or the lack of it reveals a number of interesting results. Frequency of Gospel reading and use of Gospel resources are clearly leading factors in personal transformation through the Gospels. This was not unexpected but has now been established empirically for this sample and in some measure for this population. There remains a constant need to encourage laity to engage with the Gospels and to use resources for this purpose.

Of all the factors investigated, personal transformation was associated significantly with:

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<sup>286</sup> It seems highly unlikely that confidence in reaching out with the story leads to greater Gospel knowledge, but the possibility needs to be borne in mind.

- a style of churchmanship, where it seems that those from the word/teaching-oriented churches in the Diocese are more likely to intentionally bring the Gospels to their daily lives and decision-making.
- use of electronic devices, where the most likely interpretation of the associations discerned is that those who use electronic devices are significantly more likely to bring the Gospels to their daily lives.
- theological and Biblical studies undertaken, where there is clear and not unexpected evidence that those who undertake studies of a Biblical/theological nature experience greater personal transformation, and
- Gospel knowledge, in particular the derived Teaching Index, where it became clear that those who scored highly on the Index again brought the Gospels to their daily life and decision-making.

Two associations, between the use of electronic devices in Gospel engagement (PD9) and the importance of the teaching component of respondents' Gospel knowledge, were unexpected and are genuinely novel findings which are clearly worthy of further detailed investigation.

#### **Respondents as agents of transformation (Research Question 4)**

The investigation of Gospel-related factors which bear on respondents as agents of transformation showed both expected and unexpected results. Frequency of Gospel reading and use of Gospel resources were again leading factors in discipleship as agents of transformation – those who read more and used Gospel resources more were more likely to communicate the Gospel to others. Results of both univariate and bivariate analysis showed that:

- over 50% believed they could be more active in the basic task of offering testimony about Jesus in their lives.
- over 30 respondents indicated neither agreement nor disagreement with all the questions chosen to indicate commitment and willingness to act towards others as agents of transformation. Whatever the reasons, this ambivalence is a significant area for Church response.
- reading or engaging with the Gospels in a group context is clearly significant for confidence and willingness to reach out to others with the Gospel message.

- word/teaching style of churchmanship and regular use of electronic engagement with the Gospels both suggested respondents more likely to speak about the Gospels to others. In relation to the latter, this result may well reflect that there are a number of different ways in which a person can use electronic devices to ‘speak’ with friends and others. It may also reflect the advantage of engaging at one remove and avoiding the possibility of either direct rejection or confrontation.
- those who are more active in engagement with the Gospels are consistently more aware of both the need for active word discipleship and their shortcoming in communicating the Gospels as against those who are less or little engaged. This unexpected effect was also detected for the more traditional as against the less traditional interpreter.
- Greater knowledge of Gospel content leads to greater confidence to share the story of Jesus with others.

To the extent that indicators DD2 and DD12 did indeed measure respondent’s discipleship in bringing transformation to the lives of others and indicators DD9, 15 and 17 show a lack of willingness or capacity to reach out to others, the Gospel-related factors which are thus seen to be related to spoken outreach to non-Christian friends by lay Adelaide Anglicans as a population include:

- evangelical word/teaching-churchmanship orientation,
- the frequency of Gospel reading.
- the use of Gospel resources.
- participation with others or in groups.
- the use of electronic devices to engage with the Gospels.
- the level of Biblical/theological education.
- respondent’s knowledge of the Gospels.

These seven areas of Gospel attitude, activity or knowledge are significant areas where appropriate activity may assist transformation of those who are, for whatever reason, reluctant to speak about Jesus.

It is clear from Table 7.1 that a large majority of lay Adelaide Anglicans indicate that the Gospels play an important part in their lives and, by implication, that they apply the Gospels in the lives and to the challenges and issues of daily living. It is, however, equally clear from Table 7.2 that a large majority feel that they could be applying the Gospels more fully to their lives. Finally, the data in Table 7.7 indicate a seeming lack of both

application and conviction as to their roles as agents of transformation. These results must leave in doubt any assessment of Gospel application as outlined in the final requirement of a transformative Gospel literacy; viz, ‘... it (Gospel literacy) will result in a basic ability to apply the Gospels to social, community and global issues, and to one’s own personal issues, behaviour and daily decision-making in a transformative way, and enable the disciple to both articulate the Gospel story and stories and respond to simple basic questions about the Gospels.’<sup>287</sup> It seems to me that the quantitative methodology has here reached its limit and that further assessment of lay Anglicans and transformative Gospel literacy needs some narrative insight to complete the picture. For this reason, I now turn to a qualitative exploration using semi-structured interview of both the Research Questions and some of the questions which have arisen in these chapters as I seek to assess the Gospel literacy of Adelaide Anglicans.

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<sup>287</sup> See Chapter 2 for the full definition of ‘transformative Gospel literacy’.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW METHOD I

#### **Introduction**

To this point in the project I have developed a quantitatively based picture of what Adelaide lay Anglicans know and understand about Jesus and the content of the Gospels and how this knowledge and understanding impacts their lives and the lives of those around them. This picture is, however, necessarily limited. The picture is wide-ranging but limited to the particular responses offered to the questions in the questionnaire which has been the subject of the previous chapters. Respondents are answering closed questions which channel and limit their responses; the picture includes minimal personal reflection or discretionary information. Whilst the quantitative survey technique allows respondents to adopt a middle or ‘don’t know’ position, the researcher does not find out what the respondent is thinking and why that is so. There is a dimension of information missing.

The qualitative approach allows me to explore the deeper reflections and thoughts of a sample of the respondents. Using open-ended questions, focused by the lens of transformative Gospel literacy, a sample of the original respondents can be invited to reflect on questions in their own way and from their own perspective. Qualitative investigation allows appropriate exploration and elaboration of the responses to some of the data questions asked in the quantitative segment of the project. The aim of this chapter is to outline the development and administration of the qualitative questionnaire.

#### **The qualitative questionnaire**

##### **The interview questions**

The semi-structured interview will comprise data questions both complementary and supplementary to the quantitative survey questions asked. They will be directly related to the Research Questions but also respond to items of interest or inquiry found in the quantitative outcomes, elaborating and extending such insights. The qualitative interview questions will provide a depth of data:

- into what is known of the content of the Gospels, including the relative importance attributed to different aspects of Gospel knowledge.

- about how the Gospels are understood and in particular how lay people convey their understanding to others.
- on how a group of individuals see their discipleship, and whether and how they could be outreaching more effectively.

For the projected half-hour interviews of twelve of the original respondents, up to eight questions was deemed to be sufficient. This allows significant coverage of the Research Questions, ample opportunity for probing and an opportunity for respondents to offer personal reflection.

A number of key principles will be taken into account in framing the questions.

1. The questions will be directly aligned to the Research Questions. That is, whatever other considerations apply, the questions asked must contribute directly to insight and information about the key issues central to the project or key findings which have arisen. This principle guards against a natural temptation to probe areas of interest or information shortfall which may be of interest but not of central concern.
2. Consistent with this first principle, the questions may revisit or take up issues revealed in the quantitative phase of the project. For example, knowledge of the Gospels was found to play an important role in lay outreach to non-Christians.<sup>288</sup> It might therefore be appropriate to frame a question seeking to offer reflection on Research Question 1 shaped by this finding.
3. The questions, rigorously open-ended, must invite respondents to answer the question in their own words and way without any constraint or guidance. Basic follow-up questions will be used to probe responses as needed but, so far as possible, the questions will seek to explore the responder's personal reflection .
4. The questions must be straightforward and in plain language. To ensure that all respondents are reflecting on the same question it is necessary to eliminate any ambiguities where different interpretations of either the question or key terms is likely.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> See Table 7.15

<sup>289</sup> Even after extended discussion, reflection and testing related to the questions, there turned out to be two ambiguities where my trained academic mind simply did not anticipate how an untrained lay member would read the questions.

In the quantitative phase of the project a number of interesting univariate results and relationships between variables became evident. I think it is important to pay attention to these in the framing of the questions, so that both quantitative and qualitative results can be brought together in the final chapter of this thesis. The more important and interesting findings included:

- a significant number who indicated that the Gospels did not seem to be relevant to their daily decision making and who seemed ambivalent to the Gospels as tools for reflection on decisions and actions in daily life.
- the importance of using support materials to make the most of reading and making sense of the Gospels.
- a significant number who agreed that if they knew the Gospels more deeply they would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more faithfully.
- a significant number of respondents who acknowledged that they found it difficult to speak with others about Jesus and the Gospels, and a significant number who were ambivalent to the need for speaking about Jesus and the Gospels with others.
- a significant relationship between those who used electronic devices such as smart-phones, tablets and computers to engage with the Gospels and willingness to speak about Jesus and the Gospels.

Taking into account principles of question construction and findings from the quantitative survey outlined above, eight questions were developed. The framing of these questions proved challenging but was an indispensable exercise in clarifying exactly what I wanted to ascertain from each question and how best to obtain that. The questions were tested and critiqued until clear, direct and relevant questions emerged. For each question an appropriate ‘extension’ question was included as a cue to further fill out respondents’ answers to the primary question. The Questions are included in Table form at Appendix 1 following the Quantitative Questionnaire.

1. Question 1. **‘Can you tell me one or more ways that the story of Jesus in the Gospels impacts your life?’**

- This question is related to Research Question 3 and seeks insight into how respondents see that Jesus, the Jesus story and the Gospels are important and transformative in their lives. The question is important because the capacity, or lack thereof, to explain the impact or transformative power of Jesus in their

own lives is most likely indicative of their capacity to explain it to others. The initial survey established a quantitative measure of the impact of the Gospels in the Gospels and Life Index: this question seeks to allow respondents to explain in their own words the questions which were investigated in DD20, 21 and 23 of the initial survey.

- A helpful extension question could ask, **‘Are there any other ways you might like Jesus to play a part in your life?’** This question might encourage respondents to think more deeply on how Jesus and the Gospels could play a greater or continuing transformative part in their life, and uncover responses previously not offered in the written survey. In common with many of the questions, the aim is to leave each interviewee with something to think about which may contribute to their own on-going growth.
2. Question 2. **‘If I said to you as someone who knows nothing about Jesus and the Gospels, “Tell me about the Gospel story of Jesus” what would you want to tell me. Think about the things Jesus said and did and the events that took place in his life.’**
- This question is related to Research Question 1 and seeks to gain insight into what lay Anglicans know about Jesus and the Gospels, including what seems to be important or memorable. The initial survey established a knowledge profile of laity in the simplest of terms but without any awareness of what is prominent in lay minds and whether certain aspects of the Jesus story are more or less memorable.<sup>290</sup>
  - Apart from probing responses to elicit more detail, an appropriate extension question would be **‘What further knowledge would you like to have about the Jesus story and the content of the Gospels?’** This question arises from the number of significant associations between GKI and key variables as reported in Appendix 7. This question attempts to find out what lay Anglicans are aware they do not know and might like to investigate. Responses might

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<sup>290</sup> The knowledge demonstrated by answering 22 multi-choice questions is most likely to be quite different from knowledge of the same material or in the same arena demonstrated by recall without prompt.

indicate directions for further engagement and input and thus provide a significant practical outcome. The question may assist those who indicate a lack of knowledge in response to the lead question.

3. Question 3. **‘Can you tell me how Jesus is significant (or otherwise) for you as you respond to:**

**a) personal issues such as whether to tell a lie or not, or sharing your possessions with someone?**

**b) social issues such as euthanasia?**

**c) global issues such as climate change?’**

- This question is related to Research Question 3 and seeks to gain insight about whether and how respondents bring Jesus and the Gospels more fully to the issues they face. The initial survey asked questions such as DD4, 5 and 11 as to whether or not Jesus was a significant factor in decision-making and issues resolution and established a population-wide basic picture of how the Gospels operated in this area. This question seeks to add qualitative flesh to quantitative bones by investigating how a representative group actually bring Jesus to their practical, ethical lives.
- A useful extension question asks: **‘What would assist you in bringing Jesus and the Gospels more into the centre of your daily decision-making?’** This question offers a chance for reflection specially for those for whom Jesus is not significant, and potentially practical insight into how lay Anglicans might be helped to bring Jesus further into their lives.

4. Question 4. **‘What do you see as barriers, if any, to you being able to understand the meaning of particular Gospel passages?’**

- This question is related to Research Question 2 and investigates the area of understanding of the Gospels. It became clear in the survey that there were significant associations between DD9 (On reflection I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus) and DD15 (f I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends) and how well lay Anglicans understood or were able to elicit meaning from the Gospels. This question seeks to understand and respond to the particular finding of apparent lack of willingness, based seemingly on lack of

confident familiarity with the Gospels, of lay Anglicans to share the Gospel story and stories.

- A helpful extension question might ask **‘Do you remember the Gospel story in Mark 2 of the sick man being lowered through the roof and being healed by Jesus? How would you go about explaining to me what you think it is saying?’**<sup>291</sup> This question further probes Research Question 2 and seeks to gain insight into how respondents explore what a passage or story from the Gospels might mean or how they might understand it. The initial survey sought to establish a basic picture of how respondents interpreted the Gospels and the language and images used, the results of which were used to gauge whether respondents took a more or less traditional approach to interpretation. This question seeks to explore and gain insight into the basic processes that respondents engage in when making sense of the Gospels for their own lives.

5. Question 5. **‘What would enable you to be more confident in chatting with others about Jesus and the story in the Gospels?’**

- This question is related to Research Question 4 and seeks to gain insight into clearly evident and widespread lay Anglican reluctance to speak about the Gospels, which was revealed in responses to DD9, 15 and 17 (Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others). The initial survey revealed that many respondents acknowledged an under-confidence in reaching out this way, and any information about how that under-confidence might be overcome may to potentially produce practical outcomes.
- A following question might ask: **‘How would you set about telling someone who asked what difference being a follower or disciple of Jesus has made in your life?’** This question seeks to gain insight into what approach lay Anglicans take in response to the simplest testimonial question. The question may be important in building a picture of the ways Anglicans approach testimonial situations and, thus, potentially providing significant suggestions for engagement with others.

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<sup>291</sup> The passage was read to each interviewee from the New International Version.

6. **Question 6. ‘Do you engage with the Gospels through using electronic devices such as computers, tablets or smart phones? If so, could you chat about how you do so.’**

- This question is related to Research Question 3 and sought to gain insight into ways in which lay Anglicans engaged with the Gospels using electronics. The initial survey in question PD9 revealed the unexpected finding that the use of electronic devices to engage with the Gospels showed a number of significant associations in the population. Information about this activity may well be useful to future Diocesan planning for Gospel outreach.
- The evident complementary question asks: **‘If you don’t engage with the Gospels using electronic devices, how do you think, with encouragement and/or teaching, you might be able to do so?’** The question seeks to learn from the non-users ways to encourage and teach in this important engagement arena.

7. **Question 7. ‘Can you suggest changes to the church services that might enrich or challenge people’s engagement with the Gospels?’**

- In the context of learning about and understanding the figure of Jesus this question is related to Research Questions 1 and 2. The question offers opportunity to comment on how lay Anglicans perceive the learning and interpretation they receive in their corporate church life. The initial survey revealed the possibility that respondents might not be receiving in the parish scenario inputs which led to greater knowledge and understanding of Jesus.
- A subsidiary question might ask: **‘Can you suggest any other changes to our community life within the church which might encourage greater engagement with Jesus and the Gospels?’** This question provides an opportunity for participants to offer any other ideas that they have which might be supportive of their Gospel knowledge, understanding and their discipleship.

8. Participants were offered the opportunity to make any further or final comments on their participation or the Gospels/Jesus’ story with the question:

**‘Is there anything else about either Jesus and the Gospels or about your participation in this interview that you would like to add?’**

## **Administration of the interviews**

Fifty-five of the original 135 respondents indicated they would be willing to be further contacted for follow-up. As a basic principle, it was important to choose a random sample of 12 from this possible selection pool of 55. The reason for selecting a sample of 12 interviewees only was both practical and theoretical. At the practical level it was simply beyond my resources to travel and process more than 12 interviewees, work which often took a day or more depending on the travel involved. Theoretically, I believed that I would be approaching some sort of saturation point after twelve interviews and that the effort of obtaining further returns would outweigh the information potentially obtained.

It also seemed important to obtain some sort of cross-section of respondents according to their scoring on the indices derived from the Research Questions. These primary indicators include:

- the Gospel Knowledge Index as the primary indicator of Research Question 1 – What do ordinary lay Anglicans know about Jesus and the Gospels?
- the score obtained for more traditional or less traditional understanding in relation to the Meaning and Language Data which was developed in response to Research Question 2 – How do ordinary lay Anglicans understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels?
- the Gospels and Life Index which has been developed and offered as an indicator of the impact of the Gospels on each respondent's Christian life, in relation to Research Question 3 – In what way does their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels make a difference to their own lives?
- the Gospels and Discipleship Index which offers an overview of the questions which were addressed in Research Question 4 – In what ways do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference in the lives of others?

Finally, it would also be good to have a spread of respondents' ages also. That is, in whatever sample is chosen, there needed to be consideration of the spread of these key indicators within the sample, albeit the sample has been selected on some random basis from the 55 available. It is evident that this process would be too complicated if conducted on anything other than a trial and error basis. The decision, therefore, is to select randomly a group of 15 (allowing three reserves) and to ensure that the four primary indicators were

represented across a substantial part of the range of each one. If the initial random selection failed to ensure reasonable cross-sectional representation of the indicators, the process of random selection would be repeated until a reasonable cross-section is achieved. The appropriateness of spread across the indicators and in terms of the age of respondents was determined by visual inspection with the four key indicators lined up in adjacent columns in the SPSS Data Base. The range of the indicators in the final selection is disclosed so that the reader has an indication of how representative the sample is in relation to each of the Research Questions.

The basis for random selection was to choose every fourth respondent starting from the first on the randomly ordered list, and then starting similarly from the second if needed until an appropriate random sample is discerned. The first random sample was analysed, and the following spread of key indicators determined by inspection.

- The Age range was from 41 – 90 (min 24 and max 94 for whole sample)
- The GKI range was from 8 to 21 (min 5 and max 22 for whole sample)
- The range for more or less traditional in relation to MLD was 14 to 23 (min 12 and max 25 for whole sample)
- The GLI range was from 22 to 40 (min 20 and max 40 for whole sample)
- The GDI range was from 8 to 25 (min 8 and max 29 for whole sample)

Whilst not all indicators were spread evenly over their ranges, there was certainly a variation in range for the randomly chosen sample which I assessed as a satisfactory degree of coverage within the random sample.

The random sample of fifteen respondents known only by their SPSS ID number was duly sent to my supervisor who had agreed to contact the chosen respondents to check whether they were happy to continue their involvement and to be contacted and thus have their identity known by me.

### **Conduct of the interviews**

The survey by semi-structured interview was conducted in 2016. The respondents were interviewed at a venue acceptable to them, most often their own home. The eight-question

interview was conducted using the Application ‘Recorder’<sup>292</sup> on an iPad and transcribed as described above. Each question was asked and a sheet with the question in large bold-type on it placed in front of the interviewee to act as a prompt. On average, the interviews took thirty minutes. No problems were encountered with the receipt and handling of records for either set of data.

### **Coding of interview data**

My intention had been to code the responses for each question. In practice and given the variation in responses, reducing any set of responses to single code word or code phrase categories was found to be less than ideal – fitting subtle or complex responses into false envelopes. Given the relatively small number of interviews it seemed more productive to build a table of responses to each question for each individual. Accordingly, each transcribed interview was read, and significant phrases and ideas were entered into a table for each question. Most respondents made multiple responses to each question, and naturally there were similar answers for some questions from a number of respondents. The table eventually extended over sixteen pages but had the advantage of clearly describing each individual response and clearly identifying who made it. In some instances, there were groupings which could usefully be made and patterns which emerged; for example, as in response to Question 3.

### **Reliability and validity**

In relation to the semi-structured qualitative interview, a trial interview was similarly conducted and adjustments made on the basis of feedback. Responder validation, the process of checking the final transcript with the interviewee, was considered unnecessary as all interviews were recorded, mechanically transcribed<sup>293</sup> and manually checked to produce verbatim transcripts. That is, there is no contention as to what they said, although there may be about what I think they meant! The recordings and transcripts have been retained for audit purposes should that be required and will be disposed of consistent with University regulations when no longer needed. The results are presented in Chapter 9.

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<sup>292</sup> Application found at <https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/voice-recorder-free/id685310398?mt=8>

<sup>293</sup> This mechanical transcription was carried out using the ‘VoiceBase’ facility at <https://www.voice-base.com/> which provides for automatic speech-to-text, speech analytics and predictive insights.

## CHAPTER 9

# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS - THROUGH THE EYES OF THE RESPONDENTS

### **Introduction**

The qualitative findings from the interviews will be presented question by question. For each question developed in Chapter 8, the following aspects will be explored as appropriate:

- A description of the responses.
- An assessment of the interview responses, including relevance to transformative engagement.

### **Question 1 – Impact of Gospels/story of Jesus in lay lives**

Question 1 asked for specific impact(s) of the Gospel story/life of Jesus in interviewees' lives. In explanation, I elaborated on the question using the idea of what immediate change(s) did they think the story of Jesus made in their lives. The rationale for the question was to explore what sort of impacts lay Adelaide Anglicans could identify, whether the respondents had reflected on what impacts Jesus made, and whether they could articulate these. The latter two points have an obvious bearing on interviewees' capacity to speak about Jesus to others. The primary aim of the question and its associated question (Question 1A) was to gain direct insight into Research Question 3: what difference their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels made in interviewees lives. The associated question (Are there any other ways you would like Jesus to play a part in your life?) was asked for two reasons. First was to ascertain whether the interviewee had reflected on how Jesus might become something more in their lives; that is, whether their approach was proactive or reactive. The second reason was to provide an opportunity for respondents to express hope for greater engagement with Jesus. The two questions together represent both transformation in process and further transformative potential.

In relation to the data questions, this question was asked to explore an open-ended response unlike the multiple-choice questions which were asked at DD20 (Helpful uses of the Gospels for me include:) and DD23 (The Gospels make a difference in my life by:).

Both quantitative questions offered broad categories of response such as ‘changing, helping, showing, enabling, learning’ with no specifics of just how those general verbs might be operating in particular circumstances. My hope was to sample particular examples of just how Jesus impacted lives with a view to possible practical suggestions for transformative activity.

I did not expect elaborate answers in the interview situation, given the limited time available, but did hope that responses might indicate important specific impacts within the possibilities in DD20 and 23. Over half of those interviewed answered that Jesus impacted their lives in many ways or most of the time. When pressed for particular instances four of them struggled to respond, which I interpreted as meaning they may not have (perhaps ever) reflected on just what impact or difference Jesus made in their lives. Particular impacts mentioned by two or more respondents included inspiration to pray, comfort (specially in time of loss), help in the face of conflict or taking a costly ethical position. There were a number of unique responses including the impact of being able to forgive the self for mistakes and failures.

A number of responses centred on interactions with others but only one mentioned loving the neighbour as an impact or difference. A further category of responses centred on Jesus providing an example and inspiration: as a servant leader, as a mirror for assessing conduct, as ‘saving me in the sense of hope for the after-life’, and Jesus as a model of compassion.

The question and importance of relationship with Jesus was raised starkly by two respondents. One lamented not having a relationship – “I would like to have a personal relationship, which I do not have” – and the other affirmed a very strong sense of relationship in two statements:

My relationship with Jesus is my reason for living, it’s my satisfaction in life and it’s my hope for the future, and

When something glorious happens or when crisis or something bad happens I head straight to the relationship.

The first was an older cradle Anglican<sup>294</sup> living a solid ethical and church-based life for seventy or more years but clearly aware that something more was experienced by others. There was further transformative potential he might explore, but evidently he did not have

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<sup>294</sup> A cradle Anglican is one who has been brought up in the church from ‘cradle’ (usually baptised as a baby) onwards.

the tools or knowledge to undertake such an exploration.<sup>295</sup> This important area might well be one for further investigation.

In relation to further transformative potential (Question 1A) single responses as to further ways respondents might like Jesus to play a part in their lives included: increasing strength in the face of death, more of a part in the lives of loved ones, an increasing capacity to overcome old habits and guidance in interpretation.<sup>296</sup> The only dimension mentioned by two respondents was for help and guidance in opening up to other people and talking to others about faith and belief, which may reflect the quantitative finding of nearly 75% of respondents who felt they did not reach out adequately with the Gospel.

Provisional conclusions based on responses to the first question might include:

- Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide, and presumably cradle Anglicans in particular, may not reflect on or assess adequately the particular effects that Jesus brings to their lives. This situation may lead to a lesser capacity to describe to others what impact Jesus has on their lives, and also to a lesser capacity for bringing Jesus to other aspects of their lives for transformative growth.
- Some or many Anglicans may not experience a personal relationship with Jesus which many would see as the prime, but not the only, means of transformation and transformative possibility. This might be particularly true for cradle Anglicans for whom attending church and church-related activities may be more important and familiar than following Jesus.

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<sup>295</sup> These responses raise the vexed question of just what constitutes or is the nature of a personal relationship with Jesus. The second respondent above, when asked to elaborate, characterized her relationship as Jesus being present at all times and that she could communicate with him by having an internal conversation with him when walking, thinking, sitting. Arguably the essence of personal relationship in this context is a relationship which is dynamic in influencing, changing and transforming the attitudes and behaviour of the relating party; a relationship which operates to shape life and living in a significant way, in this context by the presence of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. An example I use often to illustrate the essential nature and importance of personal relationship is that the Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca is a famous historical figure about whom I know a lot and admire enormously but who does not shape my personal life in any significant way. It is my non-famous unremarkable mother and that relationship which has radically shaped my life.

<sup>296</sup> This respondent wanted an answer 'as to the role of an educated woman wanting a career against the Biblical model of a woman at home as a nurturer and carer.'

## **Question 2 – Knowledge of Gospel story**

Question 2 set out to ask interviewees about their knowledge of the content of the four Gospels or the ‘Gospel story’. I tried to position myself as an interested but ignorant inquirer into the life of Jesus and specially the things he said and did and the major events which took place in his life. The rationale of the question was to probe respondent’s knowledge of the content of the Gospels and in particular to appreciate the priorities which were given to the many Gospel stories and details which could be mentioned. The aim of the question was to gain further insight into Research Question 1; what do ordinary Adelaide lay Anglicans know about Jesus and the Gospels. The associated question (what further knowledge would you like to have?) was an opportunity to gauge respondent’s inquisitiveness about the Gospels.

The quantitative survey used twenty-two questions to assess cognitive knowledge of the Gospels and provided a distribution and three other measures based on Section 3 of the questionnaire (Gospel Knowledge Index and assessments of what was known about Jesus’ identity, Jesus’ mission and Jesus’ teaching) to present what was and wasn’t known about the Gospels story of Jesus (see Chapter 6). The interview question sought to provide a deeper understanding of what respondents knew, including some idea of the relative importance attributed to the different things Jesus said and did, and how key events surrounding his life were recalled. Whilst the questionnaire tested discrete knowledge and could be scored well by an intelligent analysis of each question, the open-ended question looked for what any respondent might be able to offer without guidance. This capacity is seen as an important aspect of being an active disciple of Jesus. In the context of and with the limitations of the interview, however, I could not and did not expect a comprehensive description of Jesus’ life from any given interviewee. Rather, the aim was to gain insight which might lead to practical suggestions.

The question having been explained and a copy placed in front of the person, a significant number started their response with the creation of humans, no doubt wanting to place the Gospel story in context. A further group set out on an interpretive track straight off:

Jesus is someone who brings hope and knowledge of our lives and salvation,

The most wonderful way that God came down to earth...., and

Lived as one of us, totally human, suffered as we do.

Whilst most would agree with the statements, they are not details of the Gospel stories portrayed in any of the Gospels but are rather reminiscent of early interpretation of the Christ event contained in other places in the NT.

Some spoke of broad categories, such as “Jesus related to people who were struggling” “Jesus came from God and had a special role to show us how to live”, “the messages of Jesus are the most important (arrest, crucifixion not important to me)”, “showed people that everyone was important no matter who they were or what they did”. This latter begs the question from an uninformed listener as to how Jesus did that; one respondent nominated the story of the woman taken in adultery as an event in Jesus’ life which was important for the respondent, which provides a good illustration of both the need and the means to offer concrete Gospel examples.

As would be expected, significant numbers pointed to major features of Jesus activity, although some might be surprised that the frequency numbers in the brackets of some cases are not greater. Respondents mention the following activities:

- Jesus performed miracles (5)
- Jesus preached (4)
- Jesus healed and exorcised (4)
- Jesus told stories (and by implication parables) (4)
- Jesus helped people, especially the oppressed (3)
- Jesus forgave sins (2)
- Jesus taught (5)
- Jesus provided leadership and example (4)
- Jesus loves and cares (2)
- Jesus died and rose (5)
- Jesus had an unusual birth (5)

Whilst there will no doubt be many different opinions on what content would constitute an adequate presentation of the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels, there may be a question as to whether any one of the interviewees would have been able to provide an adequate account of basic Gospel content as a foundation prior to any interpretation. I understand that not everyone might have Jesus the helper as a focus but I was certainly surprised that no more than five out of twelve included both the unusual birth and death and resurrection as indispensable Gospel content in understanding the life of Jesus and being in a position to offer interpretation of that life. Equally I would think any adequate presentation of

Jesus would need to include the forgiveness of sins as a key feature of his teaching, which in many cases might well not happen on the evidence above.

So far as other responses went, the following were each mentioned by one respondent only: Emmaus story, Ascension, baptism of Jesus, doubting Thomas, humility of Jesus' family, Jesus getting angry in the temple, Jesus left alone at the end. In addition, one respondent thought that telling someone that Jesus taught in parables was not important, and another when pressed on whether she would include Jesus as a teacher in her description exclaimed that she had not mentioned it because she "thought it was understood." This latter comment illustrates the problem of assuming people know details which are taken for granted by practising Christians.

Whilst the results of the quantitative survey might suggest an adequate to good knowledge of the figure of Jesus, the analysis above indicates a number of concerns. First might be the need for would-be disciples to be aware of the difference between interpretation and Gospel content, and the need to be in command of the content of the Gospels on which their interpretation might rest. Even in answering, as five did for instance, that Jesus performed miracles, no miracles were specifically mentioned despite the prompt to think of Gospel passages and stories and to mention them. To say to an inquirer for instance that Jesus is someone who can save them, in whatever sense that might be meant, might be meaningless or even counter-productive without some reason based in the Jesus' story to make that claim. Secondly it does seem problematic on the part of many lay Anglicans to produce a basic account of the key events in Jesus' life and the key things he said and did. In an age of increasing lack of awareness of the Gospel story, this basic skill will become more important as the contracting number of disciples seek to keep the story and its meaning alive. If we are to be agents of transformation in our society and culture then we need to know the Gospel content on which the possibility is based.

Responses to the associated question revealed an awareness by some not only of the limited knowledge they held but, more importantly, that the content included in the Gospel accounts need interpretation – that without understanding their knowledge is superficial. A number indicated the desire to probe beyond the facts alone:

to gain further wisdom in a deeper understanding of the stories,  
knowing the true significance of the stories in their original context,  
knowing more of the background of Jewish thinking and theology, and

the capacity to deal with different interpretations (i.e., different constructions or meaning of a given passage of Gospel).

These responses indicate both a depth of thought and the possibility of further transformation.

Provisional conclusions based on these responses to the second question might include:

- that answering multi-choice questions on the content of the Gospels may not by itself be an adequate measure of knowledge of Gospel content. There is a real need for adequate knowledge of the Gospels to include the ability to recall Gospel content without prompting. The mixed-method design is eminently suited to providing this extra information in its qualitative phase.
- the need for a framework with an emphasis on concrete events enabling lay people to tell the basic story with key details. This need not be the same for everyone and, initially at least, need not be detailed. It does, however, need to allow the disciple to explain why and how Jesus is important for life.
- the need for laity to be aware of the difference between an interpretation and the Gospel content on which an interpretation might rest. This recognition is important for the integrity of the framework mentioned above.

### **Question 3 – Impact of Gospel story when dealing with issues**

Question 3 sought to discern how respondents brought Jesus/the Gospel story to the issues they faced. It seemed important to cover personal/ethical issues, social issues (issues affecting society or sections of society where one's response is made in a social setting) and global issues (issues affecting our whole world or major sections of our world) and examples of each were offered so interviewees could differentiate between the types of issue and the possibility of responding in different ways. The rationale of the question was that the area of behaviour and response to moral issues is a prime area in which our allegiance to Jesus is worked out and where transformation is taking place and can be further expected. The aim of the question was to further discern the detail of Research Question 3 about what difference their knowledge and understanding of Jesus and the Gospel story made in their lives. The associated question ('What would assist you in bringing Jesus more into the centre of your daily decision-making?') challenged respondents to offer insight into possible ways and means for further transformation in their discipleship.

This question sought to deepen the insights provided by data questions DD3, DD5, DD12 and DD21. In these questions participants indicated substantial agreement that they tried to take the Gospels into account when voting in political issues (77 out of 135 either agreed or agreed strongly) and when talking with friends about big issues such as those surrounding refugees and asylum seekers (78 out of 135 either agreed or agreed strongly). For DD21, 77 out of 135 respondents indicated that they thought the Gospels could provide help and guidance in three or more of the six issues which were offered for consideration. It seemed a natural follow-on to investigate how they felt this help and guidance might actually occur, and this question provides an excellent example of the complementary aspects of the quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation. In this case if the quantitative result is to provide other than basic information then it needs elaboration provided by personal detail.

In relation to personal issues, a number offered examples of Jesus providing guidance in family and money issues including prudent stewardship, giving and sharing. Likewise, particular examples were offered for social issues, “on the issue of euthanasia, Christ was able to bear suffering”, and for global issues such as consumerism;

Jesus has much to say to the diseases of the Western world such as consumerism, not only because of what it does to us but also because it disadvantages large numbers of people.

There were, however, two distinctive but related patterns of response which I think contribute most to filling out the qualitative result. For well over half of the respondents, Jesus was significant in relation to the issues in their lives by inspiring attitudes such as charity, non-judgmentalism, forgiveness, empathy, sympathy, and respect for others – “Jesus helps me to be....”. For a number who expressed Jesus’ significance in this way, this formation of attitude was underwritten by prayer both for the self as issues were faced and for the issues themselves when appropriate. The second and predominant response was that Jesus was significant in providing the model on which to act – “Jesus shows me how to....”:

act in a way that Jesus may to some extent approve of,  
approach an alternative way of life; challenges me on big issues like wealth,  
be aware of the impact my actions in whatever way on others, and  
I apply Jesus to individual cases (the question of course remains, how?)

Only two appealed to the Gospels directly:

Jesus laid down principles which have been applied by the church, e.g., the story of the good Samaritan, and

as you looked after the sick, the prisoner, you looked after me is the impact statement.

The associated question provided further insight. All but two responses indicated the need for discussion and interaction:

more interaction with other Christians, including home groups,

more chat about ethical matters at church,

greater group support and prayer, and

AA model would be useful, which gives you a sponsor or somebody to talk with about things.

These responses express a desire for greater practical reflection on ethical issues. The primary conclusion to be drawn is that the respondents brought Jesus to the various issues through the formation/transformation which Jesus had brought and was bringing to their lives. A further conclusion is that such formation may be usefully encouraged through discussion and interaction.

#### **Question 4 – Barriers to understanding the Gospels**

This question asked respondents to name anything they saw as barriers to understanding the meaning of particular Gospel passages. I was not looking for anything in particular and expected interviewees to nominate both external and physical barriers as well as internal and intellectual barriers – anything at all which impeded understanding in their view. The rationale for the question was to gain insight into what were seen as barriers. Asking respondents to name barriers to understanding seemed a good way to probe their awareness of the subtleties of interpretation.

The associated question – how would you go about explaining what you think the story of the paralysed man in Mark Chapter 2 means? – was designed to probe a fundamental apologetic task of explaining what a particular story means. Asking them to interpret a passage seemed a good way to test their potential to engage others with the story. This question was chosen not only because the particular story is well known by Anglicans through both illustrated Bible images from childhood and lectionary repetition but also because explaining a passage represents a basic task which seems to be to be fundamental to effectively telling the story of Jesus. In the interview, the passage from Mark 2 was read to each interviewee from the RSV.

Both questions were devised to investigate Research Question 2 – how do Adelaide lay Anglicans understand and comprehend the Gospels? The questionnaire investigation of this question was limited to nine data questions.<sup>297</sup> These questions provided both a picture of whether the Gospels were understood in a more or less traditional framework and an indication of whether respondents understood language figuratively or otherwise. They did not, however, provide any insight about why respondents understood as they did or whether they were happy with their understanding. Also, the respondents were working with propositions only and not with passages.

Two respondents could not think of any barriers and were quite happy with their capacity to understand. One saw no barriers because they could either use resources or “ask the priest!” A significant number acknowledged lack of knowledge as a barrier:

lack of understanding of background and particularly terms like ‘Son of Man’,

lack of detailed understanding of what Jesus is really saying,

complexity of stories both in their origin and cultural background, and

passages which are difficult if taken literally such as hating father and mother, and the problem of recognizing such as hyperbole.

A number of external barriers were raised which might, however, also provide insight into practical possibilities for augmenting understanding of the Gospels. Three mentioned different translations as providing different insights into a passage but also creating confusion. Related barriers mentioned would include different interpretations being confusing, and the inability to arrive at a conclusive exegesis of any passage. Behind such comments may lie both a particular attitude to the status of Scripture, and the Gospels in particular, and a psychological need to seek or find a definitive meaning to any passage.<sup>298</sup> One respondent further indicated they felt a barrier to understanding came from reading only a portion of the Gospel in Sunday service, the barrier being lack of context which might lead to a different interpretation.<sup>299</sup> Another noted as a barrier their failure to further investigate the Gospel passage used in church on a Sunday

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<sup>297</sup> DD19 – ‘What stands in the way of my reading the Gospels more often is that: ‘... was not understood as a question seeking to explore barriers in relation to understanding, even though one might argue that reading the Gospels more often would likely lead to greater understanding.’

<sup>298</sup> Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, 87-88. In his suggestive section on ‘Thoughts on the Use of the Bible in the church’ Clines suggests that a first step ought to be moving away from the concept of determinate meanings and to locate meaning in the activity of the reader.

<sup>299</sup> Archibald Edward Malloch, "Forum : Hearing and Reading Scripture," *Worship* 68, no. 6 (1994). 534, where Malloch discusses the difficulties of engaging text out of context.

Some acknowledged barriers associated with their own personal and social background. One respondent indicated being “still stuck with the literal interpretation of stories received as a young person”; another straightforwardly acknowledged “my own social, cultural and unique life conditioning and prejudices.” Similarly, “some of Jesus stories and teaching don’t seem to be so applicable now as ours is a different type of society.”

The foregoing comments indicate a clear awareness of barriers to understanding which might provide clues for enhancing lay understanding of the Gospels. There may, for instance, be room for educating laity in the basic aspects of Gospel interpretation, including basic techniques and limitations of interpretation.

The associate question 4A provided further interesting insights into lay interpretation. Three respondents who had theological education answered the question strictly in the sense of trying to provide a methodology of explanation (the question as they had it in front of them read – How would you go about explaining to me (the ignorant but interested outsider) what you think the passage is saying?). One provided a basis of explanation which included several layers of meaning and the background of significant imagery including paralysis and forgiveness by God. Another suggested the need to look at the context of where it is in the Gospel and the importance of the words of Jesus. A third thought they might need to say something about the context of the time and people present and to explain how things can separate us from God. Two acknowledged they were unable to explain what the passage was saying, one because he was ‘not sure himself what it was all about.’ One voluntarily thought that it was important to be able to tell an inquirer what the story means. All others understandably tried to explain what they thought was the important content and meaning of the passage, offering two or more significant insights.

A number saw it being a story of faith and about commitment and the need to persevere. A number focused on forgiveness and healing:

about the power to forgive sins,  
about healing, and healing to show something more,  
how desperate people were for healing,  
functions in metaphorical aspect of being about more than physical  
healing,  
as a metaphor – we are all paralyzed,  
story is included in the Gospel to explain why and how people were  
healed by Jesus, and  
Jesus was demonstrating that to be forgiven for your sins is more im-  
portant than to be healed physically. The spiritual healing and internal

life if you like is more important than the physical life and the healing was really only to demonstrate his power to do both.

The largest number, however, thought the story was saying something about Jesus;

Jesus wanted them to understand the full meaning of what he was doing, statement about Jesus' power and role and his strength of purpose, shows the divinity of Christ, put in a bit of context about who Christ was and what he was doing, is about Jesus' identity, more than just an ordinary man, in saying he can forgive sins, Jesus is simply declaring that he is Son of God, and the presence of the crowd indicates Jesus is already very significant or considered a great healer and teacher.

Whilst the range of responses and willingness to explore the passage was encouraging, it was difficult to discern a clear or systematic interpretation on the part of any particular interviewee. I did not get the impression that any of the interviewees had a 'hermeneutical lens' or a guiding overview of what the Gospel of Mark is trying to achieve. This outcome again points to the need to equip lay people in an appropriate way to offer coherent explanation of straightforward passages to interested enquirers. The capability could be seen as both transforming for their discipleship and transformative for those who might need to hear a message of reconciliation and hope.

The responses to these two questions revealed a willingness to have a go at the admittedly difficult task of interpretation. This activity needs to be encouraged.<sup>300</sup> They also revealed the problems lay Anglicans have in approaching this complex task. Perhaps a better approach to the apologetic task of explaining the Gospel story is to equip laity with Gospel passages they can summon to explain what they believe about Jesus and why they believe he is worth following.

## **Question 5 – Enabling confidence to tell the story**

Question 5 asked interviewees what might enable them to have greater confidence in chatting with others about Jesus and the story in the Gospels. The rationale for the question was the increasing need for committed Christians to simply speak about Jesus – why

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<sup>300</sup>Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, 88, where Clines notes that a plurality of interpretations may well unleash the creative potentiality of the church's members.

and how he is important in their lives. The aim was for respondents to consider what stopped them naturally and easily talking about Jesus, whether by invitation or on an opportunity basis, with a view to perhaps providing insights and possibilities for overcoming at least some of those hindrances. A range of possible reasons was anticipated, including intellectual (not confident with being able to answer questions), psychological (fear of rejection) or emotional (fear of conflict or ridicule). This question and associate question 5A (How would you set about telling someone who asked what difference being a follower or disciple of Jesus has made in your life?) were aimed at further investigating Research Question 4. Whilst our own lives of discipleship might make a difference to other lives in a number of ways, and specially by example, speaking to interested others about Jesus and the difference Jesus makes is a very clear way in which influence might be exercised.<sup>301</sup> What is clear is that from the period directly after the resurrection appearances, people were inspired to talk to others of their experience and understanding of Jesus, and the constant example of the NT is a dynamic sharing of the Jesus story.

The content of both Question 5 and 5A was inspired by the survey results of DD2, 9, 15 and 17. More than half of the survey respondents felt they could be more active in the simple task of offering basic testimony to the place of Jesus in their lives. The response to DD15 (If I knew more about the Gospels, I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends) showed 40% either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition. The natural follow-up to this response was seen in asking what might help to reduce this percentage and encourage lay Anglicans in the task of speaking about Jesus and his place in their lives.

A number naturally spoke of circumstances where they were more comfortable speaking about Jesus – receiving a clear invitation to do so; being easier with known people; being in an environment where people are more likely to ask about Jesus; sensing when the moment is right. One commented that this task is harder in Australia but easier in England because ‘it’s still a fairly normal part of life.’ Another commented that it was not a matter of confidence since he would not talk to someone about Jesus in his life!

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<sup>301</sup> Ian George, Archbishop of Adelaide (1991 – 2004) made this point explicitly when speaking about hospital visiting. “How will people ever know what is driving the visitor if nothing is said or no indication is given that Jesus stands behind what is being done?”

Psychological and emotional factors were also in evidence. Two specifically mentioned that they were not assertive, one that they were unlikely to bring Jesus up in conversation as they were not ‘outgoing’, one that they felt unworthy, one the fear of rejection:

I fear rejection and specially the hostile environment. Fear of not being heard and not having the opportunity to be heard on the basis of prejudice and negativity about Christianity. I am more comfortable talking to someone I don't know or someone who I know to be a Christian.

So far as approaches go, one indicated that understanding a person's situation or need or particular interest would make it easier, another that it is often very hard to explain where a hearer has no Christian background. One practical way forward suggested was to pick out stories from the Gospel that people might relate to and understand and see if it spoke to a person's situation or life. Similarly, another suggested that ‘sticking with Scriptures makes for comfort.’

A further group acknowledged the under-confidence associated with lack of knowledge and a fear of not being able to answer even simple questions about Jesus. At a practical level, two interviewees suggested positive steps to help overcome under-confidence:

more practice with fellow Christians and hearing other people's answers, and

I would be more confident if we had a church which was set up to follow up my efforts in home groups or services which were welcoming and enjoyable.

Even from this limited number of responses, qualitative enquiry offers some useful suggestions for transformative action. Apart from the question of knowledge and ability to answer questions, some basic instruction on how to go about coming alongside another and sharing or looking for shared experience would be useful. Certainly, structured group sharing perhaps including role-playing to provide example and inspire confidence would be helpful, and mentoring for learning and encouragement of willing laity would be valuable.

Whilst question one asked for ways that the story of Jesus impacted respondents' lives daily or weekly in specific or discrete ways, question 5A (‘How would you set about telling someone who asked what difference being a follower or disciple of Jesus has made in your life?’) was more interested in the difference made to an interviewee's satisfaction or fulfilment with life. I had hoped for some methodological insight into how respondents would seek to share their own convictions and experience of living with Jesus in terms of joy, peace, fulfilment and the like, but received more of a useful list of the actual differences that were evident in their lives. These included:

receiving hope in a better future and in the face of death,  
help, with carrying burdens, in the face of adversity, finding peace in  
the forgiveness of sins, making important moral decisions,  
giving purpose in helping others, giving a direction to take, offering  
a core set of values providing focus and a standard to measure ac-  
tions by,  
providing meaning in life, a place of connection,  
inspiring service, giving a compassionate outlook and helping to be  
understanding, and  
gives confidence to set an example and stand against popular opin-  
ion, gives confidence to be a spokesperson.

Whilst these are concrete additions which would make a difference in anyone's life, they do not address the reason for doing them. That is, in terms of the first dot point: why is receiving hope in a better future through believing in or following Jesus worthwhile or better than seeking it in other places? What is it about Jesus that really makes a difference to my life? The answer to this question has to do with presence leading to a relationship rather than hope as a problem to be solved by 'me' or a challenge to be met by 'me'. Indeed, the imagery of resurrection and Pentecost as they proclaim the on-going presence and power of Christ with his followers are the source of Jesus' efficacy in a human life and that which needs to be in some way communicated to a listener. This conviction and its outcome were in evidence on only one occasion during all the interviews.

## **Question 6 – Exploring electronic engagement with the Gospels**

Question 6 ('Do you engage with the Gospels through using electronic devices such as computers, tablets or smart phones? If so could you chat about how you do so.') and its associated question were asked as a response to a particular finding from the survey and the subsequent discovery of a number of unexpected significant crosstabulation results. Question PD 9 (How often do you interact with the Gospels using electronic devices?) was asked to ascertain whether electronic engagement with the Gospels was taking place. Whilst only 30 out of 135 respondents indicated that they did so often or regularly, the significant result was the clear population-wide relationship ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between PD 9 and DD 2, 4, 5, 9 and 13, and GDI and GKI. Examples of these relationships showed, for instance, that those who used electronic engagement more often were more likely to engage non-Christian friends about Jesus (DD 2) and were scored well above the expected count in Gospel knowledge.

The question does not relate directly to one of the Research Questions as has been the case for the previous interview questions, but it seems reasonable to say that regular electronic engagement with the Gospels might add significantly to knowledge, understanding and discipleship application and so is a process or activity which affects all the Research Questions. The content of the question was as simple as it could be – Do you engage and if so how? The aim of the question was to find out just how people were using either tablets or computers to read/engage/explore the Gospels and it acts as an excellent example of the value of seeking qualitative supplementation of a quantitative result. The associated question 6A, which was asked of all respondents, simply sought insight into how lay Anglicans envisaged encouragement or instruction might be provided to help people to engage with the Gospels electronically. The main justification for both these questions was practical; given the significant relationships revealed in the contingency analysis was there anything practical to be learnt for the benefit of lay Anglicans in the Diocese.

Seven of the twelve interviewees engaged electronically in varying degrees of intensity. There were many ways electronic devices were used for Gospel engagement, including:

- finding lectionary readings in preparation for study.
- finding verses for Sunday school lessons.
- searching for key words (but how?).
- looking things up, such as commentary on a passage.
- using the Bible Gateway site for comparing translations.
- using ‘Google’ for general research.
- meanings of words, especially in Greek.
- investigation of historical matters and comparison of miracles between the Gospels.
- frequent use of the internet to look up various things in relation to the Gospels and to compare the Gospels.
- use of Bible programs to study Gospels among other things.
- use of the net for comparison work on Gospels with apocryphal and other writings.

It was interesting to discover such a range of engagement among laity and an excellent example of the variety available from lay response to open-ended questions. It seems clear that basic notes be written or placed on-line for laity about how to engage the Gospels using computers and tablets. As seems to be the case with computers, if people are

given a simple template or notes and shown the steps then they will generally eventually attempt the task.<sup>302</sup>

So far as instruction and encouragement are concerned, apart from those who didn't have the time, don't think it is necessary, or that books are sufficient, there were a number of suggestions. A number of respondents mentioned one-to-one teaching and working in a group. A number of other useful suggestions included:

- teaching a person how to 'Google' and how to use search tools.
- the use of question/answer programs to both teach about using the internet and about the Gospels.
- advice on techniques/procedures for studying the Gospels and how best to go about reading the Gospels, and pointing people to good websites concerned with reading the Gospels.
- how to deal with variations in stories, and offering different interpretations and discussing ways of interpreting Gospel material.
- having a Church Facebook page where older people could engage with passages for discussion, put together a blog or chat room, use twitter.
- helping people to understand the medium and how to use it; finding out what is available on the net.

Of particular interest is that all these suggestions are 'led' activities, unlike much of what is offered to committed laity in terms of exploration and self-directed tertiary style learning. From such a list it does seem that there are possibilities for teaching and encouraging lay people to engage with the Gospels electronically but almost certainly the most important means would be one-on-one mentoring and demonstration.<sup>303</sup> Finding perhaps younger people in congregations who are willing to make a project of teaching older and other folk how to engage the Gospels using electronics would be a prime strategy, particularly if the Diocese produced a website with a plan and the means to undertake such instruction.

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<sup>302</sup> As president of my Rotary Club in Adelaide, I have spent a good deal of effort and time demonstrating to Rotarians the value of using the net for club information, communication and financial transactions. The resistance from older members, however, has been real until they both see a demonstration and are led through a series of steps. Even then problems remain but only for a few invariably older members.

<sup>303</sup> As a District Priest responsible for 16 congregations spread over a large area in the Diocese of Willochra between 2005 and 2009, the only way for me to manage ministry and organizational matters effectively was to have key personnel on the internet. I made it a rule that wardens and parish secretaries had to be able to receive and send material on the net, and to this end I spent significant hours, one to one, successfully equipping various personnel to undertake this essential activity.

## Question 7 – Changes to enhance engagement

Question 7. – ‘What changes to church services might enrich or challenge peoples’ engagement with the Gospels?’ – and its associate question 7A were, like Question 6, a practical probe seeking suggestions for transformative possibilities for engagement with the Gospels in the worshipping and community lives of laity. In relation to the Research Questions, these two questions again provide clues to activity which might well contribute ‘towards a transformative Gospel literacy’. That is, they do not aim to answer any of the research questions as such but, rather, look towards practical possibilities for investing in all the questions.

Whilst only one person felt that sermons as presented were sufficient, there were a number of interesting suggestions, some which were nominated by multiple interviewees, for greater Gospel engagement in services, including;

- services committed to the Word/a Gospel reading.
- greater emphasis on life applications of Gospel readings.
- explanation to background of Gospel reading either prior to service or prior to reading.
- greater interactivity, discussion in the service, responsive readings where people verbalize.
- dramatic presentation of Gospel readings.
- the use of projection, electronic teaching and smartboards.

There was clearly both interest and response to the suggestion of greater Gospel engagement in services. Whilst the ethos of the Diocese has in the past leaned to liturgical emphasis on the Eucharist, there does seem to be interest in services with more emphasis on the presentation of the Word. This should not be surprising given the structure and denominational history of the traditional Anglican services of Morning and Evening prayer. Together with the APBA service of Prayer, Praise and Proclamation<sup>304</sup> there would seem to be real possibility for services committed to the Word/Gospel, including services founded on interactivity, question and discussion.

Question 7A, likewise, sought suggestions for transformative possibilities for engagement with the Gospels in the communal non-worshipping life of the community. The responses were again interesting, and included:

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<sup>304</sup> The service is available at [www.sundayservices.anglican.asn.au/docs/ppp.rtf](http://www.sundayservices.anglican.asn.au/docs/ppp.rtf). Accessed October 15, 2016.

- home groups for studying the Gospels and, in any setting, the encouragement of people to chat about the Gospels. More than one noted that they never heard laity speaking about the Gospels or discussing points of detail or interpretation.
- the use of modern aids and technology, including modern music, film series and computers/computer programs. (The point was made that so much of Anglican teaching, when it occurs in other than worship, is verbal and often uninspiring.)
- a greater emphasis on Jesus and the Gospels in church-related activities such as op-shops, artistic presentations, groups using church facilities.
- every member of the community engaged in one way or another in Gospel-based activity in the wider community, and using that engagement to meet and discuss the Gospel foundations and applications of their activity.
- the extension of practical hospitality in the Gospel tradition of food, service, support, prayer and other derived activity which might illustrate and extend the Gospel to both members of the community and to others.
- the use of ‘themed’ studies based around the Gospels but carried out in a creative way rather than as traditional Bible studies.

These observations all provide useful insights into communal Gospel engagement activities and possibilities. Even at a simple level of application, some of these activities might be useful for discipleship building and potentially reaching out to others. Respondents have again provided a wealth of information, both in terms of depth and breadth, which highlights a willingness to further engage with the gospels and the Jesus story. Asking significant questions to lay people and listening to and analysing their answers provide a powerful framework for a diocese to enhance the transformative nature of the Gospels in people's lives.

### **Question 8 – Further suggestions/comments**

Respondents were offered finally an opportunity to make any comments on either Jesus and the Gospels or their participation in the interview process. Three comments are worth inclusion as indicative of important feelings or thoughts.

I would like to know how to enrich people’s lives.

Discipleship is something that Anglicans are not good at, but there is some ambiguity of just what is good or not so good discipleship.

I think we need to be mindful that every conversation we have with anybody anywhere can lead to opportunities to spread the Gospel.

### **Summary and conclusions**

The qualitative responses and analysis above have added a significant dimension of understanding to the quantitative results. A good example would be in the conclusions which

are able to be drawn about the status of lay knowledge of the Gospels, which looked reasonable from the quantitative survey but in which gaps were revealed through the interview responses.

Significant provisional findings worth mentioning include:

1. It may be that laity in the Diocese of Adelaide have not been taught or encouraged to reflect on the place or impact of Jesus and the Gospel story in their lives. This might be particularly true for cradle Anglicans who have been raised in the church from childhood and never been shown or seen the need to reflect on what the church has taught or shown them. This lack of reflection quite probably leaves them unprepared to explain the place and impact of Jesus in their lives and so limits their potential for further personal transformation and for being agents of transformation in the lives of others. To this end, training and encouragement in theological reflection at a basic level might be an important challenge for the Diocese to consider. Likewise, reflection in relation to ethical and moral issues, whether personal, social or global, was also discerned as an area worthy of attention, not only for personal growth but for explanation about why, as a Christian, one responds to issues as they do.
2. The expression of both the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus and regret at not having one was striking. The question of whether Jesus does in fact shape my daily and weekly life, or whether I simply do what the church teaches (and, for many, has taught from a young age) is important. It seems clear that many lay Adelaide Anglicans could profitably contemplate the state of their relationship with Jesus. It may be that the Diocese needs to consider encouraging people into following Jesus more actively rather than simply nurturing them in church life, albeit that church life is supportive.
3. The need for lay people to understand the difference between the content of the Gospels and the interpretation of that content; to understand that the content of the Gospels provides a basis for interpretation and that interpretive comments made to an outsider need to have some basis in the Gospel record which can be offered if needed.
4. Associated with the question of interpretation is the apparent need to equip lay people, in a simple way, to offer coherent explanation of straightforward

Gospel passages to interested enquirers. This is not to suggest apologetic responsibility but the idea of being able to explain reasonably some of the elements of the Gospels such as healings, miracles, and key events in the life of Jesus. Absence of any capacity for basic explanation or interpretation may leave the Gospel closed to inquirers and thus not a tool for the transformation of lives. This equipping may well need a hermeneutical key but there seems no reason why willing and committed lay people might not be able to offer basic explanation of passages with appropriate frameworks in place. Whilst preaching fulfils an expository and hortatory role, what is being suggested here is beyond the function of preaching. This might be carried out in a gathered event and perhaps incorporate mutual role-playing in a supportive environment.

5. The possible need for a framework of Gospel knowledge which is appropriate for a basic presentation of who Jesus is and what he can do for us. Whilst the level of knowledge as revealed in the survey questionnaire shows basic knowledge, it may be transformative in both dimensions for laity to have a basic coherent outline of the ‘essentials’ for both following and presenting Jesus to others.
6. A number of interviewees in response to a number of questions suggested shared learning and experience as being a means for gaining in knowledge and confidence in dealing with the Gospels. Even practice in the simple art of finding another’s ground and moving onto it, or having a go at telling a story or explaining a Gospel passage in a respectful and shared environment can make a transformative difference to a lay disciple’s willingness to venture forth.
7. The number of suggestions for electronic engagement with the Gospels along with the clearly significant relationships between knowledge, discipleship and electronic engagement strongly suggest programs of lay instruction and encouragement in relation to the use of computing with the Gospels. This is an area which could well be investigated by the Diocese.

The responses and suggestions provided in the foregoing are from a group of people who not only survived a seventy-question questionnaire but also who were willing, nearly a year later, to undergo a follow up interview. That is, the interviewees were a committed and keen group of Anglican lay people, and it would be erroneous to suppose that all of

the findings and particularly the suggestions and insights will be practical or reasonable for many Anglican lay people. What is envisaged here is the active and ongoing transformation of willing and committed laity on a Diocese-wide basis who might become a cadre of transformative agents within the wider community. None of the research seeks to deny that the Gospels can and do operate in a number of different ways for different people. It seems certain to me, however, that intentional, committed discipleship is a matter of ‘meeting and coming to know Jesus’ in a cognitively based way from the Gospel story about Jesus and the stories and sayings spoken by Jesus.

The qualitative results gained in this chapter now need to be brought into relationship with the quantitative results of the previous two chapters. The aim of my mixed method design was to supplement and complement quantitative results with the words and reflections of a selection of questionnaire respondents, and it is to this task and an evaluation of Adelaide Anglicans literacy in the Gospels that I turn in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 10

# ADELAIDE ANGLICANS AND THE GOSPELS – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### **Introduction**

This thesis set out to investigate and provide exploratory insight and some provisional answers into four Research Questions which were outlined in Chapter 1 and revisited in more detail in Chapter 3. The Research Questions arose from:

- my ministry and faith context in South Australian Anglican Dioceses over a period of thirty years during which I repeatedly observed a lack of Biblical (Gospel) knowledge and understanding, and discipleship activity.
- the lack of any evident investigation of these matters in the Australian Anglican context.

Using as a ‘lens’ a well-developed understanding of Gospel literacy founded on the centrality of transformation, my aim was to investigate lay Anglicans’ knowledge and understanding of the Gospels and to gauge the impact of the Gospels in their own lives and in the lives of others. In addition, I also sought to investigate whether the responders were satisfied with their engagement with Jesus and the Gospel stories or whether, and in what ways, they believed it could be more powerful or transformative. These aims and aspirations led to four research questions.

1. What do ordinary lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the content of the Gospels?
2. How do lay Anglicans understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels?
3. In what way does their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels make a difference in their own lives?
4. In what ways do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference in the lives of others?

This investigation and the resulting discoveries were achieved through quantitative and qualitative investigation, employing a mixed-method design which sought to achieve both width and depth in exploring the questions. In this process, some significant investigative tools and techniques for questionnaire construction and evaluation were also developed.

A quantitative survey based on a unique questionnaire was formulated, validated, tested and administered to over 130 respondents to provide information which, when analysed, would explore answers to the Research Questions. The quantitative findings were supplemented by a qualitative interview segment of the project. The questions for the interviews were derived from the Research Questions and consideration of some of the quantitative findings.

In this final Chapter, it is appropriate to ask; ‘What are some of the most significant findings of this thesis?’, ‘Has the mixed method adopted been helpful in addressing these research questions?’, ‘Does the definition of transformative Gospel literacy offered provide a basis for assessing the state of Gospel literacy in the Diocese?’, ‘Has the project and its methodology provided a foundation for further research in this important emerging area?’ In response to these questions and the four foundational Research Questions I will present a summary of findings bringing together both the quantitative and qualitative results, and conclude with a statement of the various outcomes and benefits of the project.

### **Summary and outcomes of results**

The investigation of the Research Questions, together with the insights gained, are described and analysed in Chapters 6, 7 and 9. This section seeks to summarize key findings in relation to each Research Question and to bring the quantitative and qualitative results together as outlined in Chapter 3 with the qualitative complementing and supplementing the primary quantitative investigation.

Investigation of each of the Research Questions required the development of data questions to be included in the quantitative questionnaire. As I have noted, any explanation and validation of the equivalent questions in the theses and articles I surveyed in Chapter 2 was either absent or minimal. An important aim of the project has been to place this research on a sound footing to provide maximum understanding for both critical and constructive purposes. For this reason, I have offered detailed explanations of each data question chosen in Sections 2, 3 and 4<sup>305</sup> of the questionnaire, including why the question was chosen, what it hoped to discern and its relevance to the Research Question and to transformation where appropriate. This allows critical reflection by readers of the thesis, but more importantly provides a basis for the selection and variation of questions for future

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<sup>305</sup> Explanation of data questions in Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Questionnaire appear in Appendices 3, 5 and 5 respectively.

questionnaires seeking similar information. The same principle was applied in the explanation and validation of the data questions used for the qualitative interview.

### **Research Question 1 - What do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide know about Jesus and the content of the Gospels?**

A primary ministry disappointment in my experience which I have sought to investigate is the apparent lack of knowledge of the Gospels by Adelaide Anglicans. Having not detected any attempts to probe the knowledge of Gospel content in and of itself on the part of an Anglican lay group, the first Research Question I asked was ‘What do Adelaide Anglicans know about the content of the Gospels?’ Their knowledge of the content of the Gospels was tested in 22 questions which made up Section 3 of the quantitative questionnaire. As well as basic explanation of each question, I sought to explain how each question might relate to present Christian life/action /challenges.<sup>306</sup> The guiding principle for this initiative is that, though one comes to know Jesus and enjoy a relationship with him through the Holy Spirit, that process unambiguously requires the mediation of the Gospel story of Jesus. The focus of the questions was therefore on their knowledge of major features of the Jesus, story which were deemed necessary for understanding the transformative potential of the person and work of Jesus centred on Jesus’ identity, mission and teaching.

The primary result was reported in the Gospel Knowledge Index (GKI), which aggregated the scores of all participants, with three quarters scoring 15 or more correct out of 22 and a quarter scoring 14 or less. The literature review failed to discover any other academic research with which to compare or evaluate this result. Backed by comprehensive theory and detail underpinning these data questions, however, it can at least potentially serve as a numerical basis for further Gospel content knowledge assessment. Whilst the scores above might seem to be encouraging, examination of the detail of the answers showed that many lay Anglicans do not know some of the basic details of the Gospels.

Some questions were answered incorrectly by around a quarter or more of the sample, clearly indicating the need for explanation or even systematic Gospel education. Key events in Jesus’ life such as the auditory disclosure of his sonship at the baptism, which is rehearsed annually in Anglican lectionaries, was not known by a significant number.

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<sup>306</sup> This is provided at Appendix 4. Whilst it can be done in different ways, it should at the least provide insight into why each question was chosen and lay the questions open to critique whereby the quality of such questionnaires can be improved over time.

How can one know that Jesus is God's incarnation if one does not 'hear' the divine voice proclaiming him to be so? In respect of Jesus' identity as revealed in the various titles accorded to him, over a quarter of respondents were not able to link the title 'Christ' to 'anointed one'. Without knowledge of key events and Jesus' titles, the possibility of transformation remains limited.

Although the information acquired on Jesus' mission was too scant to draw significant conclusions, this was not so in respect of Jesus' teaching. The command to love the enemy was known by virtually all respondents. Whilst this is reassuring, a useful further research question might ask, either quantitatively and/or qualitatively, what respondents understand as the meaning of this difficult instruction to love the enemy. In relation to love of neighbour, however, nearly a quarter of the sample were unable to link the parable of the Good Samaritan to Jesus' illustration of what it means to love the neighbour. Nearly one half could not identify the instruction to conciliate by seeking to resolve an issue with the other person by oneself.<sup>307</sup> As a crucial instruction for loving and respectful relationships within the community of faith this lack of knowledge is particularly worrying. If one of the great testimonies to Jesus' relevance to life and truly human living is found in coherent, forgiving and merciful community life, then this instruction would need to be understood and lived out in the lives of most, if not all. If we don't know what we should be doing or how we should be behaving then we will not only not be transformed by what Jesus commands for our lives, but also be unable to demonstrate and so win for Christ those who are influenced by us.

Interview question 2 sought to further investigate what respondents knew, including knowledge they might not have been able to demonstrate in the closed question survey. In addition, I hoped to gain some idea of the relative importance attributed to the different things Jesus said and did, and how key events surrounding his life were recalled. A list of Gospel content was built from the answers of the twelve interviewees. The frequency of mention of some items such as the forgiveness of sins, which was mentioned by 2 out of 12 respondents was, in some cases, surprising. Important events in Jesus' life such as baptism, transfiguration and temptations were not mentioned. Less than half of the interviewees in both cases mentioned either the virgin birth or resurrection stories as major or important features of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and work. This could not be because these committed people don't know them as Gospel content, so these results may

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<sup>307</sup> Mtt 18.15 (RSV)

well indicate that many of the interviewees could struggle to present a coherent or comprehensive (even if simple) picture of Jesus' life and ministry to others. A helpful further research question might ask, 'If you were asked to tell the story of Jesus, what details would you include?'

Even more importantly, I wonder how many lay members could recall Gospel content or are even in the habit of recalling Gospel content in response to questions such as, 'Why is that the case?' or 'What is the evidence for that statement?' This is not to suggest that all or most lay folk either can, or should, be able to tell and interpret the basic and significant aspects of the story of Jesus. Rather, it is to suggest that in the less institutional and more discipleship-centred future required by post-modern culture<sup>308</sup> it will be important for a significant number of laity to recall details of Jesus' story for the purpose of interpretation, recount the story of Jesus with basic details and answer enquirers' questions if the Gospel is to prosper.

Analysing the initial responses provided by interviewees, even with my prompting, it might be reasonable to infer that the laity in the Diocese of Adelaide have difficulty in recalling the content of the Gospels, and understanding it within a wider context. Both hesitancy in the interviews and the quality of answers provided strongly suggest that lay Adelaide Anglicans are not in the habit of reflecting on or articulating deeply about their knowledge of Jesus. It seems clear that equipping lay people to reflect on and speak simply but movingly about Jesus has not been a priority. This is a significant issue which needs to be addressed at least in the Diocese of Adelaide, if not the wider church community. The response to this interview question has also provided a good example of the power and helpfulness of the qualitative phase of the project in adding perspective and depth to the quantitative results.

Bivariate analysis revealed further important insights into the factors surrounding and outcomes arising from the extent of knowledge of Gospel content. For this population, I

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<sup>308</sup>I.T. Price, "Making Disciples in Mainline Protestant Churches in Australia in a Post-Modern Era," DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001. In his Doctoral Thesis Rev Ian Price provides an excellent comprehensive overview of the meaning of post-modern trends for Australian churches and discipleship. As he asks whether there are theological principles or foundations that will allow the church to connect with a largely uninterested postmodern world in order to make disciples in this era? (p 35), he notes that the post-modern era is not particularly interested in institutions or organizations (p 37) and nominates the task before them as 'to identify the culture, understand it, find ways of connecting with it and *to help individuals find their way to faith in Christ* (my emphasis) and to live their lives as disciples.' (p 41)

have established empirically that frequency of Gospel reading and use of Gospel resources are proven contributors to more extensive knowledge of the content of the Gospels. The importance of this seemingly obvious result is that encouragement to do these two activities can no longer be sidelined with a casual opinion, 'Oh, that won't make any difference'.

Less obvious but more important are the outcomes, established as highly likely for the population through contingency analysis, which provide both reasons for individuals to pursue knowledge of the content of the Gospels and a basis for educators to provide resources. Three associations for the population which highlight the significance of greater knowledge of Gospel content were that those with greater Gospel knowledge were:

- more likely to apply their knowledge of the Gospels to daily decision making.
- more likely to discuss issues from a Gospel-centred perspective.
- less likely to agree that knowing more about the Gospels would help them to be more confident in sharing the story of Jesus with friends.

It is noteworthy that Gospel knowledge, as tested, did not show any association with the three indices probing engagement with the Gospels, living the Gospels or discipleship based on the Gospels. This could indicate on the one hand that Gospel knowledge is not as important in the practice of Christian living as many might think. On the other hand, it might indicate that many of Adelaide's laity could be living lives which could be more dependent on their Gospel knowledge. These indices are untested and untried constructs, however, which need to be treated with care. Further detailed investigation of the part Gospel knowledge does or does not play in the lives of this population is needed in refining these measures. It would not be possible to draw any hard and fast conclusions or to determine any courses of action without further research.

Notwithstanding the lack of association with these indices, there were clear associations between Gospel knowledge and significant individual questions in the discipleship section of the questionnaire. On this basis, I conclude that statistically derived results establish that greater knowledge of important Gospel content has significant value and importance for the lived Christian experience of lay people and for their potential to reach out with the Gospel story. If in the future my claim that lay discipleship will become more important to the Christian mission as the influence of the institutional churches wane, then I have established rigorously that knowledge of the content of the Gospels will be an important ingredient of this movement.

One unexpected but important result was the detection of a clear relationship for this population between Gospel knowledge (GKI) and the use of electronic devices to engage the Gospels. Analysis revealed that regular or frequent use of electronic devices (defined in the question PD 9 as computers, tablets and smartphones) to engage with the Gospels leads to greater Gospel knowledge for more of the population. This finding has major ramifications for both individual lay Anglicans and for Diocesan planners and educators, and the wider church. Further research<sup>309</sup> would seek to determine:

- the details of the use of electronic devices to engage the Gospels, including what devices are used, when, by whom and for what purposes.
- what factors lead to and support the use of these devices.
- what is happening in other parts of the Anglican Communion and even wider Church in similar populations.
- what part or role if any is played by use of social media.
- how greater or wider use of this finding might be developed for the benefit of the Kingdom, including the use for outreach.

In the qualitative interviews, I investigated whether and how interviewees engaged using electronics, and what suggestions they might have for encouragement and teaching. Eleven ways in which laity engaged electronically with the Gospels were offered by the interviewees, most of which might well have wider usefulness if they could be presented in a helpful, easy and engaging way. These uses included clarification, discovery, comparison, searching, and research on particular themes or subjects. Whilst these modes of engagement provide a contextual insight into how a largely older laity in Adelaide use electronic devices, further investigation or research would need to start with a thorough examination of recent literature relating to the subject.

In relation to teaching and encouragement to use electronic devices there were seven possibilities offered by interviewees. Apart from helping people to understand the medium

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<sup>309</sup> A prudent step, prior to further research, would include the elimination of any third variable that is related to each of the other two variables and might affect the results if not accounted for. In this case the age and education of respondents are two variables which might need to be examined. However, even if one or more background variables or factors exist which link or are common to GKI and use of electronic devices, the association will still be valid even if having a different 'shape'. It has been beyond the scope of this project to conduct systematic third variable analysis. For explanation of hidden variables and how they affect results see further Rumsey, Deborah J. *Statistics I & II for Dummies 2 eBook Bundle: Statistics For Dummies & Statistics II For Dummies* (Kindle Locations 13855-13856). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

and how to use it, significant suggestions included the possibility of offering educational programs, instruction on techniques and procedures for engaging with the Gospels, and using social media for blog/chatroom types of interaction. Of particular note, was the repeated mention of one-to-one mentoring, perhaps a reflection of the higher ages of those involved in the interviews. What seems clear, given modern teaching and learning, is that the Gospels might well profit from a concerted, systematic and long-term program aimed at bringing the content of the Gospels to its people and to the wider community using electronic programs, apps and devices. This particular investigation has provided an excellent example of how the qualitative interview process supplements the quantitative information in a valuable and suggestive way.

In summary, Research Question 1 has:

- inspired the development of four knowledge indices including particular and unique indices associated with Jesus' identity, teaching and mission.
- provided 'base-line' information on the overall content knowledge of the Gospels by a particular population of lay Anglicans.
- revealed areas of concern about important details of Gospel content which are not appreciated or able to be orally recalled by significant numbers of laity.
- revealed an important association between Gospel engagement and the use of electronic devices.
- provided critical suggestions which could lead to further quantitative research into Gospel knowledge.

## **Research Question 2 - How do lay Anglicans in the Diocese of Adelaide understand and comprehend Jesus and the Gospels?**

This question was asked in response to a perceived lack, in my experience, of understanding of the Gospel accounts as other than a literal, historical account of Jesus' activities and sayings. The focus in this question was on how lay Anglicans make sense of, interpret and derive meaning from the Gospels. It sought in a preliminary way to probe how the status of the Gospels was understood in relation to authority and inspiration, how lay Adelaide Anglicans dealt with literal and figurative language and whether their understanding was more traditional or otherwise. These complex questions about interpretation were investigated in nine data questions which were asked in Section 4 of the quantitative questionnaire and in question 4 of the interview questions. The quantitative questions were asked in such a way that each contributed to one of the quests above. Taken together

they offered insight into whether more traditional or less traditional interpretations were adopted/employed.<sup>310</sup>

There was overall a slight leaning towards a less traditional interpretation of the Gospels. For example, in varying degrees respondents indicated less-traditional understandings of the virgin birth story, inspiration of the Gospels, Jesus' healings and exorcisms, raising of the dead, the kingdom of God and the resurrection of Jesus. A majority are able to contemplate and understand the miraculous and more incredible aspects of the Gospel story as other than literal or objectively historical accounts. Whether this is based on needing to do so to preserve their integrity as post-enlightenment persons, or based on a more sophisticated understanding of how and why the Gospels were penned, or perhaps both, cannot be ascertained from this research. The present post-modern, post-enlightenment age is one where belief in the contravention of natural laws by supernatural entities is more difficult to both accept and sustain than in ancient times by many in our largely secular Western nations. It is also an age where the description of extraordinary events and activities using miraculous and literally incredible images as metaphors is perhaps less understood and helpful in understanding occurrences in the natural world. In short, the enduring truth and transformative power of the Christian story seems to be that much harder to explain convincingly to and be accepted by non-Christians living in post-enlightenment culture if limited to literalised traditional images and doctrinal understandings.<sup>311</sup> On that basis, the relative balance of traditional versus less traditional understanding of the Gospels in any particular scenario is going to provide some measure of the transformative potential of the Gospel story for non-Christians.

Nearly half of the respondents, however, indicated understanding the Gospels in the more traditional paradigm as eye-witness records of the actual events including the words of Jesus. This group is more committed to traditional understandings including, presumably for many, the literal understanding of the miraculous and events based in the supernatural such as angelic visitations. Although for those who are traditional believers the Gospels can and may well have transformative power on the basis of their generational upbringing,

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<sup>310</sup> See Appendix 5 for the coding of these questions, including why the question was asked, the inference attributed to each of the alternatives offered in respect of each question and the rating of alternatives to each question as more or less traditional.

<sup>311</sup> Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 43, where Borg states, "... the belief-centred paradigm has become an intellectual and moral stumbling block for millions of people in our time, inside the church and outside of it."

it seems clear that, for the majority of our Australian community/society, this understanding of the Gospels is not practically persuasive.<sup>312</sup> On the basis of her investigations on how Jesus is understood by lay Anglicans in the Church of England, Ann Christie writes;

Both demythologization and deliteralization enable the difficulties that many people have with miracle to be bypassed. Without this kind of approach, the miraculous happenings will, for many, continue to be a serious barrier to accepting Christian faith.<sup>313</sup>

For Christie miracles in relation to Jesus certainly includes those of the incarnation and resurrection. My point is that for those who are traditional believers who take myth literally<sup>314</sup> the possibilities for successfully conveying the Gospels to non-Christians is much more limited, except for people who seek a more literal understanding of religion. That is, for nearly half of the Diocese the possibilities of significant outreach to a largely secular society based on a more traditional understanding of the Gospel story might be limited. If the Gospels are to have greater transformative impact based on an understanding of the Gospels as revealing meaning beyond a direct literal understanding, then clearly some education and encouragement in alternative interpretative strategies of the Gospels might be needed in the Diocese.

Analysis showed that those holding the less traditional understanding were significantly more likely to come from the communion/ceremony-oriented churches. Whilst their interpretation is significantly more likely, all circumstances being equal, to be heard by non-Christians, they are significantly less likely to actually undertake spoken outreach. In the same way that those who understand more traditionally might need to give thought to alternative interpretation strategies, those who understand less traditionally might need to give thought to developing strategies and techniques for engaging more with non-Christians. The irony here is that those who offer what seems a more transformative understanding of the Gospels in our contemporary and largely secular society seem less able to reach out with it, and vice versa. The obvious response and potential challenge for the Diocese would be to see if each group of more and less traditional responders could derive insight from the apparent strength of the other group.

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<sup>312</sup> Mackay, *Beyond Belief*, Kindle Locations 432-433. “Our current lack of respect for myths – or even our contempt for them as irrelevant, unscientific tosh – helps to explain why so many people abandon their connection with formal religion: when they discover that they can no longer sustain beliefs based on the literal, historical truth of religious stories, they may come to feel the whole thing was a hoax.”

<sup>313</sup> Christie, *Ordinary Christology*, 79.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 76 for discussion on incarnation understood as mythical or literal.

Whilst barriers to reading the Gospels more often was investigated quantitatively in DD19, investigation of barriers to understanding and interpreting the Gospels was also complemented qualitatively in interview questions 4 and 4A. The questions asked participants what they saw as barriers to being able to understand the meaning of significant Gospel passages. Many internal and external barriers were described by participants. Internal barriers centred on lack of knowledge about matters such as background, terminology, complexity of stories, difficult passages and alternative interpretations of a single passage. These were not unexpected and confirm that the Gospels are culturally remote documents which are difficult to understand and interpret without appropriate study and background, or access to resources. Resources<sup>315</sup> are readily available but in my experience not widely advocated or used in the Diocese, a matter which could well be investigated by the Diocese given the multiple associations of PD6 with many Gospel parameters. An extension of this conclusion might include the development of appropriate and engaging resources aimed at younger age cohorts, especially in electronic form.

External barriers revolved around confusing factors such as different translations, and limiting personal factors such as childhood conditioning about the Gospels and inability to relate the Gospels to daily life. This latter is concerning. The general or underlying shaping of the Christian by the Gospel story influences one's approach to life and problems/challenges encountered. There is, however, a need to clearly understand key Gospel ethical teachings and to consciously bring them to bear at both personal and communal levels. My repeated observation is that many Christians default to the socially acceptable or conformist positions in the absence of a capacity to relate the Gospel to ethical issues directly.<sup>316</sup>

When interpreting the story in Mark Chapter 2, also part of interview question 4, some sought to provide a methodology for interpretation whilst two acknowledged they were unable to explain the passage. Several major interpretive emphases were offered, including the story as one of faith and commitment, as a story of forgiveness and healing and finally as a story telling us something important about Jesus. Whilst all interpretations would have been helpful to a listener in one way or another, it was clear that quite different messages would have been imparted. Accepting that interpretation of any passage is

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<sup>315</sup> Resources include daily and other Bible reading notes and basic commentaries designed for lay readership.

<sup>316</sup> Christie, *Ordinary Christology*, 180, for discussion of the further dimension of lay resistance to engaged reading which might lead to reshaping of current ways of behaving.

individual and unique, it was clear that the lay participants I interviewed were not in the habit of explaining Gospel passages and that there was no sense of a cohesive basis or template of explanation. Could a basic interpretive strategy, or even checklist, be developed to give lay folk confidence and direction in this increasingly important task, hopefully leading to change and even transformative information for an inquirer?

### **Research Question 3 - In what way does lay Anglican knowledge and understanding of the Gospels make a difference in their ownlives?**

The third Research Question was concerned to investigate the way that lay persons' understanding of Jesus and the Gospels makes a significant difference to the way they live. The construction of four indices measuring key aspects of how Adelaide lay Anglicans relate to and use the Gospels formed a significant response to this research question. To my knowledge this quantitative approach has not been used previously for this purpose, and so this work represents a new way forward. Summary comments will be offered around these focal indices and the questions comprising each of them.

1. The first focus centred on how they actually use the Gospels in their daily life or lives in general. This was assessed in the first instance through the **Gospel Engagement Index** and the questions making up the index considered separately. The index showed expected associations with how often the Gospels were read and resources used, but with no other demographic factors such as age, churchmanship or education. This index was designed to provide a baseline measure of Gospel engagement for possible future comparison. The lack of associations confirms that individual Gospel engagement is a unique personal measure most likely based on factors not surveyed such as personality and unique personal contexts.

Sixty five percent of the sample indicated that the Gospels could be more prominent in their lives. Whilst this response may have eventuated for a number of different reasons, it is clearly a challenge for the Diocese. 'More prominent' might mean different things to different people. More importantly, however, is that 65% of the sample felt that the Gospels could play a greater part in their lives. Qualitative follow-up of this concern centred on a need and a desire for more practical reflection on ethical issues. There may be a message here for parish preaching.<sup>317</sup> It may also be useful for the Diocese to initiate a basic Gospel-centred on-line commentary on current events

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<sup>317</sup> Grayston, "The Bible and Spirituality," 101, where he notes "Many churchgoers find little connection between the preaching that they hear and the world in which they live." as a reason for church decline.

and concerns, and perhaps a blog directly related to the daily application of the Gospels in daily life. Further investigation and practical experimentation of how the Gospels could be more prominent in lay lives would clearly be an ideal area for detailed examination. Such investigation might provide outcomes which could inform the basis of future Gospel engagement strategies.

2. 'In what ways they seek to bring their understanding of Jesus to the issues of society and world' was a second focus of this Research Question. This was measured by the **Gospels and Issues Index** which showed that a majority of respondents believe they relate their Gospel knowledge and understanding to moral and social issues in their lives in adequate ways. None of the individual questions making up this index scored in such a way to attract particular attention. There were no demographic associations, but it was useful to establish empirically that there was an association between Gospel knowledge and the index. This indicates most likely that the greater the knowledge of the Gospels the greater the likelihood of relating Jesus to moral, social and global issues, and is yet another strong indicator of the importance of Gospel knowledge.

The interviewees offered limited insights about how Jesus offered guidance in relation to personal and social issues. It became clear that most of the interviewees, despite the findings in the previous paragraph, did not relate the Gospel content directly to their ethical lives, with only two out of the twelve appealing to specific Gospel stories or passages. They did, however, provide insight into two predominant response patterns, "Jesus helps me to be..." and "Jesus shows me how to...". These two patterns may suggest two helpful strategies for encouragement in grappling with both personal and social issues. The interviewees expressed a definite desire for greater practical reflection and interaction with other Christians on ethical matters. This interview question again highlighted the value of qualitative investigation of complex questions which are very difficult to probe thoroughly in a quantitative way.

3. The third focus was 'in what ways their understanding of Jesus and the Gospels makes a significant difference to the way they live'. A basic measure of the influence the Gospels and their awareness and experience of Jesus had in shaping both the general and particular of respondents' lives was developed in the **Gospels and Life Index**. There was an important association discovered between this index and churchmanship. Those from the word/teaching-oriented churches were significantly more represented in the higher GLI scores, and likewise those from the ceremonial/communion-oriented churches significantly less represented. Engagement with the Word and the

teaching emphasis on the Gospels in the way it is undertaken in churches of the word/teaching orientation appears to provide greater impetus towards the Gospel formed life. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that Jesus impacted their lives in many ways but the majority had to be pressed to nominate particular instances. The overwhelming impression gained from the interview question was that the majority of participants rarely reflected on the part Jesus played in their lives.<sup>318</sup> They had consistent difficulty articulating what Jesus did bring to and mean in their lives. As a matter of urgency, I believe that the Diocese must encourage its laity to confidently and reflectively approach key questions such as: ‘what do I know about Jesus?’, ‘why do I follow Jesus?’ and ‘what difference does Jesus make to my life?’ My research asserts also that the question of what it means to have a relationship with Jesus needs to be addressed. Providing insight into this question may I believe open up the transformational possibility that comes with any significant relationship.

4. In the fourth part of Research Question 3 I investigated ‘whether and how they believed that they could live more Jesus-centred lives’. The responses indicate that a large majority recognise the possibility of further transformation, and by inference an openness to being transformed. Whilst there was less willingness to acknowledge a Gospel factor in this, doing more to follow Jesus’ teachings and giving more prominence to the Gospels demonstrated an openness to further transformation. That people are open and honest about being able to lead more Jesus-centred lives is encouraging and, as a priority, it needs a response from those who are tasked with providing that encouragement, i.e., parish clergy and Diocesan educators.

#### **Research Question 4 - In what way do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference in the lives of others?**

As followers of Jesus there is a *prima facie* expectation that active Christians will bring the good news to others around them.<sup>319</sup> Key concerns included whether or not participants were actually bringing the good news of the Gospels to those around them, whether they thought they could be doing more and whether greater knowledge of the Gospels might be helpful in this respect.

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<sup>318</sup> Christie, *Ordinary Theology*, 181, where Christie notes a similar outcome, “...the majority of the sample do not deliberately seek to enter into a conversation with the story of Jesus.”

<sup>319</sup> The picture of Jesus and the context in Mark 1.38 is a clear reference to the expectation that as the Body of Christ his followers are to ‘preach’ the good news.

The question was investigated via the **Gospels and Discipleship Index** (GDI) which included six questions. More than half of the respondents indicated that they could be more active in the simple task of offering basic testimony to the place of Jesus in their lives, and nearly half indicated that greater knowledge of the Gospels would help them with that task. These results indicate for me both a recognition of, and an openness, that a majority could be doing more to ‘speak the faith’. One half of the respondents disclosed how they had ignored opportunities to speak about the Gospels to other people. In a faith future, which may well be more focused on Jesus and less on the Church, the challenge will be for more laity to speak about the Gospels and to testify to the difference Jesus makes to their lives.<sup>320</sup> A majority acknowledged their failure to make a difference. Consequently, I advocate strongly for the laity to be encouraged and equipped to share the significance of Jesus in their lives. This task need not be complicated; for example, demonstration and role plays might well be enough to prompt some positive responses from laity. The first step in response to this and all the suggestions made in this concluding chapter, however, is the inculcation of the vision which was held by the first followers as to the power and possibilities of Jesus for new and transformed ‘life’.

This Index revealed association with frequency of reading the Gospels and use of resources that the other indices also highlighted. In addition, it showed an association with the use of electronic devices. It was evident that those who used electronic devices often or regularly to engage with the Gospels were more significantly represented in a higher GDI, and vice versa. Along with the parallel result for GKI, this result contributes to a compelling case for serious investigation of the use of electronic devices in Gospel endeavour and the need for the Diocese to engage with this finding as a matter of priority.

The interview questions asked in respect of Research Question 4 were: ‘What would enable you to be more confident in chatting to others about Jesus and the story in the Gospels?’ and ‘How would you set about telling someone who asked what difference being a follower or disciple of Jesus has made in your life?’ In relation to the first question some people spoke of under-confidence based both on personality factors and fear of not being able to answer even simple questions about Jesus. Some indicated an awareness of the

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<sup>320</sup> Rev Dr Alister McGrath, “Clergy must equip congregations to defend faith,” *The Melbourne Anglican*, December 2016, 26. In response to an interview question McGrath states: “I’m asking for a change in the mindset of the church. Clergy and Christian leaders have such an important role to play... in pointing to good apologetic resources and also in terms of mentoring people and saying, “Look, maybe you can talk about how your faith affects you in this area and that would be really helpful to other people.”

need to discern where the dialogue partner was in their journey and to start from there. Structured group sharing could involve role-playing to provide example and inspire confidence. Mentoring for learning and encouragement was a possible means mentioned by the interviewees which might offer ways forward.

In relation to the second question, which was looking more for a discussion of the way into, and techniques for, telling another of one's own experience of Jesus, I received a basic list of actual differences which participants felt that Jesus had made in their lives. As a practical demonstration of difference made, such a response could prove a powerful way to engage with others. The question was, however, asking (perhaps not clearly enough) for the factors that might need to be considered (such as interlocutor's background, level of education, previous contact with Jesus) and the techniques of presentation (such as what to present and how) which might be useful. This response indicated to me that the participants most probably had not thought about engagement with a view to influencing another on the basis of personal experience. Yet another possibility for transformation might be in leading our people into some understanding of the basic factors involved in engaging non-Christians with the Gospels.

## **Transformative Gospel Literacy**

The development of a definition of transformative Gospel literacy has been an important undertaking of the project. It has provided firstly a guide for selecting the data questions and has thus operated as a lens through which all four Research Questions have been explored. It now also provides a basis for evaluating the response of the lay persons surveyed in the sample. This closing section of the thesis seeks to assess the question implicit in Chapter 1, viz., 'Does their Gospel knowledge, understanding and application bring significant transformation to Adelaide's lay Anglicans?'

The notion of 'transformational Gospel literacy' was chosen because the word 'transformation' simply and economically indicates what Gospel literacy seeks to achieve. The definition of transformative Gospel literacy offered is claimed as a significant contribution to developing a comprehensive understanding of Gospel literacy. The definition itself was derived from reasoned examination and analysis of the connection of the Gospels with transformation. 'Transformation' was examined from an academic, confessional and scriptural/Gospel standpoint. I have argued that the Gospel story is pervasively one of transformation: Jesus' life, teaching and ministry is overwhelmingly concerned with showing and challenging people how to become something more; to become what God

has created them to be. I have likewise argued that for Paul, the first and arguably greatest interpreter of Jesus, transformation is central as he calls for renewal of the mind, dying to the old ways and having a new life ‘in Christ’. Likewise, I have shown that ‘transformation’ is a central focus and core expectation in foundational Anglican documents and, thus, for all Anglicans. That is, we as Anglicans live the Christian life based on the Gospels and the story contained in them for the purpose of being transformed and being agents of transformation in society. To know Jesus, one must engage the Gospels; to know Jesus is to be transformed and potentially be an agent of transformation.

The examination of Biblical (Gospel) literacy in Chapter 4 established the lack of any significantly comprehensive definition or description of literacy which commands widespread assent. Indeed, the number of different ideas about what constitutes Biblical literacy leads to confusion and the clear need for an exhaustive and comprehensive explanation of Gospel literacy. To this end and after an examination of the work of others, I distilled the requirements for a meaningful Gospel literacy to three broad categories – to know, to understand and to apply – and from there derived a broad working definition of ‘transformative Gospel literacy’.

A **transformative Gospel literacy** includes substantial knowledge of the content of the Gospels, including the background, basic differences between them, the overall narrative and separate stories and the teachings of the Gospels. It is also able to make meaning of this content and the place of the Gospel story in salvation history, to appreciate the figurative and idiomatic use of language and to understand that the Gospels can be interpreted in different ways. Finally, it will result in a basic ability to apply the Gospels in a transformative way to one’s own personal issues, behaviour and daily decision making; to social, community and global issues, and enable the disciple to both articulate the Gospel story and stories and respond to simple, basic questions about the Gospels.

I have investigated what Adelaide Anglicans do and do not know about the content of the Gospels. The quantitative survey indicated a solid passive knowledge of key content and ideas in that a majority of respondents could discern a majority of correct answers in a multi—choice test format. Qualitative analysis revealed a significantly different picture in that active recall of Gospel content was limited and inconsistent. This analysis revealed that few could present a basic account of the Gospel narratives and is a good illustration

of the value of the mixed methodology providing corrective information through the qualitative follow-up.

What then does this indicate about the state of the first dimension of transformative Gospel literacy - knowing - in the Diocese of Adelaide? In relation to individual members it seems clear that most could upgrade their knowledge of the content of the Gospels, particularly their capacity to recall and recount the Gospel story. In both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the project significant numbers of respondents showed a lack of knowledge of key events, teachings and details relating to Jesus' life and work. I would hope and expect most committed Christians to know enough of the Gospels to recall key features and give a basic account of the Jesus story depending on their capacity. I would suggest that a possible benchmark would be the capacity to recount the story of Jesus, and many of the memorable stories Jesus told, in a basic but comprehensive way.

Based on the suggested benchmark and making use of the utility of electronic engagement which I have discovered in this Diocese, a number of suggestions could be made.<sup>321</sup> It would be appropriate for the Diocese to sponsor electronic resources in multiple forms allowing for differing engagement preferences. Materials provided would have to be stimulating and challenging, and most likely interactive. Successful electronic educational methodologies from other disciplines could no doubt be adapted to the purpose, and the current use of relevant and engaging electronic educational strategies by other Anglican communities investigated. Materials would be focused on:

- leading laity through the narrative, pointing out major differences between the Gospels. A basic narrative, taking account of significant differences between Gospels, told in such a way that the reader would at the very least be left with an 'easy-to-remember' story which could be recalled from memory.
- providing treatments of key Gospel passages relating to Jesus' identity and teaching.

It is neither possible nor profitable to assess individual Gospel knowledge literacy in a positive or quantitatively objective way. It is, however, possible to point to deficits and shortcomings in Gospel content knowledge of the sample group and thus provide insight into a population albeit from a negative perspective. I believe that for both individual and

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<sup>321</sup> Jenks and Ellens, *The Once and Future Bible*, 195-198, for a useful overview of 'Technology and the Bible'.

group the definition operates more effectively as an aspirational target providing a basis for becoming more knowledgeable about Gospel content.

In relation to making meaning of the Gospels, – the second dimension or understanding component of transformative Gospel literacy - most demonstrated in both quantitative and qualitative phases of the project that they were able to do this in some measure. Nearly all of the respondents were able to select one of the alternatives offered to the nine questions in Section 4 of the questionnaire. Many of the respondents indicated a general awareness that language is complex and can be used in other than literal ways. In qualitative interviews a number also indicated awareness, albeit confusing for them, of different interpretations of the Gospels and Gospel passages. It became evident, however, in the qualitative interviews that only one of the respondents had any plan or method for developing an understanding of a passage of the Gospels. This finding yet again emphasizes the value of a methodology which is able to investigate basic quantitative findings with greater precision.

The art and science of making meaning of the Gospels and individual passages are remarkably complex. In addition, making meaning of the Gospels for one's own life is going to depend on personality and on other personal and contextual factors. Given all these factors, the definition is again seen as primarily an aspirational statement providing guidance towards deepening and expanding each individual's journey of transformation. In relation to the sample as a group, the methodology adopted has shown the possibility of assessing the interpretive stance of a group – in this case as more or less traditional. With appropriate questions, it is clear that the group stance towards any particular interpretive aspect could be further researched.

In the same way as suggested for the knowing dimension, I believe that electronic engagement would be able to provide significant assistance with the undertaking of interpretation. Materials could, for example, focus on:

- providing basic plans, supported by example applications, for understanding different types of Gospel material, e.g., miracles, parables, healings, exorcisms.
- providing examples of different interpretations of different types of Gospel materials with basic explanation.
- providing one line/one paragraph explanations of key events and activities contained in the Gospels.
- providing basic explanations of obscure and contradictory content.

These suggestions are also relevant to the third dimension of transformative Gospel literacy – application. Many if not most could apply the Gospel in a basic way in their own lives and issues, and were happy to attempt to bring the Gospel story to greater social and other issues. In relation to articulating the Gospel story and stories to outsiders and responding to simple basic questions about the Gospels, however, this was not the case. It is in this area of application, and particularly application in a testimonial or apologetic context, that I feel confident to state that many Adelaide Anglicans seem to be non-Gospel-literate. It became clear that the majority of lay Adelaide Anglicans were not in the habit of reflecting on the contribution or effect of the Gospels in their lives. Whilst the majority indicated that the Gospels led to significant transformation in their lives, they found the details and outcomes of that change hard to describe. It also became clear that a majority were not in a position or of a disposition to offer testimony to the effectiveness of Christ in their lives. This was evident in their acknowledgement of unwillingness to open up conversations about Jesus and the Gospels in many contexts, and their under-confidence and under-preparedness to answer questions about their Christian commitment based on the Gospels. For the sample and thus probably for the population, it does seem reasonable to say that in relation to the application of the Gospels in their outreach to others as disciples of Jesus, many Adelaide Anglicans do not demonstrate in any significant way this component of transformative Gospel literacy. In a similar way to that suggested above, I believe that electronic resources encouraging reflection oriented towards testimony, and knowledge oriented towards bringing the Gospels to questions laity might be asked and hopefully answer, could be developed.

Given this analysis and the various literacy shortfalls it reveals, two things can reasonably be stated about the definition of transformative Gospel literacy. The first is that, given the uniqueness of any individual or group, an objective or comparative quantitative assessment of Gospel literacy is not possible. What is possible is a non-quantitative appraisal of inadequate knowledge, understanding or application as outlined above. The second is that transformative Gospel literacy is employed more profitably in this context as an aspirational statement and a guide for both individuals to adopt and those responsible for equipping to use as a guide for the promotion of Gospel literacy. With its orientation towards transformation, I hope the definition might lead to greater Christian fulfilment in striving towards a clearer goal, and greater traction for the Gospels in an increasingly problematic future for institutional church.

## Conclusion

The project has sought to provide perspectives and outcomes in relation to the four Research Questions, explored through the lens of transformative Gospel literacy, and at the same time to develop and employ a methodology and tools which I hope will be of use, at least as examples, to other researchers in this field. This thesis offers:

- a comprehensive response to the four Research Questions seeking to explore and describe the state of Gospel knowledge, the way the Gospels are understood and the efficacy of application of the Gospels in the Adelaide Diocese. This exploratory picture of the knowledge and understanding of the Gospels by lay Anglicans in Adelaide may provide useful information for both parishes and Diocesan personnel and might function to provide a basis for future assessment and comparison of Gospel engagement.
- a mixed-method methodology which has successfully provided a means for collecting suitable data to answer the Research Questions and which I hope will provide a suitable methodology for similar investigation. The methodology has allowed the collection of:
  - quantitative data suitable for univariate analysis and extensive bivariate treatment as evidenced in Chapters 6 and 7 and Appendix 7.
  - qualitative data in Chapter 9 which has provided deeper insight and in some cases corrective perspective in elaborating the numerical results.
- a rigorous questionnaire development process, which has not been found elsewhere. Because this project sought to provide a wide-focus snapshot of a particular population, the questionnaire was limited in its depth of investigation of particular aspects of Gospel engagement. It is not difficult to imagine more detailed and specific Gospel content questionnaires or a greater number of meaning and language data questions.
- the creation, justification and application of novel Gospel assessment tools in the form of indices designed to assess complex aspects of lay engagement with the Gospels. One area for future research could involve developing, testing and validating the above indices more comprehensively. This might involve further questions for addition to the indices, or for the purpose of creating further indices. Such

scales and indices would be important for measuring many population-based Gospel parameters and it might well be helpful to have a battery of such scales available Communion-wide for purposes of common measure and comparison.

- the development of a comprehensive definition of Gospel literacy<sup>322</sup> which has been used to provide perspective on lay Adelaide Anglicans engagement with the Gospels and is offered as a unique contribution to discussion on the nature of Gospel literacy.
- a number of questions for further ministry and academic research and in particular the use of electronic engagement with the Gospels. In the most general overview, any valid association or group of associations of interest indicated in the spreadsheet at Appendix 7 would prima facie provide a starting point for further investigation. The data is by no means exhausted for further investigation and analysis and especially for focus on particular question-to-question associations rather than in the use of indices.

This thesis has engaged with largely uncharted and unexplored territory as it has sought to provide both practical outcomes for consideration by the Diocese of Adelaide and has sought to contribute to academic knowledge of Gospel literacy. The project has allowed me to wrestle with my concerns expressed in the first Chapter as I have explored four Research Questions which are of significant interest and I believe will become more so as the traditional institutional Church becomes less influential.<sup>323</sup>

The project has sought to use the methods of ‘ordinary theology’ and consciously sought to add particular knowledge to the Anglican Communion Study ‘Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project. This project marks a beginning only in this area of study, albeit imperfect, which I hope will lead to the development of further investigations and instruments which will provide insight about Gospel usage and understanding for the mission of the

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<sup>322</sup> “A transformative Gospel literacy includes substantial knowledge of the content of the Gospels, including the basic differences between them, the overall narrative and separate stories and the teachings of the Gospels. It is also able to make meaning of this content and the place of the Gospel story in salvation history, appreciate the figurative and idiomatic use of language and understand that the Gospels can be interpreted in different ways. Finally, it will result in an ability to apply the Gospels to one’s own issues, behaviour and daily decision making in a transformative way, and enable the disciple to articulate the Gospel story and stories to others.”

<sup>323</sup> Mackay, Hugh. *Beyond Belief*, Kindle Locations 580-583. “The steady growth of the house-church movement is a sign of the desire to bypass institutional forms altogether, with, as the name implies, small groups of Christians gathering in private homes for intimate, informal discussion, Bible study, prayer and singing. Some of these groups see themselves as reverting to the mode of the early Christians.”

Kingdom. I have pointed to the use of Gospel literacy as a focusing mechanism and the use of indices as tools for this work. I have made some suggestions for consideration by the Diocese of Adelaide and in the course of the thesis have regularly pointed to possibilities for further detailed investigation. The project has not sought, nor has it been possible, to cover all the questions of knowledge and understanding of or engagement with the Gospels. It is my hope, however, that the project will provide a basis and even limited inspiration for further investigation of the detail of what is known of the Gospels, how they are understood and applied and what difference they make in the lives of Jesus' followers. I also hope that this project will provide inspiration for other Dioceses in the Anglican Communion and even in other denominations to undertake similar studies.

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# APPENDIX 1 – THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES

## Section 1: Details about me

*This section asks for some important information about you that will help us to understand your answers more fully and correlate them with those of the other participants.*

**PLEASE MARK YOUR ANSWER WITH A TICK IN THE APPROPRIATE BOX**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. On average, I attend a service in church:</p> <p>hardly ever. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>at least six times a year. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>once a month. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>once a week. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>more than once a week. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>2. The style of church I attend most often would be:</p> <p>more teaching/<br/>Word focussed) ..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>no particular<br/>emphasis or tradition) ..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>more Communion<br/>/Ceremony focussed) ..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>music/participation<br/>focussed)..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>3. During the last year, attendance at the church I most often attend has:</p> <p>increased strongly <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>increased a little <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>remained steady <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>decreased a little <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>decreased a lot <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>4. I read the Gospels by myself:</p> <p>rarely. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>occasionally. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>about once a month. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>once or twice a week. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>every day. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>5. Apart from church I read or engage with the Gospels with others or in groups:</p> <p>never, <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>occasionally. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>during a church season such<br/>as Lent <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>once a month. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>once or twice a week. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>every day. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6. In the last 3 years I have used resources to study the Gospels such as study notes and commentaries:</p> <p>never <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>sometimes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>regularly <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>much of the time <input type="checkbox"/></p> | <p>7. I was baptized as a:</p> <p>baby (under 2). <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>a child or youth (3 – 16). <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>an adult. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>don't know <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>8. Religion/prayer/bible reading/church was a part of my childhood upbringing:</p> <p>not at all. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>occasionally. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>often. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>regularly. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>9. I interact with (read, study) the Gospels using electronic devices (smartphone, tablet or computer):</p> <p>never. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>occasionally. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>often. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>regularly <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>10. I have completed:</p> <p>no formal qualifications. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>primary school. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>secondary school. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>TAFE certificate. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>undergraduate degree/diploma. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>postgraduate degree. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>11. I have undertaken <u>Theology or Biblical Studies</u> (such as Education for Ministry, Certificate courses, subjects at College or University) as follows. <i>(Please tick all that apply)</i></p> <p>No formal training <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Programmes in school <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Church or diocesan courses <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>University certificate/diploma <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Undergraduate degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Postgraduate degree <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>12. I was born in:</p> <p>Australia. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Europe. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Asia. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Africa. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other..... <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>13. I am ..... years of age</p> <p>14. I am: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">Rather not say <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
|---|--|

## Section 2: Exploring the part the Gospels play in my life

*This section explores what part the Gospels and their stories of Jesus play in your daily life and decision making, including views about various issues and discipleship. Please remember that these questions are specifically about the Gospels and NOT about God in general.*

### Section 1.1 PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS AS INDICATED BELOW

Please answer the following by placing a circle around a number for each question.					
<b>1 indicates you AGREE STRONGLY and 5 indicates you DISAGREE STRONGLY</b>					
1. I think it is important to read the Gospels alone as well as in services.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I try to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I experience the Gospel figure of Jesus as helpful on particular issues.	1	2	3	4	5
4. From my reading of the Gospels I am often aware of Jesus in my daily life, even in the ordinary events of daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. When deciding how to vote in political elections I try to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The Gospels don't seem to be relevant to my daily decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
7. If I knew the Gospels more deeply I would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more faithfully.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Before doing something important I often stop and reflect on the Gospels.	1	2	3	4	5
9. On reflection I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I could be doing more to follow Jesus' teachings in the Gospels.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is someone who shapes my character and attitudes	1	2	3	4	5
12. When I talk with friends about big issues like refugees and asylum seekers I consciously seek to do so from a Gospel-centred perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I find reading the Gospels is really helpful when things are difficult for me	1	2	3	4	5
14. Sometimes I wonder if Jesus should be more prominent in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
15. If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends.	1	2	3	4	5
16. My efforts to engage non-Church people in talking about Jesus have made a difference to at least one person's life.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Sometimes I feel that Gospel stories of Jesus lose their impact because they are so familiar	1	2	3	4	5

Section 2.2 **PLEASE CIRCLE LETTERS FOR ALL THE ITEMS IN EACH QUESTION WHICH YOU BELIEVE APPLY TO YOU**

19. What stands in the way of my reading the Gospels more often is that:

- a) I already read them often enough.
- b) I have too little time.
- c) I find the content uninteresting.
- d) I find them hard to understand.
- e) I don't really see a need as I know the story of Jesus well enough.
- f) none of these
- f) other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. Helpful uses of the Gospels for me include:

- a) as a source of comfort.
- b) as a source of spiritual insight.
- c) as a means to see and interpret the world and personal experience.
- d) as a source of inspiration and inspiring stories.
- e) providing rules and regulations about the right thing to do.
- f) learning about Jesus.
- g) changing aspects of my life.
- h) learning about how God acts in the world.
- i) helping me with daily living.
- j) none of these
- k) other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21. I think that the Gospels can help us in our understanding of the issues involved and the shaping of our attitudes to:

- a) in vitro fertilization.
- b) the situation of refugees and asylum seekers.
- c) marriage between people of the same gender.
- d) the place of women in the church.
- e) divorce and the remarriage of divorced people.
- f) euthanasia
- g) none of these

22. I understand a contemporary disciple to be one who:

- a) goes to church regularly.
- b) takes every opportunity to do good deeds and render service.
- c) seeks to teach the Jesus story to others whether in word and/or deed and so lead them towards Christ.
- d) none of these
- e) other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

23. The Gospels makes a difference in my life by:

- a) giving me new insights into life and living as I engage with it.
- b) changing my life in subtle ways.
- c) helping me to understand life more deeply.
- d) showing me where I have gone wrong.
- e) enabling me to change my attitudes and become less prejudiced.
- f) None of these
- g) other \_\_\_\_\_

24. Can you think of one or two concrete ways Jesus has brought change or transformation to your life? Yes / No

If Yes, please describe.

- i. ....
- .....
- .....
- ii. ....
- .....
- .....

### Section 3: What I know about the content of the Gospels

*This section of the survey sets out to understand how well the content of the Gospels is known across the Adelaide Diocese.*

*You are asked to answer the following questions without consulting the Gospels. Rather than guess, if you don't know the answer please indicate by selecting item d) don't know.*

**PLEASE CIRCLE ONLY ONE LETTER FOR EACH QUESTION**

1. According to the Gospels, when Jesus was baptized a key feature of the event was:
  - a) the presence of Jesus' disciples
  - b) Jesus' affirmation of faith in God
  - c) a voice from heaven.
  - d) don't know.
2. How long did Jesus spend fasting in the wilderness?
  - a) 20 days
  - b) 30 days
  - c) 40 days
  - d) Don't know.
3. A story of Jesus' birth appears in the Gospels of:
  - a) Matthew and Mark.
  - b) Mark and Luke.
  - c) Matthew and Luke.
  - d) don't know.
4. Jesus said that when you pray you should:
  - a) pray for a long time.
  - b) not heap up empty phrases.
  - c) pray with other people.
  - d) don't know.
5. Jesus said about those who are your enemies to:
  - a) avoid them.
  - b) to love them.
  - c) to defend yourself against them.
  - d) don't know.
6. When Jesus warned his disciples against false prophets, he said the false prophets would be known by:
  - a) their attitude to Jesus.
  - b) their appearance.
  - c) the outcomes of their actions.
  - d) don't know.
7. When Jesus healed the paralytic in Mark Chapter 2 he said that he did it to show:
  - a) that he could overcome disease.
  - b) that he was not afraid of the Pharisees
  - c) that he had power to forgive sins.
  - d) don't know.
8. Which of these was one of Jesus' twelve disciples?
  - a) Matthew
  - b) Luke
  - c) Mark
  - d) Don't know.
9. In the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel, after his resurrection Jesus instructed his disciples:
  - a) to convert the Gentiles.
  - b) to bring back the lost sheep of Israel.
  - c) to make disciples of all nations.
  - d) don't know.
10. When Jesus had calmed the storm he said to those on the boat with him:
  - a) do not be anxious, you are safe with me.
  - b) why are you afraid, have you no faith?
  - c) don't you trust me to keep you safe?
  - d) don't know.
11. Which title is Jesus NOT called in the New Testament?
  - a) Son of Man
  - b) Son of Mary
  - c) Messiah
  - d) Don't know.
12. At the transfiguration the two other figures who appeared with Jesus were:
  - a) Moses and Elijah.
  - b) Joshua and Elijah.
  - c) Moses and Isaiah.
  - d) don't know.

13. When Jesus instructed his disciples about settling conflict with a brother or sister he said the first thing to do was to:
- take one or two others along and discuss the problem.
  - tell the elders of the church about it so that they could help.
  - take it up with the other person by oneself.
  - don't know.
14. In John 4 what did Jesus offer the Samaritan woman?
- Healing.
  - Living water.
  - The bread of life.
  - Don't know.
15. What is the question that prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan?
- Who can be saved?
  - Is it right to care for my enemy?
  - Who is my neighbour?
  - Don't know
16. Jesus is called "Christ" in the Gospels. This term means:
- exalted teacher.
  - anointed one.
  - beloved by God.
  - don't know.
17. Which of the following is NOT one of the "I am" sayings spoken by Jesus in the Gospel according to John?
- "I am the resurrection and the life"
  - "I am the suffering servant"
  - "I am the true vine"
  - Don't know.
18. According to Luke, at which moment did the disciples who journeyed to Emmaus recognize Jesus?
- When he broke bread and gave it to them
  - When he gave them the Holy Spirit
  - When he opened the Scriptures to them
  - Don't know.
19. When asked which commandment is greatest, Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." What did he say was the second commandment?
- "You shall have no other gods before me."
  - "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."
  - "You shall not make for yourself a graven image."
  - Don't know.
20. According to Luke 4, in the Nazareth synagogue Jesus read which of the following from the book of Isaiah?
- "All we like sheep have gone astray."
  - "The Lord called me, before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me."
  - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."
  - Don't know.
21. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing..." is found in the parable concerning:
- the sheep and the goats.
  - the prodigal son.
  - the rich man and Lazarus.
  - don't know.
22. In John's gospel after the empty tomb is discovered, who is the person who says 'I have seen the Lord'?
- Peter
  - Mary Magdalene
  - Jesus' mother Mary
  - Don't know.

## Section 4: How I understand and interpret the Gospels.

*The following questions are designed to explore how you understand and interpret or make sense of the Gospel account of Jesus and his works. There is no right or wrong answer*

**PLEASE CIRCLE ONE LETTER ONLY FOR EACH QUESTION**

1. As written documents concerned to portray the transformative power of Jesus I think that the Gospels are best understood as:
  - a) recounting what people saw and heard, including the words and actions of Jesus.
  - b) a mix of historical recall and the gospel writer's interpretation of that recall.
  - c) stories put together to help people understand the significance of Jesus but with less emphasis on historical accuracy.
  - d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) don't know
  
2. The account of the virgin birth in Matthew's Gospel is I think best understood as:
  - a) a story told to express the mystery of Jesus origins and powers
  - b) a factual historical report that is meant to convey biological or scientific truth.
  - c) a non-factual story about Jesus told to help the reader understand Jesus' relationship to God.
  - d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) don't know
  
3. I understand and read the Gospels as they portray the life and work of Jesus as:
  - a) documents authored by people recording their experience and understanding of Jesus.
  - b) documents authored by God using people to record what God wanted to be communicated.
  - c) documents that are sacred because the Church declared them to be sacred.
  - d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) don't know
  
4. I think Jesus' healings and exorcisms as they are told by the Gospel writers are best understood:
  - a) as making sick, diseased and possessed people better so that they would lead happier lives.
  - b) as demonstrating his supernatural power over disease, demons and evil spirits.
  - c) as indicating the presence of God in the reversal of that which degrades and spoils human life.
  - d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) don't know
  
5. According to Matthew (10.8), Jesus sends the twelve disciples out on a mission, charging them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. I think that 'raise the dead' here means:
  - a) to bring back to life those who they come across who have just died, like Jesus did with Lazarus.
  - b) to bring life to those who are spiritually dead.
  - c) to offer a spiritual vision of how life might be lived without fearing death.
  - d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) don't know

6. Matthew, Mark and Luke all speak of the Kingdom of God. I understand the Kingdom primarily as:

- a) a place where God is King.
- b) a place where the faithful go after death.
- c) wherever God's will is being done.
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e) don't know

7. The Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John all record that Jesus died and after three days he was seen alive. I think they meant:

- a) that Jesus was brought back to life in his earthly body.
- b) that Jesus was brought back to life but in a different way from his previous earthly body.
- c) that Jesus didn't come back to life but his followers experienced him still being with them.
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e) don't know

8. All the Gospel writers refer to 'eternal life'. I understand this as primarily meaning:

- a) everlasting life – living with God forever in heaven after our earthly life.
- b) spiritual communion with God whether in this life or beyond.
- c) the fullness of life in this life here on earth.
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e) don't know

9. In Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus says that whoever wants to be a follower must take up or carry their cross. For me this means:

- a) that to follow Jesus I need to be ready to make major sacrifices such as in my career and wealth.
- b) that to follow Jesus I need to put the needs of others before my own needs.
- c) that I need to be ready to endure rejection and suffering, even death, on account of following Jesus
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e) don't know

## THE QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Primary Question	Extension Question
<b>1. “Can you tell me one or more ways that the story of Jesus in the Gospels impacts your life?”</b>	“Are there any other ways you might like Jesus to play a part in your life?”
<b>2. “If I said to you as someone who knows nothing about Jesus and the Gospels, “Tell me about the Gospel story of Jesus” what would you want to tell me. Think about the things Jesus said and did and the events that took place in his life.”</b>	“What further knowledge would you like to have about the Jesus story and the content of the Gospels?”
<b>3. “Can you tell me how Jesus is significant (or otherwise) for you as you respond to:</b> <b>a. personal issues such as whether to tell a lie or not, or sharing your possessions with someone?</b> <b>b) social issues such as euthanasia?</b> <b>c) global issues such as climate change?”</b>	“What would assist you in bringing Jesus and the Gospels more into the centre of your daily decision-making?”
<b>4. “What do you see as barriers, if any, to you being able to understand the meaning of particular Gospel passages?”</b>	“Do you remember the Gospel story in Mark 2 of the sick man being lowered through the roof and being healed by Jesus? How would you go about explaining to me what you think it is saying?”
<b>5. “What would enable you to be more confident in chatting with others about Jesus and the story in the Gospels?”</b>	“How would you set about telling someone who asked what difference being a follower or disciple of Jesus has made in your life?”
<b>6. “Do you engage with the Gospels through using electronic devices such as computers, tablets or smart phones? If so, could you chat about how you do so.”</b>	“If you don’t engage with the Gospels using electronic devices, how do you think, with encouragement and/or teaching, you might be able to do so?”
<b>7. “Can you suggest changes to the church services that might enrich or challenge people’s engagement with the Gospels?”</b>	“Can you suggest any other changes to our community life within the church which might encourage greater engagement with Jesus and the Gospels?”
<b>8. ‘Is there anything else about either Jesus and the Gospels or about your participation in this interview that you would like to add?’</b>	

## APPENDIX 2 - THE $\chi^2$ TEST

A lot of the analysis has been conducted using the  $\chi^2$  test. Whilst there is much book and electronic information available, it is appropriate and helpful to offer the particular understanding and strictures which have been adopted in the analysis used in this thesis.

### **What is the $\chi^2$ test?**

This test seeks to establish relationship between two nominal or ordinal variables. Basically, the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test compares the observed distribution of responses from a sampled population to the distribution computed, assuming independence between the two or more variables being compared. That is, the distribution which would result if the number in each cell was that obtained by multiplying the row total by the column total for that cell and dividing by the grand total, and called the expected total.

The test yields a  $\chi^2$  statistic which can be compared to the distribution of all possible tests to indicate how far the observed values vary from the expected independent distribution. The null hypothesis that there is no association between the cross tabulated variables is supported if the observed values in each cell do not vary sufficiently from the expected values, otherwise the alternative hypothesis that a relationship exists is supported. A cut off figure called the  $\alpha$  value is set and if the  $\chi^2$  statistic is greater than that figure then association between one variable on the other is imputed for the population from which the sample was taken.

The  $\alpha^1$  value to be used throughout in this thesis is .05. That is, if the p value of the Pearson Chi-Square test or Linear by Linear Association test for a particular cross tabulation is less than .05 then the two subject items of the test statistic will be deemed to be dependent (That is, the default assumption – called the null hypothesis - that the two variables are independent is false).

The detail and direction of association is not tested, but the computation of adjusted standardized residuals can indicate where in the table the deviation from the expected distribution is most marked. Under the null hypothesis that the two variables are independent, the adjusted residuals will have a standard normal distribution, i.e. have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. So, an adjusted residual that is more than 1.96 (2.0

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<sup>1</sup> The  $\alpha$  value 0.05 means that the cut-off is set such that the chance of genuine dependency is 95% or greater. Conversely, the chance of a valid test showing dependency being wrong is 5% or less.

is used by convention) indicates that the number of cases in that cell is significantly larger than would be expected if the null hypothesis were true, with a significance level of .05. An adjusted residual that is less than -2.0 indicates that the number of cases in that cell is significantly smaller than would be expected if the null hypothesis were true. The cell is, therefore, significant in that there are fewer or more cases (depending on the sign of the adjusted residual) than would be expected if the 2 variables were independent. In essence, the Adjusted Standardized Residual, which is computed by SPSS, simply takes the cell residual value and treats it in such a way that a value of +2 or greater, or - 2 or less, is significant in terms of variation.

If the rows and or columns were repositioned in the table, then the same  $\chi^2$  test value would be computed. But with ordinal data (such as the Likert items dealt with in this questionnaire) the row categories do have an important order which gives rise for the need of a test which takes the ordering of the categories into account. The linear-by-linear  $\chi^2$  test which is also offered by SPSS gives a chi-squared statistic with one degree of freedom which tests the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship between the row and column variables against the alternative that there is a linear relationship (variation in a straight-line fashion), although there may be a relationship of some other kind. In essence, a linear by linear association value of  $p \leq 0.05$  indicates that a linear relationship exists for the order the rows and/or columns were tested in even though an association at the level specified might or might not exist.

### **The $\chi^2$ test in SPSS**

In SPSS the  $\chi^2$  test is undertaken using the Crosstabs procedure. This procedure forms two-way tables and provides a number of  $\chi^2$  tests and measures of association for the variables being tested. The measures used in this thesis are the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test value and the Linear by Linear Association  $\chi^2$  test value.

The program usefully also computes cell residual values and adjusted residual values. Where appropriate I will seek to draw useful conclusions about the dependence, using adjusted standardized residuals which are computed and tabulated in SPSS. Using a level of significance of 0.05, the critical value for a standardized residual would be -1.96 and +1.96, outside which I can assert an association between the two particular categories locating the cell.

## Assumptions and Qualifications

There are a number of assumptions and qualifications applying to  $\chi^2$  tests which need to be observed.<sup>2</sup> In this project all observations were independent in that no respondent offered more than one response to each question. The other significant qualifier is that small cell counts for the expected distribution can significantly distort the result due to the influence of small numbers as denominators in the  $\chi^2$  calculation. This limitation can be dealt with in a number of ways<sup>3</sup>, the most useful for this project being the combination of cell counts, or re-binning, where appropriate. In many contingency tables the "outcomes" or "treatments" are related to each other and can be legitimately combined to fold rarely populated cases into similar but more commonly populated cases

There are no clear rules for the collapsing or re-binning of variables which is the same as combining or omitting cells. With reference to combining data it is possible to 'pool' or 'collapse' categories into a lesser number of categories, but care needs to be taken that it is meaningful to group the data in this way. Another way forward is to omit cells with small counts in a systematic way, thus reducing the table to the 'important essentials'. The collapsing of tables needs to be dealt with carefully and explanation offered if the basis or effect of collapsing is not clear. A useful warning is sounded:

When collapsing tables by combining columns/rows to increase expected counts that are too low, risks and benefits include the possible increase or reduction of interpretability and the possible creation or destruction of structure in the table. It is important to avoid simply trying to identify the combination of cells that produces a 'significant' result.<sup>4</sup>

For  $\chi^2$  testing in this thesis the Likert items were collapsed to two or three categories with

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<sup>2</sup> There is some contention around the assumptions and restrictions for valid  $\chi^2$  testing. For the purpose of this project the following assumptions, restrictions and qualifiers are assumed. Given each observation is independent of all the others (i.e., one observation per subject) and appropriate care is taken in the combining of cell categories to ensure no distortion of counts in relation to small cell values:

- For tables larger than 2 x 2, no more than 25% of the expected counts are less than 5 and all individual expected counts are 1 or greater.
- For 2 x 2 tables, where all expected cell counts are at least 1 the 'N - 1'  $\chi^2$  test (the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test but with N replaced by N - 1) will be used. Note that the 'N - 1'  $\chi^2$  test is equivalent to the Linear by Linear Association  $\chi^2$  test computed in the SPSS crosstabs procedure.

<sup>3</sup> The important thing to guard against is allowing some particular [cell expectation] to become so small that the corresponding term in  $[X^2]$ , namely  $[(x_{ij}-e_{ij})^2/e_{ij}]$  tends to dominate the others because of its small denominator. In such cases, it will be necessary to re-bin to fold the small-expectation cells into other cells.

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from [http://www.basic.northwestern.edu/statguidefiles/conting\\_anal\\_ass\\_viol.html](http://www.basic.northwestern.edu/statguidefiles/conting_anal_ass_viol.html), accessed 1 Jul 2014.

agree and strongly agree becoming the one category of 'agree' and likewise for disagree and strongly disagree. The 'neither agree nor disagree' category was in the first instance maintained as a separate category for inclusion in the crosstabulation analysis. If small cell counts precluded a valid  $\chi^2$  test then it was either binned with 'disagree strongly/disagree' (ds/d) or 'agree/strongly agree' (a/as) or omitted from the final  $\chi^2$  test table. If the emphasis of the query was focused on whether a respondent agreed or otherwise, then the 'neither agree nor disagree' (nad) was binned with the 'disagree strongly/disagree' alternative. Likewise, if the emphasis was on whether a respondent disagreed, then the 'nad' alternative was binned with the agree/agree strongly alternative. This step precludes the 'neither agree nor disagree' category from biasing towards the emphasis of the question. Within the scope of the project it was simply not possible to test every explored relationship with the 'nad' located with ds/d and a/as. Such a requirement would nearly double the total computation required.

Regardless of whether one or both items being compared were Likert or other types of data, maximum differentiation of the information categories within each data question was maintained to the extent that small expected cell counts did not infringe the assumptions or restrictions offered in the notes.<sup>5</sup> However, in many cases, and partly because of the alternatives offered, data items had to have categories combined to allow their use with other data. In every case the nature of combination or 'collapsing' is made clear either in the text or in the designation or title of the Table produced by the crosstab procedure.

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<sup>5</sup> As an example, take the case of checking whether there was a relationship between PD1 (Frequency of church attendance) and DD4 (From my reading of the Gospels I am often aware of Jesus in my daily life even in the ordinary events of daily life). PD1 was taken as raw data and re-binned twice into three and two categories. It was then cross tabulated with DD4 as raw data and also re-binned twice into three and two categories. This process yielded a total of nine cross-tabulations. They were treated in the order indicated: thus, the first table was 4 x 5 (PD1 with four categories, DD5 with five categories), next 4 x 3 (DD5 re-binned into ds/d/nad, a, as) and then 4 x 2 (DD5 re-binned into ds/d/nad, a/as) and so on. It was the last table (2 x 2) that produced a valid  $\chi^2$  test (that is, no observed counts of zero and 25% or less of cells with expected count less than five). The value of p was .026 which indicated a significant relationship for the population between frequency of church attendance considered as monthly or less and weekly or more, and awareness of Jesus in daily life considered as disagree/not agree or agree. The valid test is not to say that the information is necessarily useful. In this case, it seems trivial to show that little attendance leads to lesser awareness of Jesus in daily life, although it might be significant to investigate the relationship direction as lesser awareness of Jesus in daily life leading to less attendance.

### APPENDIX 3 - EXPLANATION AND CODING OF SECTION 2 OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The data questions in this section are designed to provide information and insight into Research Questions 3 and 4 and probe the different ways respondents value, interact with and are influenced by the Gospels in their daily lives. The Research Questions are:

3. Does their knowledge and understanding of the Gospels make a difference in their lives? Key concerns which will generate questions to be asked and investigated include:
  - a. whether and how they actually engage with the Gospels in their daily life or lives in general;
  - b. whether and in what ways they seek to bring their understanding of Jesus to the 'big' issues of society and world;
  - c. in what way does their understanding of Jesus/engagement with the Gospels makes a significant difference to the way they live; and
  - d. whether and how they believe that they could live more Jesus-centred lives.

4. Do their lives of discipleship based on the Gospels make a difference to the lives of others?

Key concerns that will generate questions to ascertain how this might happen include:

- a. if and how the gospels inform personal impetus towards bringing/offering the good news of the gospel to those around them;
- b. whether they think that they could be doing more in respect of bringing the good news to others; and
- c. whether deepening their knowledge of the gospels might enable them to offer the gospel to others more effectively.

Columns are designed to show:

- the data question asked in the survey questionnaire
- the reason or rationale for asking the question.
- The initial possible inferences of the Agree and Disagree options for answering the Likert questions, and the similar inferences for the multi-selection questions.
- The relevance of each data question by linking it to the appropriate Research Question(s).

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
		This column explains why the question is asked.	This column offers starting / possible inferences and how those inferences might be suggestive of change or transformative openness or potential	This column relates the data question to the research question	
1.	I think it is important to read the Gospels alone as well as hear them read in services.	Q seeks information on how often the Gospels are read and specifically if it is read more than in a service/church setting.	Agree – more open to transformation through the Gospels. Disagree – may be less open to or influenced by Gospels.	RQ 3a,	
2.	I attempt to speak with non-Christian friends and family about Jesus.	Q investigates willingness to speak about experience of, relationship with or belief about/in Jesus.	Agree – some vision of and commitment to the transformative value of Gospels. Disagree – unable or unwilling to engage others with Gospel, or not feel engagement worthwhile	RQ 4a,	
3.	I experience the Gospel figure of Jesus as helpful on particular issues only.	Q investigates whether Jesus figure is helpful for particulars rather than as a general shaper of life and character.	Agree – may indicate a more limited openness to the general influence of the Gospels. Disagree – Jesus might not be understood or seen as helpful on particular issues.	RQ 3c	
4.	From my reading of the Gospels I am often aware of Jesus in the ordinary events of daily life.	Q investigates awareness and therefore relevance of Jesus in daily life and ordinary events. .	Agree - indicates a more personal involvement and possibly deeper transformative engagement. Disagree – may indicate less personal involvement with Jesus and possibly less openness to Jesus as an agent change.	RQ 3a, 3c	
5.	When deciding how to vote in political elections I try to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective.	Q investigates whether Gospels or Gospel knowledge is engaged when considering non-religious events.	Agree - indicates transformative engagement or awareness. Disagree – may indicate lack of transformative potential of the Gospels in shaping responses to political issues.	RQ 3b	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
6.	The Gospels don't seem to be relevant to my daily decision-making	Q investigates use or otherwise of Gospels in daily life	Agree - indicates lack of connection with transformative power of Gospels in daily decision making. Disagree – indicates Gospels are helpful in daily decision making and have transformative power.	RQ 3c	
7.	If I knew the Gospels more deeply I would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more faithfully.	Q investigates awareness of limitation in Gospel knowledge which might curtail the Christian commitment and lifestyle.	Agree – may indicates a continuing willingness to be open to the transformative power of Gospel  Disagree – for whatever reason may indicate lack of openness for deepened Gospel knowledge to be agent of further change.	RQ3d	
8.	Before doing something important I often stop and reflect on the Gospels.	Q investigates intentional engagement with Gospels for a particular purpose.	Agree - significant personal commitment and transformative engagement  Disagree – Gospels not a primary source of reflection for important actions and therefore limited in their transformative potential.	RQ 3a, 3c	
9.	On reflection, I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus.	Q investigates awareness of obligation or need to bring Jesus to other lives.	Agree - awareness or acceptance of the transformative value of knowing Jesus.  Disagree – may indicate they are already fully active in this regard, or more likely are not committed to offering transformative power of Gospels as fully as possible. .	RQ 4c	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
10.	I could be doing more to follow Jesus' teachings in the Gospels.	Q investigates awareness or otherwise of adequacy of commitment to Gospel/Jesus.	Agree - awareness of potential for further/greater change or personal engagement.  Disagree – for whatever reason not open to further potential for change based on Jesus' teachings.	RQ 3d	
11.	Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is someone who shapes my character and attitudes.	Q investigates understanding of Jesus as significant for attitude and approach to life. .	Agree - a significant degree of personal transformation.  Disagree – for whatever reason Jesus is not significant in shaping character or forming attitudes and therefore not significant as a transformative power in this life	RQ 3a, 3c	
12.	When I talk with friends about big issues like refugees and asylum seekers I consciously seek to do so from a Gospel-centred perspective.	Q investigates whether the Gospels are used in a significant manner to discuss important issues.	Agree – awareness of Gospels' relevance to big issues indicating a depth of personal engagement and commitment.  Disagree – for whatever reason Gospels are not a conscious source for discussing big issues.	RQ 3a, 3b	
13.	I find reading the Gospels is really helpful when things are difficult for me.	Q investigates a particular context of Gospel engagement.	Agree – openness to transformative power of Gospels  Disagree – for whatever reason the Gospels are not a significant resource at difficult times.	RQ 3a, 3c,	
14.	Sometimes I wonder if Jesus should be more prominent in my life.	Q investigates awareness of lack of Jesus content or orientation in their life at present	Agree – possible lack of engagement but openness to further growth. Disagree – Jesus is prominent already at a personally significant level of engagement, or respondent closed to further change.	RQ 3a, 3d	

No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
15.	If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with friends	Q investigates whether depth of knowledge about Jesus affects whether people are more or less likely to share the Jesus story	Agree – greater knowledge might lead to greater engagement/sharing and thereby becoming agents of change.  Disagree – greater knowledge may not be a factor in whether a person is likely to share the story with others	RQ 4c, 4d	
16.	My efforts to engage non-Church people in talking about Jesus have made a difference to at least one person's life.	Q investigates awareness of effects of sharing the Gospel.	Agree – has experienced a positive outcome in engaging the Gospel with others, which may indicate appreciation of power of Gospel to bring transformation. Disagree – for whatever reason has not seen a difference made in another life on account of respondent's efforts to engage another with Jesus.	RQ 4b	
17.	Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others.	Q investigates awareness of need and obligation to share the Gospel/Jesus story.	Agree – aware of need to engage which might indicate lack of conviction or under confidence and therefore limitation as agent of change.  Disagree – indicates either a lack of awareness of such opportunities or that most reasonable opportunities to speak about the Gospels are acted upon.	RQ 4c	
18.	Sometimes I feel that Gospel stories of Jesus lose their impact because they are so familiar.	Q investigates engagement fatigue.	Agree – Gospels so familiar that only superficial engagement is taking place which might indicate an erosion of transformative potential.  Disagree – stories still have impact and therefore transformative potential.	RQ 3a	

No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
19.	<p>What stands in the way of my reading the Gospels more often is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) I have trouble reading</li> <li>b) I have already read them often enough.</li> <li>c) I have too little time.</li> <li>d) I find the content uninteresting.</li> <li>e) I find them hard to understand.</li> <li>f) I don't really see a need as I know the story of Jesus well enough.</li> <li>g) none of these</li> </ul>	Q investigates lack of engagement with the Gospels.	<p>Selection of a) indicates physical reason for not reading Gospels more often.</p> <p>Selection of one or more of b) to f) might indicate a lower commitment and less openness to the transformative potential of the Gospels.</p> <p>The inference is that the transformational potential lessens as more items are selected.</p>	RQ 3a	
20.	<p>Helpful uses of the Gospels for me include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) as a source of comfort.</li> <li>b) as a source of spiritual insight.</li> <li>c) as a means to see and interpret the world and personal experience.</li> <li>d) as a source of inspiration and inspiring stories.</li> <li>e) providing rules and regulations about the right thing to do.</li> <li>f) learning about Jesus.</li> <li>g) changing aspects of my life.</li> <li>h) learning about how God acts in the world.</li> <li>i) helping me with daily living.</li> <li>j) none of these</li> </ul>	Q investigates some different ways of engaging with the Gospels. .	<p>Selection of one or more of these except j) indicates Gospels as a source of value and engagement and as possible sources of change or transformative power in life.</p> <p>The number selected will be indicative of their degree of openness to the multidimensional transformative power of the Gospels.</p>	RQ 3c	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
21.	<p>I think that the Gospels can help us in our understanding of the issues involved and the shaping of our attitudes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) in vitro fertilization.</li> <li>b) the situation of refugees and asylum seekers.</li> <li>c) marriage between people of the same gender.</li> <li>d) the place of women in the church.</li> <li>e) divorce and the remarriage of divorced people.</li> <li>f) euthanasia</li> <li>g) none of these</li> </ul>	<p>Q investigates whether Gospels are seen to be relevant to particular moral and other issues affecting our community.</p>	<p>Selection of one or more apart from g) indicates Gospels may play a part in how an issue is understood and attitudes that are held.</p> <p>E.g., if d) is circled, it may indicate that the Gospels have material which is relevant to the place and role of women in religion and that the understanding of that material shapes the attitude to the place and role of women in the church.</p> <p>The number selected will be indicative of the degree of influence and thus transformative power of the Gospels</p>	RQ 3b	
22.	<p>I understand a contemporary disciple to be one who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) goes to church regularly.</li> <li>b) takes every opportunity to do good deeds and render service.</li> <li>c) seeks to teach the Jesus story to others whether in word and/or deed and so lead them towards Christ.</li> <li>d) none of these</li> </ul>	<p>Q investigates whether contemporary discipleship is seen more in institutional terms, service terms or evangelistic terms.</p>	<p>Selection of a), b) or c) indicates a distinct orientation to the idea of what it means to be a disciple</p> <p>Selection of two or three of a), b) or c) indicates a broader understanding of discipleship.</p>		

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Initial / Possible inferences	Relevance	Notes
23.	<p>The Gospels makes a difference in my life by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) giving me new insights into life and living as I engage with it.</li> <li>b) changing my life in subtle ways.</li> <li>c) helping me to understand life more deeply.</li> <li>d) showing me where I have gone wrong.</li> <li>e) enabling me to change my attitudes and become less prejudiced.</li> <li>f) None of these</li> </ul>	<p>Q investigates specific ways (giving, changing, helping, showing, enabling) in which the Gospels might make a difference.</p>	<p>Selection of one or more indicates ways in which the Gospels operate to bring about change or enable transformative power in a person's life.</p> <p>The number selected will be indicative of the degree of openness to different ways the Gospels might exercise their transformative power.</p>	RQ 3c	
24.	<p>Can you think of one or two concrete ways Jesus has brought change or transformation to your life? Yes / No</p> <p>If Yes, please describe.</p>	<p>To encourage reflection about ways life has been significantly affected by the Gospels without any cueing suggestions.</p>	<p>One or two responses here indicates understanding of notion of change/ transformation due to the Gospels in their own life. Provides respondent centred perspective on transformative power of Gospels.</p>		

#### APPENDIX 4 - EXPLANATION AND CODING OF SECTION 3 OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The data questions in this section are designed to provide information and insight into Research Question 1: What do Adelaide lay people know of the content of the gospels? In particular, the focus is on that content which is assessed as basic to change/transformation/personal relationship with Jesus:

- the identity of Jesus
- the teaching of Jesus
- the mission of Jesus
- OT imagery which relates Jesus to God's story of salvation in Israel,
- important events/locations and figures in Jesus life and ministry

This document lists the questions in section 3 of the questionnaire and for each question:

- explains why the question was asked.
- relates each data question to the research question as outlined above.
- Explains how the question might relate to present Christian life/action/challenges.

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
		This column states why the question is asked	This column seeks to relate the data question to the research question and its relevance to knowing Jesus as a transformative figure	How might the question relate to present Christian life/action/challenges	
1.	<p>According to the Gospels, when Jesus was baptized a key feature of the event was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the presence of Jesus' disciples</li> <li>b) Jesus' affirmation of faith in God</li> <li>c) a voice from heaven.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of key event in the Gospel and in Jesus' life and bearing on his identity	The baptism is a key event in Jesus life and marks the beginning of his ministry. The imagery of the baptism incorporates the direct presence of God which is important for understanding Jesus identity and relationship with God.	Provides image of God's presence and manifestation in Jesus life and potentially in our spiritual lives	
2.	<p>How long did Jesus spend fasting in the wilderness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) 20 days</li> <li>b) 30 days</li> <li>c) 40 days</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of key numerical figure having symbolic and OT significance.	Knowing Jesus spent 40 days in the desert is important in potentially making links to the Old Testament, in particular the 40 years in the wilderness. The other 84 occurrences in the NIV OT indicate that 40 has symbolic and non-literal significance.	Validates fasting as a Christian practice. Provides a picture of endurance and perseverance based on human knowledge of hunger	
3.	<p>A story of Jesus' birth appears in the Gospels of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Matthew and Mark.</li> <li>b) Mark and Luke.</li> <li>c) Matthew and Luke.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test respondent's ability to discriminate between details within the Gospels.	Knowing that the birth account occurs in Matthew and Luke indicates knowledge of key differences between Gospels and the stories they tell of Jesus.	Provides awareness that there are different versions of the Jesus story with different details. Appreciation of different ways of understanding and living the Christian life	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
4.	<p>Jesus said that when you pray you should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) pray for a long time.</li> <li>b) not heap up empty phrases.</li> <li>c) pray with other people.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of Jesus teaching.	To know what Jesus taught is essential to a possible transformative relationship with Jesus.	Validates and qualifies/instructs in prime Christian activity of prayer	
5.	<p>Jesus said about those who are your enemies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) avoid them.</li> <li>b) to love them.</li> <li>c) to defend yourself against them.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of Jesus' teaching.	To know what Jesus taught is essential to a possible transformative relationship with Jesus in which Jesus' teaching is put into action.	Conflict and dealing with people with different opinions and ideas is daily activity which all Christians undertake and for which the response of taking a loving stance is central to living the Christian life	
6.	<p>When Jesus warned his disciples against false prophets, he said the false prophets would be known by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) their attitude to Jesus.</li> <li>b) their appearance.</li> <li>c) the outcomes of their actions.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of Jesus' teaching.	To know what Jesus taught is essential to a possible transformative relationship with Jesus.	Christians are exposed to many different opinions and many different versions of what Jesus taught and what is consistent with Jesus teaching. It is important to know that discrimination is required on the basis of the actual results of what is claimed.	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
7.	<p>When Jesus healed the paralytic in Mark Chapter 2 he said that he did it to show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) that he could overcome disease.</li> <li>b) that he was not afraid of the Pharisees</li> <li>c) that he had power to forgive sins.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of details of a well-known healing event and the teaching that Jesus attached to the event.	To know that Jesus offered important teaching with healing events and that the reader is challenged to respond to what Jesus says as well as how he acts.	It is important to be open to and hear Jesus' word through the challenges of adversity and suffering in daily life and that forgiveness of sins is important for physical well-being as well as spiritual wholeness.	
8.	<p>Which of these was one of Jesus' twelve disciples?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Matthew</li> <li>b) Luke</li> <li>c) Mark</li> <li>d) Don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of and discrimination between prominent NT people and their roles.	Knowing key figures and the roles they fulfil is often important to understanding the background and flow of the Gospel story and Jesus' actions.		
9.	<p>In the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel, after his resurrection Jesus instructed his disciples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) to convert the Gentiles.</li> <li>b) to bring back the lost sheep of Israel.</li> <li>c) to make disciples of all nations.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of a key mission instruction given by Jesus to the disciples.	This instruction is a key discipleship action imperative and is an essential component of a transformative relationship with Jesus.	Contemporary Christian discipleship is hall marked by willingness to speak forth the gospel whether in word and/or deed and thus to make disciples.	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
10.	<p>When Jesus had calmed the waves he said to those on the boat with him:</p> <p>a) do not be anxious, you are safe with me.</p> <p>b) why are you afraid, have you no faith?</p> <p>c) don't you trust me to keep you safe?</p> <p>d) don't know.</p>	Q is asked to test knowledge of a well-known miraculous event and the meaning Jesus attached to it.	To know the story is not about personal safety but faith which indicates that trust which is foundational to a transformative relationship with Jesus.	Provides clear example of the power of and need for faith when faced by adversity in daily life.	
11.	<p>Which title is Jesus NOT called in the New Testament?</p> <p>a) Son of Man</p> <p>b) Son of Mary</p> <p>c) Messiah</p> <p>d) Don't know.</p>	Q is asked to test discrimination between different titles that Jesus is called.	Titles are central indicators to both Jesus' identity and role and contribute to a basic knowledge of who Jesus is.	People attach all sorts of names and descriptions to Jesus and it is important that a Christian can distinguish between them and whether they are true or otherwise.	
12.	<p>At the transfiguration, the two other figures who appeared with Jesus were:</p> <p>a) Moses and Elijah.</p> <p>b) Joshua and Elijah.</p> <p>c) Moses and Isaiah.</p>	Q is asked to test knowledge of an event which is read in the lectionary cycle every year and places Jesus in relationship with key people with important stories in the OT.	To know that Jesus stands in continuity with Moses and Elijah is central to understanding Jesus place and role in salvation history. Jesus' role and importance as the one who completes and fulfils the story as God's final word makes him the key to God-centred personal change and transformation.	To know that Jesus is the 'grand-finale' of the salvation story is reassuring and confidence building to the contemporary disciple	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
13.	<p>When Jesus instructed his disciples about settling conflict with a brother or sister he said the first thing to do was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) take one or two others along and discuss the problem.</li> <li>b) tell the elders of the church about it so that they could help.</li> <li>c) take it up with the other person by oneself.</li> <li>d) don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of Jesus' teaching.	To know what Jesus taught about relating in a loving way to community or family members is essential to a possible transformative relationship with Jesus.	Conflict within contemporary communities of faith is all too common, and knowledge of the steps to settle conflict is essential to sound Christian settlement of disputes, personality conflicts and sectarianism.	
14.	<p>In John 4 what did Jesus offer the Samaritan woman?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Healing.</li> <li>b) Living water.</li> <li>c) The bread of life.</li> <li>d) Don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge of a key narrative and theological event which is a central disclosure of Jesus' identity by the author.	To know that Jesus is the living water is by way of metaphor relating human life to the need for water to understanding that it is Jesus who sustains and transforms our spiritual life.	To know that Jesus is one who offers that which gives 'life' and invites rather than coerces and manipulates is important for contemporary discipleship.	
15.	<p>What is the question that prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Who can be saved?</li> <li>b) Is it right to care for my enemy?</li> <li>c) Who is my neighbour?</li> <li>d) Don't know</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test knowledge not of the content of the parable of the Good Samaritan but the meaning of the story.	To understand the parable of the Good Samaritan as a story about the identity of neighbour rather than as a story about deliverance from adversity or about enemies is to open up the story as a transformative resource.	The core Christian commitment to loving the neighbour requires knowledge of who the neighbour actually is or isn't.	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
16.	<p>Jesus is called “Christ” in the Gospels. This term means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) exalted teacher.</li> <li>b) anointed one.</li> <li>c) beloved by God.</li> <li>d) Don’t know.</li> </ul>	<p>Q is asked to test whether the basic meaning of the title is known and thus can point to an understanding of Jesus relationship to God rather than as a description of human regard for or assessment of Jesus.</p>	<p>Titles are central indicators to both Jesus’ identity and role and a basic knowledge and understanding of them are important in building a relationship picture of Jesus’ which is capable of leading to transformation.</p>	<p>To know what it means to say that Jesus is the ‘Christ’ rather than understanding Christ as a surname is important in being able to clarify Jesus’ status and role.</p>	
17.	<p>Which of the following is NOT one of the "I am" sayings spoken by Jesus in the Gospel according to John?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) “I am the resurrection and the life”</li> <li>b) “I am the suffering servant”</li> <li>c) “I am the true vine”</li> <li>d) Don’t know</li> </ul>	<p>Q is asked to test whether two well known ‘I am’ sayings are recognized and/or a plausible alternative which is not an ‘I am’ saying can be discriminated.</p>	<p>Knowing what the foundation documents say as to who Jesus claims to be and doesn’t claim to be is important in shaping a truth based transformative relationship. The early church used the image of the suffering servant to describe Jesus but he himself did not.</p>	<p>It is important for the contemporary disciple to understand the difference between how Jesus described himself and how other people might describe or have described him.</p>	
18.	<p>According to Luke, at which moment did the disciples who journeyed to Emmaus recognize Jesus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) When he broke bread and gave it to them</li> <li>b) When he gave them the Holy Spirit</li> <li>c) When he opened the Scriptures to them</li> <li>d) Don’t know.</li> </ul>	<p>Q is asked to test knowledge of a key moment in a key story about Jesus.</p>	<p>To know that, at least in one account, Jesus was recognized by the earliest disciples not in speech or giving of the Spirit but in breaking of the bread is potentially transformative in opening up the image of broken bread (shared meal) as a key activity for relationship with Jesus.</p>	<p>From earliest times Jesus has been present in the (sacramental) sharing of food, and that any sharing of food by Christians is potentially an occasion when Jesus is present in a transformational way.</p>	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
19.	<p>When asked which commandment is greatest, Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” What did he say was the second commandment?</p> <p>a) “You shall have no other gods before me.”</p> <p>b) “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”</p> <p>c) “You shall not make for yourself a graven image.”</p> <p>d) Don’t know.</p>	<p>Q is asked to test knowledge of fundamental statement by Jesus of his understanding of what God required from people.</p>	<p>To not know the second great commandment and that Jesus stated it is to not know a fact which is central to Jesus understanding and teaching and which would seriously prejudice the possibility of a transformative relationship.</p>	<p>A basis of any discipleship activity in any situation is knowledge of the need to love the neighbour as the self.</p>	
20.	<p>According to Luke 4, in the Nazareth synagogue Jesus read which of the following from the book of Isaiah?</p> <p>a) “All we like sheep have gone astray.”</p> <p>b) “The Lord called me, before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.”</p> <p>c) “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”</p> <p>d) Don’t know.</p>	<p>Q is asked to test knowledge of one key self-disclosure of Jesus identity.</p>	<p>To understand that Jesus believed himself to be specially related to and empowered by God is to open the possibility for Jesus to be seen as a figure or person who can bring God legitimated change or transformation.</p>	<p>To understand that Jesus claimed God’s patronage directly encourages the modern follower to also claim God’s attention and favour.</p>	

Q No	Question	Why the question is asked	Relevance to change/transformation	Present Christian Life	Notes
21.	<p>"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing..." is found in the parable concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the sheep and the goats.</li> <li>b) the prodigal son.</li> <li>c) the rich man and Lazarus.</li> <li>d) Don't know.</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test whether this key statement encouraging action uttered by Jesus can be associated with the parable to which it is attached.	To know the correct context for this saying (and that it doesn't refer to either Lazarus or the hungry son) shows that it is available as a teaching which might bring about transformation in the way one acts in respect of the hungry, thirsty, naked.	Jesus bids us to action now and always, and specifically in relation to all who do not have the essentials of human life and dignity.	
22.	<p>In John's gospel after the empty tomb is discovered, who is the person who says, 'I have seen the Lord'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Peter</li> <li>b) Mary Magdalene</li> <li>c) Jesus' mother Mary</li> <li>d) Don't know</li> </ul>	Q is asked to test whether it is recognized that it was a woman to whom Jesus is recorded as first revealing himself after the resurrection.	To know that a woman was both present at this critical moment and that a woman was privileged to first communicate with the risen Lord might be seen as transformative knowledge in what is still a largely male-centred world.	Calls the contemporary Christian to accept and respond to equality for all of God's human creatures.	

## APPENDIX 5 – EXPLANATION, CODING AND RESULTS OF SECTION 4 OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The data questions in this section are designed to provide information and insight into Research Question 2: How do Adelaide lay people understand and comprehend Jesus and the gospels? In particular:

- whether they interpret language as figurative or literal, metaphorical or historical, and
- whether their interpretive framework inclines more towards a traditional framework or to more modern interpretive understandings such as the 'emerging paradigm' articulated by Borg and others.

This document lists the questions in section 4 of the questionnaire and for each question:

- explains what each question seeks to find out.
- explains what each choice offered for each question infers.
- coding of each alternative offered for more or less traditional.

Options also offered for each question include 'other' where the respondent may indicate an alternative understanding, and 'don't know' where the respondent can indicate ignorance.

- 'other' potentially guards against restricting interpretation to my particular ideas and may be assessed as:
  - a completely different understanding in which case it would need to be dealt with independently
  - a conflation of two of the alternatives offered where respondent is not satisfied with either by itself but with an understanding of two taken together either in whole or parts, in which case the response given might be able to be allocated to one or other of the alternatives involved.
- 'don't know' might mean the respondent
  - genuinely doesn't know whether any of the answers are suitable.
  - does not wish to choose an alternative: in effect, rejects the question as applicable to them.

Q No	Question	Why question is asked	Initial inference of response to each alternative offered	Responses rated for more traditional or less traditional	
				More traditional-1 Less traditional-3	Participant scores for each alternative
1.	<p>As written documents concerned to portray the transformative power of Jesus I think that the Gospels are best understood as:</p> <p>a) recounting what people saw and heard, including the words and actions of Jesus.</p> <p>b) a mix of historical recall and the gospel writer's interpretation of that recall.</p> <p>c) stories put together to help people understand the significance of Jesus but with less emphasis on historical accuracy.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondent views the content of the Gospel documents as primarily historical accounts or something other.</p>	<p>a) Indicates a primarily historical/eyewitness account view of Gospel document, which may possibly indicate understanding of descriptions as historical and factual and lead to literal understanding of miracles.</p> <p>b) Indicates an understanding of basic historicity but that the accounts of various incidents may have been ordered and interpreted by the Gospel authors. May or may not indicate literal/factual understanding of miracles.</p> <p>c) Indicates an understanding which is not concerned with historical accuracy and factuality so much as painting a picture of Jesus for the readers to get to know.</p> <p>Further inference would be that whether or not miracles happened as described doesn't matter but are stories told according to ancient story-telling conventions to convey an understanding of Jesus in a way which would be understood by the original readers.</p>	<p>1 a) 1</p> <p>1 b) 2</p> <p>1 c) 3</p>	<p>1 a) 56</p> <p>1 b) 39</p> <p>1 c) 25</p>
2.	<p>The account of the virgin birth in Matthew's Gospel is I think best understood as:</p> <p>a) a story told to express the mystery of Jesus origins and powers.</p> <p>b) a factual historical report that is meant to convey biological or scientific truth.</p> <p>c) a non-factual story about Jesus told to help the reader understand Jesus' relationship to God.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondent understands the Gospel account of the virgin birth as a literal historical truth or as something other.</p>	<p>a) Understood as a mythical story (in the technical sense of a story told to convey meaning), which might indicate a non-historical/biological mystery-based appreciation of the event.</p> <p>b) Understood as historical/biological story consistent with a literal/factual understanding of referents and events.</p> <p>a) Understood as a theological story using worldly images to convey a picture of Jesus relationship to God.</p>	<p>2 a) 2</p> <p>2 b) 1</p> <p>2 c) 3</p>	<p>2 a) 82</p> <p>2 b) 37</p> <p>2 c) 2</p>

Q No	Question	Why question is asked	Inference of response to each alternative offered	Responses rated for more traditional or less traditional	
3.	<p>I understand and read the Gospels as they portray the life and work of Jesus as:</p> <p>a) documents authored by people recording their experience and understanding of Jesus.</p> <p>b) documents authored by God using people to record what God wanted to be communicated.</p> <p>c) documents that are sacred because the Church declared them to be sacred.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondents view the content of the Gospel documents as divinely determined/ authorized or something other.</p>	<p>a) Indicates documents considered as human productions with the limitations and shortcomings of any human document. Inspiration here is the inspiration given by the Holy Spirit to the writer to tell a significant or life-changing story in such a way that it might have the same impact/meaning for others.</p> <p>b) Indicates view that God is determining what the human author writes, which is correct and ultimately authoritative for that reason. Inspiration here is the guidance of the Holy Spirit independent of the convictions, intentions or shortcomings of the writer.</p> <p>c) Indicates that authorship whether by God or human is secondary to what makes the Gospels authoritative in the respondent's life.</p>	<p>3 a) 3 3 b) 1 3 c) 2</p>	<p>3 a) 67 3 b) 46 3 c) 0</p>
4.	<p>I think Jesus' healings and exorcisms as they are told by the Gospel writers are best understood:</p> <p>a) as making sick, diseased and possessed people better so that they would lead happier lives.</p> <p>b) as demonstrating his supernatural power over disease, demons and evil spirits.</p> <p>c) as indicating the presence of God in the reversal of that which degrades and spoils human life.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether healings and exorcisms are interpreted as exclusively supernatural displays of power or something other.</p>	<p>a) Indicates understanding of Jesus as someone who is concerned to make people well and perhaps nothing more. Jesus as a carer, albeit using seemingly supernatural powers.</p> <p>b) Indicates understanding of healings and exorcisms as exercise of Jesus supernatural powers and possibly as evidence/proof of Jesus metaphysical divinity.</p> <p>c) Indicates a theological understanding of Jesus as one who brings God's transformation in salvation/redemption to those whose lives are blighted: understanding of the story as more than an account of a healing.</p>	<p>4 a) 2 4 b) 1 4 c) 3</p>	<p>4 a) 4 4 b) 34 4 c) 77</p>

Q No	Question	Why question is asked	Inference of a response to each alternative offered	Responses rated for more or less traditional	
5.	<p>According to Matthew (10.8), Jesus sends the twelve disciples out on a mission, charging them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. I think that ‘raise the dead’ here means:</p> <p>a) to bring back to life those who they come across who have just died, like Jesus did with Lazarus.</p> <p>b) to bring life to those who are spiritually dead.</p> <p>c) to offer a spiritual vision of how life might be lived without fearing death</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondents understand death as only applied to the body or as being used as a metaphor for other human dimensions of life.</p>	<p>a) Indicates a literal understanding of the disciples bringing dead people/bodies back to bodily life.</p> <p>b) Indicates a figurative understanding based on life understood as spiritual life rather than physical life.</p> <p>c) Indicates an understanding of death as primarily something to be feared and which might need to be transformed.</p>	<p>5 a) 1</p> <p>5 b) 2</p> <p>5 c) 3</p>	<p>5 a) 23</p> <p>5 b) 0</p> <p>5 c) 95</p>
6.	<p>Matthew, Mark and Luke all speak of the Kingdom of God. I understand the Kingdom primarily as:</p> <p>a) a place where God is King.</p> <p>b) a place where the faithful go after death.</p> <p>c) wherever God’s will is being done.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether the respondent understands the ‘Kingdom of God’ as a geographical/spatial kingdom or other worldly place, or something other.</p>	<p>a) Indicates an understanding of a geographical/spatial realm where God is literally King as in an earthly kingdom.</p> <p>b) Indicates an understanding of attaining the Kingdom on completion of life on earth, and may be as a reward for faithfulness etc.</p> <p>c) Indicates an understanding of the Kingdom as the doing of what God wants us to do regardless of where/when/how.</p>	<p>6 a) 2</p> <p>6 b) 1</p> <p>6 c) 3</p>	<p>6 a) 13</p> <p>6 b) 11</p> <p>6 c) 93</p>

Q No	Question	Why question is asked	Inference of response to each alternative offered	Responses rated for more traditional or less traditional	
7.	<p>The Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John all record that Jesus died and after three days he was seen alive. I think they meant:</p> <p>a) that Jesus was brought back to life in his earthly body.</p> <p>b) that Jesus was brought back to life but in a different way from his previous earthly body.</p> <p>c) that Jesus didn't come back to life but his followers experienced him still being with them.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether the respondent understands the resurrection as a literal/factual coming back to life in their previous earthly body or something other.</p>	<p>a) Indicates an understanding of the crucified and buried body as being miraculously revived.</p> <p>b) Indicates an understanding of Jesus being bodily alive but in a different 'body' than his crucified body albeit with an appearance the same as his crucified body!</p> <p>c) Indicates an understanding of 'being seen alive' as being a strength of ongoing presence best characterized as 'being seen alive', much as is reported by human subjects who report 'seeing' a loved one who is deceased.</p>	<p>7 a) 1</p> <p>7 b) 2</p> <p>7 c) 3</p>	<p>7 a) 29</p> <p>7 b) 75</p> <p>7 c) 11</p>
8.	<p>All the Gospel writers refer to 'eternal life'. I understand this as primarily meaning:</p> <p>a) everlasting life – living with God forever in heaven after our earthly life.</p> <p>b) spiritual communion with God whether in this life or beyond.</p> <p>c) the fullness of life in this life here on earth.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondents understand the central Gospel idea of eternal life as a temporal idea associated with 'everlasting life' or as about spiritual communion/life with God regardless of extension in time.</p>	<p>a) Indicates an understanding of eternal life as life beyond our earthly life and everlasting in the sense of having no end in time as we understand time.</p> <p>b) Indicates an understanding of eternal as primarily a full relationship with God regardless of time or state.</p> <p>c) Indicates an understanding of life lived in the flesh on earth in full communion and harmony with God with no reference to an afterlife.</p>	<p>8 a) 1</p> <p>8 b) 2</p> <p>8 c) 3</p>	<p>8 a) 50</p> <p>8 b) 63</p> <p>8 c) 6</p>

Q No	Question	Why question is asked	Inference of response to each alternative offered	Responses rated for more traditional or less traditional	
9.	<p>In Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus says that whoever wants to be a follower must take up or carry their cross. For me this means:</p> <p>a) that to follow Jesus I need to be ready to make major sacrifices such as in my career and wealth.</p> <p>b) that to follow Jesus I need to put the needs of others before my own needs.</p> <p>c) that I need to be ready to endure rejection and suffering, even death, on account of following Jesus.</p>	<p>Q is asked to discern whether respondents see following Jesus in terms of sacrifice, other centred caring or personal suffering.</p>	<p>a) Indicates 'carrying cross' means primarily personal sacrifice of worldly ambitions to presumably be like Jesus.</p> <p>b) Indicated 'carrying cross' means primarily to look out and care for others in their suffering, setbacks and deficiencies.</p> <p>c) Indicates 'carrying cross' means primarily being willing to suffer and even face death if required in being faithful to Jesus and what we believe he wants from us.</p>	<p>9 a) 1 9 b) 2 9 c) 3</p>	<p>9 a) 15 9 b) 35 9 c) 42</p>

## APPENDIX 6 – DETAILED RESPONSES TO MEANING AND LANGUAGE DATA (MLD) QUESTIONS

The following nine dot points are a record of the responses, including individual responses, to the questions asked in Section 4 of the Quantitative questionnaire.

- In the first question (MLD1) nearly half (44%) chose the traditional understanding of the Gospels as an eye-witness record of the actual events including the words of Jesus. Whilst this understanding is not interpreted as denying obviously figurative language such as that of the temptation narrative in Matthew's Gospel, it does indicate an understanding of the general flow of events as historical and factual, including Jesus miraculous healings, the nature miracles and other activities. It is clear, however, that a slight majority see the Gospels as something other than an historical account in the traditional way. Whilst the degree of historicity attributed might vary, 54% see the Gospels as written documents as not just historical but as either interpreted versions of events or as stories told for the purpose of portraying or explaining the Jesus figure and event. This result suggests a laity open to other than traditional interpretation and willing to understand Jesus in a more subtle way. It might also suggest a laity more willing to explore complex and multiple levels of meaning. Further, I would suggest that this openness is a more potentially transformative way to understand Jesus, especially for those who find it more difficult to 'believe the unbelievable'! The two 'other' responses which could not be assigned to one of the three categories sought to add nuance:

Combination of the above, and early church history/story telling designed to convey the significance of Jesus.

- MLD2 was asked to discern the whether the Virgin birth story in Matthew's Gospel was understood as a literal account offering biological or scientific truth, or something other. Responses provided the result that over half of the sample did not acknowledge the Gospel account of the Virgin birth as either non-factual or as an historical (factual) report. The word 'mystery' clearly offered a helpful alternative indicating a deeper understanding of the Virgin birth story than the traditional understanding of full historicity, but not forcing reduction to the realm of non-historical. A quarter of respondents understood the story as literal picture of reality and a little over 10% as a story to help the reader understand Jesus' relationship with God. Seven of the thirteen 'other' offerings were towards the factual understanding with some sort of qualification, e.g.:

A factual report that is meant to express the mystery of the Son of God's incarnation;

A factual historical report which expresses the mystery of Jesus' origins and power, and

I think the story is factual, but the primary truth is to demonstrate not biological fact but the nature of Jesus' relationship to God.

The result seems to recognize the Gospels both as more than simple historical accounts and Jesus as more than a miraculously produced figure, again allowing Jesus to be something more than a classic 'divine man' of ancient history.

- MLD3 was designed to gain insight into how the respondents saw the Gospels as being divinely inspired. Both alternatives offered assumed the work of the Spirit, with a person-sided or a God-sided emphasis. Just under two thirds selected the person-inspired-by-the-Spirit understanding of the Gospels as documents, and just over one third the God-controlling-by-the-Spirit understanding. Three of those who selected 'other' were keen on a combination of the two answers. The majority reflect an understanding based on a normal understanding of human story telling rather than the more traditional understanding of God 'dictating' what was to be known.
- A significant majority (61%) saw Jesus' healings and exorcisms as concerned with Jesus mission rather than 29% who saw them as demonstrations of his supernatural power over disease, demons and evil and thus primarily contributing towards his identity. That is, more than twice as many wanted to interpret these actions as indicating something about God and God's will for his human creatures as revealed in Jesus. Those who answered 'other' opted for a combination in one way or another with Jesus seen as bringing God's transformative power and reality to those in need, e.g.:

Both a demonstration of Christ's power over disease and evil spirits as well as a foretaste of God's future reversal of the impact of sin and evil in this world (i.e. both now and 'not yet'.)

- MLD5 was designed to test to what extent the general concept of resurrection could be understood figuratively. Not only does such understanding affect the fundamental question of how people perceive God to act in the world but also indicates whether the resurrection of Jesus might also be open to interpretation. Over three quarters of respondents indicated a spiritual understanding of resurrection in the context offered, which is seen as a genuinely transformative understanding of Jesus' relevance to normal everyday human life in every age. Whilst it is difficult to allocate the physical resuscitation alternative to traditional belief, the 18% who opted for it clearly

understand resurrection only in a literal or physical sense. Those who selected ‘other’ mostly thought the answer required a combination of both physical and spiritual understanding, e.g.:

relating to both spiritual and physical death

We have to grasp that Jesus, speaking for His Father, means what he says! So (a) is the best choice here – even though there is no report that the disciples did raise the dead, (b) is vastly more applicable and can be seen by the twelve’s changing responses with time.

- In response to MLD6, a vast majority saw the Kingdom of God as being wherever God’s will is being done, which may be a reflection of devotion based on the Lord’s Prayer (Your kingdom come, your will be done). In a traditional physical picture of God’s kingdom, however, the idea of a place is predominant and has been argued theologically and philosophically. Respondents were offered two ‘place’ alternatives but only 19% chose one or other of them. Few saw the Kingdom of God in a traditional light of a reward after death for a life well lived. For the three quarters who saw God’s Kingdom as being where God’s will is being done, the Gospels and their account of the Kingdom offer both incentive and transformative power/suggestion towards a Jesus centred life. Those who selected ‘other’ mostly sought to make the idea of the Kingdom as comprehensive as possible, e.g.:

God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule

God’s Kingdom includes earth, everything, as He is King over all and he reigns over all.

- MLD7 asked respondents for their understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. They were offered three alternatives: the common popular traditional understanding of corporeal resuscitation in which the earthly body which has been crucified and buried is miraculously restored; the Pauline understanding of being raised a spiritual body; and a modern understanding of resurrection as denoting a subjective experience of presence which is so powerful and suggestive as to be termed ‘real’. Just less than a quarter opted for the raising of the earthly body of Jesus indicating a more traditional literal/historical reading of the resurrection accounts. Close to two thirds opted for the Pauline expression of the mystery which denies restoration of the earthly body but affirms a spiritual body. That is, a total of 70% opted for an understanding other than physical restoration. This number indicates a clear transformative (rather than preservative) understanding of resurrection however that might happen.

Of those who indicated ‘other’, the predominant response sought to retain the bodily aspect of resurrection but qualified to escape the earthly physical aspect, e.g.:

Jesus was brought back to life in a physical, tangible body which looked like his former body, but it was a transformed (eternal) glorified physical body which will never die.

Resurrected in a transformed earthly body.

These responses seem to capture the essential dilemma of resurrection as expressed in the NT – a body which is physical but never dies!

- One key Gospel idea is that of ‘eternal life’. A widely acknowledged traditional understanding of eternal life is as a temporal concept of life continuing indefinitely, commonly as a reward for a good life in our earthly existence. With 50 respondents (40%) affirming this view, the response to MLD 8 clearly indicates a significant continuing adherence to this traditional understanding and presumably the traditional Christian hope of life after death, however that might be understood. A majority of 54%, however, see eternal life as something other than indefinite extension in time, with nearly half placing the emphasis on relationship (communion with God) as against temporality. Of those who answered ‘other’ the commonest response sought to not let go of the traditional but seeking to broaden the understanding of ‘eternal’, e.g.:

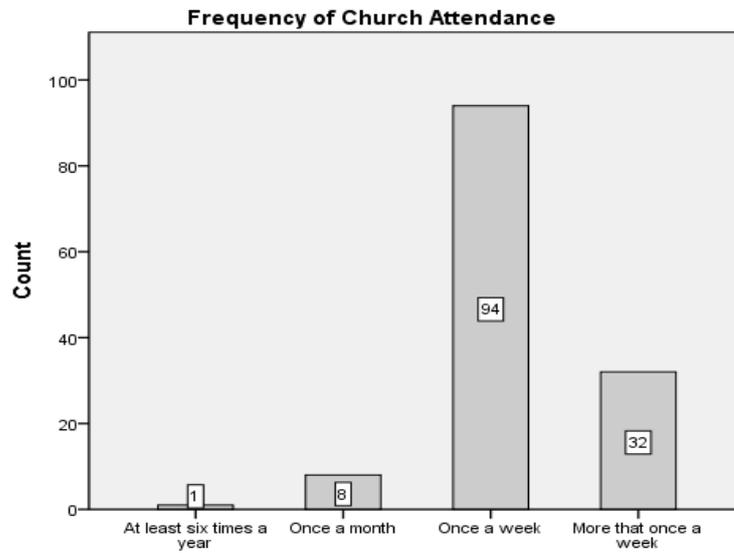
It’s a life of eternal quality here and now that will stay with us during our transition to the next world, and continue unabated there and then.

- One practical question every Christian must answer is ‘What does it mean to follow Jesus?’ or ‘How do I follow Jesus?’ MLD9 was asked to gain insight into different perspectives which might be viewed on this matter. Whilst a genuinely Gospel understanding of ‘taking up or carrying their cross’ is closely associated with the idea of enduring rejection and suffering as we seek to model and live Jesus message, many have traditionally interpreted following Jesus as giving up personal ambition or aspiration and putting others first and/or the self, last. MLD9 was asked to investigate the extent of this latter interpretation. Whilst following Jesus might be seen as often putting the needs of others before one’s own, or occasionally making a major sacrifice, only 40% saw these as more important than enduring rejection and suffering. This response has clear implications for discipleship in that the latter two classes of activity do not necessarily bear testimony to Jesus or the Christian life. It will be helpful to enquire further about the forty-eight respondees who did not indicate the suffering and rejection priority, and whether there might be some fear of rejection or abuse if they attempt to testify to Jesus.

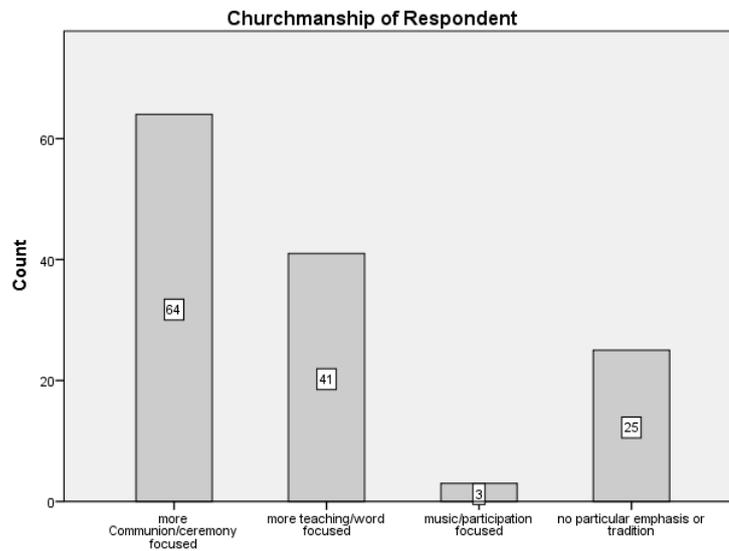
APPENDIX 7  
 MASTER GRID OF ASSOCIATIONS - DD, PD AND INDICES

	Indicator status	Content of Questions	PD1	PD2	PD3	PD4	PD5	PD6	PD7	PD8	PD9	PD10	PD11		GKI	Teaching Index	Identity Index	Mission	MLD	
			Frequency of church attendance	style of church attended	congregational variation in last year	frequency of Gospel reading	Gospels experienced in company	Use of Gospel resources in last three years	Baptism age	Whether religious/prayer/bible reading/church was a part of upbringing	Use of electronic devices to engage with Gospels	Highest education level achieved	Theological/biblical studies undertaken							
<b>Indicators for respondent's personal transformation</b>																				
DD4	These five data questions are the chosen indicators for personal transformation	From my reading of the Gospels I am often aware of Jesus in my daily life	chi .026 2x2. Trivial	val chi .025 3x3 no lin assoc	x	val chi .000 5x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .010 4x3 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .026 2x3 no lin assoc	x	linear assoc		x	val chi .023 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	x	
DD5		When deciding how to vote in political elections I try to look at issues from a Gospel-centred perspective	x	val chi .010 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .024 2x3 lin assoc	val chi .020 5x2 lin assoc	val chi .001 4x3 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .024 4x2 no lin assoc	x	val chi .020 3x3 lin assoc		val chi .008 2x4 lin assoc	val chi .003 3x3 lin assoc	val chi 0.048 4x2 lin assoc	val chi .004 4x2 lin assoc	x	
DD8		Before doing something important I often stop and reflect on the Gospels	x	x	x	val chi .000 5x2 lin assoc	lin assoc	val chi .000 4x3 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	val chi .001 3x2 lin assoc		x	val chi .049 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .035 4x2 no lin assoc	val chi .014 2x2 lin assoc	
DD11		Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is someone who shapes my character and attitudes	x	x	x	val chi .025 2x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .043 2x3 lin assoc	linear assoc	x	x	x	val chi .013 3x3 lin assoc		x	x	x	x	x	x
DD13		I find reading the Gospels is really helpful when things are difficult for me	val chi.004 2x2 lin assoc	val chil .014 3x2 lin assoc	x	val chil .000 5x2 lin assoc	x	val chi .003 4x2 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .023 2x2 lin assoc	x	x		x	linear assoc	x	val chi .027 4x2 no lin assoc	x	
DD6	These four questions are the chosen indicators for possible lack of personal transformation and/or need for further awareness	The Gospels don't seem to be relevant to my daily decision making	x	x	x	x	val chi .005 5x2 no lin assoc	val chi .026 4x2 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x		val chi .008 3x2 lin assoc	val chi .017 3x3 lin assoc	val chi .006 4x2 lin assoc	val chi .022 4x2 lin assoc	x	
DD7		If I knew the Gospels more deeply I would be able to live the Jesus-centred life more faithfully	x	x	x	val chi .000 2x5, .002 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	val chi .032 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	x	
DD10		I could be doing more to follow Jesus' teachings in the Gospels	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
DD14		Sometimes I wonder if the Gospels should be more prominent in my life		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Indicators for respondents as agents of transformation</b>																				
DD2	These questions are the indicators for respondent's discipleship as agents of transformation	I try to speak with non-Christian friends about Jesus	x	val chi .002 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .001 5x2 .001 lin assoc	val chi .001 5x2 lin assoc	val chi .000 4x3 .001 2x5 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .022 4x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .047 2x2 lin assoc		x	x	x	x	x	
DD12		When I talk with friends about big issues like refugees and asylum seekers I consciously seek to do so from a Gospel-centred perspective	val chi .015 2x2 lin assoc	x	x	x	valchi .000 5x2 lin assoc	val chi .011 4x3 .031 2x5 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x		val chi .002 4x2 lin assoc	val chi .021 3x3 lin assoc	valchi .040 4x2 lin assoc	val chi .007 4x2 lin assoc	x	
DD9	These questions are chosen to investigate respondents' willingness to speak the Gospels	On reflection I do think I could be more active in speaking to others about Jesus.	x	val chi .003 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .003 5x2 .00 2x5 1002 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .003 4x2 .001 2x5 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .025 2x3 no lin assoc	x	x		x	val chi .001 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .005 3x2 lin assoc	
DD15		If I knew more about the Gospels I would feel more confident sharing the story of Jesus with others.	x	val chi .031 3x2 no lin assoc	x	val chi .030 2x2 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		val chi .015 3x3 no lin assoc	x	x	x	val chi .019 2x3 lin assoc	
DD17		Sometimes I ignore opportunities to speak about the Gospels to others	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	val chi .042 4x2 no lin assoc	x	x	
GEI	Gospel Engagement Index	Index comprising DD1, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 19	x	x	x	val chi .000 2x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .005 2x4 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
GDI	Gospels and Discipleship Index	Index comprising DD2, 9, 12, 15, 16 and 22	x	x	x	val chi .000 2x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .000 2x4 lin assoc	x	x	val chi .009 2x4 lin assoc	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
GLI	Gospels and Life Index	Index comprising DD3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 20 and 23	x	val chi .012 3x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .001 2x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .002 2x4 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
GII	Gospels and Issues Index	Index comprising DD3, 5, 12 and 21	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		val chi .034 3x3 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x	
GKI	Gospel Knowledge Index	score on 22 Gospel knowledge questions	x	lin assoc		val chi .001 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .006 2x4 lin assoc		x	val chi .020 2x4	x	val chi .000 3x4							
Identity	Jesus Identity		x	x		val chi .003 2x3 .007 2x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .007 2x4		x	x	x	val chi .045 2x3 lin assoc							
Teaching	Jesus Teaching		x	x		val chi .012 3x3 lin assoc	x	val chi .049 3x3		x	val chi .019 2x3	x	val chi .000 3x3							
Mission	Jesus Mission		x	x		val chi .000 3x4 lin assoc	x	val chi .004 2x4		x	val chi .045 2x4	x	x							
MLD		Index based on nine questions scored for more or less traditional interpretation	x	val chi .000 3x2 lin assoc	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	0	

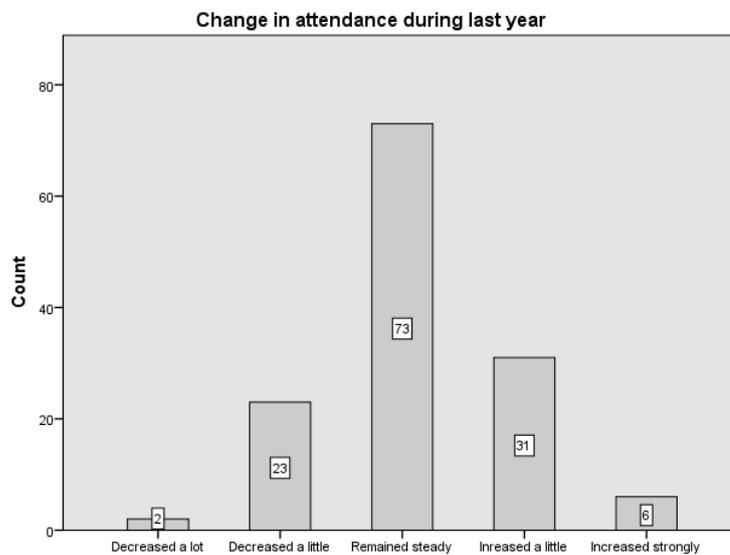
## APPENDIX 8 – CHARTS OF SECTION 1 PROFILE DATA



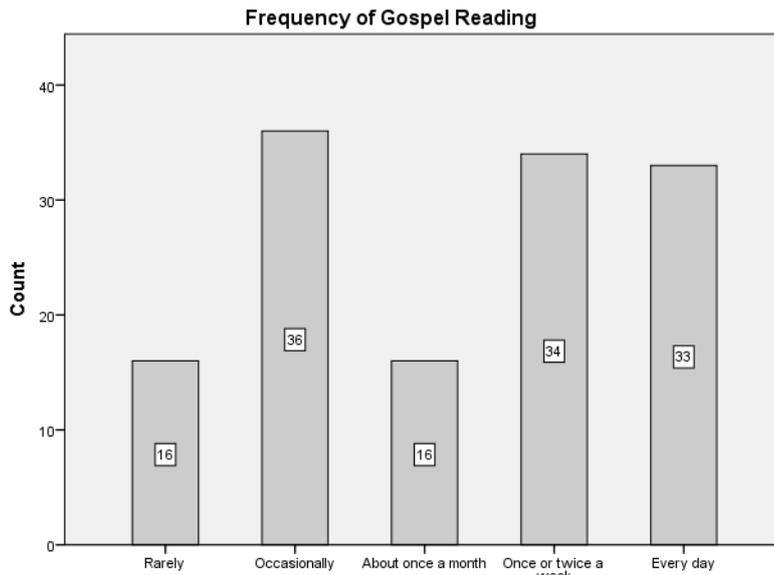
**PD1 - Frequency of church attendance**



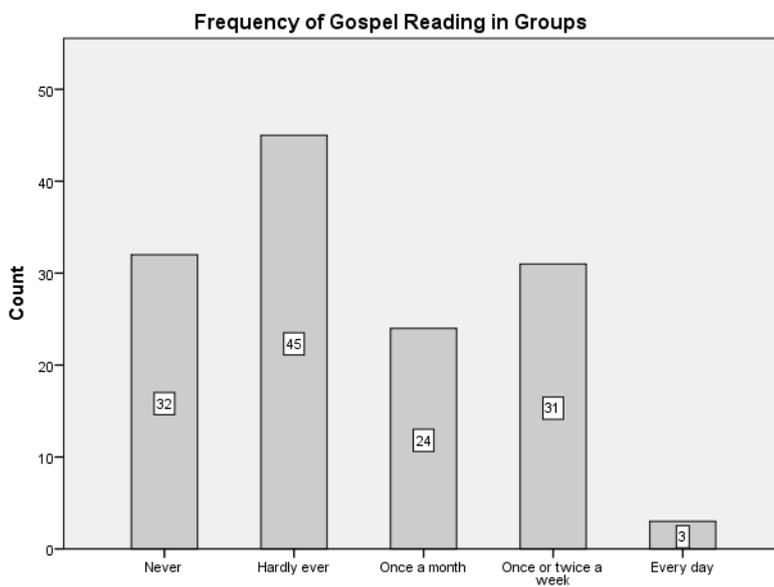
**PD2 - Churchmanship of respondent**



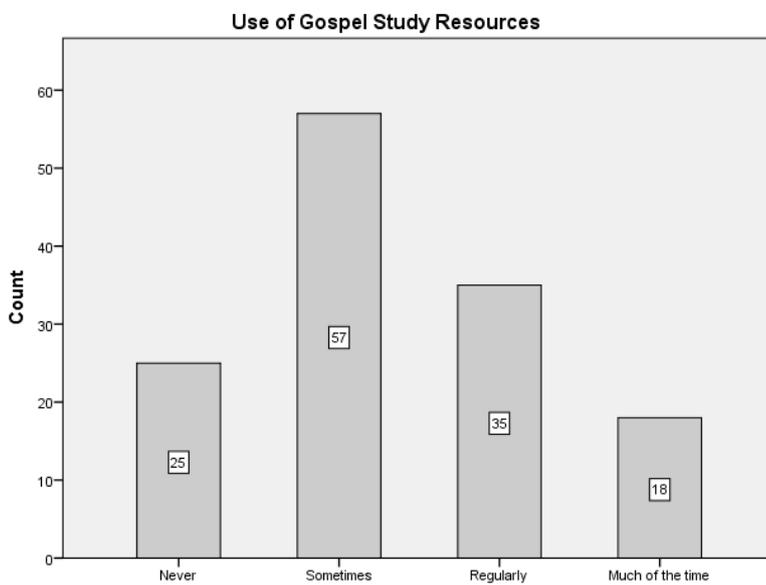
**PD3 - During last year attendance at the church I most often attend**



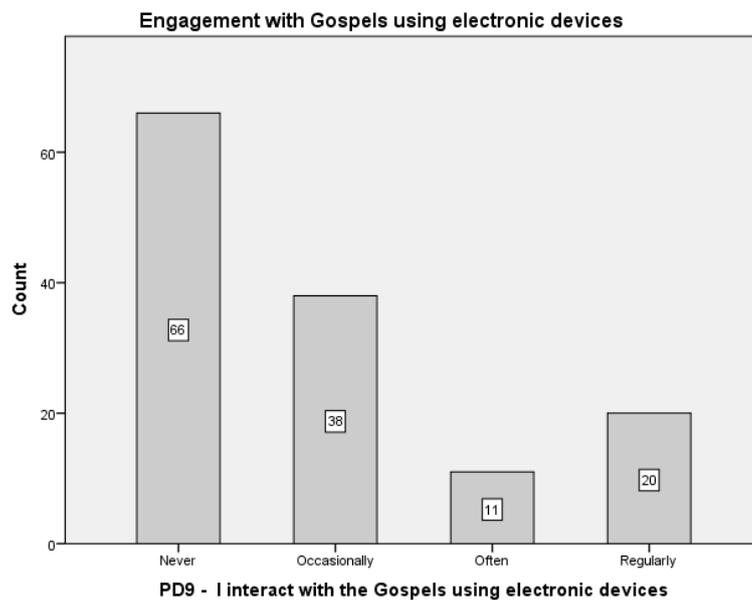
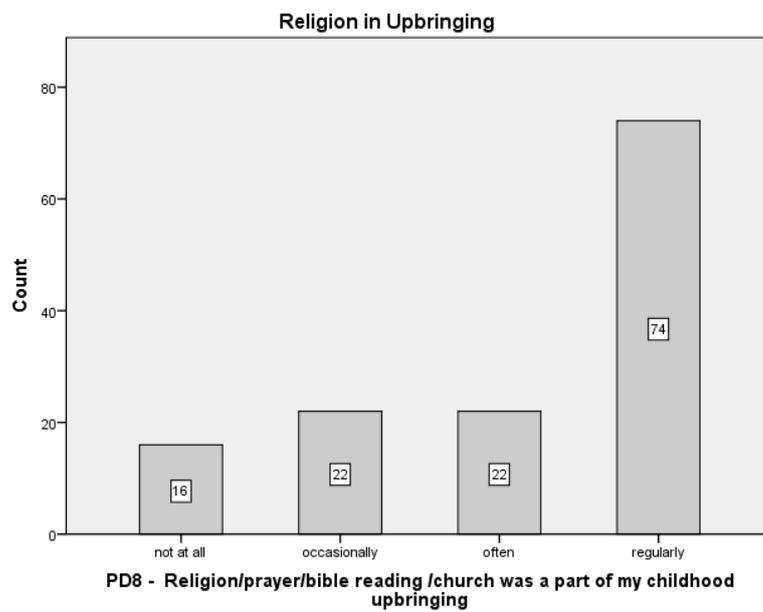
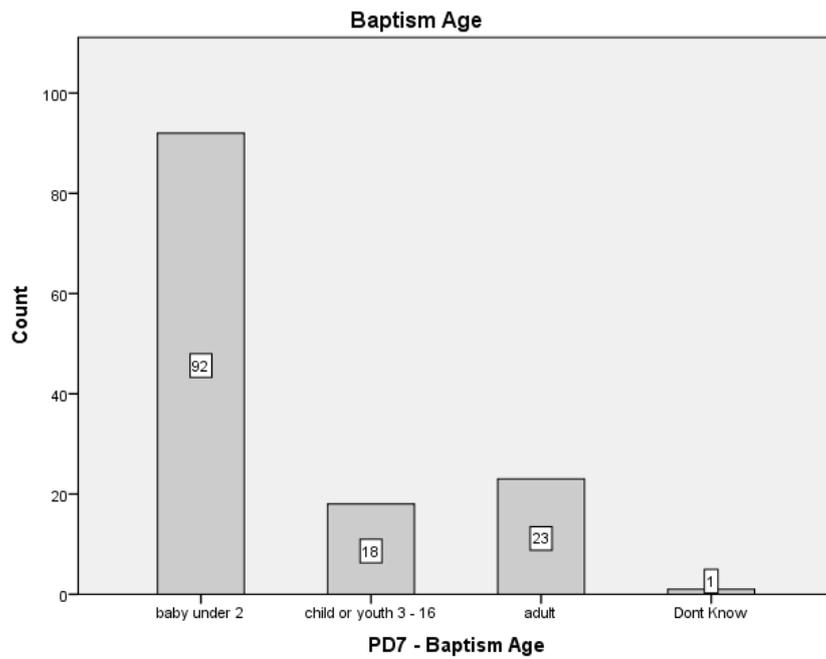
**PD4 - I read the Gospels by myself**

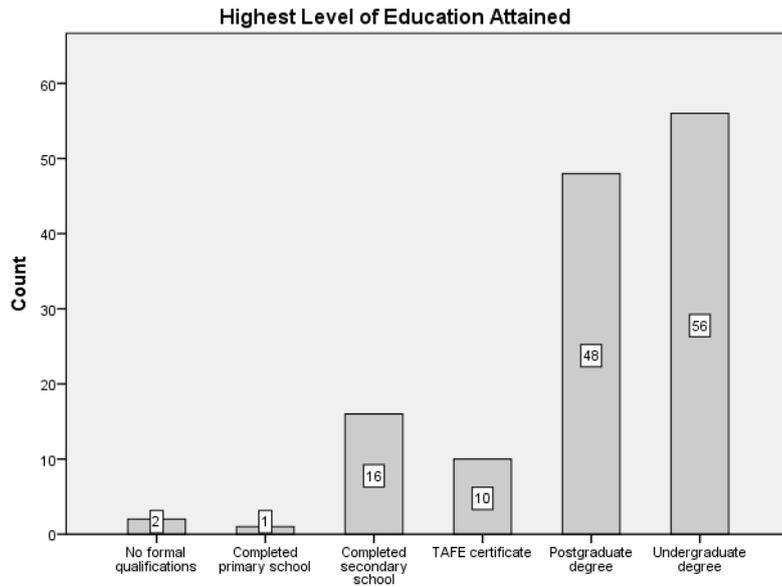


**PD5 - I Read or engage with the Gospel in groups or with others**

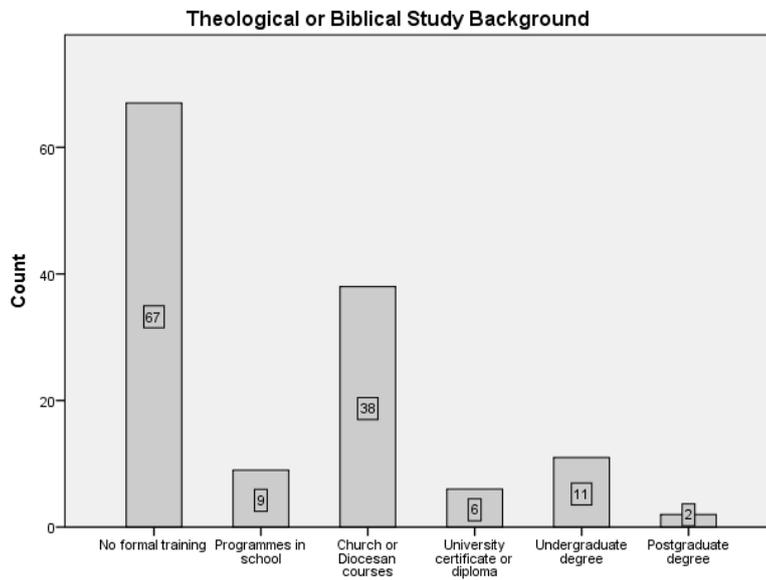


**PD6 - Use of Gospel study resources such as study notes**

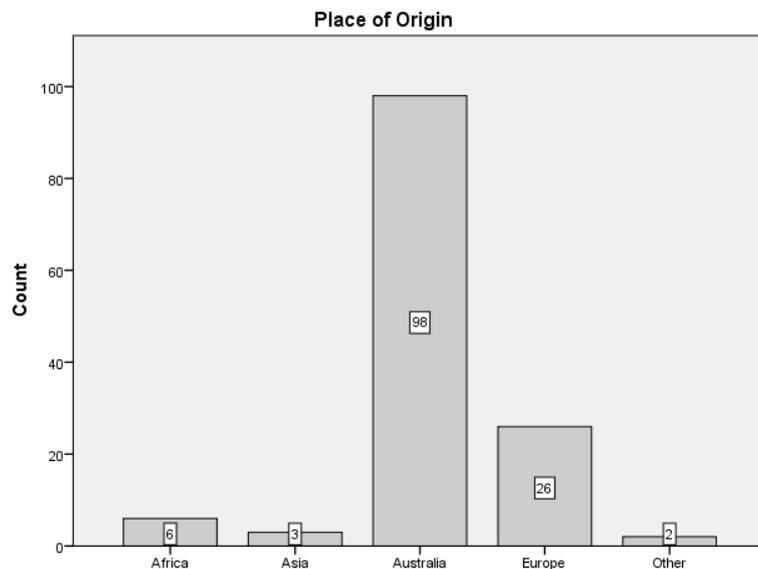




PD10 - Highest level of education



PD11 - Theological or biblical studies undertaken



PD12 - I was born in

