"Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse"

A thesis submitted to Charles Sturt University for the Doctor of Ministry.

Keree Louise Casey (Rev.) BTh, MTh
April 2005
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue to the Dance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Telling and Rites of Passage</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Trust</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical Connection</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Process</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader Landscape</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1:</strong></td>
<td>41-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the Scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Love to Tell the Story; ‘Twill be my Theme in Glory</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative – Story Telling</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Theology – Psychology – Counselling</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical Studies</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Abuse</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist and Liberation Theology</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Psychology</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2:</strong></td>
<td>72-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the Issue Seriously</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Intentionality</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Does What?</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s Doing What?</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission to Speak</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close, but Not Close Enough</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3:

The Gathering of the People of God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Relationship with God and Ourselves</td>
<td>91–111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shall We Dance?</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to Dance</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will be Our Choreographer?</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the Right Beginning</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Dance of Relationship</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personal Dance</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting the Congregational Dance</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once Step Forward – Two Steps Back</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the Tempo of the Dance</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4:

The Gathering of the People of God –

Lament to Hope

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants on the Journey</td>
<td>112–150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the Right Words is Not Always Easy</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personal Dance – Continued</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dance of the Liturgy – Words of Lament and Hope</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Theology and its Song of Lament</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding Harmony to the Song of Lament</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transforming Despair into Hope</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A New Outfit for the Dance – Reclaiming the Sacred Space</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby-Stepping – Developing the “Pastoral Care Web”</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5:

The Service of the Word –

Hearing to Receiving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patience is a Virtue – Possess It if You Can!</td>
<td>151–174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story within the Story</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personal Dance – Continued</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this is the Word of the Lord – Thanks be to God</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Re-Introduction and Re-Connection to the Word</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Reason for a Season</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6:

The Service of the Word – The Response Andreas
Changing the Style and Rhythm of the Dance – Once Again176
Teamwork in the Dance 179
Putting Words into Action 181
Responding to the Changing Direction of the Dance 184
The Rhythm of Creativity 187
The Visual Expression of the Dance 189
Taking a Rest from the Dance 191

Chapter 7:

The Eucharist – Great Prayer of Thanksgiving Pages 197–216
Remembering and Re-membering 198
The Subtlety of the Dance 201
Change Can be Disconcerting 202
A Personal Dance – Continued 204
The Penultimate Dance 206
It is Right to Give our Thanks and Praise 209
The Holy Moment of the Dance 213

Chapter 8:

The Sending Forth of the People of God Pages 217–233
Bleeding and Broken from the Dance 218
So Long and Farewell … 220
A New Dance – A New Dance Partner 221
Who would have Thought It! 222
Preparing for a Change in the Choreography 224
Wounded Healers Don’t Limp – They Dance On! 226
A Slight Sprain, but I can Still Dance! 228
A Personal Dance – Continued 231
What Goes Around – Comes Around 232
Conclusion

Story Telling has a Place of Significance 235
Never Too Busy to Dance the Dance of the Liturgy! 236
The Church Must Listen to its Hurting and Broken People 238
The Final Word 240

Appendices

Appendix 1 – 245
Appendix 2 – 246
Appendix 3 – 259
Appendix 4 – 267

Bibliography

Pages 244–269

Pages 270–275
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 acknowledgement is made in the dissertation. 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.

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Keree Louise Casey
Abstract

Stories are a part of our everyday lived experience. From the stories of our family heritage, through to the stories of the communities in which we live, work and play our lives are impacted by story. Story telling also has a significant history in the Christian tradition. Communities of faith throughout the generations have handed down their stories as a way of maintaining traditions and keeping faith alive. However, there are some stories that the Church would prefer were not told.

Disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse can negatively impact not only an individual, but also a community – including a Christian faith community. The following dissertation "Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse" investigates the significant role story telling plays in the process of transformation/restoration in traumatised communities of faith and how those stories find their voice. Specifically this dissertation investigates the transformation/restoration undertaken by a congregation within the Uniting Church in Australia which had previously been traumatised by the non-sexualised abuse of power by a Ministry Agent. The process of story telling mirrored the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day.

My role as Ministry Agent called into the community of faith of Downtown Uniting Church included assisting the gathered people of God to find a way forward in order to experience restoration/transformation. I was to offer leadership which would find ways in which the community of faith could be encouraged to enter into the journey of healing and forgiveness. My personal experience as a survivor of abuse, my theological training as a Minister of the Word within the Uniting Church in Australia and my
academic speciality of integrating issues of abuse with theology would assist me in my leadership of the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith.

Ultimately, the process of transformation/restoration is defined as the "dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness". This journey mirrors the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord's Day. Through the investigation of the story of the Downtown Uniting Church "Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse" the Church is offered a process through which congregations and individuals that have been negatively impacted by the abuse of power by the Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership can be assisted to find healing and forgiveness.

Beyond the specific process the "dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness" this dissertation also encourages the church to look more intentionally at the training and provision of specialist Ministry Agents who are able to assist traumatised and damaged individuals/communities of faith. The provision of such trained Ministry Agents will not only assist those negatively impacted by the sexual misconduct of their Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership. They will also be able to offer ministry to individuals and congregations negatively impacted by non-sexualised abuse. This dissertation also encourages the church to investigate the creation of guidelines and processes that will assist individuals and communities of faith to speak of their negative experiences. Ultimately, the provision of such Ministry Agents (as well as guidelines, procedures and processes) will encourage the rite of passage that moves those traumatised by the negative experience from victim to survivor. Such provision also validates the contribution story telling and
lament through the process of the “dance of the liturgy — the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness” plays in the ability of individuals and communities of faith to move from being a victim to becoming a survivor. The story telling is not just an account of facts. It is a naming of pain, a cry for mercy, a hopeful act that is directed towards becoming whole. This is all done facing God.
Introduction
Prologue to the Dance

An experience of abuse profoundly affects and impacts a person’s life whether they are female or male, young or old. The impact is so significant that words like shattered and broken are often used to try and describe the effect the abuse has had on the victim. The words “broken glass” used in the title of this dissertation describe the fragility of how it feels to be a victim – the overwhelming sense of personal delicateness, along with the deep realisation of the possibility of being completely crushed and forever broken by the experience. These simple words also point to the delicate nature of pastoral work with an individual or community of faith that has an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

It must be stated that it is not necessarily an easy or simple task to put the broken pieces back together. The words “broken glass” emphasise clearly in this dissertation the need for the Church to be aware of the vulnerability of individuals and communities of faith in these circumstances. These words caution those who are called to minister to these individuals and communities of faith to be aware of the potential hazards of working with a victim/survivor precisely because of their brokenness. The words are also an acknowledgement that it will require skill, care and patience to undertake the task of attempting to repair that which is broken.

The words “angel kisses” indicate the depth of gentleness, sensitivity and respect needed and longed for by the victim/survivor of abuse. They also remind us of the compassion that is experienced in knowing God’s grace. These simple words are also an encouragement to those working with individuals or communities of faith that have an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse to be aware of the significance that their role will have in encouraging and enabling the journey towards
healing and forgiveness. Just as a baby is gently held and kissed so that she/he might learn to respond and feel loved, so too the Church must nurture those of its communities that have been harmed back into a place of safety and trust. It is vitally important that the Church visibly love and support its disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people and/or communities of faith. The Church must model and put into practice the hospitality of Jesus Christ in an effort to encourage its people back into health and wholeness.

It is important to note that in this dissertation the terms used – disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse – encompass not only situations of sexual misconduct (particularly as described under the Uniting Church of Australia Regulations 7.7.5)¹ but also other misuses and abuses of power. The misuse and abuse of power can take many shapes and forms and is not limited to one particular expression.

The misuse and abuse of power within a community of faith can also include such negative experiences as liturgical and/or spiritual abuse. For example the abuse of power may take the form of demeaning, shaming, humiliating and/or embarrassing the congregation and/or individual members from the pulpit or in other liturgical contexts such as prayer meetings or Bible studies. Psychological and/or emotional abuse must also be included as an abuse of pastoral power. That is, such things as diminishing, degrading, shouting, bullying, intimidation, vilification and/or rumour making about a person or persons for whom the Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership has pastoral responsibility are to be understood as manifestation of the misuse and abuse of power.

¹ Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 194.
As stated in my Ethics Proposal approved by Charles Sturt University "[T]his project does not aim to reveal specific and personal details of particular instances of abuse."\(^2\) This dissertation concerns the process of healing and forgiveness (restoration and transformation) undertaken over a specific period of time by the Downtown Uniting Church. This dissertation also focuses on the transformative learning experienced by me in my role as Ministry Agent for this disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. Furthermore, the Regulations of the Uniting Church in Australia (specifically Section 7.7.16) prohibit the release of any details without the prior consent of all parties and/or the discretion of the Moderator. I do not have such consent and have not sought it. The specific details are of less importance than the transformation and restoration experienced by the community of faith.

The primary focus of this dissertation is not to explore and develop liturgical theology, although one might gain that impression from the chapter titles. The primary focus is the transformation of a damaged community of faith and my ministerial practice with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church over a period of six years. This dissertation outlines the process of the journey of healing and forgiveness undertaken by that specific community of faith and illustrates connections between their journey and my own personal journey of healing and forgiveness as a survivor of abuse. It also highlights the significance of the connection between the journey of healing and forgiveness and the shape of the liturgy known as the Service of the Lord’s Day, particularly as it is understood and practised within the Uniting Church in Australia. This dissertation also records my transformative learning as a Ministry Agent both within Downtown Uniting Church and within other personal, professional, pastoral and liturgical experiences.

Story Telling and Rites of Passage

Story telling has a significant history in the Christian tradition. Communities of faith throughout the generations have handed down their stories as a way of maintaining traditions and keeping faith alive. However, in past generations where abuse has been experienced within the community (either secular or ecclesial), the telling of the story of abuse has been discouraged for the sake of social order. Perpetrators, as well as society, have made the victims of abuse very aware of the ramifications of their story being told. In a congregational context of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse the institution, that is, the church (and I refer here to the particular context of the Uniting Church in Australia) via some of its misconduct processes and determinations has also made it clear that the story should not be told, either publicly or more closely amongst the gathered people of God. The conspiracy of silence to protect the interests of the institution has often overwhelmed the importance and necessity of healing and forgiveness.

In the broader context of the community and the Church universal, the threat of further abuse, the fear of isolation and/or rejection and the risk of victims not having their stories believed has meant that throughout the centuries, generations of perpetrators have been able to continue to perpetuate abuse upon individuals and/or communities of faith. When the conspiracy of silence is broken and stories are told, the power of the disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse is diminished and the journey toward healing and forgiveness can be commenced. The Church (which includes the Uniting Church in Australia) must find ways, both pastorally and liturgically, of not

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3 Note: The Uniting Church in Australia does not release the final determinations of Investigation Panels for public scrutiny. The Regulations under “Privacy” 7.7.16 a-f give some indication of the extent of the emphasis on privacy when conducting an investigation. However, the Regulations do not cover the occasions when communities of faith are silenced and prevented from telling their story through the imposition of a confidentiality agreement (by a determination of an Investigation Panel). Confidentiality agreements can be between the Complainant, Respondent, Presbytery and others i.e. Elders etc.
only allowing this journey to commence for individuals and communities of faith but also assisting and encouraging it.

Narrative inquiry is an established qualitative research method in adult learning. It embraces the development of both autobiographical and ethnographic accounts. The method is particularly useful in investigating adult transformation and complements the Christian tradition of story telling as enacted in the Service of the Lord’s Day. It shows the processes of transformative learning within the social, cultural and theological contexts of the narrators.

The Ministry Agent seeking to elicit narratives within a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith works within a pastoral, liturgical and theological framework governed by the Christian story. Care and leadership are expressed by supporting and assisting those exploring their own narratives to place them within that framework. The formational/transformational process of the Service of the Lord’s Day is one of the key tools in this context.

In her article “Theology and Poetics of Testimony”, Rebecca Chopp writes that the “poetics of testimony” is her “way of naming the discursive practices and various voices that seek to describe or name that which rational discourse will not or cannot reveal.” For Chopp, the phrase “poetics of testimony” includes:

discourses – poetry, novels, theory, and theology – that speak of the unspeakable and tell of the suffering and hope of particular communities who have not been authorized to speak.  

The Service of the Lord’s Day also offers a process for expressing testimony, that is, through narrative and poetically. It offers the opportunity for those who have been silenced by their experience of abuse to give voice to their experience in ways that may not speak of the details of that abuse, but rather of the journey of the pain of abuse and the possibility of the hope of survival from the abuse. It redresses injustice in the experience of abuse by honouring unacknowledged accounts offered by individuals and the community of faith. It allows transformation to occur within contexts in which some of the abuse took place without the further humiliation of revisiting the details of that abuse. It uses the framework of the liturgy of the Service of the Lord’s Day to effect the rite of passage from being disempowered to being restored. It offers a transformational journey from abuse towards healing and forgiveness.  

Supporting Chopp’s writing is my own opinion stated previously in my approved Ethics Proposal. I quote

The research method of Narrative Inquiry undertaken in this dissertation is particularly apt in the study of the Downtown Uniting Church because;

- it gives a voice to those who have been silenced by their experience of abuse.
- it redresses injustice in the experience of abuse by honouring the unacknowledged accounts offered by individuals and the community of faith.
- it allows transformation to occur within contexts in which some of the abuse took place.
- it uses the framework of the Liturgy of the Lord’s Day to effect the rite of passage from being disempowered to being restored.”

In my own work with victims of abuse and as a survivor myself the role and significance of story telling as an integral ingredient of what I name the “dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness” can not be overstated. I believe that Chopp’s use and understanding of the term ‘poetics of testimony’ supports and encourages my own thesis concerning the importance of story

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telling as a rite of passage in the journey of healing and forgiveness – the dance of the liturgy. For Chopp

    testimonies ... summon even theory to serve those who suffer and hope, those whose voices testify to survival, those who imagine restoration and transformation.\(^7\)

These words further add support to the place narrative has in the transformation of a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith.

Rites of passage are significant moments in human lives marked in significant ways. A rite of passage is an indication that a process of transformation is taking place. Often this process takes place witnessed by others and in socially recognisable ways. In the protestant Christian liturgical context baptisms, weddings, funerals and confirmation are experiences that are named as rites of passage that also have public liturgical rituals which accompany them. The public liturgical ritual assists the participants in their understanding of the transformation that is taking place.

The decisions made to undertake the rites of passage through the rituals of baptism, weddings, funerals and confirmation are intentional and expressed publicly. They demonstrate a movement of transformation at this particular time of their lives. For example, parents who choose to undertake the baptism of their child have made a conscious decision to raise their child in a Christian home. In addition the parents are willing to make public affirmations of their intention to incorporate the Christian faith in to the upbringing of their child. The rite of passage of baptism is experienced and expressed as an intentional and public moment of transformation where their child is blessed and received into the faith and family of the Christian community.

\(^6\) Ibid.
In the ceremony of marriage, a couple who love each other come together having made the intentional decision to share their lives as husband and wife. They make public promises of love and commitment to each other in front of witnesses. The rite of passage that is marriage is a movement of transformation that takes the individual from being a single person to becoming a married person. Likewise in a funeral, family and friends intentionally gather to mourn the loss of their loved one and to give thanks for their life and the gift of relationship shared with them. This rite of passage transforms a living reciprocal relationship into one where memories are now the precious substance of the relationship.

Through the ritual of confirmation a young person/adult makes a public declaration of faith which names their desire be a follower of Jesus. Assisted by the gathered people of God, the person's previous rite of passage (baptism) is re-affirmed. This particular rite of passage is a tangible expression of a growth in maturity in faith and transforms the one making the declaration into a full member of the Church.

However, rites of passage are not limited to the Christian tradition and are well-documented occurrences within everyday community and family life. In Western cultures, as in Australia, the first day at pre-school or school; getting a Learner Diver's Permit; a first date; a buck's party; or leaving home – all fit into the understanding of what constitutes a rite of passage. In all of these examples the one undertaking the rite of passage has reached a new stage in their personal, social, cultural and/or religious development. For example they are now old enough to go to school; are recognised by law as someone who has reached a level of maturity that will assist them in learning to drive a car; are socially aware of the significance of the relationship of marriage; and are now mature enough to separate themselves from their parents and live
independently of their daily practical care and provide the essentials of living for themselves. Those who are the participants and observers to these rites of passage are aware of the change in status, social identity and self-awareness that is pivotal to this process of transformation.

In the experience of a person who has been abused, there are also moments which can be understood as a rite of passage. It can be in the first time of admitting the abuse (to themselves or others), the first time of telling the story and/or the first time of feeling safe. For a community of faith that has had a traumatic experience in their communal life (such as that of Downtown Uniting Church) there are also moments which mark a rite of passage. The reclaiming of the sacred space, becoming a survivor and being named as healed/transformed are some of the rites of passage which can be named in the journey towards healing and forgiveness for the particular damaged community of faith at Downtown Uniting Church. Ultimately, these separate rites of passage merged into the most significant rite of passage. This movement transformed the congregation (and its individuals) from being and remaining disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused to becoming and being restored.

The rites of passage undertaken by the Downtown Uniting Church and its individuals were expressed in an intentional and unintentional manner. They were also expressed in public and in private contexts. One moment which marked a movement in transformation was the public naming of their pain in the context of a worship service. Another unintentional rite of passage was in the undertaking of a group activity – a particular example being the remodelling of the interior of the church building. At other times something which looked like an intentional ritual expression of a rite of passage was in fact unintentional. For example, a child lighting a candle at the beginning of
worship and then hugging me, the Ministry Agent. Other moments of transformation were shared in private as a small group or alone. Whatever the action, the contribution to the journey of healing and forgiveness was and is none the less significant. In referring to all of these instances the use of the term rite of passage incorporates the formally understood meaning as well as the extended understanding expressed above. In the context of the Downtown Uniting Church I was connecting a psychological, spiritual and social process of restoration in many instances with a formal liturgical ritual. The sacramentality of the transformation came through the ministry of the Ministry Agent, the collaboration and relationship built with the gathered people of God and most importantly, the grace of God.

Rites of passage are both deliberately prepared intentional experiences undertaken with the full knowledge and understanding of the participants as to what they are actually doing, as well as, subtle, inconspicuous and unintentional experiences undertaken by a participant or participants. In the first instance the proposal of marriage and its acceptance, the purchase of a ring to signify a couple’s engagement and the holding of a wedding ceremony marks the intentional rite of passage from being a single person to a married person.

The less intentional and public rite of passage may not necessarily impact the participant/s until a later time or upon reflection. For example, the movement from being and remaining a person debilitated by grief through the death of a spouse to becoming and being a person who is able to envision a future without their beloved. This rite of passage may not be realised on a conscious level at the moment of its happening. However, in hindsight and upon reflection it is possible to realise the where
and when of the rite passage, the enormity of the experience and the impact of it upon the participant.

**Building Trust**

The reality that the Church must face is that there are a number of congregations within and beyond the Uniting Church in Australia that have an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse by either the ordained person (Ministry Agent) or a congregant in a position of leadership. As a result of these situations, congregations have been injured not only emotionally, but also numerically as people have removed themselves from the painful situation because of a loss of trust.

Members of the community of faith who have chosen to remove themselves from their usual congregational context may have done so for a variety of reasons. Some may disbelieve the story of abuse. They are unable to believe that their Ministry Agent would or could be capable of such misconduct as is claimed by the Complainant. Their experience of the particular Ministry Agent does not equate with those who have divulged their experience/s of woundedness; their experience of the Ministry Agent may have only been a positive one. Those claiming this negative experience must therefore be mistaken, if not completely wrong, in their assertions and/or allegations.

Other members of the community of faith may have removed themselves from their usual congregational context because of an experience of disenchantment or dissatisfaction concerning the church’s response to the allegation of misconduct. They

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8 Statistical data on the numbers of congregations or individuals disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by a Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership within the Uniting Church in Australia is not available. In the UCA context details of disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused communities of faith are monitored through the Pastoral Response required under the Regulations. At this time no specific numerical data is kept by either the Synod of New South Wales or the Presbyteries within its bounds. No data has been sought from other Synods. Beyond the life of the UCA, each
might believe the church has acted too slowly in assisting the individual or community of faith deal with the negative impact of the Ministry Agent. Processes and procedures, for these people, may have moved too slowly and through frustration, anger or disenchantment they too might remove themselves from their particular community of faith.

Even more tragically, for others of the faith community the experience might result in a destruction of faith as a result of the misconduct. For these members of the community, their perception of the role and office of Ministry Agent is so profoundly connected to God, that they are unable to separate human failing and sinfulness from the actions of God. Their perceived understanding of the situation is perhaps that God allowed the misuse of power to happen. That is, it was God’s fault.

In contrast to those who choose to leave the community of faith, there are congregants who stay because they do not know what else to do - where would they go? Others might stay out of habit. Their state of being is dulled by something like shock which may or may not be able to be nurtured back to life with care. Others consciously choose to remain within the congregation to tough it out because the community of faith is their home. There is a connection that calls them to look beyond the pain of the immediate experience, beyond the confusion and dislocation, to the possibility of what might be waiting for them in the future. The experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse may profoundly affect them - emotionally, psychologically and spiritually - but they remain committed to the community of God’s people, with hope their only encouragement to keep going on the journey of life and faith. God is there, somewhere.
Working as the Ministry Agent with a community of faith that has been negatively impacted is difficult. Working with a community of faith that has been decimated by the inappropriate actions and behaviour (either sexualised or non-sexualised) of the ordained person or one of its leaders is not only extremely difficult, it is time consuming. Restoration becomes the focus of the community of faith. However, restoration is not limited to only a rebuilding of the pastoral relationship between the Ministry Agent and the congregation. It is also a situation or context of the congregation’s life which is liturgically under-resourced. The Ministry Agent needs creativity and intuition to provide liturgical resources to sustain the process of healing.

As an ordained person whose placement was in such a congregation, I became acutely aware of how under-prepared I was liturgically for such a context. I also became aware that the distressing story would only unfold as I became a trusted person within that faith community. My position of being the ordained person – the Ministry Agent – did not guarantee my automatic acceptance as a trusted person. I discovered that I would have to prove that I could be trusted with their sacred (albeit painful) experience and story. I would have to find a way of being the leader of a congregation of hurting and distrusting people – both children and adults alike. I would have to be prepared to be a willing participant on the journey towards healing and forgiveness. Christ-like love and leadership were not enough. There would need to be evidence of my respect – individually, communally, pastorally and liturgically. It would not be an easy exercise. It would require both pastoral and liturgical sensitivity to establish and build trust.

The church must find ways of assisting the individuals and communities of faith devastated by their negative experience of the Ministry Agent or Lay person in a position of power. Consideration must be given to the provision of specific liturgical
resources being available to assist these individuals and communities of faith. Specialist Ministry Agents must also be trained in order to assist these traumatised individuals and/or communities of faith in their journey towards healing and forgiveness – whether or not the experience has been that of sexual misconduct or indeed the non-sexualised abuse of power.

**Liturgical Connection**

In working with one community of faith for a period of six years – which for this dissertation will be named “Downtown Uniting Church” – I noticed what seemed to be a connection between my own lived experiences of abuse as an individual to that experience of the whole community for whom I was the ordained person. One could argue that this perception of a parallel process is simply projection. However, I undertook the position of Ministry Agent fully aware of my own personal experiences of abuse; my reactions to my abusers; my responses to the Church and the pastoral care I was offered. My personal experiences of abuse rather than being projected onto the community of faith assisted me in my observations and reflections as a pastoral theologian, liturgist and practitioner of congregational ministry.

As I looked at the correlation between my personal experiences and that of the congregation there was in addition I discovered, a further connection. This connection was to the shape of the liturgy – the Service of the Lord’s Day – as it is practised each week. As the process towards healing and forgiveness was undertaken, the journey was shaped by what could be named as the elements of the liturgy which celebrated the ongoing transformation of the people of God into the likeness of Christ. Upon reflection, it appeared possible to me to connect each significant stage of the healing process with the corresponding element of the Service of the Lord’s Day, that is, the
“Gathering of the People of God”, the “Service of the Word”, the “Eucharist” and the “Sending Forth of the People of God”.

Theologically, the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day nurtures the Christian life into its own liturgical shape, that is, the liturgy reflects our life. The word liturgy comes from the Greek word “leitourgia” which means “work of the people.” Both the liturgy and the expression of pastoral care arise out of the community of gathered people. They are completely interconnected at all times.

In the “Introduction” to “A Short Guide to the Service of the Lord’s Day” we are reminded that

[W]hen we cross the threshold into a service of worship, we bring with us the concerns and joys of our lives. In other words, we bring the concerns and joys of the mission field in which we live. The Sunday service does not provide “time out” from our daily mission; liturgy and mission are integrally related.⁹

The stories (both of the Downtown Uniting Church and that of the author) used in this dissertation explain the various movements in the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day and their connection to the “dance of the liturgy” – the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness. They demonstrate in practical terms the inter-connectedness of the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith and the symbol ∞.

In “A Short Guide to the Service of the Lord’s Day: The Service of the Word/Receiving God’s Word” we are told that

[P]eople are shaped by story, by narrative. When we want to get to know a person, we listen to their story. When we hear stories again and again, we are shaped and re-shaped by the story of Jesus, the Incarnate Word; the story of

⁹ Uniting Church in Australia Working Group on Worship, *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2005), 131.
God’s dealings with Israel; and the story of God’s people through history. As we hear this story, we are formed by an alternative perspective on life – the perspective of the gospel.\textsuperscript{10}

It is important to realise that, while experiences of abuse are always similar, they are \textbf{never the same}. Each person is their own unique and individual self with their own personality, experience and response to a unique and particular context. McFadyen notes

\textit{What the reality of abuse actually is for any individual child or adult survivor – how it is experienced, the nature and extent of its effects – relates to a complex interaction of factors which will be unique in every case ... Because the experience of being abused and surviving is idiosyncratic, it is not possible to give any unitary account that will hold true for all survivors.}\textsuperscript{11}

In particular, I must stress that the correlation of experiences between my story and that of the community of faith were \textbf{similar} – never the same.

As human beings we may have each endured an experience of abuse. However, the precise nature of that experience is different from all other such experiences because of our placement in the history of time, context and relationship to our own perpetrators. The same could also be said about our experience of the liturgy. The uniqueness of the experience found in time, context and relationship makes each liturgical experience different. This does not exclude a correlation between an experience of transformation from abuse to dignity with liturgical experiences that take the shape of the Service of the Lord’s Day. I believe that as we recognise and give credence to this sense of uniqueness it is possible to see the relationship between the journey of healing and forgiveness and the shape of the liturgy as it is found in the Service of the Lord’s Day.

\textsuperscript{10} Unititing Church in Australia Working Group on Worship, \textit{Uniting in Worship 2} (The Assembly of the Unititing Church in Australia: Sydney, 2005), 134.


Note: Whilst McFadyen is writing particularly on the issue of sexual abuse his argument also speaks wisely to those individuals and communities of faith disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused through the non-sexualised abuse of power by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership.
Significant moments in our life reflect the shape of the liturgy. Whether it is in our work, relationships or play, we gather (come together), praise, lament and confess (share our joys, sorrows and longing that our lives be lived in fullness), listen for and respond to the Word of God (look for meaning beyond the mundane in our lives), remember and re-member (share in community with others) and are sent forth (continue the journey of life and faith). I maintain that the process that is the journey of healing and forgiveness which reflects the shape of the liturgy is experienced not as a linear process, but more as a continuous and life-long figure-8. I name this process the “dance of the liturgy”.

**Figure 1**
The “dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness” is the process of transformation/restoration undertaken by the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused congregation. It is this process of transformation/restoration which mirrors the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day. In both the framework of the liturgical event and in the steps of the “dance of the liturgy” (transformation/restoration/healing) there is a correspondence.

As individuals and communities we constantly move in and out of the elements that mirror the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day. We gather, we listen, we respond and we move out into God’s world. And then we do it again in another context just as we would change partners in a dance. The diagram of the “dance of the liturgy” not only illustrates the author’s premise that our everyday lives
constantly mirror the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day it also shows the fluidity of the process. It is in the constant movement of the process that transformation/restoration finds its way towards healing and forgiveness. Just as the liturgy constantly transforms/restores the gathered people of God each week, the “dance of the liturgy” transforms and restores the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness.

The symbol \( \infty \) is the mathematical symbol for infinity. This symbol has been chosen specifically to signify that the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – is a life-long process. That is to say, the process is timeless – not limited or constrained by expectations of schedule. It is a process that is at all times contextualised in the time of the people involved.

As Christians, both individuals and communities, we move in and around the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day as we grow, mature, are injured and become restored/transformed. Our lives are not lived in isolation. Rather they are interconnected with those around us (in the places we live, work, play and worship). As such we move (dance the dance of the liturgy) in/out/around and into the various relationships (dances) our whole life. The dance of the liturgy continues into eternity.

Ruth Duck and Patricia Wilson-Kastner remind us in their “Introduction” that “Christian worship is, by nature, Trinitarian… because it grows out of and renews the church’s relationship with the God made known in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.”

That is, those who participate in worship are restored and transformed through their relationship with the Triune God.

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The life of the Triune God is described as a dance itself. This dance of "perichoresis" describes the inner life of the Trinity: three persons relating with each other. This relational model of God is mirrored in God's relationship with humanity and in the dance of the Christian Life, of Christian people in relationship with God, with each other and with God's creation. The perichoretic model of the Trinity expresses the movement of God's people towards restoration/transformation with God, in Christ Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Catherine LaCugna\textsuperscript{13} reminds us that the translation of perichoresis as 'the divine dance' is an effective metaphor for the being and interaction of the Trinity. The language of "inclusiveness, community, and freedom"\textsuperscript{14} speaks profoundly to a broken and battered community of faith. The welcome of inclusiveness, the warmth of community and the freedom to worship as the gathered people of God – loved by God no matter what – assists those disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused in their journey of restoration/transformation. The 'divine dance' encourages the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – to continue. It is a life long dance with the Triune God.

One way of characterising the pastoral situation of the Downtown Uniting Church (that is, the movement of a broken, scattered and traumatised people to becoming those who were ultimately restored and transformed) uses the idea of the dance of the liturgy: a ritualised movement which progresses in the shape of the liturgy of the Service of Lord's Day. For the people of Downtown Uniting Church, the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness was parallel to the journey towards restoration and transformation in the Triune God that the liturgy fosters and effects.

As I undertook a ministry of healing and restoration with Downtown Uniting Church which experienced abuse – in this instance, a non-sexualised abuse of power – I focussed strongly on intentional pastoral care and offering context-sensitive liturgies. These liturgies were intended to name the pain of the community (in varying degrees and ways) and offer the possibility of a journey beyond the pain towards healing and forgiveness. In the offering of intentional pastoral care every opportunity was given for people to tell their stories (if they chose to) both individually and in smaller group settings. As the liturgy each Sunday reinforced the community's desire to be and become a safe place, people felt more able to speak about how the experience had affected their lives and faith and what made them leave, stay or return to the community of faith. The whole of the community of faith, both adults and children alike, were invited to share in various parts of the presentation of the liturgy, thus offering a sense of ownership amongst the gathered people of God.

In re-telling the story of Downtown Uniting Church in conjunction with telling part of my personal story I will show the value of this connection to my role as Ministry Agent. I will demonstrate that this connection does not take away anything from the story of the congregation. As I re-tell some of the stories of the journey of healing and forgiveness of Downtown Uniting Church, I will show how the shape of the liturgy is connected to them and model some practical and liturgical resources for use in a community that has been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused. By recognising story telling as a rite of passage, I will show how this was and can be undertaken with a negatively impacted community of faith.

14 ibid., 273.
In the re-telling of the community narrative (that is, their story), it must be noted and remembered that it is out of my re-telling and reflection on my being a Ministry Agent that there came my understanding and appreciation of and for transformative learning in ministry. That is to say, through my participation and leadership of the community of faith in the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – I have been able to reflect and learn from our journey together.

The process of transformation undertaken by the people of the Downtown Uniting Church not only altered their perception of themselves as a gathered people of God, but also influenced how I offer ministry. As Ministry Agent I can never have access to the complete congregational story. I have only been a companion on the journey towards healing and forgiveness.

**Institutional Process**

I now intend to provide important information about the ecclesial context in which this dissertation project is located. The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people are made in the image of God, and as such we accept every individual regardless of race, age, creed or gender. As a Christian community we believe that God reached out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other shall express love and commitment and not be abused. As a community of faith we are committed to providing a place in society where human beings can explore what it means to be made in the image of God. As an expression of this commitment, the Uniting Church in Australia recognises its responsibility to provide worshipping and pastoral communities that are free from abuse. We seek to provide a safe environment for all people to explore and express their faith in Jesus Christ.  

By means of its "Regulations" the institutional church (UCA) has procedures in place whereby matters of misconduct (particularly sexual) can be appropriately and significantly dealt with and addressed. Through the various state Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committees, Committees for Discipline, Committees for Counselling and Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees, matters of misconduct are addressed with specific focus given to the Complainant (the person making the complaint) and the Respondent (the person against whom the complaint is made).

However, when the complaint is based upon non-sexualised misconduct which affects the gathered people of God, the church is far less organised and prepared in its response.\(^{16}\) So often, communities of faith, where there has been an experience of the abuse of power amongst its gathered people, are the forgotten parties. The church currently finds itself in unknown territory unable to offer substantial assistance to congregations that are hurting.

When the negative experience is between one individual and another or an individual and multiple others, congregations struggle to comprehend and come to terms with the significance of what is happening for those people and themselves. The Synod has procedures and practices which can be undertaken\(^{17}\) in order to debrief the community of faith and where possible, address and answer any questions regarding the concerns of the congregation. The focus, however, is on the process; addressing the issues, answering questions concerning the process of investigation, sharing information regarding the implementation of a pastoral plan and taking into consideration the issue of confidentiality.

\(^{16}\) This discussion will be addressed further in the chapter "Taking the Issue Seriously" and the specific discussion on the Code of Ethics.

\(^{17}\) The Synod of NSW Training Officer (Misconduct Awareness) has prepared a programme of training - "Congregational Healing" - modelled on the work of Rev. Marie Fortune and the Right Rev. Chilton Knudsen, Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Maine USA. This programme of training prepares trauma debriefing teams from within the Synod of NSW and its Presbyteries. This training is not specialized or
Confidentiality is an issue that confronts the church wherever and whenever experiences of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse occur within its communities. However, confidentiality can often be confused with secrecy. A secret is "done, made, or conducted without the knowledge of others"[18]; that is, it is not to be shared, whatsoever. McFadyen notes

"[T]hose party to a secret are drawn into a closed circle of meaning which others are prevented from entering by the boundaries of hidden information...Secrecy is designed to prevent others becoming aware of the information ... A situation of secrecy usually involves collusion to restrict shared knowledge and understanding from wider public access."[19]

Confidentiality within the church in a context of abuse requires the parties to keep certain information in confidence, that is, between themselves. However, confidentiality does allow room for a sharing of information outside the specific context.

Understanding the difference between secrecy and confidentiality is at times difficult, especially in the church culture. The confusion between the two words leads people to become angry, frustrated and at times emotional as they try to come to terms with what the church expects of them. Questions arise such as "what can I say?"; "who can I tell?"; "what will you tell the congregation?" and "why can’t I say anything?" These are all reasonable questions and should be answered. The difficulty becomes even more exacerbated when those given the task of oversight of investigation processes fail themselves to comprehend the difference in meaning between confidentiality and secrecy. The church must assist its investigation panels to come to terms with the difference in definition between these two words.

[18] A. Delbridge, et al., The Concise Macquarie Dictionary (Lane Cove: Macquarie Library, 1997), 1149. Note: The Regulations in 7.7.16 (a)-(f) specifically addresses privacy. The Code of Ethics in 3.6 (a)-(f) addresses confidentiality. Neither document addresses secrecy or the current NSW Privacy Legislation and/or the impact on church governance and pastoral implications.
In the context of Downtown Uniting Church the Elders/Leaders were held to the conditions of a Confidentiality Agreement which meant that they were not able to share any information about the complaint or the process the church was undertaking with the wider community of faith. This meant that the negative experience of the congregation was further impacted by a misrepresentation of the word confidential. The Elders/Leaders were in fact bound by secrecy and forbidden to speak about the matter with other members of the congregation. Rather than assist the process of healing and restoration, the Presbytery (which imposed the Confidentiality Agreement) perpetuated further abuse upon the Elders/Leaders and the wider community of Downtown Uniting Church. The priority of ‘keeping things quiet’ was chosen at the cost of allowing those in pain to have their voices (questions and concerns) heard in an appropriate manner.

Congregations that have been required by the church not to tell their stories – even amongst their own congregants – deteriorate emotionally and spiritually as well as communally. Not having the ability or even the permission to tell their corporate and individual experiences of pain or to work it through and try and make sense of their situation/s only reinforces the community’s state of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The community is rendered powerless; it fragments, and ultimately has the possibility of even disintegrating because the journey towards healing and forgiveness is unable to be undertaken. There is nowhere to go. Pastoral and liturgical leadership needs to prevent the need for confidentiality from becoming a means of increasing the gathered people’s distress.

In the re-telling of the stories, individuals and communities of faith are set free from the shackles of oppression that perpetuate their experience of disempowerment,

disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The manner in which people are welcomed into the community at the Sunday service, through to the way in which they are sent out to be the people of God in the wider community, will impact the community or individual’s ability to undertake the journey towards healing and forgiveness.

**Forgiveness**

Forgiveness of wrongdoing is a fundamental expectation of the Church. It is part of the core values of Christian doctrine and belief. However, when forgiveness is understood principally to be an act or action to be undertaken by the one who was sinned against, questions arise for those who have a lived experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. “Why is it our responsibility?” “What about the offender’s accountability, remorse and repentance?” When the Church expects the one sinned against to bear the major responsibility in reconciling by “doing the forgiving”, the abuse continues to be perpetuated. When the offender does not recognise his or her accountability or show remorse and repentance, the abuse also continues to be perpetuated. However, when forgiveness is understood to be neither an act nor an action but rather “an experience of grace which invites all into the wholeness of life”\(^{20}\), those offended against are able to move forward in the journey of healing and forgiveness. The expectation is removed from the one offended against to make sure something is done about doing (giving) forgiveness. With or without the offender’s accountability, remorse or repentance, the journey towards healing and forgiveness can still be undertaken by both the individual and the community that has experienced disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

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**Broader Landscape**

In undertaking the writing of this dissertation I am very aware of my own personal, theological and cultural predisposition. I am a person with a lived experience of abuse who is also an Anglo-Celtic, middle class, middle aged, lone parent, feminist, ordained woman! My perspectives and opinions have been informed by my lived experiences as well as my academic study and my day-to-day congregational work. I am also aware that the topic of abuse (in all its forms) in the context of the Church is both unpleasant and uncomfortable for its members and sensational to the wider community. It is not my intention to sensationalise any of the subject matter in this written material. Rather, I desire that people be encouraged to look at the possibilities of how the liturgy can inform and support the way in which we offer ministry to hurting congregations.

The research data for this dissertation has been collected over six years of working with a specific congregation with a lived experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse through its relationship with a Ministry Agent. The research method is a narrative inquiry which includes theological reflection and interpretation for pastoral action. Hard copies and data copies of all worship services as well as all relevant correspondence prepared as Ministry Agent have been faithfully maintained and remain unaltered. The community of faith is fully aware that as I wrote about my learning as Ministry Agent amongst them, I would make observations about their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse and their journey towards healing and forgiveness. In the exposition of the journey, the focus of my writing will concentrate on the place of story telling (narrative) and the process/journey of healing and forgiveness and its connectedness to the shape of the liturgy, that is, the Service of the Lord’s Day, rather than on any specific congregational or personal experiences of abuse.
The manner in which the information for this dissertation has been gathered has been, and will remain at all times, respectful of people’s privacy. The manner in which the story of the congregation of Downtown Uniting Church will be reflected upon in this dissertation will not only respect the privacy of the members of the gathered community, but also that of any Ministry Agent.

The methodology for the writing of this dissertation is layered. One might use the metaphor of an onion and the peeling of it – layer by layer. The processes of narrative inquiry and action research allow me to move in and out of and backwards and forwards through the story telling spaces – that is, the personal and institutional, as well as the congregational stories. Starting from the outside, that is, my personal experience, and peeling back the layers, I will reflect on and theorise about issues of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse which concern the institutional Church (specifically, the Uniting Church in Australia, New South Wales Synod). I will look at the Church’s understanding of forgiveness and healing and how this understanding impacts upon disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused individuals and/or communities of faith. I will interweave stories, both personal (mine) and congregational and investigate how they correlate with each other. I will pay attention to the transformation in both my story and that of the gathered people of God and how this transformation mirrors the liturgical process, that is, the Service of the Lord’s Day. I will reveal, layer by layer, the journey of healing and forgiveness which takes its shape as the Dance of the Liturgy, and which ultimately influences and informs our journey of life and faith. Diagrammatically the process and methodology can be seen as follows:
"Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse" is about my transformative learning as a Ministry Agent and practitioner. This learning has been impacted upon and informed by my personal experiences as a survivor of abuse; as a member and ordained Ministry Agent of the Uniting Church in Australia; and as a practitioner among the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church – a community of faithful people who once had an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

This document is offered to the Uniting Church in Australia; specifically the New South Wales Synod, the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee, the Committee for
Discipline, the Committee for Counselling, the Moderator, the General Secretary of the Synod, the Board of Education, Presbyteries and Presbytery Ministers. It is also offered to practitioners (both lay and ordained) who will be responsible for leading disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused communities of faith in their journey towards healing and forgiveness.

The congregation of people with whom I commenced the journey of healing and forgiveness – Downtown Uniting Church – was a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community. They were dismayed and disillusioned with the institutional church and its processes. Six years since the commencement of my ministry with them the congregation has experienced significant restoration and is now functioning and worshipping like a colloquially ‘normal congregation’.

One might ask the question “Is there such a thing as a normal congregation?” My response would be a simple “Yes.” By using the term ‘normal congregation’, I am referring to the majority of congregations that have not been damaged by an experience of the abuse of power – in whatever form that might take – either sexual misconduct or the non-sexualised misconduct by the Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership.

Although the community of faith with whom I shared the journey of healing and forgiveness now responds very differently to any representative of the church from the way in which they did when I first joined them six years ago, they will carry their experience of pain with them for the rest of their worshipping lives. Some of the original gathered community of faith have left the institutional church. Some have changed denominations in an effort to distance themselves from the experience. Others
have lived through the experience and ultimately felt that they have received the blessing which allows them to move on to other communities of faith. Others have remained within the worshipping community that continues to be home. Whether still physically members of the particular gathered community, all will take their experience (as members of that particular community of faith) with them as part of their sacred story in their journey of life and faith.
Setting the Scene
I Love to Tell the Story; ‘Twill be my Theme in Glory”

In its most basic form narrative can be defined simply, as story. More fully defined it is “a story of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious”. Historically, and in practice, Christianity is based on the re-telling of the stories of the tradition through the words of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) and the New Testament. The words of the Scriptures, once gathered by the passing on of stories via oral tradition, are brought to life in the modern context, again and again, by the use of modern oral tradition via Sunday School lessons, Religious Education classes, sermons, Bible Studies and devotions, as well as in many other varying and creative ways.

In the theological academic world, the use of narrative is strongly embraced within the fields of History, Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Pastoral Theology and Psychology. The use of narrative within the field of Pastoral Theology has broadened its academic usefulness with the possibility existing of being able to “offer a conceptual bridge across the separation between the classical and practical disciplines of theological study.”

Anton Boisen’s use of the metaphor “living human documents” in his work in developing Clinical Pastoral Education (as quoted in Scalise), speaks clearly of the place and value of narrative in the field of Pastoral Theology, Counselling and Psychology.

Human beings naturally tell stories to describe their experiences. What some philosophers and theologians categorize as “the narrative quality of experience” implies that human nature is essentially characterized by storytelling. The

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22 A. Delbridge, et.al., The Concise Macquarie Dictionary (Lane Cove: Macquarie Library, 1997), 1271.
24 ibid.
25 ibid., 92.
claim is that human experience is inherently narrative; experience without a story becomes less human. For example, each person possesses a “life story”, no matter how tragic, fraught with contradiction, or even meaningless it may seem.26

Narrative research is an acknowledged and indeed valuable research methodology for gathering the story of a particular person and/or community. Scalise supports this premise out of his own experience and academic work when he notes “[T]he power of stories to build bridges between past and present, between speaker and audience, between Christian teaching and ministry practice, has long been evident.”27 More specifically, Gerard Loughlin notes that “[T]he narrative quality of experience may be specific to certain traditions which make story central to their negotiation of the world, as in Christianity.”28

In my personal experience as a survivor of abuse, permission to tell my story was invaluable to my ability to enter into the journey of healing and forgiveness. Narrative inquiry has been no less important in my professional/pastoral experience. As a practitioner, finding a way of giving voice to the story of the community of faith into which I was called as the Ministry Agent was crucial to any process that might lead the people on a journey towards healing and forgiveness. Furthermore, finding a way of giving voice to the story of the community of faith was even more important when attempting to understand and gather the story of the hurting, disempowered and disenfranchised community of faith.

All communities have their own common narrative that shapes, influences, informs and sets them apart from other communities. We, that is, the individual members of those

27 ibid., 106.
28 G. Loughlin, Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 66.
communities, also have our own narratives – our own stories to tell. Our stories are contextual: sometimes shared with others, and at other times, kept more closely guarded, protected and/or private. It is how those stories are invited out of us that offers us freedom in our telling, re-telling, remembering and re-membering. When the narrative (of an individual or community) is valued, that is, held sacred by the one undertaking the listening, there is a new freedom in the telling and re-telling, remembering and re-membering of the narrative. It is not only how stories are received and interpreted, but valued and respected, that gives them meaning beyond the moment of a particular experience.

In the context of a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused congregation as the story unfolds in either one-to-one conversations, group discussions, pastoral interactions or via the liturgical or pastoral context, healing has the opportunity to manifest itself in the lives of individuals and the community of faith. When the story is kept hidden, secreted away, healing is hindered – even prevented – from being experienced by those who need it most. Gerard Loughlin affirms this when he writes “[W]hen the stories that society tells about itself change, so does society”.²⁹ Beyond Loughlin’s assertion, I would maintain that when the narrative of a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith has permission to be told and enabled to be enacted in varying community contexts, the narrative of that community begins to change.

In order to grasp the issues that affect an individual and/or community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse it is helpful to survey a wide range of relevant academic writings. In particular the literature of narrative studies, narrative theology, pastoral theology, psychology, counselling, liturgical

studies, issues of abuse, feminist theology, liberation theology and New Testament
studies are all relevant. This particular and extensive literature is supplemented by the
formal church documents that are the Basis of Union, Regulations, the Code of Ethics
and Ministry Practice, policy documents and procedures of the Uniting Church in
Australia. As this literature is explored an understanding of the place, significance and
contribution of narrative to the journey of healing and forgiveness for congregations
with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse will slowly
emerge.

Narrative – Story Telling

Tell me the old, old story…
I love to tell the story…
... and on the night of his betrayal Jesus took bread, broke it and said ...

The Christian tradition loves a story. Throughout the Bible – from beginning to end –
there are stories of creation and destruction; honour and shame; despair and renewed
hope; journey and discovery; life and death. For a Christian faith is founded on the re-
telling of these stories – especially those concerning the life, death and resurrection of
Jesus Christ. The story of Jesus is a story of love and grace, justice and hope.

Throughout the centuries and across the generations the Church has loved to tell its
story. By means of its prayers, songs, rituals and proclaimed Word (sermons, reflections
and Bible readings), the Church has enacted the story of the Christian tradition in order
that its people would value and own the story, live in hope because of the story and
receive healing and forgiveness through the story.
Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones bring together some of the most significant essays on narrative theology and ethics in their work “Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology”. By their own admission they have chosen the articles because of the ways in which we are convinced they illumine the significance of narrative for theology and ethics (thus providing an answer to the question “why narrative?”); and on the other hand, the tensions and divergences among the essays reveal the continuing importance of asking whether appeals to “narrative” are so diverse that the notion has outlived its usefulness (thus the sceptic continuing to ask “why narrative?”). 30

Hauerwas and Jones encourage the reader to look beyond his or her own personal theological and ethical bias and see narrative from a more expansive range of perspectives.

Miroslav Volf also expands the reader’s understanding of narrative. Through such topics as ‘Distance and Belonging’; ‘Gender Identity’; ‘Oppression and Justice’; ‘Deception and Truth’ Volf tackles the issues surrounding the harmony and embrace of inclusion, as well as the pain and negativity of exclusion of being in community with others. He notes with interest that some of the world communities which once were noted for their inclusion of the other are now in fact exclusive of the other. He notes in his “Introduction” the historical reality of “Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, Muslims, and Jews”31 having lived and worshipped peacefully alongside each other for centuries in Sarajevo. However, that once inclusive narrative of that particular community has altered in the late twentieth century to being one of exclusion.

Volf also notes that some communities which once expressed a negative narrative of exclusion of the other are now in fact voicing their narrative in another way. That is, their narrative has transformed to become one which is now inclusive of the other. Volf

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mentions the fall of the Berlin Wall as a prime example of exclusion of the other being converted to inclusion.\textsuperscript{32}

The significant contribution Volf makes to the discussion on disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse of individuals or communities of faith by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership is in bringing to the fore the reality of the fragility of community life. The inclusion that was once experienced by community members can so easily become collapsed into exclusion through the inappropriate and abusive actions of the once trusted leader of that community. The narrative of the community (consisting of the stories of its individual members as well as its corporate story) once sitting comfortably amongst and around its members (embrace) is shredded by the negative impact of the inappropriate actions of its leader/s. The narrative changes bringing with it heartache and pain (exclusion).

Tyron Inbody in his chapter on 'Revelation and Faith'\textsuperscript{33} makes specific mention of the role of narrative in the theological understanding of 'revelation'. For Inbody, narrative plays a significant part in how Christians encounter God. He maintains "[T]he God the Christian knows is mediated to us through the history of Israel and the story of Jesus embodied in the Scripture and interpreted by the church".\textsuperscript{34} That is, it is through the stories found in Scripture that the Christian is able to recognise God's saving actions in history. However, these stories do not remain in the past. Not only do they remind us of God's presence in the world at that time, they also encourage the Christian to recognise the presence of God in their own time and place and experience of faith.

\textsuperscript{32} ibid., 14-15.
Irene Baird argues for the liberating and rehabilitative potential as well as the healing properties that narrative can offer women. Using a Freirian Liberation Model and a Women's/Feminist Studies Perspectives model, Baird determines that the following themes arise out of the use of narrative:

- the significance of self-exploration replete with ‘yearnings, hurts and hopes’; the importance of dialogue for generating critical thinking; and …getting in touch with one’s reality and finding a ‘voice’ as a liberatory, learning process.  

The potential for the journey of healing to begin and hopefully continue into the future is for the women whose stories have been collected by Baird reiterated and reinforced in their own personal and positive comments on their experience of being introduced to narrative. For example

‘.... I have written down a lot of pain, happiness and hope for the future. I got out a lot of emotions through my writing ... It would also give me hope to read other women's struggles with life who made it and succeeded.’

However, for congregations or individuals with a lived experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, the freedom the Church has to tell its story is at odds with their own personal and corporate experience. Individuals and more specifically faith communities with this traumatic experience have been silenced either subtly or directly by the Church that demands or decrees that their story not be spoken. In the Uniting Church in Australia context, for example, some of the determinations of investigation panels of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee and/or the Committee for Discipline or Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees result in Confidentiality Agreements being put into place between the parties. This means that the narrative of the individual or the community of faith is once again hidden.

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34 ibid., 57.
36 ibid., 108.
Whilst no-one in the church would liken a community of faith’s community-lived experience to that of being incarcerated, the fact that a traumatised congregation does not have the freedom to tell its story of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse (even at times amongst itself) does imply a connection that is disturbing. Pastoral Relations Committees as well as Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committees by way of their investigation panels make determinations which may result in the imposition of Confidentiality Agreements or other determinations which prevent the hurting people from telling their story in public. The community of faith becomes imprisoned in and by their imposed silence. However, the possibility of being able to tell their story through narrative and liturgy can bring a similar hope of freedom and healing to which Baird refers.

Our lives are made up of an abundance of stories whether they are the stories of our families or our individual experiences. For those who choose to believe in God and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there are even the stories of our faith experience. Stromberg argues that it is indeed, “through the use of language in the conversion narrative that the processes of increased commitment and self-transformation take place.”37 Whilst Stromberg is more focussed on self-transformation rather than community transformation, the issue of commitment to the faith experience is one with which the victim/s of an abuse of power – including members of congregations – struggle. The ability to find the language of the story (be it the personal or faith story) does not necessarily or easily, come into being.

Whether we are male, female, young or old; wherever we are and whatever we are doing, our day to day living is surrounded and influenced by stories. Even beyond our

own personal narrative experiences, advertising, art, and literature all influence our perception of what story is and can be, and what it is not. Don Cupitt maintains that “[S]tories are interpretative resources, models and scenarios through which we make sense of what is happening to us and frame our own action.”

Cupitt writes out of his experience as a lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion and covers such topics as “Words and Time”, “The Power of Stories”, “Stories and the Self”, “Histories and Myths”, “Theological Stories” and “Story Anti-story”. His discussion on the direct contrast between the philosophical Logos which is “orderly, direct rational thought and expression” (associated historically with men) and Muthos “... (myth, story) ... associated with narrative, poetry and rhetoric, with the imagination, time and human weakness, with ambiguity, persuasion and seduction” (analogous with women) strikes at the heart of the issue of story telling for individuals and/or congregations such as Downtown Uniting Church. Historically the patriarchal emphasis of the Church has dominated Doctrine and issues of faith. Reason and logic have over-ridden the personal and the narrative in order to privilege the institutional and the edict or creed.

Paul Tillich with the assistance of theological, sociological and philosophical concepts looks at issues relevant to the subject matter at hand. Some of these issues are being and non-being, courage, anxiety, meaninglessness and emptiness. His discussion on these issues speaks with much relevance and poignancy to the issues that face an individual and/or a community of faith wrestling with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Where once there was a sense of belonging, a certainty in the faith that found its expression in the life of the church, following the

39 Ibid., 40.
negative experience which damaged and traumatised the community there is now emptiness, uncertainty, anxiety, isolation, doubt, mistrust, anger, despair and even, meaningfulness. The sense of isolation, emptiness and meaningfulness are further exacerbated by the inability, individually or corporately, to tell the story.

When a community of faith or an individual begins to question their place amongst the wider gathered people (that is, the Church), then it also follows that questions about the core of its being – God – will also arise. Tillich observes that “[T]he anxiety of meaningfulness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings.” Accompanying this meaningfulness is emptiness.

Tillich also observes that

[T]he anxiety of emptiness is aroused by the threat of non-being to the special contents of the spiritual life. A belief breaks down through external events or inner processes: one is cut off from creative participation in a sphere of culture, one feels frustrated about something which one had passionately affirmed, one is driven from devotion to one object to devotion to another and again on to another, because the meaning of each of them vanishes and the creative eros is transformed into indifference or aversion.

Narrative is at the heart of what it means to be the Church. The story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is where the Church finds its meaning. Narrative is also integral to the journey of faith. As a people of faith we continue to tell, not only the Jesus story, we tell our own story in relation to our experience of faith. If the institutional Church is to be authentic to its core beliefs, then it must actively participate in the journey of healing and forgiveness alongside its communities and individuals. It must provide ways, both pastorally and liturgically, wherein the story can be told. Telling the story of an individual or community of faith traumatised and damaged by an abuse of power is more than using words in a logical sequence. Telling the story

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40 ibid.
42 ibid.
involves reflection and intuition as well as anecdotes and explanations. Telling the story is not only about explanation, but also involves communication.

Communication is a key issue in the life of the Church and one that so often fails despite best intentions. Rex Hunt determines that communication is “about responding to experience, the sharing of meanings, interaction and relationships. For behind all the models used to describe communication lie models of human contact – community.”

How the Church chooses to respond to the experience of its communities of faith with its hurting and broken individuals will determine not only the future strength of community, but also the possible manner in which the community is able to work through issues of faith and theology.

Hans W. Frei offers a good, although very technical, discussion on the place and role of narrative and theology. Frei, credited for developing the term “realistic narrative”, believes that “it is narrative specificity through which we describe an intentional-agential world and ourselves in it.”

If communities of faith and individuals are to continue to be able to share relationship with the wider Church, then issues of communication, identity, narrative and theology must be addressed – not ignored – by the Church. In looking at the issues of communication and identity, the growing of an understanding of narrative theology becomes very significant indeed. For Frei, narrative theology is integral to the life and witness of faith communities. He asserts that

the meaning of that term in the context of the self description of the Christian community is that we are specified by relation to its particular narrative story

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and by our conceptual redescription of it in belief and life, not by equality of "narrativity" inherent in our picture of self, world, and transcendence at large.\(^{45}\) Christian tradition, as well as personal faith experience, requires that we connect our own personal story to the God-story. It is through this inter-connectedness that we are able to discern our relationship with the Divine and co-exist among the saints of the Church.

John Shea maintains "[S]tories can be funny or sad, despairing or hopeful, noble or degrading, tragic or comic, trivial or monumental, central to a whole culture or private to the soul of an individual."\(^{46}\) As individuals or communities of faith remember the past, live the present and look to the future, the possibility of healing and forgiveness becomes more real each time their story is enacted or told. As individuals or communities of faith take the risk to name the pain of their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, they are also empowered to name the shame and anger which accompanies the realisation of the injustice of their experience.\(^{47}\)

However, when looking at the narrative of an individual or a community of faith, it is easy to restrict our interpretation and re-telling of the story to only that of the experiences of the adults who have been impacted upon by the painful experience. It is necessary for the Church to also realise and respond to the children who are an integral part of our faith communities and as such, are also affected by the issues surrounding any experience of the abuse of power which face the whole of the gathered community. Susan Engel looks at the way narrative influences the worldview of children. Just as the lives of adults are surrounded by stories, so too are the lives of children. Whilst looking...


at the place of narrative in the lives of children, Engel's primary focus lies mainly with the stories that children read and write. However, her contribution to the academic discussion surrounding communities of faith and individuals that have been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused is that she reminds us of the significant place and role that narrative has in the life of a child.

The adult population of a negatively impacted congregation longs to have their stories told and heard by the institution. So do our children. However, children and young people are far less vocal about their desire (or need) to be heard. Whilst the adult members of the congregation are dealing with issues of shame (how could this happen to us?); guilt (why did we let this happen to us?); and trust (will this happen again?); children struggle to find the words to describe how they are feeling. Children may not have the developed verbal skills or the place in the community which allows them permission to interrupt the introspection of the adult population of their community of faith. It is essential that the adult population within the community of faith are assisted (by the church) to realise the significance of how they model the telling of their stories in order to encourage the children to tell their stories in the most comfortable, safe and appropriate manner (and environment) available to them. Trust is not only an issue for adults; it is significant in the development of children as well.

**Pastoral Theology – Psychology – Counselling**

The following section of this dissertation considers a range of literature which addresses the ways in which Pastoral theology, psychology and counselling relate to the experiences of a community of faith with an experience of abuse and how the telling of stories is recognised in these disciplines. Eugene King maintains that “experience can
only be studied in its expression. And when interest shifts to an investigation of the
expression of experience, story and narrative come to the surface.\(^{48}\)

Paying attention to the narrative, that is, the story, allows for the possibility that
learning and maturity might ultimately be experienced, not only by the church
hierarchy, but also by its people. Ignoring and/or denying any opportunity for the story
to be told, heard and experienced brings a negative influence to any attempt to
understand what disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse can mean for an
individual or a community of faith; not only in the present experience, but also in the
future.

Although specifically detailing his private diary and addressing the many different
issues that have affected him personally, Henri Nouwen, an insightful and significant
pastoral theologian writes of some of the heartache of his own personal pain and
struggles of faith. Nouwen offers some profound wisdom when talking about story. For
Nouwen

\[\text{T}\]here are two ways of telling your story. One is to tell it compulsively and
urgently, to keep returning to it because you see your present suffering as the
result of your past experiences. But there is another way. You can tell your story
from the place where it no longer dominates you. You can speak about it with a
certain distance and see it as the way to your present freedom ... It has lost its
weight and can be remembered as God’s way of making you more
compassionate and understanding toward others.\(^{49}\)

Nouwen also encourages the reader “to stay united with the larger body and know that
your journey is made not just for yourself but for all who belong to the body.”\(^{50}\)

Although not specifically addressing the issues surrounding the abuse of power,
Nouwen’s writing speaks profoundly to the Church as a whole in encouraging it to

\(^{49}\) H.J.M. Nouwen, The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey through Anguish to Freedom (New York:
\(^{50}\) ibid., 57.
address the issue of narrative. Only when an individual or a community of faith is given
the opportunity to tell the story of their disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or
abuse can there be any possibility of moving forward to a place of healing and
forgiveness where that story no longer dominates.

Henri Nouwen encourages the Church and its people to do theology out of its
brokenness. This encouragement is vitally relevant to those individuals and
communities of faith wrestling with the issues and experiences of disempowerment,
disenfranchisement and/or abuse. It is not only the responsibility of each individual in
this circumstance to see themselves as a “wounded healer”\textsuperscript{51} it is also imperative that
the institutional church itself recognises its own brokenness. Out of such recognition
can arise the life-giving narrative and liturgical contribution ultimately able to
encourage us all as the gathered people of God.

In contrast to the plain speech of Henri Nouwen, a psychologist, Roy Schafer is very
technical in his discussion on narrative. As a training and supervising analyst, Schafer
writes more for those professionals who use psychoanalysis as a tool of trade. However,
Schafer challenges the reader (and the Church) to think in a more critical manner when
looking at narrative. His chapters “Narratives of the Self” and “Self-deception, Defense,
and Narration”\textsuperscript{52} offer some insight into the analytical understanding of narrative and
how it is used in the particular area of psychoanalysis. His discussion on narrative is
aimed at assisting analysts to understand analyses – how they reveal their life (and
experience) through the words they use in their conversation with their professional, the
manner in which they construct their story, and how they refer to themselves in their

\textsuperscript{51} H.J.M. Nouwen, \textit{The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society} (New York: Doubleday,
1972), xiv.

\textsuperscript{52} R. Schafer, \textit{Retelling a Life: Narration and Dialogue in Psychoanalysis} (New York: Basic, 1992),
Chapters 2 and 3.
story. However, it is also beneficial to the practitioner of ministry, especially those working in communities of faith with hurting, broken and disempowered people. His analytical understanding of narrative is another tool in understanding that there are layers to the stories that people tell and that it takes time, patience, energy and expertise to assist people in the telling of their stories.

If, as a church, we are to continue to encourage individuals and our communities of faith to claim the words of the Basis of Union, that is, that “the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal;”53 then the church must also reflect this belief in its dealings with its individuals and communities of faith that have been negatively impacted and traumatised by its Ministry Agents and/or congregants in positions of leadership. There must be a genuine promise that there is still the possibility of the journey of healing and forgiveness continuing despite the discomfort of telling and hearing the story. Nelson develops this reasoning further saying “[T]he church as a living community is always compelled “to say truly what it stands for” and is unable “to do so otherwise than by telling the story of its life”.”54 And that story telling includes the stories of the faith communities and individuals who have been broken and damaged by a Ministry Agent and/or congregant in a position of leadership.

When congregations and/or individuals are disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused within the Uniting Church then the ethos “and the values under which the Church lives”55 are at put at risk. Issues arise for these individuals which affect their

53 Uniting Church in Australia, Basis of Union (Collingwood: Uniting Education, revised 2001), Paragraph 3.
55 Uniting Church in Australia, Basis of Union (Collingwood: Uniting Education, revised 2001), Regulations 7.7.12 (a). This is a phrase that is used within all of the procedural documents of the UCA Assembly that relate to situations/issues of misconduct and abuse. “Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors in the Uniting Church in Australia (whether in approved placements or not); “Constitution and
understanding of what it means to be part of a Christian community located in a particular place, as well as that of being part of the wider church community. The experience also impacts at an individual level, bringing into question issues of faith (where is God in this experience?), Church (how can this happen within a church community?), Christianity (aren’t Christians “good” people?) and philosophy (what does it all mean?).

Liturgical Studies

The use of narrative, the telling of the story by an individual or community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse is not limited to the context of therapeutic conversation. The gathered community of faith is able to call upon the corporate traditions of the Church to assist them in the telling of their story. These can include not only such things as pastoral care but also Regulations and Code of Ethics. They also include the liturgical tradition.

Through the liturgy, the spoken word is enhanced by the richness of tradition, ritual and practice as the gathered community acknowledges the presence of the Divine amongst them. Saliers reminds us that “[A]ll of us, in one way or another, seek a blessing.” 56 And this is no less true as we gather to be the people of God who celebrate together through our participation in the liturgy. Those whose lives are fractured seek the blessing of wholeness in the liturgy. Saliers believes that

[T]ruth in our inner selves and in our relationships is also necessary to becoming human. To address God is to be addressed by God. So God’s holiness and justice and love illuminate the landscape of human history as well as our own

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Regulations: Uniting Church in Australia”; “Guidelines for Dealing with a Complaint of Sexual Misconduct made against a Lay Staff Person or Voluntary Worker of the Uniting Church in Australia and its Agencies through a Commitment to Working Towards being a Safe Community”; “Pastoral Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Sexual Misconduct at Special Events run by the Uniting Church in Australia”; “Policy for Dealing with a Complain of Sexual Misconduct made against a Member or Adherent of the Uniting Church in Australia”.

personal character. Any genuine sense of truth in our gathered assemblies asks that we give time, place, word, and ritual care to the discovery of the truth about ourselves.\footnote{57}{D.E. Saliers, *Worship Come to its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 51.}

For individuals and communities of faith, enabled and encouraged through narrative to seek the truth about their story "[T]here are things we can do together to restore a sense of hope to our common worship."\footnote{58}{ibid., 82.}

Through his writing, Saliers continues to encourage the Church in its thinking about theology and the liturgy. While exploring topics such as "Liturgy and Theology"; "Liturgy as Prayer"; and "Liturgy in Context"\footnote{59}{D.E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), Parts 1, 2 and 3.} Saliers is constantly asking the institutional Church and its communities of faith, to think more intentionally about the liturgy. He challenges the Church to see itself in the liturgy, in the present here and now, as well as to look to the possibilities it offers in an eschatological sense. Saliers, quoting Joseph Gelineau, says

\cite{60}{[O]nly if we come to the liturgy without hopes or fears, without longings or hunger, will the rites symbolise nothing and remain indifferent or curious ‘objects’. Moreover, people who are not accustomed to poetic, artistic or musical language or symbolic acts among their means of expression and communication find the liturgy like a foreign country whose customs and language are strange to them.}

People closed off from their own lives find themselves displaced in the liturgy. However, individuals and communities of faith struggling emotionally and spiritually because of their traumatic and negative experiences as a result of an abuse of power, need to find their home in the liturgy. When they are only able to talk the language imposed upon them by the expectation that they do not name their pain or tell their story, then they too are in a strange land unable to communicate with themselves or the Church. It is important that the Church continues to recognise that liturgical rites of
passage are often enablers of communication and vehicles of community building; the link between the spoken word and actions which allow people to name their pain.

As mentioned previously, rites of passage are integral to the life of the Christian church. Pickering maintains that “… what might be called personal crises are often at the heart of the rites of passage …” \(^{61}\) Anderson and Foley agree. They note that “it is necessary to dismantle one commonly held presumption about rituals: that tradition and repetition are essential for any authentic definition of ritual.”\(^{62}\) Some rites of passage may be repetitive, for example, our prayers of confession and declaration of forgiveness. Others may be enacted only once (baptism/confirmation) because that is sufficient. However, the rite of passage can also be found in the act of reclaiming the sacred space or in the shaping of a specific liturgy and these

ritual techniques perform many functions. They often emphasise the importance of what is happening to the actor and to other participants. They define social reality. They may encourage the actor to feel that he has changed in some way \(^{63}\)

As participants in the liturgy, the gathered community (made up of individuals) participates in the present whilst remembering the past through the narrative of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Theologically, the Church also believes that Christ is made present in the re-telling of the Gospel story. In the being together comes a sense of solidarity, despite perhaps their different theological perspectives.

Beyond the present, being together there is also the looking forward to the future in an eschatological sense; the looking beyond the now to what might and could be in life and

\(^{60}\) ibid., 139.


\(^{63}\) ibid.
faith. For a damaged and hurting individual and/or community of faith, hope is something with which they share a tenuous relationship. If the Uniting Church in Australia is to be true to its desire to be “a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal”,\(^\text{64}\) then it must assist its people to find the hope when at times it is lost. The church must enable the telling of the painful sacred story by the individual or community of faith if there is to be a rebirth of hope.

Mark Searle refers to the

sacred stories ... the stories which “lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: they form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly aware” ... “and the mundane stories”

that is, those that relate to the “mundus or world of meaning”.\(^\text{65}\) Whilst agreeing that sometimes the painful sacred story of the individual or community of faith is too deep to be told, it must not be an excuse for the Church to further disempower, disenfranchise and/or abuse its broken and hurting people. The liturgical expression of the Christian narrative can give voice to a story of pain, when words are too hard to find. Communities of faith and individuals can be empowered through the creative expression of the liturgy so that their distress can be known to exist and be acknowledged even when it may not be articulated in detail.

**Issues of Abuse**

In addressing issues of abuse, whether perpetrated in communities of faith or beyond in the wider community, it is necessary to understand how abuse can be and is defined. Here the work of the “Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project” specifically helps the wider Church to understand issues of domestic violence and

\(^{64}\) Uniting Church in Australia, *Basis of Union* (Collingwood: Uniting Education, revised 2001), Paragraph 3.

abuse. Understanding the cycle of violence and the specific definitions of abuse (sexual, psychological, social, financial, spiritual, physical and emotional) assists the Church to take up the challenge to think theologically about these issues. It also assists in reflecting upon what must also be taken into consideration when dealing with an individual and/or a community of faith that has been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused.

Statistically speaking, one in four women has a lived experience of abuse and more often than not, they will not tell anyone about it. This is an important statistic for the institutional Church as “61% of attenders are female”. For women (and men), the previously mentioned issues of shame, anger, forgiveness and trust all impact on the victim. Disclosure of the event is threatening, difficult and painful. Beyond those issues, the spoken and unspoken desire of the community – both ecclesial and society in general – is that experiences of abuse (either of a sexual or non-sexual nature) should not be spoken of in public. In the ecclesial context ‘publicly’ also includes amongst the gathered people of God. This desire for non-discussion of the sensitive subject of abuse has become intolerable peer pressure on victims to “hold their tongues”. The term ‘conspiracy of silence’ is often used (in victims/survivors groups) to describe the pressure children and young people; women and migrants experience not to speak out about the injustices they have experienced. Whether the injustice and/or abuse has been

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66 ibid., 20-21.
67 See: D. Finkelhor, Sexually Victimised Children (New York: Free Press, 1979). Finkelhor interviewed 1800 College students finding that 19% of the women interviewed reported being sexually abused by an adult or a much older adolescent; R. Goldman, and J. Goldman, “The Prevalence and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse in Australia,” Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and the Family 94. A study of 710 Australian women which indicated that 20% of the women had experienced child sexual abuse involving contact and 27.6% of girls had experienced sexual abuse by persons at least five years older. See Also: P. Parkinson, Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches: Understanding the Issues (Sydney: Aquila Press, 2003). Parkinson quotes studies in the United States of America, Nethelands and Britain noting the various statistics.
experienced through government policy or personal experience, not speaking out has been a clear preference of the wider community. It is no different in the culture of the Church. The challenge for a practitioner working in a community of faith with damaged and hurting people is to find appropriate ways in which voices can be heard and the ‘conspiracy of silence’ resisted.

Marie Fortune notes her awareness “that the church, like all institutions, carries a mentality of institutional self-protection.” Very little within the mindset of the Church has changed since Fortune wrote these words in her groundbreaking research.

However, the Uniting Church in Australia with the assistance of its Regulations works very hard to undertake its best practice in addressing complaints of misconduct—especially sexual misconduct—against those in specified ministries, employed staff, volunteers and adherents. What is not done well is the addressing of the situations of non-sexualised misconduct by its Ministry Agents and/or congregants in positions of leadership that result in the abuse of individuals or communities of faith. Neither is there a cohesive or extensive ability to deal with the aftermath issues, that is, the congregational and individual responses to the abuse and/or the need for liturgical resources in these specific contexts.

Fortune, through her work as Executive Director of the Centre for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle Washington, vigorously and tirelessly holds the Church accountable for its Ministry Agents and their behaviour. Her work on

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domestic violence, as well as sexual misconduct by clergy, has influenced denominational procedures in misconduct throughout the world, including those within the Uniting Church in Australia. Whilst the leading light in the work of understanding and dealing with sexual misconduct by clergy, Marie Fortune is not alone in her quest. Nancy Hopkins and Mark Laaser bring together a number of articles addressing various issues which ultimately affect congregations when misconduct is experienced in their midst. They recognise the usual primary place of the complainant and the respondent in the eyes of the Church. However, they also call the Church to attend to the issues weighing heavily on secondary victims\(^73\); issues such as congregational dynamics, effects on other clergy, the offender’s family and the impact on the wider Church.

As a practitioner, James Poling discusses a number of case studies as he speaks of his own experience as a pastor and professor who came into contact with young women and children – some in his congregation, some who were his students – who had been sexually abused.\(^74\) He is open about his initial naivety on this taboo subject and his inadequate responses to the particular situations. He names the culture of silence under which the Church has operated for centuries when issues of violence and abuse have been raised. He tackles the ethical and theological issues confronting the Church as it continues to struggle with how to be in relationship with individuals and/or communities of faith that have been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused.\(^75\)

There is no doubt that silence is an issue of great magnitude that emerges when working with survivors of abuse. Ruth Wajnryb’s work (whilst dealing particularly with the


\(^75\) See also: N. Ormerod, and T. Ormerod, *When Ministers Sin: Sexual Abuse in the Churches, An Australian Book for the Australian Context* (Alexandria, Millennium Books, 1995). Whilst similar to
aftermath of the Holocaust, its survivors and their families) speaks profoundly to the issue and power of silence. She writes,

"[O]ne difficulty of silence is that it is not a conducive environment for processing trauma or accomplishing healing. A survivor of trauma needs to process the event, make sense of it, and the way to do this is through the representative function of language. Words must be found to represent the event. At the same time, for the survivor to heal, there is a need to break out from the isolation that trauma imposes. This is the communicative or interactive function of language. Clearly, when representation and/or communication is denied, processing and healing are rendered impossibly difficult."

This is no less true than in the context of the church. Individuals and congregations must be assisted to find the words they need to tell their story, both as narrative and through the liturgy. The church (through its Regulations, pastoral strategies and liturgical practice) must also assist the people of its gathered communities to find the words for all the topics human beings find difficult to verbalise. In particular, the church must find ways of empowering and giving permission to its people to talk about sexuality.

Human beings are sexual beings. However, the issues of sexuality and sex are topics commonly avoided by the institutional Church (although some would dispute this and assert that the Church is preoccupied with sex). Lebaczq and Barton bring into the open the issues of sexuality and its expression and ministry. The authors work out of their expertise as ethicists and look at issues ranging from power, boundaries and the pastoral role, through to women in ministry. They also ask the question "What theology informs sexual ethics?" Their framework involves

"... understanding the impact of power and vulnerability on matters of consent, the significance of the trust required in the professional role, and the special vulnerability that attaches to sexuality in our cultural setting."

Poling, Omerod also addresses issues of "Celibacy – Problem or Solution?" chapter 2 and "Not only men abuse – important sub-issues for the Church", chapter 10.


ibid., 114.
Whilst the specific issue of the abuse of power in the context of Downtown Uniting Church was of a non-sexualised nature, the issues of power, boundaries and the pastoral role were of deep significance.

**Feminist and Liberation Theology**

When doing theology I acknowledge my own personal and cultural predispositions as a middle-class, middle aged, Anglo-Celtic, ordained, Australian woman. And as a person who has a lived experience of abuse in her own life, I acknowledge that this personal experience influences my theological and life-view lens as well. That is, I see and attend to the issue of abuse from a personal and lived perspective, as well as a theological and academic one. My theology is developed and informed by who I am as an individual (with her own life experience), as well as someone whose faith is supported by the Christian tradition and finds expression through liberation and feminist theology.

Feminist theology and liberation theology, though emerging from different contexts of experience, resonate deeply at many different levels. Issues of justice and liberation from oppressive structures of violence play a significant role in the development of these theologies. Cheney in her “Introduction” notes that some feminist theologians “want to find ways to read and interpret the Bible that allow them to expose the oppression of women and other peoples as contrary to God’s plans for humanity”79 something with which liberation theology would soundly resonate. When addressing the issues of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse in the experience of individuals and/or communities of faith the statement “[W]e cannot change history at will...we must have visions of the future which can be translated into reality. Otherwise

it would be impossible to change reality speaks loudly to the Church. For
congregations and individuals to be able to look toward a future of dignity within the
Church there must be a vision for the future – something to help bring hope to the
otherwise hopeless experience. Narrative and liturgy can be a means of helping people
give voice to this essential vision.

Liberation theology holds a conviction that God has a preference for the marginalised
within society and that includes those within the institutional Church. Whether
exploring larger community and social contexts or the denominational community of
faith, it is possible to see correlations between the hurting people of both communities.
In the congregational context there are those members of the gathered people of God
who suffer because of a ministerial abuse of power. In the larger context there are others
whose livelihood is undermined by an abuse of economic and/or political power.
Silence and oppression influence the quality of life of both communities.

Disempowerment and disenfranchisement, as well as a lack of resources, affect the
manner in which people are able to live truth-filled lives in both the broader social
context as well in the congregational context. Freire explores the issue in a social
framework as he struggles with the questions of how to construct a new social order
where underprivileged and dispossessed people can live lives of substance and value. Individuals and communities of faith struggle with very similar questions, even in
different circumstances, when they have been traumatised and damaged by an abuse of
power by a Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership.

Feminist theologian Anne Carr maintains that

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[F]eminist scholarship within the Christian context...is unified in its critical perception of sexism as a massive distortion in the historical and theological tradition that systematically denigrates women, overtly or covertly affirms women’s inferiority and subordination to men, and excludes women from full actualisation and participation in the church and society.\textsuperscript{82}

In her seminal work, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza moves beyond Carr and dissects the Church’s traditional understanding of itself, as well as its understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. She insists that the Church look with new eyes at the Scriptures and ultimately critique their historicity and tradition with a “hermeneutic of suspicion”.\textsuperscript{83} Fiorenza critically examines patriarchal values which have historically influenced the thinking of the Church, the way it has presented the Scriptures and the representation of women. Her approach informs and challenges the Church’s desire to assist and ultimately, be in relationship with its broken and damaged individuals and communities of faith who have been abused by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership. Mutuality, respect, reciprocity and equality are not only values held within feminist theology, they are also values that should be strenuously modelled (and upheld) by the hierarchy of the institutional Church.

Anne McGrew Bennett writes

\begin{quote}
[E]arly in the century anthropologists discovered that by painstakingly examining a language they could learn more about the culture of the people who spoke the language than its native speakers could tell them about their beliefs, structures, behaviour.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Bennett was a pioneer amongst Feminist Theologians. Her work in her essay “How Important are Language and Imagery about God? About Ourselves?”\textsuperscript{85} continues to nip at the heels of our understanding of God through the language we use. This is especially

\textsuperscript{81} See: P. Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), Chapters 1 and 3.
\textsuperscript{84} A.McG. Bennett, \textit{From Woman-Pain to Woman-Vision: Writings in Feminist Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 89.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
important when working with individuals and communities of faith who are living with
the experience of being abused.

Feminist Psychology

It must be noted that, in the context of this dissertation, it will be assumed that both men
and women are members of communities of faith that have an experience of
disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. This dissertation will also, as
mentioned before, take into consideration the place of children in those congregations.
Feminist scholars with expertise in Psychology will also assist the Church in
understanding the majority of its congregants – women.

Belenky and her co-authors “examine women’s ways of knowing and describe five
different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about
truth, knowledge and authority.”86 Using a significant number of interviews the authors
explore how families and school influence both positively and negatively the
development of women. The work of Belenky (et al) assists the leadership of the
Church and its members in learning about and understanding women. Why do women
behave in a certain way? Do they think differently to men? If so, why?

Feminist researchers tell us how women have conformed to the expectations of the
patriarchy throughout the centuries, inside and outside the Church. In the academic
world, psychology has often based its interpretations of women and their behaviour
using the behaviour of men in Western cultures as the norm. Carol Gilligan investigates
women and men and their differences through the use of three case studies. Her work is
profound, challenging and insightful. Gilligan’s contribution to the argument of this

86 M.F. Belenky, Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind (New York:
Basic, 1996), 3.
dissertation is in assisting the church to understand better the women who are crucial and valuable members of the gathered people of God.

Gilligan in her ground-breaking work “In a Difference Voice” states that “[C]risis reveals character, says one of the women as she searches for the problem within herself. That crisis also creates character is the essence of a developmental approach.”87 The crisis within the Church of individuals and communities of faith seeking to find ways of telling their story and naming the pain of their disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse will continue until such time as the Church takes seriously the need for the stories to be told, listened to, and enacted through the liturgy. The character of the individuals and/or communities of faith that have lived through the experience of the abuse of power can be enhanced, strengthened and restored with the assistance of the Church.

**Conclusion**

Through the investigative reading of not only the above material, but also other writings not specifically referred to in this chapter,88 the role and significance of narrative has been confirmed in my thinking. The investigative reading has further corroborated my belief that ministry with a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith is a specialist role and requires particular training and study. It has also substantiated my premise that the Church and in particular, the Uniting Church in Australia must work towards providing training for this specialised ministry.

The importance to individuals and communities of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse of being able to tell the story, as

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well as have their stories heard, can not be disguised. The connection of the journey of healing and forgiveness is beginning to take shape. The journey of healing and forgiveness can become part of the lived experience of individuals and communities of faith damaged and traumatised by their Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership. Story telling will be the catalyst for that journey to commence. “Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse” will offer to the Church and its practitioners a lens in which to examine the possibility of what can be achieved when the story is given permission to be told. The dance of the liturgy will be the energy to keep attending to our journeys of life and faith.

88 See: Bibliography
Taking the Issue Seriously
Institutional Intentionality

On June 22, 1977 a new Australian Christian denomination came into being. Three historical denominations joined together to become the Uniting Church in Australia. "The Basis of Union" is the foundational document which facilitated the union of Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches to form the Uniting Church in Australia. This document, grounded in this specific historical event, time and space, brings with it a commitment to the ongoing life of the Christian community that is specifically located in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Through this foundational document the Uniting Church in Australia explicitly acknowledges that it is a living, breathing entity and "that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end". In acknowledging that the church is made up of fallible human beings the Uniting Church in Australia also makes itself vulnerable before God and "prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life".

Recognising that all communities are vulnerable because of the inherent fallibility of their constituents, the Uniting Church in Australia takes the issue of misconduct and abuse very seriously. Through its Constitution and Regulations, the church seeks to give voice to its desire and commitment to being a place of safety and nurture. Through its policies such as the Code of Ethics, it also seeks to live its corporate life aware that there are consequences for the inappropriate actions and behaviour of both its

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89 Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 19-29.
90 ibid., paragraph 18.
91 ibid.
93 Uniting Church in Australia, "Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors in the Uniting Church in Australia (whether in approved placements or not)" in Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 233-242.
Ministers and its Lay People. In order to understand more fully the serious intention the Uniting Church has in dealing with issues of sexual misconduct, I will now detail some of the internal self-adjudicatory process.

Section 7: 7.1.1 – 7.13.1⁹⁴ of the Uniting Church in Australia Regulations 2002 deals specifically with the issue of Church Discipline. Within these pages is outlined the process and method of dealing with matters of misconduct – specifically, sexual misconduct. There are descriptions of the various committees to which any complaints of sexual misconduct are to be referred. Along with the definitions of sexual misconduct there is also a description of those who are covered by the discipline procedures of the church. Beyond Section 7 of the Regulations there are also policies (named below) that are pertinent to the various sections that refer to the members and workers of the church.

- Guidelines for Dealing with a Complaint of Sexual Misconduct made against a Lay Staff Person or Voluntary Worker of the Uniting Church in Australia and its Agencies through a Commitment to Working Towards being a Safe Community, Assembly document, 2000;
- Pastoral Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Sexual Misconduct at Special Events run by the Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly document, 1999;
- Policy for Dealing with a Complaint of Sexual Misconduct made against a Member or Adherent of the Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly document, 2001

These documents all point to the commitment of the church to being open and integrity-filled and to its desire to be a place of safety and nurture for women, men and children, its Lay People and those it ordains, its voluntary workers and those the church employs.

In the area of sexual misconduct, Regulation 7.7.4 specifically and clearly defines how the Uniting Church in Australia defines such behaviour. Sexual Misconduct means:

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⁹⁴ Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 188- 209.
(a) sexual harassment: any unwelcome sexual advance, or unwelcome request for sexual favours to a person, or engagement in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to that person, in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated the person complaining would be offended, humiliated or intimidated;

(b) sexual assault: any unwelcome sexual behaviour that may occur along a continuum from verbal insult to sexual intercourse, that makes a person threatened or afraid;

(c) sexual conduct prohibited by criminal law;

(d) sexualisation of a pastoral relationship: any interaction, consensual or otherwise, in which the Minister engages in sexualised behaviour with or towards a person with whom he or she is in a pastoral relationship, which is in breach of the Code of Ethics.”

Furthermore, Regulation 7.8.2, relating specifically to misconduct matters which may be referred to the Committee for Discipline, states that there are other possible consequences for sexual misconduct if the investigation determines the matter to be of such substance as to warrant the complaint being referred from the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee to the Committee for Discipline. Such matters and determinations may be referred under paragraph 7.8.2 regarding a Minister who has

(a) wilfully and persistently neglected the duties of a Minister;

(b) wilfully failed to comply with any provision of the Constitution, of any Regulation, rule or resolution of the Church or any body of the Church, or any terms of a conciliated outcome agreed under Regulation 7.7.12 (f)(iv), or any lawful direction of the Moderator made pursuant to Regulation 3.5.17(i);

(c) advocated doctrine contrary to that which the Church has determined essential to the faith;

(d) engaged in grave conduct unworthy of a Minister; or

(e) wilfully failed to comply with the principles contained in any Code of Ethics approved by the Assembly or the Assembly Standing Committee; which has been:

(i) referred to it by the Committee for Counselling or the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee; or

(ii) made to it by a member of the Church at the direction of the Standing Committee.

Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group

In living out its undertaking to be open and integrity-filled, especially concerning issues of sexual misconduct, the Uniting Church in Australia commits itself to training those it

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95 Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 193.
identifies as having particular gifts and skills who will be able to assist it in the various committees that oversee any complaints of sexual misconduct. In the Synod of New South Wales, a specific group of people form what is known as the Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group. Each person who participates in the Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group comes either because of their expertise in the issue of sexual misconduct, their specific role in the life of the Synod, the Misconduct procedures and processes and/or their role within a particular area of training. The group consists of, but is not limited to, the Moderator; Associate Secretary: Ministry Oversight; Secretary/Convenor: Committee for Discipline; Chairperson: Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee; Synod Training Officer (Misconduct Awareness) and other trained personnel.

The Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group comes together on a regular basis in order to bring to greater awareness any issues which may impact upon future training such as financing, scheduling and timetabling; Presbytery requests for training of personnel; co-operation between various Synods for training assistance; and discussion of training materials. Consideration is also given to any recognised or perceived areas of weakness in the sexual misconduct procedures, processes and/or training, as well as any new names of people that might ultimately become available personnel willing to be called upon to act as Contact Persons, Advisors or members of the various committees. The collective wisdom of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group attempts to keep the issue of sexual misconduct before the councils of the church in the Synod of New South Wales.

96 ibid., 203-4.
Who Does What?

The Moderator of the Synod undertakes many and varied tasks in the execution of his/her daily ecclesial role. One of these roles is involvement in the Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group. According to the Regulations there are a number of very specific tasks surrounding the issue of sexual misconduct that relate to the role and function of the Moderator of the Synod.

When a complaint is received, under Regulation 7.7.10 (b) the Moderator, through the Chairperson of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee, is to receive confidential notification of the complaint. However, whilst being kept informed about the complaint, Regulation 7.7.6(k) determines that the Moderator may not be a member of any investigation panel.\textsuperscript{97} Beyond being kept informed, at any time during the course of the investigation, the Moderator, by way of the investigation panel, may have referred to him/her “a matter or matters arising out of the complaint”.\textsuperscript{98} In addition he/she may also receive recommendations “that the Synod meet the expenses of therapy costs for the complainant and/or the respondent which relate to the circumstances of the complaint”.\textsuperscript{99}

The appeal process is also something which directly involves the participation of the Moderator. A respondent or complainant has the right to appeal not only the final determination of an investigation panel, but also at the very commencement of the investigation, may appeal “(i) ... a decision by the Chairperson made pursuant to Regulation 7.7.5(b)”. That is, a respondent or complainant may assert that the

\textsuperscript{97} Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 7.7.19(a), (b) and (c): 202. Note: If the Moderator “receives information which provides reasonable grounds for believing that there has been sexual misconduct by a Minister but no complaint has been made, that person shall seek to take whatever steps are reasonable to clarify the matter”.

\textsuperscript{98} Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 7.7.12(e)(iv): 197.
Chairperson upon receiving the Complaint was wrong in their determination to deem the complaint to be a matter concerning sexual misconduct and appeal that decision.

If a respondent or a complainant decide they wish to appeal the final determination of an investigation panel\textsuperscript{100}, that appeal must also be made to the Moderator who, in turn, will then appoint a three person committee to oversee the hearing of the Appeal.\textsuperscript{101} It is also the Moderator’s responsibility to “inform the committees, councils and individuals involved of the pending appeal”.\textsuperscript{102} Once a complaint has been received by the Chairperson of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee and an investigation panel is formed the Moderator may determine that it is in the best interest of the church to stand aside the Specified Ministry Agent about whom the complaint of sexual misconduct has been made. This action does not equate with being suspended as there is to be no presumption of guilt or innocence in the Moderator’s decision. However, if legal proceedings (either civil or criminal) are commenced then it is also appropriate that, “[T]he Moderator when informed of such proceedings shall consider standing aside the respondent”.\textsuperscript{103}

The Moderator also plays a significant role in conjunction with the Committee for Discipline. As with the process of investigation of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee, Regulation 7.8.3 (e) also precludes the Moderator from being a panel member of the Committee for Discipline. However, this can be altered if necessary, as a matter of urgency, when there is a casual vacancy on the Committee and time does not permit or allow another person to be appointed by the Standing

\textsuperscript{99} ibid., 7.7.15(a): 201.
\textsuperscript{100} Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 201. Note: An appeal may also be made: “7.7.17 (iii) on the grounds that the Committee has acted contrary to the principles of natural justice”.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid., 7.7.17(c), 202.
\textsuperscript{102} ibid., 7.7.17(d).
Committee of the Synod. If a Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee investigation panel has determined that the matter should be forwarded to the Committee for Discipline, then it is the responsibility of the Moderator to appoint a person as advocate who shall be responsible for the presentation of the case in support of the complaint and the Moderator may from time to time appoint a substitute as required. In addition, the Moderator receives a copy of the complaint being dealt with by the Committee for Discipline and “particularised by the advocate”; appoints or engages (in cases of urgency) “a legal assistant to the Committee for the purpose of the proceedings”; receives a copy of the final report; and “may make such public statement concerning the proceedings as the Moderator considers appropriate”.

Along with the chairperson of Presbytery, the Moderator “may make a statement to a congregation and/or to relevant bodies about proceedings where appropriate and shall ensure appropriate pastoral support for such congregations and/or bodies.” And finally, as with the procedures of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee

[The Moderator, in the exercise of the duties and responsibilities of the Moderator under Regulation 3.5.17(i) may, at any time following the making of a complaint and in such a manner as the Moderator sees fit, stand aside a respondent from the performance of ministerial duties pending the determination of a complaint, if such action be considered necessary for the well-being of the Church. The Moderator may inform such people of this action as the Moderator considers necessary in all the circumstances.]

The Associate Secretary: Ministry Oversight; Synod Training Officer (Misconduct Awareness), as well as other trained personnel, at this present time, all participate fully

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103 ibid., 7.7.18(b).
104 Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 7.8.3(f): 203.
105 ibid., 7.8.5: 204.
106 ibid., 7.8.6: 204.
107 ibid., 7.8.7(a).
108 ibid., 7.8.18(c): 207.
109 ibid., 7.8.18(d).
110 ibid., 7.8.18(e).
111 ibid., 7.9.1.
in the Misconduct Awareness and Code of Ethics training programmes undertaken by the Synod of New South Wales. Intentional planning and re-assessment of the training programmes is constantly undertaken as more and more requests are received for training in these particular areas to occur.

Participation in in-service training is compulsory for all Specified Ministry personnel within the Synod of New South Wales. A Synod register is kept in order to maintain accurate records of those Ministry Agents who have and who have not met the Synod’s expectation of participation. The training days across the length and breadth of the Synod of New South Wales are conducted by the Associate Secretary: Ministry Oversight; Synod Training Officer (Misconduct Awareness) and other trained personnel; and are organised in conjunction with Synod Boards, Agencies and Presbyteries and are specifically geared to those present and to whom the particular Regulations or policies apply.

The Secretary and/or Convenor of Committee for Discipline and the Chairperson of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee attend the Synod Sexual Misconduct Co-ordinating Group in the specific capacity that relates to their role and function within the two committees. Both the Secretary/Convenor: Committee for Discipline and the Chairperson: Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee work very closely with the other members of the group. The committee members of both the Committee for Discipline and the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee come from both the Lay and Ordained within the life of the church and undertake their roles and tasks on behalf of the church in a voluntary capacity. The voluntary nature of the membership of the Committees, combined with the fact that the Regulations under

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which their respective committees must operate are to be followed meticulously, means
that the process of investigation and determination is not a speedy process.
Whilst the Uniting Church in Australia is very thorough in its Regulations covering the
issue of sexual misconduct, the church is less prepared practically for situations of
misconduct which do not fall under the specific category of sexual misconduct as
defined and detailed in the Regulations. Other misuses and abuses of power still occur
within Christian communities and the disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or
abuse of individuals and/or communities of faith by a Ministry Agent or a congregant in
a position of leadership is of particular interest in this dissertation.

Who's doing what?
Beyond the life of the Uniting Church in Australia, the broader landscape of the wider
Christian Church in Australia is also undertaking determined steps towards being more
proactive and intentional in the prevention of sexual misconduct within their faith
communities. Over the period of March 4 – 6, 2004 the National Council of Churches in
Australia invited representatives of its member denominations to come together to begin
to address, ecumenically, the issue of sexual abuse in Australian churches and their
communities. The Conference entitled “Safe as Churches?” saw for the first time
Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox,
Lutheran, Society of Friends, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist and Uniting
Church in Australia representatives come together to listen, explore and vision what
might be possible and potentially achieved co-operatively in the prevention of sexual
abuse in churches. The representatives of the national wider Church became a close,
gathered community seeking wholeness and healing for those already disenfranchised
and hurting people they have met in their communities and sadly, those they are still to
meet through the varying misconduct processes and procedures that are yet to happen.
Those who attended the Conference, to some degree or another, had a great deal of experience within their church context in the area of professional misconduct and sexual abuse prevention and the subsequent discipline procedures\(^{112}\). Some participants came because their role as Bishop, Director of Professional Standards, Chair/members of Misconduct Committees or Moderator meant that they dealt directly with the issue of misconduct within their particular denomination. Some participants were academics, some were in-service trainers and others were volunteers called upon by their denominations because of their specialist area of expertise, that is, lawyers, social workers, counsellors and ethicists. All those present were committed to the task of finding ways of making communities of faith places of safety for all – women, children and men, young and old alike.

The benefit of such a Conference was not found in the discovery of an immediate solution to the problem of sexual abuse and misconduct in the Churches. The benefit was in the building of networks, the exchange of information, structures, policies, procedures, ideas, questions and practical experiences. For some attending the Conference, the issue of misconduct and sexual abuse in the Church has been an issue diligently and fervently addressed by their particular denomination for a long time. For others, it was an issue that was only beginning to surface and be addressed within their specific context. Whatever the experience, the exchange of information was not only

helpful, it was also, at times, daunting and overwhelming with more questions being raised than answered.¹¹³

Having been a small part of a very intentional gathering of like-minded people, one begins to realise the enormity of the scope of the issue of misconduct and sexual abuse in Christian communities of faith. This does not take into account the experiences in other faith communities, nor does it take into consideration the broader context of the communities in which we live, work, play and study. The issue is simply enormous by anyone's estimation. It is an issue that is not new. It is, however, an issue that has not been openly encouraged into free and frank discussion within denominational boundaries, let alone in an open ecumenical forum.

In coming together through the “Safe as Churches?” Conference the general Australian Christian community is seeking to be transparent in its procedures, processes and understanding of the issues of misconduct and sexual abuse in the Church. In contrast to this assertion is the anecdotal evidence which would suggest that, as yet, there has been no comprehensive study undertaken across the denominations as to the numbers of complaints, types of complaints, responses by the churches, ethnicities of complainants and respondents, responses of the complainants to the processes, and ultimate outcomes¹¹⁴. It can not be denied that this would be an overwhelming task, taking into consideration ethical issues, natural justice and confidentiality. However, it might not be impossible. Those working in the specialised area of Professional and Applied Ethics might find a study of this nature beneficial when re-working their policies and

¹¹³ Note: From a personal perspective, being a practitioner and having recently worked in a disenfranchised and disempowered community of faith, attending the Conference meant that I had the opportunity to share my own individual and professional insights in a workshop setting. It also meant making myself vulnerable as I shared some of my work out of this dissertation.
procedures. Pastoral theologians, developing appropriate pastoral responses and strategies, might also benefit from such a study. Ultimately, it is difficult to deny that this area of research would be of great benefit to the wider Australian Christian Church context.

**Permission to Speak**

There were many stories told throughout the Conference – personal experience stories of being a victim; being a member of a sexual misconduct investigation panel; and writing and/or designing policies and procedures. There were stories that expressed anger at the Church and its Ministry Agents who had betrayed their pastoral relationships; regret that the Church had not responded appropriately, promptly and/or efficiently to allegations of sexual misconduct; and hope, that as individual denominations and as the wider Australian Christian community, people’s experiences, as well as the procedures and processes would improve dramatically.

The stories we listened to as professionals, talking with other professionals (which included both the Laity and the Ordained) enhanced our personal, professional and ecclesial learning. It also reinforced my thesis of the centrality of the role of narrative (story telling and how we enact it) as a rite of passage in the journey of healing and forgiveness. Without hearing the stories of our brother and sister communities of faith, the Uniting Church in Australia (or any of the other denominations) would in and of itself continue to feel isolated in the mammoth exercise of confronting misconduct and sexual abuse in its faith communities. Hearing the stories, listening to the narratives of others, enabled a broader understanding of not only the issue, but the difficulties experienced by other travellers along the road. It also allowed for an enactment of a rite

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114 Note: There has been a denominational survey conducted within the life of the Uniting Church in Australia. See: H. Thompson, and D. Cairns, “How Uniting Church Ministers View Sexual Misconduct
of passage, that is, the coming of age of the Australian Christian community in facing head on the issues of misconduct and sexual abuse.

I believe these communities of faith will continue to be enhanced and benefit from an ongoing and persistent dialogue on these important, very challenging and complex issues. As the narrative informs the content of further ecumenical conversation, it will, in turn produce its own new narrative and inform the generations to come.

Close, but Not Close Enough

The Uniting Church in Australia document – “Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice” – stands alongside of the Regulations in attempting to state clearly the church’s expectations and requirements in relation to the conduct and accountability of its Ministers – both Lay and Ordained.115 It recognises the “seriousness of the pastoral relationship”116 as well as acknowledges the fact that Ministers “exercise considerable influence and power”.117 The document reminds Ministry Agents of their pastoral role “and the vulnerability of people in that relationship” and their responsibility to adhere to appropriate pastoral boundaries;118 and names the requirement of the church that its Ministry Agents “embody integrity, trust and compassion”119 and must ultimately, “carry out their Ministry in a professional and accountable manner”.120

115 Uniting Church in Australia, “Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors in the Uniting Church in Australia (whether in approved placements or not)”, Constitution and Regulations (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 1.
116 ibid., 1.4: 3.
117 ibid., 1.5: 3.
118 ibid.
119 ibid., 1.6.
120 ibid.
The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice 2.4 states clearly the role of the Ministry Agent in relation to the pastoral relationship. It requires that Ministers shall exercise their ministry in a manner that expresses:

(a) commitment to God;
(b) inclusiveness of the Gospel;
(c) accountability;
(d) commitment to the call of the church to ministry
(e) (i) that Ministers do not seek to meet their personal needs through the pastoral relationship;
(ii) that people are encouraged to identify and use their power;
(iii) that clear boundaries are recognised and observed (i.e. the relationship and behaviour are appropriate to the pastoral relationship);
(iv) respect, sensitivity and reverence for others;
(v) confidentiality;
(vi) non-abusive use of power;
(vii) commitment to justice.

However, the Regulations and the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice do not clearly specify precise definitions of misconduct of a non-sexualised nature. Admittedly, there are many other misuses and abuses of power in addition to that of sexual misconduct and naming all possibilities would be an onerous task. However, it is a necessary task as more clear and definite guidance must be given to individuals and communities of faith to assist them in recognising the weight the Uniting Church places on all experiences of misconduct. It would be advantageous to practitioners as well as communities of faith if some examples were given detailing other abuses of power. These could then be broken down even further into sub-categories, for example, such as autocratic, arrogant, aggressive, dictatorial and/or domineering behaviour.

However, the non-sexualised abuse of power is not limited just to these categories, but must also include such things as liturgical and/or spiritual abuse. For example, demeaning, shaming, humiliating or embarrassing the congregation and/or individual

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121 Uniting Church in Australia, “Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors in the Uniting Church in Australia (whether in approved placements or not)”, in *Constitution and Regulations* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2002), 2.1-2.4: 4-5.
members from the pulpit. Psychological and/or emotional abuse must also be included as an abuse of power; that is, such things as diminishing, degrading, shouting, vilification and/or rumour making about a person or persons for whom the Ministry Agent has pastoral responsibility.

The church must find a way to respond more appropriately and effectively to situations and experiences of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse caused by congregants in positions of leadership or its Ministry Agents. Individuals as well as communities of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse must be as supported as thoroughly and intentionally as those who have an experience of sexual misconduct.

Another area which is not covered anywhere in the Regulations or the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice is the possibility that a notification of previous sexual misconduct by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership may arise out of pastoral conversations with those with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Due to the impact of the abuse of power the possibility exists that the individual making the disclosure may still be so traumatised and debilitated by their experience that they may feel unable to make such a notification to the church themselves. It is possible that an incumbent Ministry Agent may receive such a notification from an individual or individuals within the community of faith. In light of Regulation 7.7.9 which states

(a) Anyone who wishes to make a complaint may do so to the Chairperson of the Presbytery, the Presbytery Minister, the Moderator, the Synod Secretary, or the Chairperson of the Committee

122 ibid., 5.
the church must assist its investigation panels in coming to terms with this type of situation and give them the tools (education and training) to deal with these difficult situations. Questions must be asked as to the church’s understanding of the integrity of ministry (and ordination) alongside of the possibility of potential complaint scenarios. The church must not hide behind the complexity that these new situations bring with them. The church must make itself as vulnerable as do the people who bring these notifications to their attention.

As individuals and communities of faith wrestle with issues of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, so too, the church must wrestle with these complex issues and situations not, as yet, addressed in its procedures and protocols. Whilst congregants and Ministry Agents must be held accountable for their actions in ministry, the church must also be held accountable for ensuring (to the best of their ability) that individuals and communities of faith are safe places and that stories can be told.

In this chapter I have described in detail the ecclesial context in which the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse within the Downtown community of faith occurred. The Uniting Church in Australia is clearly and determinedly undertaking an intentional process of making sure communities of faith, all church gatherings, as well as workplaces are ‘safe places’. The Uniting Church in Australia seeks to be a place where abuse of power (in any form) is not accepted or tolerated.

The ecclesial response to the experience of the community of faith of Downtown Uniting Church was not simply a matter of applying the appropriate procedures. No specific procedures covering the particular and specific abuse of power were in place. The response of the church to the situation was unsupported by its Regulations and
Procedures in this instance. As the Ministry Agent for the Downtown Uniting Church it was important that I responded to the stories of the people. Advocating on their behalf before the councils of the church was also an integral part of the leadership role.

The research process of this dissertation, in conjunction with broader church processes has contributed to the administrative, pastoral and liturgical responses being developed in an effort to encourage the community of Downtown Uniting Church to undertake the journey of healing and forgiveness. Just as the church has precisely outlined the significance of undertaking disciplined responses to allegations of sexual misconduct, so too, the church must develop disciplined responses to other abuses of power. Out of my practical experience with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church has come the strong belief that the church must be more willing to look at the bigger picture, that is, a broader and more detailed definition of the abuse of power. Without a more comprehensive definition of the abuse of power, individuals and communities of faith will remain vulnerable to being disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by a congregant in a position of leadership and/or a Ministry Agent of the church. There will remain nowhere to go.

One might ask the question “why is this chapter so detailed and focused on the church’s response to the procedures and protocols concerning occasions of sexual misconduct rather than on other possible abuses of power?” I believe that practitioners who will be called to share ministry with disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused communities of faith need to be reminded of the significance the church has placed on providing detailed Regulations and procedures covering the issue of sexual misconduct. I also believe that it is vital to point out the inconsistencies of procedures and protocols in the Regulations and Code of Ethics when talking about other abuses of power.
It is my opinion that specialist ministry practitioners working with communities of faith such as Downtown Uniting Church need to be reminded to be watchful and alert for circumstances and experiences of abuse of power that are not covered in and by the Regulations or the Code of Ethics. By bringing this information to the attention of the church it is then possible for the church to challenge itself and its understandings of the abuse of power. Only by doing this can then come the changes that are needed in the Regulations and the Code of Ethics. It will not be an easy task but it is one that must be undertaken by the church.
The Gathering

of the People of God
Building Relationship with God and Ourselves

Gather your people, O Lord.
Gather your people, O Lord.
One bread, one body, one spirit of love.
Gather your people, O Lord.¹²³

So far in earlier sections of this dissertation I have begun to explore the use of narrative in the Social Sciences, Biblical Studies and Theology and particularly in the practice of congregational ministry. I now intend to investigate the shape of the liturgy, that is, the regular weekly worship service that is named the Service of the Lord’s Day. I will show its impact on and connection with the journey of healing and forgiveness in the experience of a survivor of abuse and a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. How is the narrative of transformation in a community of disempowered and disenfranchised people enacted in such a way which mirrors the shape of the liturgy? How is the liturgy enacted in all of our daily lives? These are some of the questions that assisted me in my investigation.

As an Ordained Minister of the Word whose ministry responsibilities revolve around the integration of being a reflective pastoral practitioner and a liturgist, I hold strongly to the opinion of Dom Gregory Dix that

the study of liturgy is above all a study of life ... Christian worship has always been something done by real men and women, whose contemporary circumstances have all the time a profound effect upon the ideas and aspirations with which they come to worship.¹²⁴

Beyond the professional experience as a practitioner, I come to worship as a middle-aged, middle-class, Anglo-Celtic, lone parent female. I bring with me my personal experiences of everyday life – the joys and struggles of what it means to be a person of faith coping with her humanity and being part of the broader human landscape. As a person with a lived experience of abuse in my own life, I also come into the

worshipping community bearing the pain inflicted upon me by others (some of it in the name of God), as well as my own sinfulness before God. I come, as do others, looking for connection with God, a deeper relationship with the risen Christ and for healing and restoration of my brokenness.

Shall We Dance?

Vogel writes "[N]o liturgical theology can afford to ignore the basic facts that the "social occasion” which is a liturgical act is occasional, formal, unifying and about survival." I would maintain strongly that the liturgical context and the pastoral context are profoundly intertwined. The movement between each context is as a dance – ebbing and flowing, influencing and impacting the other – as people journey together, some sharing the dance in its entirety, whilst others move in and out as the rhythm of life (God) leads them.

The liturgy is not only an expression of our corporate faith, it is also a communal experience. It is also an expression of our personal relationship with the Divine through the Word Incarnate – Jesus the Christ – encouraged, nurtured and supported by the Holy Spirit. Our participation in the dance of the liturgy – however that may be lived out in practical terms – can not be done in isolation from our everyday life experiences, that is, the pastoral context. The liturgy is the work of the people of God focussed in specific occasions but also intimately related to the whole of life.

The main components of the liturgy of the Service of the Lord’s Day are the Gathering of the People of God, the Service of the Word, the Eucharist and the Sending Forth of the People of God. Through these essential elements of the liturgy we:

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gather together to name who we are as followers of the Christ and to bring our praise and worship to God;

listen for the word of God that touches our hearts and minds and that calls us to respond;

share in the life giving meal – the body and blood of Christ;

remember Christ’s death and resurrection acknowledging and reflecting on from where we have come, who we are and who we can be through the grace and mercy of God; and finally,

are sent out to return to the wider world – our places of work, play, education, family and relationship contexts – renewed and encouraged to continue the journey of life and faith. We continue on this journey hopefully, seeking to become the people that God longs for us to become.

Learning to Dance

Susan White maintains that

... many representatives of the liturgical tradition of Christian spirituality invite us to look to the liturgy as an environment within which we might learn the shape of the true human community and to rehearse our roles as members of this community.¹²⁶

As previously discussed, the role of narrative is primary in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has a lived experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. However the abuse of power may have taken its form, the community dynamics will have been negatively influenced, whether theologically, spiritually, psychologically and/or physically. In some cases the feeling of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse might be understood as being so severe that the communal perception determines and ultimately becomes, that it is impossible for the individual or community of faith to recover in the short term, or even
in the long term. Hopelessness replaces hope; despair replaces joy; apathy and despondency replace energy and enthusiasm for continued life as the particular people of God in that specific place.

The people, that is, the congregation, the gathered people of God, the community of faith must find a way to re-group and re-name themselves. The re-grouping and re-naming or “Gathering of the People of God” is the same recognisable movement, that is, the beginning of the dance, undertaken each week within the liturgical context of the Service of the Lord’s Day. It is also something that can be experienced beyond the life of the Sunday service of Worship. Aidan Kavanagh reminds us that the “[L]iturgy happens only in the rough-and-tumble landscape of spaces and times which people discover and quarry for meaning in their lives”. 127 Those spaces and times can be both inside the worshipping space and outside in the wider world, in the places in which we live, work, play and build relationships beyond the life of the Church.

In our own unique, individual and personal life story we are both the author and the main character, especially as adults. However, as children we can only be the main character as we are shaped, informed and influenced by those who are charged with our care; that is, our primary care-givers. In most instances these care-givers are our parents, that is our father and mother. However, they might also be relatives or guardians, depending on our particular family circumstance.

As we grow and develop the skills of integration and separation we are able to become the author of our own narrative in order to take charge of our own life story. However,

for some of us, this can at times be delayed or even prevented from occurring because of the negative impact our relationship with our primary care-givers has had upon us. We may need outside assistance in order to learn the skills required to be the author of our own personal narrative. It is no different for a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

**Who Will be Our Choreographer?**

“Like all generations before and after us, we need to learn the remembrance of God and to call upon God to remember us even in our seeming God-forsakenness.” In the Uniting Church in Australia there is a specific process under which a Ministry Agent is appointed to a congregation. Through the Synod Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements (ACOMP) process, the issue of Call is very much the focus when matching congregations with Ministry Agents. The underlining question is: “Who might God be calling to share in ministry with this particular community of people?” It is not an easy question to answer and one which is not taken lightly amongst the members of the Synod Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements. It was no different when I came into my particular community of faith as Ministry Agent.

Upon meeting with those chosen representatives of the Presbytery and the congregation known as the Joint Nominating Committee (JNC), to whom my name had been suggested by the Synod Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements, many questions focussed on my understanding of the issues of abuse. My perception and interpretation of theology – both pastorally and liturgically – was addressed and questioned very thoroughly. Out of these conversations over a period of months grew a steady awareness that not only were the people representing the congregation hurting

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people, but the congregation was in fact itself a damaged community of faith that had been decimated through their interaction and relationship with a previous Ministry Agent. It would be a major focus of my role as Minister of the Word to encourage the people towards healing, wholeness and forgiveness. It would also be necessary to find a way of nurturing the gathered people of God back into a safe liturgical practice.

Having had a number of in-depth conversations with the JNC members representing the Downtown Uniting Church, some examples of their negative experiences were being offered for me to hear. Not only had they been intimidated by some of the actions and words of a previous Ministry Agent, their ability to participate in worship had become a negative experience for many within the community of faith. Going to Church was a painful experience.

For the people of the gathered community worship was no longer an experience of joy, but one where a number of people felt unsafe. The worship space was no longer a place of nurture, but rather, one that represented sadness, helplessness and fear for many of the gathered people of God; their sense of trust in the institution, that is the Church, was almost damaged beyond repair. Their sense of trust in the welcoming and healing nature of the liturgy was almost completely destroyed. Their ability to trust the Church’s representative, that is the Ministry Agent, was almost non-existent. The dance of the liturgy was no longer something in which they were confident to participate.

Don Saliers notes wisely that “[W]orship is God-centred yet thoroughly grounded in human life; it is theocentric and andropological at the same time.” For a congregation like Downtown Uniting Church, a community with an experience of disempowerment,

disenfranchisement and/or abuse, it is no different. The people’s ability to worship God was impacted upon severely by their traumatic experience, their place of holiness and worship now a place of sadness and negativity. It would be necessary to honour not only God through our worship, but also honour and name the pain experienced by the faithful people of God as well.

Finding the Right Beginning

As stated previously, the community of faith into which I was called was a disempowered and disenfranchised community. The personal, pastoral and liturgical relationship with a previous Ministry Agent had completely collapsed through the inappropriate words and actions of that Ministry Agent. Their ministry role had been sacrificed to the misuse and abuse of power. The gathered people had eventually acquiesced to intimidation, not only by the Ministry Agent’s words (liturgical and conversational), but also by that person’s theological stance, physical presence, interpersonal skills and management practice.

The gathered people had also suffered at the hands of the processes of the church. What was deemed to be seen as confidential was actually masquerading as secrecy. Misinformation and lack of communication shaped the supposed assistance from the church. It was an unusual circumstance and outside of the normal experience of those (i.e. the Presbytery) charged with the broader pastoral oversight of both the Ministry Agent and the community of faith. It was also a situation that was very poorly attended to by the Synod. It is a credit to the faithfulness and dedication of the remnant congregation that there is still a community of faith that gathers.
Upon entering the community of faith as the Ministry Agent I became aware of a number of disturbing things – none of which were actually spoken of out loud. As someone who enjoys and is energised by the presence of others, I was most disturbed by the fact that when I would greet the gathered people they would become very reticent to look me directly in the eye. Although their greeting was warm it was also nervous, uncertain, tentative and unsure. Women in particular, were very wary when I would approach them, my only expectation to simply make a connection with them through conversation or interaction. The women would step back, look down (at times some with eyes welling with tears) and in some instances, their hands would shake. Their anxiety level was raised markedly upon my approach. Interestingly, it would appear to abate as soon as I removed myself from their space – their laughter, smiles and conversation would not take long to return.

On other occasions when the children would become boisterous – particularly during worship or when exiting the worshipping space – the mothers would quickly attend to their children whilst at the same time watching me to see what my response to the situation would be. The physical demeanour of some of the women would change, almost becoming a cowering stance – indicating some level of physical fear. They kept one eye on me all the time and whispered to their children. The men on the other hand, kept their distance trying not to be noticed. They would not cower or show outward signs of fear but they were reserved in their conversation and willingness to engage in building a relationship with me, the Minister of the Word.

**Designing the Dance of Relationship**

I am not a very tall person. In fact, some would call me short, but for some reason my immediate presence reduced some members of the congregation to anxious individuals.
How could I gain their trust? How could I rebuild the pastoral and liturgical relationship vital to the life of a congregation? How could the worship space once again become a safe place in which people would want to be gathered? How could we name what was happening when it could not, in so many instances, be verbalised?

I discovered very early on that when entering a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse (in whatever form that particular experience may take), it is very important that the Ministry Agent does not have a thin skin. Although the gathered people may be responding to you (the person) in a negative manner, it is not really you (the person) to which they are actually responding. It is, in and of itself, their experience of the position, role and title that evokes such a response. In the congregation to which I was called simply bearing the title “Reverend” meant that I would be received – and perceived – amongst the community of faith in a fairly negative fashion. It was in fact nothing personal.

Gathering the people of God with sensitivity to their previous experience became imperative. But, how does one gather people who do not trust the role, position or office of the one doing the gathering? How can the disenfranchised people be gathered and brought into the presence of God when they feel that God has probably abandoned them and left them in their time of distress? What could one human being do to encourage a whole community of hurting people? Would words be enough?

**A Personal Dance**

As mentioned previously, throughout this dissertation I will be connecting and comparing my own personal story of healing and forgiveness as a person with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse with that of the
Downtown Uniting Church experience. The stories are not identical. However, the process of restoration and transformation – the journey towards healing and forgiveness – bears a striking resemblance. The dance of the liturgy had its own unique choreography in my life.

Growing up in my family was not fun or safe. It was abusive, violent and disempowering. The place for nurture and safety was dangerous and frightening, although, throughout my childhood I thought it was normal – the way in fact, in which all of my peers lived their lives. I thought every family lived as ours did. The startled reaction I would have when one of my parents would enter a room was, in my understanding, the way all children and parents interacted with each other. A parent was a parent; a child was a child – and in my mind, each family environment lived out its life as our family did. It was not until I was a teenager that I was to learn that this was not necessarily the case. There were other ways of being in relationship with people – especially adults.

In the very first week of my commencement of High School I made a special friend. She was to become my best friend. She is, all these years later, more like a sister than a friend and I still love her dearly. During these formative years we shared many things in common; the same classes, playing on the same softball team, and sometimes, we shared a crush on the same boy. But mostly, we loved music. We loved to play duets on the piano. I always had to play the bass part because my hands were bigger and could reach further.

We loved to listen to records, especially the Beatles. But more than anything we loved to sing. On our own or in a choir, it did not matter as long as we were singing! We were
even known at times to practise our harmonies with each other when we were on the telephone. We would ring each other, have a short conversation and then sing our own part that we needed to practise. I am sure it must have sounded peculiar to those who were listening in our respective houses, but at least we could hear what we sounded like together. Our voices blended magically over the telephone wires.

During our years of friendship we shared many times together – on our own and with her family – not mine. Without my knowing it, her family was gathering me into their own; encouraging and nurturing me to be the person God longed for me to become. Although they were not able to give voice to this in words, their actions were the outliving of the “Gathering of the People of God”. Not only did I gain a best friend through our friendship; I also gained a surrogate family. Without my knowing or realising it, her family became my place of safety. Her parents became and remain my role models of what parents could and can be. Her home was a place where I could be myself without fear of abuse or violence. Amongst her family members – her mum and dad, her younger brother, aunts and uncles and grandparents – I was simply given permission to be me. I was welcomed and loved unconditionally. And it was not long into our friendship that these people became my extended family.

It was and still is a place of belonging without fear. I was gathered up by arms of love and encouraged to listen to words of hope, love, forgiveness and encouragement. I was encouraged to hope – to have hope in the future. I was encouraged to love – as I was being loved by my adopted family. And, hardest of all, I was encouraged to trust – trust everything that was normal in their family context but unfamiliar and unsafe in my family context. This was risky.
My friend’s parents were soon to become known to me as Aunt and Uncle. They welcomed me into their home, offered me hospitality and even took me on vacations with them whenever the opportunity presented itself. They were never certain of my actual circumstances at home — I never spoke of them. But somehow, they knew that “things” were not right. They tell me I always looked frightened of people, especially adults. Through their collective wisdom and strong sense of intuition they made the conscious decision to try and have me come into their space as much as humanly possible. They could not prove anything was amiss in the family relationship and they knew that I was certainly never going to tell them what it was like at home. The experiences with my friend’s family and her extended family opened my eyes to how other people lived, not only on holidays, but in everyday family life as well. I experienced many firsts – my first stay in a caravan; my first prawning expedition and my first time learning to play cards. More importantly, it was my first time away from my parents. And I liked it very much.

S. G. Post in an article entitled “Conditional and Unconditional Love” maintains “[W]hen the purpose of love is to heal those who suffer from ill health or some other harm … unconditionality is without rival.”\(^{130}\) This is no less true for a survivor of abuse or a community of faith disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by its Ministry Agent or a congregant in a position of leadership. I believe that my relationship with my adopted parents has not only influenced how I live my life in relationship with others, it has also influenced how I understand love. Without realising it their expression of unconditional love to me as a twelve year old child through to a middle aged adult, has influenced how I live my life, how I relate to my own children, and how I claim who I am as a person. More importantly, they have modelled unconditional love in such a way.

that I am now able to understand what is meant by the unconditional love of God.

Without their example of what love could be, love would have remained a mystery, only something to do with pain – physical, emotional and spiritual.

With the example of my Aunt and Uncle, unconditional love became something I was and am able to express to my own children. I was also able to model it for the community of faith into which I was called. Without the gift of knowing the home of my adopted parents as a safe place for me, I could not have understood the need of the Downtown Uniting Church to reclaim their space as a ‘safe place’. No question about it.

**Starting the Congregational Dance**

Through their interaction with the Ministry Agent, the Downtown Uniting Church community of faith had become disempowered liturgically. What was once an experience of gathering with expectation and awe in the presence of God had become oppressive, discouraging and disrespectful. Adults were fearful of being embarrassed and humiliated by comments from the Ministry Agent about their inadequate participation in worship. Children were fearful of being the brunt of jokes. Older people were intimidated by the length of time the worship service took – more than they were physically able to endure. Together, the people came to worship not knowing what to expect and wondering if it would be a positive or negative experience. Many people left the gathered community. However, those who stayed did so determined to find a way through out of the darkness that was their experience. There had to be light at the end of the very dark tunnel that was being part of this particular worshipping community.

Upon entering the gathered community as the Ministry Agent it was not possible to have all of the congregational narrative, that is, to know all the story of the previous
circumstances. The story telling would only come through the building of our relationship, both pastorally and liturgically. Through the process of Call (the ACOMP and JNC process), it had been possible to gather only a faint understanding of the congregational experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Ultimately, it would be necessary to rely on my personal intuition, once again both pastoral and liturgical, to find a starting point. What was clear was the fact that the worshipping space was no longer a safe place for the majority of the gathered people. When one entered into the space there was a sense of heaviness – one could even say darkness – which pervaded the gathered people of God.

Many Christian traditions make use of the lighting of the Christ Candle at the commencement of the worship service. However, it was not the normal experience of the community of faith into which I had come as Ministry Agent. Symbols and symbolism, a more formal presentation of the liturgy or in fact an explanation of the liturgy had not been their experience for many years.

In an effort to name the pain the congregation was feeling and experiencing, I perceived that it was necessary to find a way to do so liturgically. The community of faith had to be rebuilt corporately, pastorally and liturgically. The institution of the lighting of a “safe place candle” was a tangible way in which the pain of the congregation could be named. It was a simple action – direct, visual and liturgically sensitive and used in conjunction with the specific naming of the hope found in Jesus Christ – the light of the world.

This is the safe place candle.
We light this candle to signify our desire that our community always be a place of safety. (Candle is lit)
This is the Christ candle.
We light this candle to remind us
that Jesus is the light of the world. (Candle is lit)\textsuperscript{131}

These simple words were spoken as part of the Call to Worship. As I said the words and lit the candles I was naming the underlying hope of the gathered people, that is, that their community of faith would never have to experience such pain again – at any level.

As the weeks progressed the modelling of the lighting of the candles gave people such a sense of encouragement that ultimately, when they were approached and asked if they would like to light the candles, their tentative responses began to change into more positive and enthusiastic participation. Across the congregation and across the generations, people were gathered into the liturgical act by participating in the lighting of the candles. Very young children would be assisted by older adults to light the candles; older adults would encourage new readers as they undertook the liturgical action together; families and individuals would come together to participate in the simple action with the significant meaning. The congregational question soon became “Whose turn is it to light the candles today?”

\textbf{One Step Forward – Two Steps Back}

The process of “Gathering the People of God” is not something done easily or quickly in a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Not only must the issue of naming the pain be addressed but, also, the profound issue of the re-building of trust. This means that the Ministry Agent must be prepared to accept that at times it will be two steps forward and one step back as people enter into the dance of the liturgy as they feel safe and able to do so.

\textsuperscript{131} Note: The lighting of the “safe place candle” commenced in the first weeks of Placement as Ministry Agent and lasted until the following Good Friday – approximately six (6) months.
The lighting of both the “safe place candle” and the Christ candle gave the community of faith a sense of ownership of the words that were spoken at the commencement of the worship service. There was no fanfare, just simple words that assisted people in their need to feel the hope that their community would once again be a place of safety. This hope in turn helped fuel the desire to rebuild the community more intentionally through the undertaking of a church camp.

As stated previously, the “Gathering of the People of God”, I believe, is something which also occurs beyond the walls of a church building and/or the structure of a worship service. We are constantly being gathered – in our families, work places and communities – waiting to hear words of encouragement, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. It is no different in the coming together as a group of people at a church camp.

The time of being together in a relaxed environment gave people the opportunity to begin to renew relationships with each other. It also gave the opportunity for the gathered people to risk sharing part of their experience of being a member of the Downtown Uniting Church with the new Ministry Agent. Their individual narratives danced in and out and around the narrative of the congregation, melding more and more, as the people of the community allowed their story to be verbalised more freely. As the conversations progressed and people allowed themselves to enter into the time together, a recurring question began to arise and which was directed specifically to me – the Minister. “When are you going abseiling?”

It would be reasonable and accurate to state that there will rarely be the occasion in a ministry placement where the community question of the Ministry Agent will indeed focus on abseiling. Though it may seem a trite and trivial question at first hearing, it
was soon evident that there was more to the question than simple teasing. No matter who I would speak with, the question would be verbalised – “When are you going abseiling?” What did it mean? Was there more to the question than it implied? Would I be able to identify the meaning and attend to it in the appropriate manner?

Spending time with the gathered people over the weekend revealed more of the community’s pain, fear and lack of trust in the office of Minister of the Word whether past, present and/or future. Arising from their congregational and personal experience, a mistrust had evolved which was now attached to all who bore the title Reverend. It was to become clear that the underlying question was actually – “Can we trust you?”

Finding courage I had not expected to find, I surreptitiously organised with the leaders of the abseiling activity to help me undertake the fulfilment of the unspoken question. When my assistant/coach and I were completely organised, a helper was dispatched to call the community together. The single action of undertaking the abseiling activity enabled the physical expression and living out of the “Gathering of the People of God”
— they came from all over the camp site. The outpouring of sentiment – cheering, clapping and overwhelming surprise – meant that the underlying question “Can we trust you?” had been answered – visually. By my stepping outside of my comfort zone the gathered people of God were encouraged to take the risk of stepping outside of their comfort zone – “we can trust you because you have shown us that you will trust us.” We would rebuild the trust together.

**Increasing the Tempo of the Dance**

Trust does not come easily to a survivor of abuse or to a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. In the context of the Downtown Uniting Church the unusual undertaking of an abseiling activity would only be part of the process of the “Gathering of the People of God”, not its completion. A further corporate expression of the rebuilding needed to happen (and with the placement commencing in September) the perfect time for focussing on rebuilding trust through the themes of anticipation, expectation, preparation, patience and new life in the worship services would come during the season of Advent and Christmas.

Prior to the commencement of the liturgical season of Advent, all members of the congregation – those who attended regularly, who came now and then, or hardly ever, and anyone whose name appeared on the official church rolls – were sent a letter inviting them to participate in a special worship service. The special service would be a Service of Word and Sacrament with Prayer for Healing. The letter read as follows –

> Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

> I write with an invitation to be part of a very special worship service to be held on XXXX – the first Sunday in Advent. This is a time in our worshipping life where, as a community of faith, we prepare together for the celebration of Christmas and the birth of the baby Jesus – the Christ child. Advent is a time of expectation, waiting and hope. Sometimes waiting can be difficult and unpleasant. Sometimes waiting prompts us to look backwards
limiting our ability to look towards the positive. Sometimes waiting
overshadows our expectation and hope leaving us feeling less than excited – we
just want to get it over with!

Our service of worship on XXXX will be a normal 9.00am combined worship
service with Holy Communion and the opportunity to have special prayer for
healing or any other needs for yourself, or on behalf of others. There will also be
the opportunity for anointing. In other words, this service will be a Service of
Word and Sacrament with Prayer for Healing.

The practice of sharing bread and wine together as a community of faith, as well
as being anointed with fragrant oil, is an age-old tradition of the Church and is
open to any who wish to participate. There is no pressure, only an invitation to
open ourselves to the gentleness and generosity of God’s love for us all.

Our worship service will be reflective and gentle, inviting us to prepare
ourselves, both intellectually and spiritually for the coming of the Christ child.
Our time together will be significant in the life of the Downtown Uniting
Church as adults and children alike wait together and share the experience of
being part of the body of Christ.

Looking forward to sharing the experience of Advent with you –

There was no guarantee that people other than those who had remained within the
congregation would come. There was no guarantee that people would feel safe enough
to trust the invitation of another Reverend. There was no guarantee that the “Gathering
of the People of God” would continue beyond the present, limited experience. The
invitational gathering may in fact, reignite the anger and corporate mistrust, even
further. However, it was a risk that had to be taken.

The Service of Word and Sacrament with Prayer for Healing on Advent 1 was another
turning point for the community of gathered people, not only because the church
building was full to capacity. It was significant because people chose not only to
participate in the prayers for healing, but the anointing, as well. The visual impact on
the community of faith was profound, propelling the “Gathering of the People of God”
another step towards the people being ready to enter the journey of healing and
forgiveness more fully through the “Service of the Word”.

110
The narrative of the community of faith began to take on a different shape and texture. People were noticing each other and the fact that they were smiling when they came into the community of faith for worship. People noticed that members who had once chosen to remove themselves from the community of faith, because of their unhappy previous experience, had again made the community their home.

The community of faith had begun to enter the worship space, once again, with their heads held high, eyes no longer down cast. They left in the same manner, greeting the Ministry Agent and willing to enter in to conversation. The shaking and trembling had stopped. The gathered people of God had taken a baby-step forward in their journey towards healing and forgiveness. The narrative of the congregation that was modelled and lived out at the beginning of the placement was slowly beginning to change. The negative narrative had not been completely erased but had faded, if only a little. Trust was slowly being rebuilt. There was only one more action to occur that was resoundingly longed for by the congregation – the rejoining of the now two worshipping congregations into one. The congregations which once worshipped as one had been forced to separate into two different worshipping times. They wanted very much to be rejoined as the one worshipping family, young and old alike. It was the beginning of the next phase of the journey of healing and forgiveness.
The Gathering
of the People of God –
Lament to Hope
Participants on the Journey

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer."

The dance of the liturgy had commenced. The "Gathering of the People of God" had begun. The disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people had been called to worship the one true and living God and encouraged to continue the journey of becoming the people God longs for them to be. Together as individuals and as a community of faith they would be participants in the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness.

As a community of faith and as individuals we come before God with repentant hearts and acknowledge that we are people who fail even when we try not to. We rejoice at knowing that God does not hold our humanity against us. As individuals and as the gathered people of God we move in and out of the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – energised by the possibility that God will inspire the creativity of our dance despite our brokenness. However, in order to be able to move further forward in the dance of the liturgy there will be times when we will need to stop, rest, renew, be restored and re-energised in order to regain our energy for the rest of the dance.

Sometimes, we will choose to rest on our own, still in the solitude that is our place of healing. Sometimes, we will choose to rest in the company of others, their warmth and enthusiasm for the journey of the dance enlivening our spirit to keep going. Sometimes though, we might need to be encouraged to actually rest and take time-out for the sake of our own personal well-being, for the journey has worn us down.

\[132\] Psalm 19: 14
Finding the Right Words is Not Always Easy

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." For a survivor of abuse these words of Scripture offer little, if any, comfort. How can one possibly "rejoice always" and "give thanks in all circumstances" when one’s soul has been damaged seemingly beyond repair and when one’s heart is crying out in deep sadness and distress? The question is, indeed, no different for a congregation with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The question, ultimately, does not differentiate between a loved one, friend or stranger, Lay person or Ministry Agent. How can God expect those who have been sinned against to "pray without ceasing" when God has seemingly abandoned them in their time of need, despair and pain? If "actions speak louder than words" why is the emphasis of the church so heavily focussed on words?

To a community of the gathered people of God who have been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by the actions and/or relationship with the Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership, the above words of encouragement and hope from the Bible are not filled with praise but confrontation and affront. These words (at other times perhaps encouraging, uplifting and appropriate) have the sting of a slap in the face more than a warming of the heart to those who have felt the depth of pain that abuse brings. How can these words speak the will of God in Christ Jesus? How can these words bring the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused into a closer relationship with God? How can a God of love, mercy and justice expect the outliving of these words by those who have experienced the depth of such pain and heartache? Even more poignantly, the question ultimately becomes – in fact, for what should they be thankful?

133 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

114
In working with the community of faith of Downtown Uniting Church, the place, value and significance of lament had to be acknowledged and given voice as we continued the “Gathering of the People of God”. It was important for the people to hear from their new Ministry Agent that it was not heretical for them to question their relationship with God and in turn, God’s relationship with them. The gathered people of God were longing to connect with God through the Word of God, but the spoken words they had heard from the pulpit has caused them concern, angst and anger. Could the new Ministry Agent be trusted to interpret the Word of God? Would they be damaged further as a community of faith? Would God hear their heartache and bring them comfort?

**A Personal Dance – Continued**

The denomination from which my understanding of God was drawn, was very firmly Old Testament focussed. A great deal of emphasis was placed on the teaching of the Laws of the Old Testament. The Good News of the Gospel was taught, but somehow, grace was darkly overshadowed by consequence. Being acutely aware from a young age of the consequences of failing to follow the expectations of the church strongly influenced how I understood God. At a very early age I became very determined to make sure that God knew I was on His [sic] side.

My mother had a devout faith. My father had very little time for the God stuff. He preferred to be kept in the dark about how God influenced and impacted on humanity and our lives. Most of the time he was vaguely agnostic, sometimes he appeared atheistic. At other times, he claimed a Presbyterian heritage.
M. Scott Peck in his best selling book “The Road Less Travelled” defines love as “[T]he will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth”. One could easily imagine that growing up parented by a devoutly religious mother I would be strongly aware of the nurture of my spiritual growth, as well as my physical and emotional growth. In addition, being loved by one’s parents must surely only be enhanced by knowing that one is also loved by God. However, my religious education at home made it clear that God was constantly angry at my personal and persistent inadequacies. He (and I use that term specifically referring to the traditional theological understanding of the male patriarchal God) despaired at my limitation of being female and was ultimately going to be vengeful to me because of my inability to be perfect, that is, male. God had no desire to nurture me into wholeness, only the desire to “get me” if I did not follow all the rules of Holy Scripture, that is, the Law – without question.

My mother was not an enthusiastic parent of me, the girl child. It was made clear to me from a very young age, that had it not been for my birth, my mother would have been and remained a healthy woman. My birth, she believed, had been the catalyst to her long battle with medical problems. I was constantly reminded that not only was God disappointed that I was a girl, so was she.

My mother lamented my birth. God lamented I was a girl. I lamented that I had been born. The words of the traditional Afro-American spiritual song “Lord, how come me here?” have always touched the chords of my heart in a profound way –

Lord how come me here?
Lord, how come me here?
Lord how come me here?
I wish I’d never been born.

The two most powerful influences in my life – my mother and God – did not approve of me, could not love me for who I was and would never forgive me for being female. I either had to conform to their expectations, cease to exist or find a way of making both God and mother love me, despite my being a girl.

The Dance of the Liturgy - Words of Lament and Hope

Don Saliers says

[S]o often we miss the essentials. Not only in our daily lives are we aware of what is right before us, but to do what is expected, and in our routine habits, we settle for our duty. Thus we miss one of the most essential features of vital worship: sheer delight – delight in God, in one another and in the very means by which common life is graced.135

For a congregation with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse coming to worship to hear the Word of God as interpreted through God’s Ministry Agent can be intensely threatening – especially, if that Ministry Agent has used their words as an instrument of their abuse. As a new leader coming into a congregation where the words of the Ministry Agent had had a negative impact on both the corporate and/or individual experience, I had to have an openness and sensitivity which acknowledged the fact that worship might not necessarily be experienced as sheer delight, awe and wonder by the gathered people of God. In fact, for the gathered people of God delight, awe and wonder might simply be impossible for those who came into the worshipping space. There were no guarantees that the people would be receptive to making themselves vulnerable with me, let alone before God.

As mentioned in the Introduction it is my thesis that everything we do and experience in life in some way reflects the shape of the liturgy, that is, the “Service of the Lord’s Day”. Whether it is in our work, relationships or play, we gather (come together),

praise, lament and confess (share our joys and sorrows longing that our lives be lived in fullness), listen for and respond to the Word of God (look for meaning beyond the mundane in our lives), remember and re-member (share in community with others) and are ultimately sent forth (to continue the journey of life and faith). I maintain that the process that is the dance of the liturgy is experienced not as a linear process, but more as a continuous and infinite figure-8. For example,

![Figure 3](image)

Whether it is the birth of an individual, a relationship or community, the dance – the journey of life and faith – is fluid. It commences, develops, increases tempo, slows down, rests and re-starts in different ways, at different times throughout the dance. And as stated previously, the process of the “Gathering of the People of God” is not something purely restricted and/or confined to the worshipping space. It is something in which we participate in many different ways and on many different levels. Our lives can be changed, influenced and impacted upon in many different ways as people come and go and touch our lives enacting the grace and mercy of God. Our lives can also be changed, influenced and impacted upon in many ways as people come and go and touch our lives enacting an abusive interpretation of the grace and mercy of God.

Whether a congregation has a lived experience of sexual abuse amongst its members or has experienced other misuses and abuses of power by the Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership, the disempowerment, disenfranchisement and disconnection to their ability to celebrate the love of God with delight, awe and wonder is no less substantial. As the Church and as the Ministry Agent, it is necessary to give
the gathered people of God permission to lament not only their personal and corporate experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, but their tenuous and delicate relationship with the Divine as well. Don Saliers reiterates this understanding when he writes “[O]ur avoidance of lament has a strange result – it opens a great gulf between our liturgies and our lives”.  

Lament is the cry of our hurting souls to God that God will hear the pain, be our companion on the journey of healing and forgiveness, and love us despite our strong belief that we may have been in fact abandoned. Lament is the verbalisation of our internal struggle for peace – peace in our relationship with God and peace in our relationship with ourselves and others. Lament gives voice to despair and yet strangely, holds on to hope, if only precariously.

Despite the fact that Job is the most well known and remembered Biblical character associated with lament, women have been lamenting for centuries. Their lament has been and continues to be for their loved ones, family relationships, their children being sent to war, the injustices of the world and in creation and even, their place in the Church. The Traditional Afro-American song of lament referred to previously continues

They stole my chil’en away, Lord
They stole my chil’en away, Lord
They stole my chil’en away, Lord
I wish I’d never been born.

The development in the second half of the twentieth century of Feminist and Liberation Theologies has assisted women (and some men) in giving voice to their lament thoughtfully and in the strength of conviction that God is indeed, present and active in

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the Church and their lives. Lament has enabled women to name the pain of their situations just as Rachel\textsuperscript{137} and Job named theirs.

Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes

\ldots some feminist ethical analysis now argues that women’s experience identifies the most fundamental evil to be the phenomenological conditions of pain, separation, and helplessness \ldots From Rachel weeping for her children to the mothers and grandmothers of the Argentinean Plaza de Mayo, we could not measure the pain of women occasioned by harm done to those they love \ldots women do more than a fair share of the crying in the world.\textsuperscript{138}

Johnson’s discussion on the “suffering God”\textsuperscript{139} is one that is appealing to consider when working with those with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Whilst detailing different understandings of God and suffering throughout the ages Johnson provokes the reader into being aware of their own understandings of God and suffering. Her journey through classical theism and its understanding that “suffering at times may be a punishment for sin”\textsuperscript{140} leads into a discussion concerning “[T]he apathic God”. Originating “from the Greek a-patheia”\textsuperscript{141} which means “no pathos or suffering”, the apathic God “seeks to preserve divine freedom from a dependency on creatures that would in fact render God finite”.\textsuperscript{142} These perceptions of God lead Johnson to discuss God as impassible that is, the one to choose who does and does not suffer. God is omnipotent, invincible and all-deciding.\textsuperscript{143} But how are survivors of abuse able to engage and be in relationship with this dominating and uncaring God? How can disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused communities of faith endure such proclamations?

\textsuperscript{137} Jeremiah 31: 15-20
\textsuperscript{139} ibid., 246-272.
\textsuperscript{140} ibid., 246.
\textsuperscript{141} ibid., 247.
\textsuperscript{142} ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} ibid.
Beyond these and other explorations Johnson's most compelling discussion is saved for Feminist theology. Her comment "the idea that God might permit great suffering while at the same time remaining unaffected by the distress of beloved creatures is not seriously imaginable"\(^{144}\) speaks clearly to those negatively impacted by disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The notion of a powerless, victimised God is as oppressive to women as one who is all powerful.

The Feminist theological understanding that God is not distant or apart from suffering permits a place for anger/wrath and righteous indignation to exist and ultimately find its voice at the injustices experienced throughout humanity and creation. It is empowering and creative allowing for the possibility of change to occur. The understanding that one is not alone in their suffering – that God is not apart or distant from that suffering; that God enters into suffering through Jesus – offers not only comfort and hope but also permission to cry out in lament. For indeed God too cries out in lament. Johnson reminds us

"[W]eeping women, women whose hearts moan like a flute because those they love have come to harm, are everywhere in the world. As imago Dei they point to the mystery of divine sorrow, of an unimaginable compassionate God who suffers with beloved creation. Holy Wisdom keeps vigil through endless hours of pain while her grief awakens protest. The power of this divine symbol works not just to console those who are suffering, but to strengthen those bowed by sorrow to hope and resist. If God grieves with them in the middle of disaster, then there may yet be a way forward."\(^{145}\)

For individuals and communities of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, a Feminist understanding of God and suffering encourages the people forward towards healing and forgiveness. It challenges and confronts injustice and degradation; permits lament and grief; and calls individuals and communities towards the possibility of hope and restoration/transformation.

Billman and Migliore maintain that

[P]rayers of lament ... are not only voiced by bereaved parents and other wounded individuals who have experienced wrenching personal losses. They are voiced by entire peoples who have been ravaged by war or have suffered poverty, hunger, oppression and humiliation for long periods of time.  

This is no less true an experience for an individual or community of faith living with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The depth of sorrow, heartache and pain is no less real or significant. The impact on how relationships are formed, maintained and sustained is no less profound. Trust is damaged, sometimes irreversibly. Individually and corporately the people grieve the loss of relationship they once shared with the Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership. And like Billman and Migliore, I too would ask the question “Who gives or withholds permission to lament within a community of faith?” Having been a practitioner working with an individual and/or community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse I would maintain that it is the responsibility of the specialist Ministry Agent (and the church) to enable that voice of lament to be heard.

As a practitioner of ministry I had to be mindful that for those within the community of faith with the experience of suffering, pain and dislocation, faith in God may also have diminished or perhaps even eroded away. The place of lament was the only place of hope. The reassurance that God hears the voice lamenting in the wilderness of pain and confusion is what kept the community and/or individual continuing on the journey of life and faith – the dance of the liturgy – when otherwise it felt just too hard.

145 ibid., 260-261.
147 ibid., 109.
Lament has a long tradition within the history of the Church. However, it is a tradition which has been (and is) both accepting and unaccepting of lament. Billman and Migliore quote contemporary theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff as saying “to acknowledge the legitimacy and necessity of lament in Christian life and worship is to depart from the great theological tradition of the church”.\textsuperscript{148} However, beyond accepting and unaccepting, I believe that it would be fair to suggest that the modern Church is on the whole uncomfortable with lament. The overt encouragement of the modern Church is that we give voice – loudly and enthusiastically – to our praise rather than our lament.

Throughout the history of the Church theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Barth have given deep contemplation to the place of lament in their considered theological understandings of what it means to be in relationship with God. According to Billman and Migliore, Augustine does not deal well with the negative expression of emotions. Yet, Augustine was no stranger to grief. He “merely grieved and wept”\textsuperscript{149} at the death of his very close friend maintaining that “[O]nly tears were sweet to me, and in my ‘soul’s delights’ (Ps. 138:11) weeping had replaced my friend”.\textsuperscript{150} He also grieved at the death of his mother writing “[W]hat madness not to understand how to love human beings with awareness of the human condition!”\textsuperscript{151} However, he was embarrassed by these human emotions and his weakness in giving in to them maintaining “[H]ow stupid man is to be unable to restrain feelings in suffering the human lot!”\textsuperscript{152} He could not reconcile lament, sadness and/or tears in light of his Christian faith because “[G]rief for reasons other than our sin and separation from God

\textsuperscript{148} K.D. Billman, and D.L. Migliore, \textit{Rachel’s Cry Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope} (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 46.


\textsuperscript{150} ibid.

\textsuperscript{151} ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{152} ibid.
manifests improper attachment to persons, relationships, and things of this world.”

Lament for anything other than a poor relationship with God was seen as human failure and exposed our sinful nature and capacity for sin. Augustine believed that God “lives in undisturbed serenity and is a stranger to emotions like grief and anger.” For Augustine God was incorruptible, inviolable and immutable and as such removed from the human expression of lament and suffering.

Luther, on the other hand, maintained that “the grace of God is the only source of consolation in our experiences of loneliness, despair, and abandonment.” There was no good work that could be done that would take the place of a sincere and honest relationship with God. Our lament and “[O]ur readiness to suffer is our acknowledgement that before God there is nothing that we can do but wait on the grace of God”. Luther is able to relate to lament through his extensive reading of the Psalms. His understanding of “Anfechtung” helped him enter into a more personal understanding of lament. For Luther, the cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” was to be understood in light of the crucifixion of Jesus. Through his development of a theology of the cross Luther, in comparison to Augustine, could find a place for lament in the life of Christian. However, it was not to be excessive. If one was to lament, it was to lament and mourn the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of humanity.

154 ibid., 50.
155 ibid., 52.
156 ibid.
157 Note: “Anfechtung” can be translated as temptation, trial, affliction or tribulation. See: K.D. Billman, and D.L. Migliore, Rachel’s Cry Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 53. For a more detailed explanation.
158 ibid., 52.
In contrast to both Augustine and Luther, Calvin, in developing his theology, had less difficulty relating to lament. He recognised the place of grief in the personal experiences of humanity and named that pain through the tears that Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus and his own impending death on the cross.\textsuperscript{159} For Calvin, grief was a real emotion to be experienced when it was felt — not pushed aside. After all, the Psalmist cried out to God, as did Jesus.\textsuperscript{160} For Calvin, lament was connected to grief and as such Christians should bring their experiences of pain, sorrow, grief, heartache and fear before God in prayer. However, in developing his theology of prayer it was important to Calvin that prayer “attempts to hold in tension the contrary affections of joy and sorrow, faith and doubt.”\textsuperscript{161} For Calvin, this was evidenced in the Psalms. Ultimately, whilst Calvin has a place for lament he “counsels patience, avoidance of all murmuring and debating with God, and moderation in the expression of sorrow”\textsuperscript{162} as “humility, patience and moderation are the virtues” that are to be commended.\textsuperscript{163}

Whilst Karl Barth did not write as extensively on the Psalms as other texts, he still held that lament was “an appropriate and accurate response to the human situation”.\textsuperscript{164} Like Augustine, Barth had experienced his own personal experience of pain through the death of his son. However, unlike Augustine who struggled with the guilt of grief, Barth saw grief and lament as natural expressions of human emotion. Beyond the lament of Christian life and experience Barth’s emphasis was on the depth of misery suffered by Jesus. He understood that “Jesus Christ the incarnate Word of God has plumbed the depth of human misery, and hence his misery encompasses and transcends the misery of

\textsuperscript{159} K.D. Billman, and D.L. Migliore, Rachel’s Cry Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 56. 
\textsuperscript{160} see: Psalm 22; Matthew 26: 39; Mark 15: 34
\textsuperscript{161} K.D. Billman, and D.L. Migliore, Rachel’s Cry Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 57.
\textsuperscript{162} ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{163} ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} ibid., 62.
all others.\textsuperscript{165} However, Barth could not remain with lament as solely sorrow-filled, wanting prayer to be more Christocentric and hope-filled.

As Billman and Migliore have indicated, all of the above theologians have contributed to the discussion concerning the place of lament in a theology of prayer. Beyond this discussion, I maintain that the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse for an individual and/or community of faith calls the Church to consider seriously the place and significance of lament in the journey of healing and forgiveness. Whilst I acknowledge that it is at times difficult for others without the negative experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse to relate or understand this connection to lament, I would suggest that that does not mean it has no place in the life and theology of the modern Church. We live in a world where many people’s lives are impacted by tragedy and trauma daily. Grief and lament co-mingle enabling the other to be expressed physically, emotionally and spiritually. If the Church is not able to offer those who suffer a place of lament, where else can the people go?

As many\textsuperscript{166} of the women and men in the community of faith of the Downtown Uniting Church gained the courage to tell of their disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, they found their voice of lament. In the telling of their stories amongst each other, to the church through the Presbytery, and to the new Ministry Agent, the people were able to lament their negative and painful experiences. They were able to speak of their pain at their perceived isolation from the wider church community, as well as ponder what might have been their experience as a gathered people of God if they had not had their destructive and debilitating experience. They could name the pain and

\textsuperscript{165} K.D. Billman, and D.L. Migliore, \textit{Rachel's Cry Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope} (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 64.
heartache of their damaging experience to God, having the freedom to question, express anger, confusion, doubt and fear. Through voicing their lament the people of the Downtown Uniting Church moved further forward in the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness.

Without realising it, the finding of their voice of lament connected the community of faith to God in a powerful way. Just as Job, Rachel, David and Jesus\textsuperscript{167} lamented their own personal experiences of the abuse of power, the community of faith lamented their experience. They were connecting their everyday life experience with the stories of the Bible in a real and tangible way. They were indeed living out the “Gathering of the People of God – Lament to Hope”.

The lament of the congregation manifested itself in many different ways. It was sung or spoken as a public prayer and/or voiced in and through a private meditation. It was formed with angry words and shaped by many tears. It existed in the quietness of confusion. The lament of the community of faith was a corporate as well as private experience. The lament of the gathered people of God did not debilitate them, but rather, was absorbed into informing and developing their dance of the liturgy.

**Contextual Theology and its Song of Lament**

Working in ministry with the Downtown Uniting Church meant working in a middle-class suburban context. This meant that beyond my own personal study there was no direct exposure to the richness and depth of feminist or liberation theology. These areas of theological study and thought were for most of the people of the congregation outside

\textsuperscript{166} Note: Not all members of the community of faith had the same level of experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Just like the experience of the Psalmist, the depth of lament was equated to the depth of negative experience.

\textsuperscript{167} See: Job 3ff; Jeremiah 31: 15-20; 2 Sam 1:17-27; Matthew 27: 46; Mark 15: 34.
of their reading experience. It was a new way of thinking and potentially intimidating and threatening to their conservative theological background and heritage. If it were to be referred to it would need to be introduced gently with sensitivity and with encouragement of the congregation to be open to the surprise of the Holy Spirit. It was and is my belief that the outliving of feminist and liberation theology can and does influence, support, inform and enhance congregations – especially those who have an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

Feminist and liberation theologies strongly encourage the practice of contextual theological reflection as a tool to enhance and assist in building up the individual and/or community of gathered people. Nickoloff writes that Gustavo Gutierrez, a renowned South American liberation theologian, believes that “[T]heology does not generate a pastoral approach: rather it reflects upon it”.168 Specifically Gutierrez is referring to the reflection upon the economic and socio-cultural influences of Latin America and the need to develop theological reflection on those particular circumstances. As a feminist pastoral theologian in leadership with a negatively impacted community of faith, I maintain that just as lament is vital to the journey towards healing and forgiveness, so too is theological reflection intrinsic to understanding the spoken and unspoken issues impacting on that specific context. Without theological reflection by the Ministry Agent as well as the community of faith, the process of healing and forgiveness is hindered. Without theological reflection, the Word becomes and remains only words. Without theological reflection, the pastoral and liturgical leadership is only management practice.

It would be important as Ministry Agent with the Downtown Uniting Church to continually practise the art of theological reflection. It would also be important to gently pass some of this feminist/liberation theological reflection on to the community of faith. This would be done through conversation and preaching of the Word. It would be done with respect for the conservative theology of the majority of the congregation, but done nevertheless.

As the new Ministry Agent it became very clear very quickly that the women of the congregation were the most traumatised group of the gathered people of God. The words previously spoken by a particular Ministry Agent, both liturgically and conversationally, to many women of the congregation had led to their deep understanding and belief that they were not people of worth. The women spoke negatively of themselves as individuals and as a group of people within the life of the worshipping community. They had no place of value in their eyes; they could not be the people God longed for them to be because they had no worth.

The resultant anxiety, which arose out of their negative relationship (through both word and interaction) with a previous Ministry Agent led to a generalised apprehension and distrust of the role and office of Ministry Agent – no matter who the Ministry Agent might actually be. I was at times a participant observer in the conversations that the women had with each other. In our conversations both on an individual basis and in relaxed group conversation, the stories began to unfold as to why they were apprehensive toward the position of Ministry Agent. Naming this apprehension was not an easy conversation for any of the women to have. Some said much, some said very little. Some spoke with tears in their eyes. Some said nothing at all, though their body language spoke the words they could not voice.
As a participant observer, noticing the body language of some of the women became something which assisted in assessing the non-verbal communication within a group setting. It must be said that not all people who fold their arms and/or cross their legs are consciously or unconsciously shutting out those around them. They may, in fact, simply be comfortable sitting that way. However, in the group conversations and contexts where people chose to share some of their own narrative, those who chose to say nothing often sat closed off to the rest of the group. Arms folded, legs crossed and/or eyes looking down to the floor or from side to side at the other participants of the conversation. Sometimes there would be a sense of agitation with a subtle tapping of a foot or finger. At other times there seemed to be an internal prayer happening that perhaps by some miracle they could morph themselves into another space. The lament of some of the women would be spoken and enacted through the body language they exhibited.

Adding Harmony to the Song of Lament

As the Ministry Agent coming into this particular community of faith, building relationships with the gathered people of God was not only important and necessary, it was a deliberate action needed in order to model right relationship. Rather than offer leadership and relationship over and above the people, I modelled leadership and relationship in, amongst and alongside of the people – children, women and men alike. In order for a new narrative to develop it had to emerge from within and amongst, the gathered people of God. I could not impose or compose it. The people needed to experience new ways of being so that they could discover their stories and give them voice.
Theological reflection was an invaluable tool in assisting me in my practise of ministry particularly with the women of the community of faith. It was important to ask myself questions such as

- How would Jesus see the task of ministry with these women?
- What is the Jesus story that will help me understand my ministry with these women?
- What would Jesus say to these women?

The gospel story that came to mind was the story of the woman caught in adultery. In the story found in John 8: 2-11 a woman is brought before Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees.\(^{169}\) The woman had been caught in the act of adultery and it was required by the Law that she be stoned to death.\(^{170}\) A strange story perhaps for making a connection with the women of the Downtown Uniting Church, but one that offered hope to hopeless women.

Whilst none of the women (nor myself for that matter) had ever had the actual experience of the woman in John’s story, they had been shamed and embarrassed before other members of their community of faith. Their discomfort and embarrassment was brought about by the words and actions of a Ministry Agent – someone they had trusted. Knowing that their leader thought little of their opinions, the way they dressed and their friendships, the women’s self-esteem began to erode. Knowing that their faith and theology was considered underdeveloped and unacceptable, they had retreated within themselves, afraid to express their true selves, lest they be condemned even further.

Like the woman in John’s story, the women of the Downtown Uniting Church did not say much and tried not to attract any more attention to themselves than was absolutely

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\(^{169}\) John 8: 3
\(^{170}\) John 8: 4-5
necessary. They knew that they were not able to change the mind of their Ministry Agent. They accepted their lot and kept their eyes downcast.

Jesus challenged those who brought the woman to him. "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Unfortunately, for the women of the Downtown Uniting Church, there were no Regulations or Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice procedures which supported their particular experience and situation and which were able to challenge their Ministry Agent appropriately. There was no one who was willing to challenge the abuse of power that they and their community of faith were experiencing.

Why was this story helpful to me in my determining a way to encourage the women out of their state of helplessness and hopelessness? I too had been publicly shamed in my life by people I loved and trusted – my abusers. I too had chosen to withdraw rather than risk being humiliated again. What assisted me in my recovery from being and remaining a shamed and frightened human being was the compassion and encouragement shown to me by those who believed in me and who longed that I live the life God intended for me to live – my Aunt and Uncle and best friend. They constantly reminded me that I was a person of worth – albeit a damaged and broken one – and that they loved me and God loved me, no matter what. I would encourage the community of faith to believe that they too, were people of worth. I would encourage them to find their expression of lament without expectation of shape or form. I would model that same compassion and unconditional love I had once experienced. As Ministry Agent I would remind the people – women, children and men – that God loved them no matter what and longed that they live their lives confident of that fact.

\[171\] John 8: 7

132
Beyond compassion and unconditional love as Ministry Agent it was necessary to have perseverance and patience in building relationships with the women of the congregation. Through this perseverance and patience, the negative self comments the women had been making about themselves and each other eventually changed to become more hope-filled and affirming words of encouragement. The development of a new women’s narrative had begun. However, it must be stated clearly that at no time were the negative comments derogatory and/or personal attacks; they were simply unconstructive expressions of their low self-esteem and self-perception. The new story that they articulated told their story in a different and more positive way. Rather than saying: “we are only women…” and concluding with a negative self-deprecating phrase, a new story was given its voice and ultimately, claimed by the women of the congregation. The new story began with these words –

No self-deprecating comments by the women of Downtown Uniting Church will be accepted. You (we) are women of worth.

In the beginning of my Placement as Ministry Agent with the Downtown Uniting Church, the women of the congregation would either simply look blankly at me or hold their eyes downcast. They would listen to my words with suspicion. But at least they listened. Initially, I was the only one who was able to give voice to what was to be our new narrative. However, as affirming and life-giving relationships were built between the women of the congregation and me, this new narrative took its place amongst the community of women and slowly began to be restated and reaffirmed. We were moving towards the sunshine of possibility. Who knew what it might be possible to achieve if the women could believe in their gifts and graces and their place of value and worth in the community of faith – and the kingdom of God?
Ultimately, a rite of passage was achieved. The shamed and humiliated women were transformed from their downcast state to being able to hold their heads high amongst themselves and their community. They were able to move from the place of lament to the place of hope, not only for themselves, but also for their community of faith. They believed their new narrative – their new story became their everyday story. The women appropriated it to themselves as their confidence grew – in their relationships amongst themselves and with me, the Ministry Agent. Eventually, the women (young and old alike) knew they had permission to let me know that when I experienced a bad day that they could lovingly remind me of their (our) new narrative – and encourage me to repeat the words of the new women’s narrative! The song of despair had moved a step closer to the hope of possibility. No longer would the women remain singing

Lord how come me here?
I wish I’d never been born.

They could now find a new song, a song of possibility.

One song of possibility and hope which I sang on a number of occasions to myself and to others was another traditional Afro-American song and sometime companion piece to “Lord how come me here?” –

Over my head, I hear music in the air.
Over my head, I hear music in the air.
Over my head, I hear music in the air.
There must be a God somewhere!

Don Saliers writes “[H]uman beings do hope, even in the midst of despairing circumstances.”\textsuperscript{172} The song of lament experienced by the women did not remain full of despair and heartache. By being able to give their lament its voice they were able to find the song of hope amongst them.

Whether or not an individual or community of gathered people has experienced the trauma of sexual misconduct and/or other misuses and abuses of power by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership, disempowerment and disenfranchisement are still the resultant consequences of such actions. People, once empowered to worship freely with awe and wonder among the gathered people of God, become uncertain of their place as part of the gathered community. The ability to know, comprehend and understand unconditional love becomes impaired, and questioning becomes an influential component of what it means to be part of the gathered people of God. Is my/our worship still acceptable to God? Is God displeased, disappointed or angry with me/us? Does my/our experience of trauma make me/us inappropriate people to be in relationship with God and the Church? How is it possible for God to extend love to those of us with such an unlovely experience? Can we/I forgive? Should we/I forgive? Why should we/I forgive?

Janet Wootton believes strongly that “[T]here is a need to recognize and express the hurt and harm that has been done in the name of the Church by the misuse of Scripture in worship.” I would contend it is also necessary that we (the Church) recognise the hurt and harm experienced by those who gather as the people of God and which is caused by those called to lead God’s people. If, as Wootton asserts “… the radical message of Scripture is to be heard, our encounter with these scriptures as sacred texts through liturgy must interact with the historical reality of our communities and lives” that historical reality must include the traumatic and abusive experiences of the gathered people of God. This means that permission must be given to the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused individuals and/or communities of faith to name, enact and re-tell their stories liturgically as well as pastorally. Specialist Ministry Agents must

174 ibid., 100.
be trained in order that damaged communities of faith can be led safely towards the wholeness of life God has waiting for them. Whether or not the negative experience is in the form of sexual misconduct or the non-sexualised abuse of power by a Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership, the story must be allowed to be told.

**Transforming Despair into Hope**

As the Ministry Agent charged with the leadership of a community of disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people, it was important that I have sensitivity to the spoken pastoral words as well as the liturgical words. This sensitivity needed to be a primary focus along with the building up of relationships. Deep thought had to be given to a myriad of questions that arose out of the pastoral and liturgical contexts. How does one help the traumatised people to rediscover hope – hope in the future, in each other, the Church and/or God? How does one turn the negative self-perception of the individual and/or community of faith into a positive and affirming consciousness? Is positive reinforcement and affirmation all that is needed to resolve the problem of personal and communal low self-esteem?

It is a reasonable question to ask me – “How did you know what to do with the gathered people of God in order to transform their despair into hope?” The short answer is “I didn’t!” Another answer is – “The best way I knew how”.

The process of formation, field education and theological education received as a Candidate for Minister of the Word within the Uniting Church in Australia through the United Theological College (NSW Synod) provided me with an excellent knowledge and skills base from which to draw upon as I entered my Placement with the Downtown Uniting Church. Constant and persistent reflective practice as well as action research
combined with a desire to provide the gathered people with the pastoral care I had always hoped for in my personal times of despair and need inspired me as Ministry Agent with the people of this community of faith. It is important and necessary to state clearly at this point that I am in no way suggesting that all those engaged in pastoral ministry should have a similar life story or the same pastoral expectations as I did. Rather, I am being specific about the catalyst of my own transformative learning and that which undergirded my ministry practice. In terms of any other Ministry Agent being able to work within and amongst a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith, I believe that it is possible to make use of the same pastoral and liturgical model described in this dissertation in order to assist the process of healing and forgiveness.

The following pastoral, theological and reflective questions formed the basis of a theological reflection that continued throughout my Placement.

- How does one help the traumatised people to rediscover hope – hope in the future, themselves, the Church and/or God?
- How does one turn the hearing of the words of the Ministry Agent, until now such a negative experience, into the receiving of new words with a positive consciousness?
- Is positive reinforcement and affirmation all that is needed to resolve the problem of personal and communal low self-esteem?
- How is trust re-established?
- What will restore the confidence of the gathered people of God – in worship, the role of Ministry Agent, the Church and each other?

The respect, love and unconditional acceptance that my Aunt and Uncle modelled for me as a young person also profoundly influenced my way of being in ministry with the gathered people of God, as did my memory of my own experience of negative pastoral care. Both the theological reflection and the positive (and negative) modelling assisted me to relate with the disempowered and disenfranchised community. Natural intuition
and empathy were also integral ingredients to the pastoral and liturgical strategy and education that I undertook within the community of faith.

As I was slowly accepted in to the community of gathered people it became clear to me that it was not going to be enough only to love the gathered people back into health. Respect and trust also had to be rebuilt. The people – young and old alike – needed to know and believe that the person they had called to be their new Ministry Agent (me), respected them for who they were as individuals and as the gathered people of God.

More importantly, they had to know and believe that that respect was genuine. It was also vital that the community of faith – children, women and men alike – knew that I respected not only their level and expression of faith; I respected their sacred story of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The gathered people of God also needed to believe that I could be trusted with their sacred story – both that of an individual and that of the community of faith.

When respect is present and reciprocal it is possible to maintain individual and perhaps differing opinions. The possibility exists that those who were once negatively impacted through the sharing of their opinions will learn and become able to build community together, respectful and appreciative of the differences amongst them. Respect, trust and love go hand in hand, each building upon and encouraging the other to grow and develop – they cannot exist without the other.

In a congregation with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, respect and trust are elements of relationship which may have been completely destroyed especially in relation to the Ministry Agent or congregant in a position of leadership. It is important that respect and trust are modelled by the Ministry Agent and
re-learned by the people in order for the community of faith to be able to move forward on their journey of healing and forgiveness. In working with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church it was imperative that, as the Ministry Agent, I constantly reaffirmed the place of respect and trust through my words and actions to and with the gathered people of God. This meant working together, not only in the building up of relationships but also in the day to day running of the community of faith. I needed not only to stand alongside of the people in their pain, but to get my hands dirty (sometimes literally) and not ask them to do anything that I was not prepared to do myself.

**A New Outfit for the Dance – Reclaiming the Sacred Space**

As referred to in the previous chapter, the longing of the Downtown Uniting Church community of faith was that they would one day be re-united into the one worshipping congregation. The ultimate decision to re-unite was a community decision and was unanimously welcomed and embraced. With this exciting decision came a renewed interest in the ambience of the worshipping space. The gathered people were slowly beginning to notice the uninviting and depressed surroundings in which they worshipped. The worshipping space had come to mirror the mood of the congregation. It must be stated emphatically that the congregation of the Downtown Uniting Church were and still are a people of immense hospitality and welcome, willing to offer assistance to anyone at any time in their hour of need. They had simply stopped caring for their own space of worship because they had too many other things to worry about as a community of faith.

As the gathered community of faith, the people of the Downtown Uniting Church had begun to experience the "Gathering of the People of God" as a community – both inside and outside of the worshipping space. They had named and claimed the worshipping
space as a safe place. They had been invited to name their pain and struggle. They had been given permission to lament their individual and corporate experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. They had been encouraged to find and give voice to their own personal and corporate narrative. They had been encouraged to begin the journey of developing a new narrative. And another narrative was indeed beginning to develop amongst the community of gathered people – the narrative that commenced with the possibility of “what if?” Changing the appearance and the ambience of the worshipping space was yet another expression of the community coming together to embrace, if still tentatively, the journey of healing and forgiveness. The gathered people of God, having slowly realised that the church building had not been painted inside for over twenty-five years, determined that they should put plans into place to redesign and repaint the worshipping space. Without realising it, not only were the people continuing to find new ways of developing a new narrative, they were also about to undertake their most significant rite of passage to date – the reclaiming of the sacred space.

The beginning of reclaiming the sacred space
There were many tasks to be completed in the renovating of the worshipping space—moving furniture, taking up carpet, having floors polished and walls painted. However, the most difficult task would prove to be the moving of the grand piano. It not only had to be moved (lifted) from one side of the church to the other, it had to be lifted from the raised platform on which it stood on to the floor. It would take many people to achieve this task as well as much conversation and lots of co-operation. It would, without the congregation realising it, be the most significant task the community had undertaken since issuing the Call to me to become their new Ministry Agent. It would be an expression of the community of gathered people once again coming together to achieve a difficult task.

It was interesting to observe and note that the number of people participating in this particular working-bee was far greater than at other times over the years. Throughout the congregation there were many animated conversations that revolved around this observation. The mood of the gathered people was excited, almost joyous, as these observations were made and given voice. What did this mean for the community of faith? Was it a one off occasion? Would the ‘new’ people to the working-bee ever participate again?

Was it the beginning of something new (other than the renovations) for the community of faith? As people pondered the meaning of the additional helpers, something that had not been taken into consideration was the fact that the piano, once moved, would have to be moved back to its permanent position once that section of the carpet had been laid during the coming week. The community would have to go through the same ritual once more the following week – and put the piano back.
The majority of the community of faith participated in the working-bee in order to contribute to the renovations. Those who were physically unable to undertake the heavy physical tasks provided the culinary staples for the helpers – morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea, as well as the practical chores of washing up, cleaning up and most importantly, lots of encouragement and good cheer. Everyone was pitching in, doing their bit to contribute and make things new.

As Ministry Agent it was fascinating for me to watch the community dynamics unfold. Children, young adults, adults and members of the older generations all came together to do their bit. No one was turned away. No one was denied a place. Everyone was given something to do. Everyone made a contribution in some way or another. People would stop and watch a very small child tentatively carry something over to an adult. Young people and adults worked alongside each other. The enthusiasm of the children was infectious and energising; the cups of tea, refreshing.
At the moment when the piano was to be moved, a call went out for all able hands to help. Men downed tools, and women and children made their way to where the grand piano waited. Standing aside to watch the event, it was remarkable to note that there would actually be too many hands to lift the piano! However, the people found ways of including as many people as they physically could. The small children were given their own special task of moving the piano stool and some music. The “newcomers” were invited to take pride of place. The logistics were worked out and, on the count of three; the grand piano was slowly and cautiously moved from one side of the church building to the other – without a problem. As the piano was gently lowered into place a large corporate smile seemed to appear – the men and women were smiling, the children cheering. It was a magic moment.

Could the mood and level of participation be sustained in order for the piano to reach its proper resting place next week? What would it mean if people did not show up to help again? Could the enthusiasm and energy levels be sustained beyond this particular working-bee? The community of faith was not only deconstructing the worshipping space in which they had experienced such negativity, they were preparing to reconstruct it with hope and expectation that their place of worship would always be a safe place. During the following week I received many comments about the working-bee – all of them overwhelmingly positive. People could not stop speaking about it, nor could they not note how the community seemed to have changed because of it. The carpet was eventually laid where the piano would finally stand. Now we would have to move it back again!

Those of the community who were not able to attend the following week were not only apologetic about their inability to participate they were also, in fact, disappointed that
they could not be involved again. However, what was interesting was that despite those who were not able to be there, the numbers of helpers the following week grew. Different members of the community took the place of those who could not be there. The energy and enthusiasm not only remained, it grew. Without the people of the congregation realising that they were participating in a rite of passage, they sensed they had participated in a profound moment in the life of the community of faith. As the renovations were eventually completed not only did the interior of the worshipping space take on a new and more welcoming face, so did the community of gathered people. Indeed, something even more profound had happened. The people had embarked on and achieved the rite of passage which was the **reclaiming of the sacred space.**

![The Piano](image)

In the time that the renovations took to be completed the people of the congregation would bring others from outside of the community of faith to see what was being achieved. In the six years of being in Placement with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church, the overwhelming comment concerning the congregation which has
been made to me, concerned not only the generous hospitality offered to visitors, but what a feeling of welcome the worshipping space offered to all who came into it. The love and respect that had been modelled to the community had transferred to how they could now enter into the worshipping space.

The practical upkeep and transformation of the worshipping space had been achieved. The sacred space had been reclaimed. However, before it was possible to pastorally re-build the whole community, it would be necessary to re-build the pastoral leadership of the community. It would be a case of baby-steps, a group of people at a time. It was now necessary to assist the lay leadership of the community to re-learn that they had been chosen by the other members of the community to share their gifts and graces in pastoral leadership for a reason: that reason being, that they actually had those gifts and graces to share.

Ready for the first service in the new worshipping space
Baby-Stepping — Developing the Pastoral Care Web

It has been my personal and professional experience that the ability to care for one’s self is remarkably diminished when one has had an experience of abuse. Having entered into a disempowered and disenfranchised community of faith, as Ministry Agent it was obvious to me that they too had lowered levels of energy for pastoral care within and amongst the gathered people of God. Before the congregation as a whole could be cared for it would be necessary to re-educate, re-focus and re-energise the Elders/Leaders who had been charged with the role of pastoral care amongst the community.

As the church calendar allowed, two full days were set aside for the Elders/Leaders to spend time together getting to know each other more and to talk about the perception they had of their role within the life of the community. An opportunity would also be given to them to speak about their own observations of the effect that the disempowerment and disenfranchisement had had on them personally and/or the community of faith, if they chose. We would workshop and process pastoral care together. On Day One we would focus on relationship building amongst the pastoral team. On Day Two we would focus on the pastoral care of the community of faith. We would talk this through together and eventually I would offer a model of pastoral care for their consideration.

Through conversation and discussion with the Elders/Leaders an understanding of what constituted pastoral care for them was thoughtfully determined by consensus. As Ministry Agent I then offered a proposed model of pastoral care which focussed on sharing the responsibility amongst the gathered people of God. The suggested model encouraged people to be pro-active in their caring for each other. The role of Elder/Leader would not be eradicated, but rather still exist and in fact be strengthened
as they would now play a key co-ordinating and communication role in the pastoral care of the community of faith. We would all work as a team.

The adults and young adults of the Downtown Uniting Church would be offered the opportunity to become Carers amongst the gathered people of God. However, there would be no pressure or expectation placed on anyone. Carers would be instituted and recognised liturgically as a valuable addition to the pastoral leadership of the community of faith. The community worshipping space had been transformed. It was now the turn of the gathered people of God to begin the experience of transformation.

The development of the “Pastoral Care Web”\textsuperscript{175} was a first step in enabling the Elders/Leaders of the congregation to begin to learn to take care of each other once again. It was a new way of undertaking pastoral care within the community of faith – that is, the Ministry Agent would no longer be the only one to do the intentional pastoral care. The negative impact of one Ministry Agent upon the gathered people of God would be undone by the care of many as the responsibility for pastoral care would be shared throughout the whole of the community of faith. In order for the “Pastoral Care Web” to be successful, adult education of the Elders/Leaders, as well as the whole community of faith, would be necessary. After the traumatic experience of the community it was important that we understood – as a community of faith – what was pastoral care. And we started simply, one baby-step at a time.

Informal networks of care – relationships and friendships – would still offer the special care of those relationships. Nothing would diminish or detract from them. Looking at it

\textsuperscript{175} The “Pastoral Care Web” is based on a programme originally designed by Rev. Kevin Dilks, Wesley Mission Perth and named the “Pastoral Care Network”. Permission was obtained from Rev. Kevin Dilks for the adaptation and re-working of his programme, culminating in the final design of the “Pastoral Care Web”.

147
from another perspective there would now be focussed, pro-active and intentional pastoral care flowing throughout the community of faith. Everyone (from the age of 15 upwards) would be offered a Carer, life-partners would not have to share a Carer and everyone (over the age of 18) would have the opportunity to become a Carer. The individual members of the gathered people of God were asked if they would like to consider being a Carer and the opportunity was also given for people to refrain from having a Carer if they so chose. The Elders and Leaders would continue in their specific, commissioned roles. The Ministry Agent would not control the caring, but rather share it with those of the gathered community of faith.

The Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, who was elected by the congregation at their Annual General Meeting, in conjunction with the Ministry Agent in the first instance, set about the task of matching Carers (those doing the caring) with Carees (those being cared for). It was a complicated task. However, it was one which ultimately set the path on which the pastoral care of the Downtown Uniting Church would follow. No one was locked into caring for any set period of time and the Pastoral Care Web list was constantly monitored, altered and re-arranged if and when needed.

The model of the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care” was based on the diagram of a spider’s web. People would not be trapped in the role of pastoral care; rather, the community of faith would be supported, upheld and strengthened by the pastoral care offered amongst the gathered people of God. The support structure of the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care” would be flexible, non-dictatorial, available, co-ordinated and acknowledged as the desire of the Downtown Uniting Church to be a community which openly and generously cared for not only its visitors/newcomers, but each person who
chose to call it home. The Ministry Agent would remain the person charged with the pastoral oversight and leadership of the congregation (as stated in the Service of Induction). However, with the role of caring shared amongst the people, pastoral care was not the sole responsibility of one person – it was a shared experience amongst the gathered people of God. Each of us would share the load, encourage each other and keep the lines of communication open with the Ministry Agent still accessible and available to all.

Figure 4 - Model of Pastoral Care Web
Regular co-ordinating meetings were held in order that checks could be made to make sure no one missed the opportunity to either be a participant in the “Web of Care” as either a Carer or a Caree.\textsuperscript{176} Invitations would continue to be extended to new people each month to join the “Web of Care”. Training sessions were also offered to the recognised Carers. Training manuals were issued in order to assist and remind the Carers of their role and responsibilities and provide information to the Ministry Agent when necessary; for example, specific requests for pastoral visits by the Ministry Agent. Phone calls, letters, post cards, emails and conversations flowed amongst the community of gathered people. The people of the congregation had Carers; the Carers had Carers; and the Leaders/Elders had Carers. The “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care” took its shape and still remains strong six years later.

The Downtown Uniting Church had begun the movement within the Service of the Lord’s Day that would take them beyond the experience of lament and hope in to the “hearing and receiving” of the Word. The gathered people of God were beginning to take risks. That is, they were beginning to allow themselves to care more fully, intentionally and reciprocally for each other. They were also beginning to take the risk to ‘hear’ and to ‘listen’ for what God might be saying to them and amongst them.

\textsuperscript{176} Note: although the words “Carer” and “Caree” have a ring of action (Carer) and passivity (Caree) these words were chosen specifically to indicate the specified role with the “Web of Care”. The mutuality of the “Web” was to be found in that all of the gathered people of God had the opportunity to be part of the “Web”. A “Carer” could choose to take leave of absence from their specified role and thus become a “Caree”. A “Caree” could in turn, also choose to become a “Carer” increasing their participation in the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care”. Each “Carer” also had their own “Carer.”
The Service of the Word –

Hearing and Receiving
Patience is a Virtue – Possess It if You Can!

Being called into the damaged community of faith of Downtown Uniting Church meant I had to acknowledge and (more importantly) remember that I would never have complete access to the whole narrative of either an individual or the gathered people of God. Only those who were the actual participants of the story could tell the story – for it was indeed, their story. Only they were the ones who would be able to re-tell and re-member the story of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Even these people would only have access to their part of the story.

As Ministry Agent with the Downtown Uniting Church I was only ever able to gain access to the story of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse as a result of being invited into the telling and hearing of the story as it was told by those with the actual experience. I was only privy to the details of the story as they were released and re-told by the one/s who had the lived experience of the story. As the Ministry Agent sharing ministry with a damaged and traumatised community of faith, I would always be and remain a participant observer in relation to the story.

My experience as the Ministry Agent working with an adversely affected individual and/or community of faith convinced me that practitioners working with these particular communities must remember that they are a guest in the sacred space of the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people. No matter how warm the welcome of the gathered people of God, the Ministry Agent will remain a participant observer whose action-reflections will inform not only the quality of their ministry but also the manner in which they are able to build relationship with that particular individual and/or community. The journey of healing and forgiveness will be undertaken by the people accompanied by the Ministry Agent.
From the perspective of a practitioner called to share not only ministry but also the journey of healing and forgiveness with a traumatised and damaged gathered people of God, I found that the time spent together was intense. There were times when schedules, work plans and timetables had to change with any given moment. The energy levels within the community for the journey of healing and forgiveness changed from day to day, week to week, month to month. As we shared ministry together I found the old saying “patience is a virtue – possess it if you can” an invaluable instruction. As the Ministry Agent I had to be prepared and willing to adjust to the rhythm of the congregational dance.

There were many times when people simply needed to talk, often for hours, about their particular experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The individual/s needed someone not only to hear their story, concerns, heartache, pain, anger and frustrations but, more than having their spoken words heard, they also needed to be listened to. Robert Larson suggests that

… listening sounds so simple, so purely passive, that most people don’t realize how important, how therapeutic it is. Yet there are many occasions when listening is the most helpful thing, the most kindly thing, one person can do for another.\(^{177}\)

Hearing the words of another person is a physical action. We use the ear and auditory senses to undertake the task of hearing. Listening, on the other hand, is more than hearing. It is the appropriation of the spoken word beyond the actual act of hearing through the ear and taking that spoken word into the soul. It is “to hear attentively; to give ear to; to pay attention to (a person or what is being said)”.\(^ {178}\) It bears the emphasis of attending to, thus shutting out extraneous distractions. It is focussing, paying close

\(^{177}\) R.E.Jr. Larson, ...Preparing to Listen: Listening’s Quiet Power (Pennsylvania: Teleministries USA, 1978), 21.

attention to and concentrating on, not only the spoken words but also the narrative which accompanies those words. There is a sense of mutuality.

Listening takes time. Listening uses energy. It is not a passive act. G. E. Boyd notes that “[L]istening is an act of will.¹⁷⁹ As I became an intentional listener as Ministry Agent among the gathered people of God, I was entering into relationships that needed to be based on trust, mutual journeying and respect. It was not simply the acquiring of facts for the benefit of building my own personal and professional knowledge base. It was not about discovering how someone else’s experience might influence or impact upon me – though it must be said many conversations did impact upon me and tap into experiences within my own journey of life and faith. The relationship that comes with intentional listening is always respectful of the speaker’s story, listens beyond the words and values the risk the speaker takes in the telling of their narrative.

In practical terms, being an intentional listener meant that I had to be aware of the sometimes spontaneous nature of conversation. I needed to be conscious of the fact that there would be times when I would need to be flexible in my time keeping and schedules for the day. Although many conversations were held through appointments, there were numerous times when they were unscheduled, spur-of-the-moment conversations sparked by a comment, a question or even an event. In particular, a person’s personal reaction to a comment, question or event might have been a trigger for the spontaneity of the conversation. In this context it was inappropriate for me, as Ministry Agent, to indicate anything other than my willingness to hear and listen to their story. It was not simply hearing the words spoken by the person speaking them. It was an act of intentional listening; respectful of the sacredness of the story being told.

The Story within the Story

Communities, as we have noted, have their own individual and particular narratives. These are the stories that form not only the historicity of a particular community, but are the narratives which speak of the lives and circumstances of the individuals that make up those communities. Beyond the narratives of the communities there are also the stories of the sub-communities within those communities. Whether the communities are families, schools, work places, jails, netball teams, youth groups, hospitals or churches there is always a story around, beneath and beyond the story that can be accessed readily. As the Ministry Agent working with a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community, it was not only important for me to look for and listen to the story of the community, it was necessary to find ways of helping the individual and/or the community of faith to find their voice in order that their story be told, re-told and re-membered. It is in the re-telling and re-membering that the story is integrated beyond the mundane of the everyday into the fabric that is our narrative, assisting us to commence the journey of healing and forgiveness. Doug Purnell puts it this way “[W]hile the naming of one’s life experience or story shapes a knowing of identity and soul, it also works to bring healing following crises.”

Gerkin reminds us of the words of Anton Boisen who asserted that

the depth experience of persons in the struggles of their mental and spiritual life demanded the same respect as do the historic texts from which the foundations of our Judeo-Christian faith tradition are drawn. Each individual living human document has an integrity of his or her own that calls for understanding and interpretation …

It was important that as the Ministry Agent I did not assume that each person’s re-telling and re-membering of the story would be identical or easy. Neither could I assume that the re-telling and re-membering of the story would be any less significant.

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180 D. Purnell, Conversation as Ministry Stories and Strategies for Confident Caregiving (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 70.
for the person unable or unwilling to share their story beyond themselves. As they were able and willing and whenever and however the opportunity arose, the individual and/or community of faith had to be allowed to give voice to their narrative. The journey of healing and forgiveness could not be forced upon anyone.

The progression that I would name as the movement from the “Gathering of the People of God” into the “Service of the Word” is not necessarily dramatic or spectacular. It can, in fact, be quite a subtle movement – happening in the most simple and unexpected ways at the most unexpected times. However the movement is experienced – whether individually as a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused person or corporately as a community of faith; as a profound “a-ha” experience or by barely noticing the difference – people hear and receive the Word of God as it comes to them in their context. As indicated earlier, this can occur not only in the church building, but beyond, in the wider context that is people’s life contexts as well.

For individuals and/or communities of faith disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by a person in a position of leadership in a ministry context, the words needed to speak their story may not be easy to find. The feelings of shame, guilt and anger may impede their ability to give voice to the naming of the pain that the individual and/or community of faith may be experiencing. Elsewhere I maintain that in accepting “that the silence which has surrounded the abuse must finally be broken and those responsible held accountable for their actions”,¹⁸² individuals and communities of faith are once again able to find their voice as they enter into the journey of healing and forgiveness. It is important to note that those who have experienced disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse may struggle to express their anger at their experience

— after all they are Christians and should forgive rather than get angry. However, "[T]he right expression of anger seeks justice, not revenge, looks toward a new life without shame, guilt, or fear, and bestows to the survivor of abuse the possibility of an experience of forgiveness." ¹³³

The role of the Ministry Agent is not only to help the people find their voice; it is also to assist in bringing the voice of God into the hearing of the individual and/or community of faith. The proclamation of the Word Sunday by Sunday is only part of how that Word will be proclaimed.

The Uniting Church in Australia, in the Service of Induction of a Ministry Agent called into a Placement, makes the following statement:

N, my brother/sister in Christ,
you are called to be a servant and a shepherd
in this congregation/these congregations.
It is your work to preach Christ's gospel,
to call people to repentance,
to assure them of God's mercy, and to baptise.
You will teach, inspire and encourage,
both by word and example,
the people entrusted to your care.
You will lead them in worship,
and celebrate the Lord's supper with them.

You will take Christ the Good Shepherd as your example,
caring for his people and serving with them
in their witness to the world.

In view of this solemn trust,
we ask you to reaffirm
the declaration of faith and obedience
that you made at your ordination
and to show that you desire, by God's grace,
to continue your ministry in this congregation/these congregations. ¹³⁴

The Church then asks of the Ministry Agent the following questions:

¹³³ ibid.
Do you confess anew Jesus Christ as Lord?
I do so confess.

Do you receive the witness to Christ
in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?
I do.

Do you accept the discipline of the Uniting Church
and the oversight of this presbytery?
I do.

Will you take part in the work of this presbytery
and other councils of the Uniting Church,
and will you share in the life and witness
of the wider church?
I will.\(^{185}\)

In making these public promises the Ministry Agent not only renews the vows made at
their ordination (if they are either a Minister of the Word or Deacon) they are also
making a commitment to the gathered people of God in that particular place. They state
before the gathered people of God that they will lead and nurture the community of
faith as well as listen for and speak the Word of God as interpreted for that context.

The Induction continues with the interaction between the new Ministry Agent and the
gathered people of God. Some representative members of the community of faith bring
forward symbols that represent the role and office of Ordained Minister. For example,
the people bring a Bible, a jug of water (representing Baptism) and some bread and
wine (representing the Eucharist). The people ask of the Ministry Agent

Will you study the scriptures,
proclaim the gospel
and preside at the sacraments
within the discipline of the church?
Will you exercise pastoral care of the family of God
in the congregation/s of N?

The Ministry Agent responds to these questions with the affirmation
I will, by the grace of God.

At the point of Induction the gathered people of God within any congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia is left in no doubt of not only their expectations of their incoming Ministry Agent but also the Church’s expectations of its Ministry Agent. Not only will the Ministry Agent study the Scriptures, preach the Good News and preside over the community meal of the Eucharist, they will exercise pastoral care of the community of faith. All of this is done under and within the discipline of the church. The promises made at Ordination, as well as during the Service of Induction, are public promises to which the one being Ordained or Inducted is (and will be) held accountable by the councils of the church, as well as the members of the community of faith in which they are called to be Ministry Agent.

A Personal Dance – Continued
My best friend and I told each other everything: our likes and dislikes, our secret crushes. We never ran out of anything to say, though I did not tell her the realities of what home was really like. She knew that my mother was an angry woman who yelled at me a lot. She knew that there were times when I was very unhappy. She was aware that there were times when I did not want to leave her house. However, she did not know about the violence I endured during our High School years until we were both grown adults and had young children of our own.

When you are young and have a best friend you imagine that nothing will ever be a secret. But when you are a young person in a domestic violence situation there are secrets that must be kept – for your safety – and for the safety of your friendships. In my heart I knew that my best friend would care for me no matter what and that she could be trusted implicitly. But how could she change anything? She couldn’t. If I told

185 ibid., 530.
her what was happening to me the only thing she could do was tell her parents. And what could they do for me? If they had confronted my family it would have only made the situation worse. The encouragement from social service departments to disclose situations of domestic violence and abuse at that time was not the same as it is now. The resources, information and understanding of domestic violence and abuse issues were not of the standard they are today. More significant for me was the fact that if my parents knew that I was talking to others about my home life, their retribution would have been swift indeed. More than living with the physical pain would be the pain in my heart at knowing I would be prevented from seeing my friend ever again. I did not need anything else to inflame the home front. So, the secret remained just that – a secret.

Underlying all of my reasons not to tell my surrogate family what it was really like living in my family home was the unshakeable fear that, by telling them, I was breaking the cardinal rule of silence. The entirety of my life had been surrounded with an impenetrable wall of silence which was accompanied by an unspoken understanding that the breaking of the silence could mean the ultimate sacrifice – death – from whom I was never absolutely certain. But it was either going to be one of my parents or God – that I knew for certain.

Having developed in my adult years a theology – an understanding of God – which refutes and shuns the primarily vengeful and abusive God of my upbringing, I am now of the opinion that God was not out to get me. God was in fact weeping with me and indeed for me. I just did not know it at the time. I was not alone.
However, as a young person this was not what I was encouraged to believe. Grace, compassion, mercy and unconditional love were not words ever associated with God. If ever I had a bad dream and tried to explain it to my mother she would listen carefully and thoughtfully and then explain the meaning of the dream. Simply put, God was telling me that I was not a good enough person and that if I did not try harder God would punish me. Most responses to my questions about God detailed the fact that God was “watching” me all of the time and would “get” me if I did not pass God’s assessment of me and the way I lived my life. What I wore would be judged by God. What I ate would be judged by God. Who I chose as a friend would be judged by God. My relationship with God was based purely on fear – fear of the consequences of simply being me because I could never attain the perfection that I was told was necessary for God to love me. God was vengeful and abusive and as was the case with my parents, you don’t argue about that. You just try harder.

The compassionate God with whom I share relationship now as an adult was with me as a child and young adult and longed for me to live a life of wholeness and possibility. I just did not know it. The angel that I needed each night to protect me was not just the imaginary dream or longing of a neurotic child. Yes, I was scared. Yes, I knew I needed protection. But it was also an inner knowing that something holy and other was with me – an experience of the Divine without realising or being able to verbalise it.

It was not until I was a young mother raising my two children on my own that I began to understand God in a different way to that of my childhood. Having begun to attend my local Uniting Church with my children I began to hear words about God that were very different to those I heard as a child and young person. The Minister of that community of faith was a generous and gentle man who spoke words about God loving
us (me) unconditionally. He spoke about Jesus as a man who welcomed the unlovely and unloved and loved them even when they did not love themselves. His words and actions started me thinking about God in a different way. His words and actions encouraged me to see God not as vengeful and violent, but rather loving and compassionate.

Today my understanding of God says that God is foremost a God of compassion. Equal to that compassion I believe that God is also a God of justice – not retribution. As such, God requires that the silence be broken. The perpetrators of violence in my family’s experience must be held accountable. But it does not end there. To do this the pain must be named. The story must be told. The silence must be broken.

I remember very clearly the bright sunny morning I woke and looked out of my bedroom window and told God that I believed that he[sic] would not kill me for simply being me. I remember acknowledging that I was choosing to be in relationship with God through this Jesus who loved the un-loveable. Acknowledging the new-found awareness that God actually loved me despite my life experience was and is a gift that has sustained me since. Knowing that God will not kill me for breaking the silence is also highly encouraging and re-assuring. It motivates me to continue the journey of remembering. Knowing that my surrogate family will not abandon me, even though they now know my story, is remarkably comforting. Being able to visualise and verbalise what was once a secret allows for the feeling and experience of wholeness – of completeness.

Like the community of faith at Downtown Uniting Church I too experienced a rite of passage that moved me forward on my journey of healing and forgiveness. The faith of
a child was evolving into that of the faith of an adult. The dysfunctional faith experience of a child of a dysfunctional family was commencing the journey of becoming and being a functional and integrated adult.

My best friend and I are now able to talk about what happened to me without discomfort or embarrassment. Her ability to be analytical as well as sensitive is constructive and comforting. Her commitment to our relationship remains unchanged. Her love for me as her friend continues to be unquestioning and constant. She is no longer my best friend. She is my sister. The journey into the second half of our lives will be no different in commitment to that which we had in our relationship as twelve year old girls. There may be more tears to come, but there will never be any more secrets – not ever.

In this is the Word of the Lord – Thanks be to God

Each week as the community of faith gathers together for worship they hear the word of God proclaimed throughout the liturgy; in particular, the Word as read from Holy Scriptures and in the Uniting Church context (as in other mainstream Protestant and Catholic congregations), usually as determined by the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the day. The people are encouraged to hear and receive the Word into their minds and hearts and go out into the world to put that Word into action. However, in the case of an individual or community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse the “receiving” of the Word may, in fact, be more difficult than the “hearing”.

In the case of the congregation of Downtown Uniting Church it was necessary to help the people understand that it was possible for God to continue to speak to them through
the Word despite their brokenness and indeed through their traumatic and painful experience. The appropriate development of Bible Study material which encouraged them to understand not only issues of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and abuse in general, but also how Scripture might be able to assist them in their understanding and interpretation and bring them hope, was very important. The Bible Study material was prepared as an activity open to all those who wished to participate during two very different seasons of the Christian year. The first study was during the period of Lent and focussed on the Passion story and was named “Walking to Golgotha – a Lenten study from Luke’s Gospel”.

A Re-Introduction and Re-Connection to the Word

For the people of the Downtown Uniting Church, being re-introduced and re-connected to the Word meant not only looking at passages of Scripture during the corporate gathering each Sunday during worship, but beyond and outside of the Sunday morning worship context. It meant coming together during the week, not unusual in many Christian denominations, to study the Bible as a small group community. It entailed not only looking at passages of Scripture, but also at themselves and their specific congregational context, as well as the experience of that community of faith of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

It was at times very difficult to engage the people in deep conversation, though this did not mean that they did not participate. Rather, it meant that they kept their thoughts to themselves. At other times, emotions would arise that would take the participant/s by surprise and debilitate them emotionally for a time. But throughout the process of re-introduction and re-connection the people of the Downtown Uniting Church continued to participate and make themselves vulnerable before God (as much as they were able).
In doing this they chose to take the risk that God might actually speak to them through the Word despite their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. Others, on the other hand, deliberately chose not to participate because they were not sure that they would not be negatively impacted even further. They did not tell me this immediately though, but only as our relationship grew, deepened and I was trusted. There were others who did not participate because the time did not suit their timetabling or simply because they were not interested in participating in a Bible Study.

The Bible Study "Walking to Golgotha – a Lenten study from Luke’s Gospel" was written specifically for the congregational context of the Downtown Uniting Church and was offered twice in a period of twelve months. Those who participated came for many different reasons; some in their capacity as Leaders/Elders, others simply curious of the content. The focus of the Bible Study addressed the issues of power and powerlessness and looked at these issues from the perspective of the Passion story as taken from the Gospel of Luke, Chapters 22 and 23. The Bible Study was offered during the season of Lent and met weekly over a period of four (4) weeks.

**A Reason for the Season**

As a ministry practitioner I have found that there is a great deal of value in assisting the community of faith through the presentation and participation in a Bible study during a specific liturgical season. The participants, along with the Ministry Agent, are afforded the opportunity to extend themselves creatively. This may, for some, be fairly threatening; however, with the right encouragement it may also assist the gathered people in their participation in the event. Creativity, ambience and drama can help facilitate the gathered people in entering into the Bible Study and/or worship experience more fully than perhaps they might have on other occasions. In preparing the Bible
Study "Walking to Golgotha", ambience was a way of connecting the gathered people, not only with the written words of Scripture, it was also a tool to assist in the building of an atmospheric picture to support and enhance the spoken words. For example

Luke 22: 1-23 "...a time of preparation...
Setting up: The people gathered to be seated in a circle around a table in the centre. On the table is a cloth, with four purple (4) candles around a large white Christ candle. Light all candles. Also on the table are some pita bread and a chalice.\footnote{K.L. Casey, Appendix 2.}

The specific time frame for presenting "Walking to Golgotha" was the four (4) Wednesday evenings prior to Passion Week. The liturgical colour for the season of Lent – purple – was used to help the people visually connect with the season. The purple candles surrounded the white (Christ) candle and each week one was extinguished to mark a further progression towards the cross of Good Friday. The chalice and bread focussed attention on the chosen text for the first week and connected those gathered with the meal Jesus shared with his disciples.

The Bible reading was accompanied by instrumental music in an effort to help the people focus more intentionally on the words that they were hearing. Both the atmosphere – light and sound – and the spoken word combined to add drama and mood beyond what might normally have been experienced in a Bible Study. This is not to suggest that all Bible studies should always be done in this manner. I would suggest that it is necessary to ask the questions of oneself such as: Is this creativity useful and appropriate to the presentation of this Bible Study? Will this context benefit by creative expression? How much creative expression is appropriate? How will the creative expression take its form?
In the case of the Downtown Uniting Church the ambience of the space in which the people gathered assisted the actual naming of the gathering space as a “safe place”. The people were assured that at no time would any judgement be made concerning their level of participation. People could participate as much, or as little, as they desired. The following questions were addressed to the group

1. In remembering the Exodus experience of their ancestors each Jewish family and community participated in the Passover; a time in which the people re-covenanted, reassessed and renewed their relationship with God. The symbolic act we share in, as a gathered people of God, the Eucharist (Holy Communion) is enacted in this reading from Luke 22:1-23 with Jesus and the disciples.
   ☑ How does our participation in the festivals of the church such as Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday and Easter bring us together as a community?

2. In the reading, Jesus names not only his future suffering but also the fact that he knows he is going to be betrayed by one of his disciples. The secrecy, out of which Judas Iscariot plots his betrayal, is named as an issue which will affect the future life of the gathered community.
   ☑ As you reflect on this reading discuss how you, and in turn your faith community, deal with issues of pain and hurt.

3. In “Walking to Golgotha” we are undertaking a journey of discovery. It is a journey with Jesus and the disciples where we will become intimately aware of the spoken and unspoken issues of that community. It is not necessarily a pleasant or comfortable journey. However, it is a journey where we will learn about ourselves as individuals and as a community of faith.
   ☑ In the light of this knowledge what makes you uncomfortable about this passage of Scripture? Is there anything that is comforting to you? 187

These questions were designed in light of the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse experienced by individuals and/or the community of faith of the Downtown Uniting Church. The questions subtly asked the gathered people “Why are you here?”, “What is your lived experience (if any) of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse?” and “Where is God for you in this?”

Having spoken amongst themselves and shared what needed to be shared, the people were encouraged to share beyond that closed group with the whole of the gathered people at the Bible Study. Though fairly tentative and unsure about sharing those who
did share in the larger group acknowledged (at the close of the evening) that it had
indeed been a difficult decision to speak to the whole group. However, they also made
comments which named how it had been a positive experience for them as well.
Each week, the commencement ritual (the “Gathering of the People of God”) assisted in
grounding the people in the context that was the Lenten Bible Study. Each week, the
reading of the passage of Scripture to the instrumental music set the mood for the
journey that was “Walking to Golgotha”. Each week, the questions connected those
gathered with the Scriptures, their lived experiences and their life as the Downtown
Uniting Church.

Whilst I acknowledge that some of the questions were, in fact, confronting to those who
attended, I am convinced that it was the naming of the issues in the context of the Bible
Study that gave some of the people permission to speak (if only vaguely at times) about
their personal as well as the corporate experience of disempowerment,
 disenfranchisement and/or abuse. It must also be said that whilst there were those who
chose to attend and speak, there were equally those who deliberately chose not to come
to the Bible study. It is important to acknowledge that in a community of faith that has
an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, the Ministry
Agent should not see the numbers of people who attend and/or participate as the only
measure of success. It may be quite probable that the counting of numbers of attendees
is actually a contra-indicator of success. If one person is assisted to enter the journey of
healing and forgiveness then that is success in and of itself.

The liturgical season supports the chosen passages of Scripture as well as helps the
gathered people of God place the readings in a specific cultural and historical context.

In a congregation such as the Downtown Uniting Church it was important that the Bible Study connected to all the aspects of the life and journey of the congregation – both positive and negative. This meant that what was referred to in the specific Bible Study was alluded to, in some way or other, in the gathered experience that was Sunday worship – both morning and night services. The people would be connected scripturally, if not physically, throughout the week.

In “Walking to Golgotha” it was important to acknowledge the place of power, powerlessness and pain. This acknowledgement of power and powerlessness in the liturgical season of Lent connected the people to their place of lament – that is, the place of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. However, beyond this connection it was also important that the gathered people have an understanding of how power and powerlessness could be interpreted and understood. Having defined power and powerlessness it was then possible to make a further connection with the chosen passage of Scripture.

The people attending the Bible Study gathered in groups of two or three and discussed the following

1. In the Bible reading from Luke 22: 63 – 23:25 power and powerlessness play a significant part in determining the roles, actions and even the future of the characters in the story.
   - In your group, share some of the moments of power and/or powerlessness which emerge from this reading.

2. “The misuse, not the use of power may be the most serious issue in human existence.”
   - Discuss this statement in your group.

When leading a Bible Study, at any time of the liturgical calendar, it is helpful if the gathered people are able to connect their individual and personal experience with the

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chosen passages of Scripture. In a community of faith where there has been an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, connecting their individual and personal experience may exacerbate painful emotions and/or memories. I found that it was therefore necessary to name the gathering space as a “safe place”. It was also necessary that those gathered understood that any personal information or feelings that were shared would not be talked about beyond the gathering space. Respect of each participant’s journey of life and faith had to be of paramount importance.

In leading the gathered people through a discussion on power and powerlessness room was made for people to reflect on their own (individually) and at their own pace. In “Walking to Golgotha” this was done as follows

* An exercise on your own:
As we think about the issue of power and powerlessness in Luke 22: 63 – 23:25, we think about power in our own life situations. All of us, at some time or another (be it as a child or an adult), feel the impact of power and powerlessness. In a quiet place on your own make a list of situations where you feel power in your life and/or the situations where perhaps you might feel powerless.

This task may raise some difficult issues for some of us which we may not even be aware. Being sensitive to this possibility, if this task does make you uncomfortable, please just take some time to reflect on our time “Walking to Golgotha” so far. The exercise is aimed to raise our awareness of our own sense of power and/or powerlessness and is not compulsory. Neither will the results of our thinking be shared with the larger group.

* An exercise for the whole group:
In this Bible reading from Luke 22: 63 – 23:25 we witness power and powerlessness. From the apparent powerlessness of Jesus as he is intimidated, taunted and physically abused, through to the power and powerlessness of Pilate and ultimately the power of the crowd.

❖ Being the gathered people of God in this place how is our individual sense of power and/or powerlessness recognised and acknowledged or denied?

189 K.L. Casey, Appendix 2.
As a people who recognise in ourselves our own sense of power and/or powerlessness, our strengths and weaknesses –

\[\ast\] In what ways are we able to bring to the wider community a sense of healing and wholeness as it struggles with its own sense of power and/or powerlessness?\(^{190}\)

Space and time had to be provided for the gathered people to enter into the questions as they were able. Permission was also given for people not to participate or not to share their answers to any of the questions beyond themselves. If, as leader of the Bible Study, I perceived that the Bible Study would only be successful if people shared their answers with the larger group then the possibility existed for further disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse of the gathered people. It was paramount that the gathered people were at all times aware of their being in a place of safety as much as that could be guaranteed. Success could not be judged on how many of the gathered people were prepared to make themselves vulnerable before the other participants by sharing their personal thoughts and reflections to the asked questions.

In contrast to the preparation and presentation of the Lenten Bible Study “Walking to Golgotha” was the preparation and presentation of an Advent Bible Study. In this particular Advent Bible Study it was important and helpful to move the gathered people of God beyond their experience of lament and to offer them the opportunity to think about “hope, hopefulness and anticipation”. Once again, it was important to not only connect it with their personal experience, but also their corporate journey as a community of faith.

The liturgical season of Advent – the time of waiting for the Christ-child to be born in a stable – was purposely chosen to explore the issues of hope, hopefulness and anticipation. The people who participated in this Bible Study were not necessarily the

\(^{190}\) K.L. Casey, *Appendix 2.*
same ones as those who participated in the Lenten Bible Study, although some were. Once again they came for varying reasons; however, this time the people were more animated in their discussion and participation. Not only was the content of the Bible Study more hope-filled, so were the actual participants. The level of vocal participation also grew from that of the Lenten Bible Study. This was an indicator that the level of people's confidence in each other and with the Ministry Agent (me), had grown over time. The people once again gathered over a period of four (4) weeks and again the chosen passages of Scripture followed the Revised Common Lectionary readings from the Gospel of Luke and connected with and to the corporate worshipping life of the community of faith each successive Sunday.

The Advent Bible Study called on the people to once again look at themselves and their own personal journey of life and faith and passages of Scripture. It also asked them to look beyond their individual experience of faith and the corporate worshipping experience into the wider community, as well. The more personal questions were not only gathering questions, they were aimed at getting people in touch with their own life experiences which, in turn, could then be put alongside that of the story found in Scripture. We asked ourselves simple questions such as

- Questions:
  - Sharing with the person next to you
    - a. What is your favourite music at this time in your life?
    - b. When you were a teenager?
    - c. What song best describes your spiritual journey at the moment?

- Sharing some of our answers with the larger group

On your own:
- a. Why did you choose to come tonight?
- b. What would you like to get out of the experience of being here?
- Share you answer with the larger group – only if you choose.191

191 K.L. Casey, Appendix 3.
The questions for deeper reflection asked the people to look at both their experience of lament and ultimately (as the Bible Study progressed week by week), towards the possibility of hope. For example:

- What do you think it means to doubt and fear God?
- Has there been a time when you were fearful but believing?
- How did God meet you in that place of fear?
- Of the attributes of God celebrated in Mary’s song which do you appreciate the most? Which challenges you the most? Why?
- How can we invite people this Advent to know the God of justice and mercy?
- How did you first become a disciple of Christ?
- Who has helped you continue your journey of faith? Have you ever wanted to give up the journey?
- Of the promises listed in this song which one is most relevant to you at this time in your life? Why?
- Do you recognise God’s plan for you in your life at this time?
- During this Advent how could we encourage someone to “hear” the good news?\textsuperscript{192}

Throughout the preparation and presentation of the Lenten and Advent Bible Studies, the Word was re-introduced and re-connected with the wider gathered people of God, allowing for as many of the community as possible to participate to some degree or other in the “hearing and receiving” of the Word as unearthed through the Bible Studies. Through the connection to the Sunday presentation of the liturgy in the Service of the Lord’s Day, the Word was re-voiced and reinforced thus re-affirming the presence of God within the life and worship of the community of disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people. They were not alone, indeed Immanuel was with them.

The progression in the Service of the Lord’s Day from “lament to hope” to “hearing and receiving” moved the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church further forward along the journey of healing and forgiveness. The dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – had begun to pick up momentum. The rhythm of the dance

\textsuperscript{192} ibid.
was accentuated, stronger and more energetic. The dominant narrative had now become a slightly more confident “we are not alone – God is with us!”

The energy amongst the gathered people of God had begun to be renewed, bit by bit, piece by piece. The narrative of possibility that had found its voice and named as “What if?” was alive and beginning to bear shoots amongst the gathered people of God. Possibility and hope had not been subsumed into the darkness that was the individual or corporate experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The gathered people of God were becoming stronger. They had heard the Word of God and they had received it. They were not standing still or stagnating. The gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church were now ready to respond.
The Service of the Word –

The Response
Changing the Style and Rhythm of the Dance – Once Again

In the early time of my Placement as Ministry Agent with the Downtown Uniting Church, the Parish and Congregational structures of the Uniting Church in Australia were changed by the national council of the church called the Assembly. New structures across the membership of the Uniting Church in Australia had to be put into place concerning congregational oversight. These changes meant that not only would there be a significant structural task to be undertaken and eventually implemented, but people’s understanding and ability to adjust to these new structures also needed to be attended to pastorally. It was not only an oversight and administrative change, but also a new development in the pastoral care of the community of faith of the Downtown Uniting Church. The gathered people of God and their way of being in relationship with other congregations, that is through the structure of a Parish (more than one congregation operating in conjunction with each other), also had the potential to change.

Through the process of change in the structures, communities of faith across Australia had the opportunity to ask questions of themselves as to whether they wanted to remain in the same and familiar structures, or move beyond that structure into other corporate relationships with other communities of faith within the Uniting Church, or become separate and individual communities of faith responsible for their own management and financial support. It was a time of immense change, much conversation, consultation, concern and some dreaming of what might be able to be achieved as a single and wholly responsible congregation for the gathered people of God in the context of the Downtown Uniting Church.

My initial experience as Ministry Agent with the gathered people of God found that the “response” of the Downtown Uniting Church to the “hearing and receiving” of God’s
Word (described in the previous sections of this dissertation) was very tentative. Gradually, as time and relationships developed, it grew in enthusiasm as well as the degree of participation. Those who chose to give of their giftedness in the day to day running of the church structures, in the form of the Church Council, did so with what could only be described as tentative enthusiasm. The members of the Church Council heard the call from the congregation to give of their giftedness, responded to that call and along with the Elders/Leaders of the congregation gave their best efforts to managing the day to day corporate leadership of the community of faith. It was not an easy task but all participants gave of themselves capably.

Having worked through all of the ramifications of being and becoming a single congregation without the support of the Parish structure beneath and behind them, the people of the Downtown Uniting Church began the process of putting into place the management structure that would assist them in the practicalities of being such a congregation. As Ministry Agent I was responsible for the leadership and facilitation of these conversations but it was always the decision of the people that ultimately determined how they wanted to be and be seen in Ministry in the Church community and in the wider community. The process of conversation progressed and with the approval of the Presbytery (the regional council of the church) the structures for the Downtown Uniting Church were approved and put into place.

K. W. Irwin maintains that “[T]he effectiveness of God’s Word is concretized in the paradigm of the call to the chosen ones and their response in faith …”. This can be said not only in reference to the Call to Worship and the people’s response through adoration, praise and confession it can also be true for the people’s “response” to the

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“hearing and receiving” of God’s Word. This was no less the case for the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church.

The focus of being the Ministry Agent amongst and with the gathered people of God in addressing the issue of changing institutional structures is no less important or difficult for a community of faith which has been disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused than it is for a community which does not have that particular experience. However, my leadership role required that I ask and promote reflection upon questions before processes could be put into place in order to make sure that no more damage – that is, disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse – could or would be experienced by the gathered people of God. Questions such as:

- How might the changes in the structures be perceived by the gathered people?
- What is the narrative that arises out of this possibility of change?
- What might the narrative of the congregation become if their perceived identity is changed – again?
- How much change is too much change?
- How can fear of change become hope for the future?
- How can the new structures assist and build on the new understanding of Pastoral Care?
- How can teamwork be extended and grown even further, without the people feeling pressured and/or worn down more than they already are?
- What vision might I as Ministry Agent have and be able to offer the gathered people of God which will empower and not disempower them through the new structures?
- What structure or shape will offer the possibility of vision, optimism and hopefulness for the future?

These questions enabled theological reflection in, through and beyond any specific immediate personal contact with the community of faith. Observation of people’s responses to the possibility of change in the structures; the listening to many conversations (with me and around me) concerning people’s practical and personal/emotional responses to the possibility of change; the eventual giving voice to the underlying narrative of “but we have always done it this way and we have been OK”
enabled and assisted the development of an overarching model that would be able to be visually and practically connected with the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care”.

Building upon and reinforcing the model of teamwork that was encouraged through the development of the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care”, a model for the structures was suggested for the community of faith to consider. In constructing this model (not unique in Uniting Church in Australia contexts I am sure) the focus was enabling the gathered people of God to be able to see in graphic form

- How much they tangibly contributed to the ministry of the Church and the wider community through the implementation and offering of different programmes and activities;
- What ministry they actually participated in as individuals and as a community of faith and,
- How that offering of ministry might be able to be seen across the theological and pastoral spectrum – and not simply interpreted as “jobs to be done”.

**Teamwork in the Dance**

In seeking to connect the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care” with the new structures of the congregation it was necessary to help the community of faith to see teamwork not as an expectation, but rather as a reward. Teamwork would be and become something which would further enhance the relationships within the community and assist the people to see that they were not the “only ones” doing the work of ministry. It could also potentially grow people’s enthusiasm for a more predominant and available narrative that continued the theme of “What if?”

Language was a particularly important focus of the model in order that the community of faith would be able to see the specific roles of leadership. More importantly, it was to assist the community of faith to understand that that leadership was not coming from over and above but rather alongside of and together with the gathered people of God as
a whole. This teamwork not only needed to be modeled by the Ministry Agent, but by those individuals called by the congregation into positions of leadership. Words such as: teams, teamwork, co-ordinators and together assisted the people to be able to see that the model was inclusive of the gathered people of God and not restricted to only the “chosen ones”.

Figure 5
The implementation of the Church Council and Team structures enabled the gathered people of God to continue the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – which offered them, ever so slowly, another glimpse of the possibility of wholeness on their journey toward healing and forgiveness. It was yet another time of being gathered, hearing the Word of hope (the Good News) and having the opportunity to respond to God’s graciousness. Their “response” to being re-introduced and re-connected to the Word assisted and enabled their re-introduction and re-connection to being a community of faith able to not only sustain themselves managerially and practically but spiritually, psychologically and emotionally as well. Once again the seemingly fruitless existence of being a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith was faced head on and took on an air of possibility. They, the community of faith named as the Downtown Uniting Church, might not be condemned to always being identified as a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. Hope, vision and future were still growing – bit by bit. They were headed towards the rite of passage that is the movement from being a victim to becoming a survivor.

**Putting Words into Action**

Many corporate structures have Mission Statements. From banks to merchandising companies through to schools and soccer clubs, Mission Statements help insiders and outsiders know (if not understand or appreciate) the underlying values of that particular institution or organisation. In the case of a congregation, a Mission Statement focuses the gathered community’s vision of itself and makes it public and available to the wider community context. In the case of the Downtown Uniting Church, their Mission Statement had changed significantly, not only over the previous decade, but because of their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.
The leadership for developing a new Mission Statement came from within the Elders/Leaders and the members of the Church Council. Together they voiced their concern that people (both insiders and outsiders) would know who they were as the gathered people of God in that particular context and that they had not totally succumbed to their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse as individuals and/or as a community of faith.

The discussion and development of a possible new Mission Statement grew out of the narrative eventually finding a stronger voice; named previously as “What if?” It was a natural progression in the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – though not without its questions and concerns. Together as the Elders/Leaders and Church Council questions found their voice and were reflected upon and discussed. Questions such as

- What words would/could describe our community of faith?
- What words would/could describe the values of our community of faith?
- What is it that we desire to share in Ministry – with each other and the wider community?
- How do we want to be seen to each other and to the wider community?
- What are our intrinsic and theological values?
- How can our experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse (my words) enhance and assist us in the development of our new Mission Statement?
- What text of Scripture encompasses our desire to continue the journey of life and faith? (my words)

The Elders/Leaders and Church Council members met together on a number of occasions and processed the need for a new Mission Statement. After much consideration and prayer they took their vision of a possible new Mission Statement to the community gathering that is known as the Congregational Meeting. The idea/vision was discussed with the gathered people of God. The people were sent away to reflect on what had been discussed and asked to come together at another time in order that the community could continue the discussion and vision, even further, what might be
possible and achieved in forming a new Mission Statement. The process which was followed by the Elders/Leaders and the Church Council was replicated with the gathered people of God and eventually, a possible Mission Statement was proposed.

Piece by piece, question by question, line by line the proposed Mission Statement was pulled apart, examined, reflected upon and discussed in small group conversations and whole group conversations. Through a process of consensus the following Mission Statement was eventually endorsed and adopted by the Downtown Uniting Church:

Downtown Uniting Church is a community of faith moving forward together as a people of God. We long to nurture people in their journeys of life and faith and to practise the hospitality of Jesus Christ.

Love one another as I have loved you. (John 13:34)

Those of the gathered people of God who were able to attend the vision meetings came prepared to willingly look towards the future, as well as continue the journey of life and faith as the community of Downtown Uniting Church. This does not mean that those who were unable to attend held an opposing view. Their non-attendance could have meant that their personal timetable did not allow them to be there at that time on that particular day. It could have meant that they believed they had nothing to contribute to the discussion concerning the new Mission Statement. It could also have meant that they were simply not interested in being part of the discussion. It should be noted, however, that a large majority of the gathered people of God participated in the conversations concerning the potential new Mission Statement.

With the conversations completed the new Mission Statement was not only uncovered and claimed; it was also given its voice. There was now a stronger and more vocal sense that the community of faith was indeed, “moving forward together as a people of God”.

183
Today, the Mission Statement proudly stands as the deep seated desire of the community of faith that they live out their interpretation of the Good News. In addition it denotes their desire that they claim their inheritance as a community of faith prepared to continue the journey of life and faith – the dance of the liturgy – not only corporately and individually but by being a place of hospitality and welcome to any and all who come. Their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse was not and is not going to prevent them from either living as and/or becoming the people God longs for them to be.

It must be acknowledged that the Mission Statement developed at this time will not remain forever as the only Mission Statement in the future vision of what it means to be the Downtown Uniting Church. The voicing of this Mission Statement is another rite of passage along the journey towards healing and forgiveness. This rite of passage, alluded to previously, moves the congregation from the role of being (and remaining) a victim to that of becoming and being a survivor. As I have maintained in previous academic writings, this movement is profound in the journey toward healing and forgiveness.¹⁹⁴

**Responding to the Changing Direction of the Dance**

In the worshipping life of a community of faith there are numerous ways in which the gathered people of God offer themselves to God, the Church and the world in which they live, work, study and play. In a suburban congregation like the Downtown Uniting Church, volunteer work within the life of the community of faith is one of those valued and important responses. Rosters need to be filled. Jobs need to be undertaken and completed. Projects and programmes need to be implemented. Structures and management need oversight. There is a lot involved in being a community of faith.

However, in a community of faith which has an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse energy levels for the tasks of ministry can be very low indeed, more so than in a normal congregation (see previous explanation). The impact of the disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse can leave the community of faith experiencing a debilitating weariness. People’s emotional energy levels are drained, not only from the particular experience, but also from the shame and anger that impacts upon the people’s journey of life and faith.

As the dance of the liturgy continued within the life of the community of faith of the Downtown Uniting Church, it became clear to me as Ministry Agent that the people, although “moving forward together as a people of God”, still had an underlying sense (and belief) in their inability to contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God through their own unique and personal giftedness. As Ministry Agent, I observed the congregation’s willingness to commit themselves thoroughly to any task asked of them. Without realising it they worked very hard on the restoration of their community dynamics, as well as their spiritual and mental health issues. However, their self-confidence as people who offered and could indeed bring creativity to their corporate worshipping life and the building up of their community was still very poor.

Working-bees had allowed for as many people from the community of faith as possible to contribute to the “re-claiming of the sacred space”. Participation in the Bible Studies and the “Pastoral Care Web – Web of Care” had allowed for the emergence of another new narrative – “What if?” The consultation and development of the new structures and Mission Statement moved the community of faith from being and remaining a victim to becoming and living life as a survivor. The journey toward healing and forgiveness had

most definitely begun, but there still existed an uncertainty amongst the gathered people of God concerning their ability to contribute, in any significant manner, to the further building up of the community of faith.

Rather than revert to the disconnectedness that comes with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse (as demonstrated in the diagram below),

![Diagram](image)

Figure 6

the community of faith needed tangible evidence, that is, ways of seeing their creative contribution to the life and task that is discipleship, ministry and mission – in their specific community context and beyond in the wider community context.

In the context of the Downtown Uniting Church the dance of the liturgy indeed ebbed and flowed from week to week, month to month, year to year. The dance constantly moved in and out, through and around the community's life. It would continue, though at times have a need to be re-encouraged and re-nurtured so as to maintain the energy levels required to be and remain a survivor. It was vital that the gathered people of God did not revert, either individually or corporately, back into the role of being and remaining a victim of their particular experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 7

186
The Rhythm of Creativity

Louise M. Wisechild writes “creativity often proceeds the process of memory and insight”\textsuperscript{196} when referring to the possible elements which can assist the healing process from the particular abuse of incest. For Wisechild, creativity is not only an outlet for expressing repressed emotions, it is a valuable tool which assists the survivor’s ability to begin the experience of healing and forgiveness. In reflecting upon Wisechild’s statement it is possible to interpret it in three different ways – two with which I am comfortable and able to agree, and the other, I am not.

Firstly, there are two specific ways in which the word “proceeds” can be used, and I believe, applied to creativity and the process of healing and forgiveness. If by using the word “proceeds”, meaning \textbf{profits} that is, something one gains as a tangible benefit (in the process of healing and forgiveness) then I am able to concur with Wisechild. Creativity is indeed something that once given acknowledgement, nurture and encouragement is able to grow, develop and be experienced as a tangible benefit. In this definition of “proceeds”, progression along the journey of healing and forgiveness as well as possible learning which might prevent any further disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse to either an individual or community of faith can indeed be a tangible benefit.

If by using the word “proceeds”, meaning to \textbf{continue or advance}, I am also able to concur with Wisechild. It is indeed possible for creativity to advance or continue the process of memory and insight. The enhancement of creativity has the potential to assist the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused find and give voice to their negative experience through their particular chosen form of creativity. This giving voice can be

\textsuperscript{196} L.M. Wisechild, \textit{She who was Lost is Remembered: Healing from Incest through Creativity} (Washington: The Seal Press, 1991), xviii.
experienced at any level of expertise of creativity and I maintain, is not limited to those individuals or community members with an already developed and practised level of creative expertise. Creativity is something which to some degree or other each of us as individuals carries within us – whether we know it or not and whether we have nurtured that creativity or left it dormant. In whatever shape or form that creativity finds its expression, the opening up of one’s-self to the creative processes within can be very revealing, as well as healing.

A third way in which to interpret the use of Wisechild’s quotation is to ask the question: did Wisechild actually intend the word “proceeds” to read “precedes” (through a typographical error) and which means leads the way or comes first. If this is the correct interpretation then I am unable to agree with her statement. I do not believe that it is possible to maintain that creativity, in and of itself, is what leads an individual or community of faith towards healing and forgiveness. I do maintain, however, that creativity can assist the process of healing and forgiveness, calling out of the individual and/or community of faith responses that might otherwise have remained dormant and/or closed off to the mind, as well as the heart.

Through the travelling of my own journey of healing and forgiveness I have experienced the impact and value that the development and nurture of my own personal and professional creativity has contributed to my dance of the liturgy – my journey of life and faith. Using this personal knowledge and experience I believed it was vital that the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church have the chance to discover their own articulations of creativity. This would be an opportunity as the people of God in that particular context to explore their creativity together – at their own pace and level of expression.
The Visual Expression of the Dance

It would be safe to assume that when working with a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, creativity is not necessarily something on which the gathered people place great emphasis or hope in any way shape or form. Day to day survival and existence as a gathered people of God is far more important to the community’s identity and continued ability to function, than the expression of creativity. The recognition of the place of creativity in the life of an individual, as well as the life and journey toward healing and forgiveness for the gathered people of God, was for the people of the Downtown Uniting Church to become a tangible (and annual) “response” to the “Service of the Word”.

The introduction of the “Month of Creativity” at the Downtown Uniting Church was a specific response to the gathered people of God’s persistent perception that they were not people who had many (if any) gifts beyond participating in the quarterly working-bees. Whilst the people gathered together, heard the Good News (hope for the future), responded to God’s Word through working-bees, Bible Studies, pastoral care programmes and new structures participating in anything beyond the practical and tangible left the community feeling uninspired, uncomfortable and inadequate. The people’s self-esteem and self-worth as vital and creative people who were helping to build, not only their faith community, but also the Kingdom of God beyond the walls of the church building was very under-developed. As individual people the gathered people of God had little confidence in their own personal creative giftedness. They had even less awareness of their giftedness as a community.

The rationale for designing the “Month of Creativity” was the underlying belief I held that the people of the Downtown Uniting Church would be assisted in their journey
towards healing and forgiveness if they could be encouraged to see the life giving
creativity they held within them. It was not an attempt to make some of the people stand
out above any of the other members of the community of faith. Rather, it was an attempt
to give validity, recognition, energy and encouragement to each person’s expression of
creativity, no matter how or where it may have been exercised, at what level and with
whom they had undertaken their specific expression of creativity.

As Ministry Agent I held many conversations with the members of the Church Council,
as well as the Elders/Leaders of the congregation concerning the development of the
“Month of Creativity”. These conversations assisted the leaders of the community of
faith to gain a broader understanding of how creativity could be interpreted, what it
could actually entail, as well as encouraging them to think about their own creative
giftedness. Questions and comments such as:

- I can’t do anything
- What are we supposed to bring?
- I don’t have any creativity
- I’m no good at anything like that
- I used to do that stuff when I was young
- You’re better at that than me
- That’s just for girls

were not uncommon amongst the Elders/Leaders. These statements ultimately re-
affirmed and re-stated the community of faith’s corporate belief that they were a people
with not very much to offer beyond the practical stuff of “getting your hands dirty”. The
consensus seemed to be (both spoken and unspoken) that it was the Ministry Agent who
was expected to be the creative one in the community of faith. And as it was the spoken
and unspoken expectation of the gathered people of God, I invited the people to join me
on a journey of creativity. It would be as least a threatening a journey as possible. It
would be as undemanding a journey as I could possibly make it. We would simply have
fun, broaden our corporate worshipping experience, relate to each other in different
contexts and respond to God in our own unique and personal creative ways. We would try and let go of our tentative and uncertain interpretations of what it meant to use our unique giftedness and see what might happen. After all, we had begun previously to voice the narrative of “What if?” — we might be pleasantly surprised by the results.

In a liturgical sense the introduction of the “Month of Creativity” became an offering of the people of the Downtown Uniting Church to and before God. It was the offering of themselves as unique and creative individuals as well as the offering of themselves as a creative community of faith. It was the offering of themselves that indicated that they were open to possibility — the possibility of what might be able to be achieved as creative people and what they might be able to offer beyond the life of the worshipping community.

The “Month of Creativity” was also an affirmation of their faith. It was an affirmation of their own ability to be creative people, as well as affirmation and acknowledgement that despite the negative experience of the community of faith, God was still blessing them with the ability to be creative ministers of the gospel. The bringing of their expressions of creativity became a visual prayer in which all could participate. They were able to give thanks for the giftedness of another, as well as intercede on behalf of another.

**Taking a Rest from the Dance**

It is not a common experience for a community of faith to have its meetings cancelled — deliberately. However, during the “Month of Creativity” it was determined, as an expression of the community’s desire to grow and discover their creativity, that all meetings for the month of August would be cancelled. We would rest, play and be
nurtured, encouraged and renewed – on purpose – as the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church. As a community of faith we would respond to the “hearing” of God’s Word by looking beyond the mundane and everyday busyness of life, into the world of creativity.

For the month of August

- all meetings were cancelled
- morning and evening worship had special liturgies prepared with visiting preachers and/or visiting musicians/singers sharing leadership of those services
- community events were held – for example:
  - kid’s disco
  - picnic
  - concert
  - bush dance
  - community luncheon
  - dinner dance
  - dinners for 8
  - Myers-Briggs Personality Type workshop
  - art display

However, the main focus for the commencement of the “Month of Creativity” would be the first Sunday of the month on which was held the Service of Holy Communion.

It could be argued here that if my thesis revolves around the premise that the journey of healing and forgiveness mirrors the shape of the liturgy of the Service of the Lord’s Day, then I should not be mentioning anything to do with Holy Communion, as yet. It should be part of the next chapter – the Eucharist. However, I contend that in this specific and particular instance the community was, in fact, “responding” to the “hearing and receiving” of the Word and were preparing themselves to enter into the next part of the journey of healing and forgiveness – the “Eucharist – Great Prayer of Thanksgiving”.

In the month prior to the usual service of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month of August, the gathered people of God – women, men and children, young and old alike – were all asked to think about how they expressed their creativity.
Did they do a particular craft – wood work, tapestry, art, build models, knit, colour in, finger-paint or play with Lego?
Were they members of any special clubs or societies i.e. Scouts, Guides, Sporting Clubs, Legacy, Book Clubs, Lawn Bowls, Musical Societies or Choirs?
Did they have any special interest in gardening, volunteering, cooking, collecting stamps or coins?
Were they secret inventors?

Each member of the community of faith was invited to bring into the service of worship (either morning or evening on that particular Sunday) something which represented them and their expression of creativity.

Interestingly, much of the community conversation during the weeks of July concentrated on the negative perception of the level of creativity that the gathered people of God possibly had to bring to worship. People were quite happy to make sure others were going to bring something in to make up for their personal inadequacy concerning creativity. However, on the morning of the first Sunday in August many people gathered for worship much earlier than usual. They came before the allocated 9.00am commencement time rather than during the Call to Worship or during the first song – a more usual practice. They came early to quietly bring their creative contribution into the worshipping space. By the time 9.00am had arrived the church was almost overflowing with the gathered people of God’s expressions of creativity.

From the youngest to the very oldest, people brought in their tangible expressions of who they were beyond the life of the community of faith and how they expressed their creative giftedness. Very small children brought in their colouring books and pencils, finger paintings, Lego pieces made into creative and imaginative creatures and machines, dress-up costumes and favourite cuddly toys that had their own name and special personalities.
As adults, children and young people came into the worship space they too brought their expressions of creativity forward to be added to the community’s display. People were excited, surprised, enthusiastic, stunned and amazed at not only how much creativity there actually was amongst the community but also the vast array and range of that creativity. There were all levels of expertise – from the very technical creation of a special piston for an engine designed and made by a retired engineer, to some delicious pumpkin scones. There were tapestries, hand-painted glass work, paintings, photographs, knitting, cooking, sporting equipment and medals, gardening equipment, tomato plants, hand made bridesmaid dresses and photos of wedding gowns, framed cross-stitches, jigsaw puzzles, musical instruments, half written books, poetry, woodwork and much, much more. The community had “responded” to the “hearing and receiving” of God’s Word in a very personal manner.

A model aeroplane standing proudly on the pulpit

They had taken a risk and had made themselves vulnerable before their partners in the dance of the liturgy – their companions in the journey towards healing and forgiveness. More significantly and more subtly, they had made themselves vulnerable before God. They could see with their own eyes that they had, indeed, been blessed by God individually and corporately with a creative giftedness that surprised and encouraged them. They actually were people who might be able to use that giftedness in ways that
they were yet to recognise, understand, imagine or experience. They actually had
something – no matter how underdeveloped or expert they may be at their particular
expression of creativity – to offer. They were indeed “a community of faith moving
forward together as a people of God”.

Two young Downtown members with their contributions of creativity

The “Month of Creativity” became an annual and much looked forward to event. Each
year a new sending out song was learned. It would be sung at the close of worship each
Sunday morning and evening service during the following twelve months. Each year
different people would contribute to the activities organized for the community to
participate in during the month of August. Each year the Church Council made sure that
the “Month of Creativity” was on the planning agenda. Each year there was a new
theme for the “Month of Creativity”. Each year people brought in their expressions of
creativity. Each year, those who were new to the community were encouraged to not
only participate in the social events but to bring in their expressions of giftedness and
creativity. The gathered people of God were able through the “Month of Creativity” to live out in a tangible way the words of their new Mission Statement:

Downtown Uniting Church is a community of faith
moving forward together as a people of God.
We long to nurture people
in their journeys of life and faith and
to practise the hospitality of Jesus Christ.

Love one another as I have loved you. (John 13:34)

The “response” of the Downtown Uniting Church to the “hearing and receiving” of God’s Word was not, and will not be, limited to the two examples mentioned, that is, the “Mission Statement” and the “Month of Creativity”. The gathered people of God will continue to listen for God’s Word as it is revealed to them in their particular context and respond as they feel led. They will also continue to nurture each other and those who come to make the Downtown Uniting Church their home. They will consciously continue to practise the hospitality of Jesus Christ, no matter if their numbers are great, or diminished. They will intentionally continue to seek to extend the love of Jesus Christ amongst each other as they continue the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – together.

The “Month of Creativity” may occur every year for a very long time, it may not. What will remain however, is the re-awakened appreciation of the creativity amongst them. Not only will they continue to “respond” to the “hearing and receiving” of God’s Word as the years progress, they will “respond” in new and more creative ways. They will continue to build up the gathered community that is the Downtown Uniting Church.
The Eucharist

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving
Re-membering and Remembering

The Christian tradition has a rich history of narrative. As Christians, the stories of our faith as told in both the Old Testament and New Testament are integral to our understanding and interpretation of what it means to be in relationship with God as well as to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. For the gathered people of God the liturgical presentation of these narratives enhances and brings them to life for us in order that we may be able to re-member and remember that which under-girds our faith and tradition. In the twenty-first century this story telling continues as communities of faith all around the world come together each week to worship God.

The communities of faith gathering to tell their stories come together in many different contexts, from Cathedrals to school auditoriums, open air bush chapels to suburban community churches, jail or hospital chapels to faith communities in cafes. In most Christian communities we come together as the gathered people of God not only to “hear” the sacred story of Scripture, but to enact it through our participation in the liturgy that is the Service of the Lord’s Day. The sacrament of Holy Communion – the Eucharist – is part of that liturgy.

The World Council of Churches, of which the Uniting Church in Australia is a member, defines the Eucharist as “the new paschal meal of the Church, the meal of the New Covenant, which Christ gave to his disciples as the anamnesis of his death and resurrection, as the anticipation of the Supper of the Lamb.”197 The Eucharist is a remembering of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is in this remembering that we are able to give thanks to God for God’s continued presence in our lives, through our relationship with Jesus the Christ. James White notes that “[T]he

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English word eucharist derives from the Greek verb eucharistéo, “give thanks, render or return thanks.” It is closely related to the giving of praise.” The celebration of the Eucharist is also a time of remembering who we are as the people of God in our particular context and giving thanks for God’s leading in the past, God’s present direction (both personally and corporately), and looking with hope towards the future and the surprise of the Spirit.

Raymond Moloney in his book “The Eucharist” reminds us that the

[E]ucharist and community go together, just as liturgy and life are inseparable. You cannot have the one without the other. Eucharist without community easily becomes a flight from reality. Community without Eucharist deprives the community of one of its most far-reaching sources of power. Consequently systematic theology sums up this teaching by saying that the primary effect of this sacrament is the greater unity of the people in love. ... Community is part of the meaning of the Greek koinόnia, communion, which... has been a Eucharistic word since the New Testament.  

It is in the coming together – in the re-membering – that the gathered people of God tell not only the stories of their tradition but the stories of their life and faith, as well. The act of sharing together in the sacrament of the church that is the Eucharist is a visible expression of the historicity of the faith tradition as expressed throughout the centuries. It is no less or different an expression of the faith tradition within the life of the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is in the act of re-membering that Christ is made present to us. Whether or not in the coming together – the re-membering – we are in the church building on the first Sunday of the month or gathered together in a make-shift bush chapel as part of a church camp is irrelevant. What is relevant is that in this re-membering we are not only remembering a past event, we are coming together as the present body of Christ in our particular context acutely aware of Christ’s presence amongst us. In this liturgical event – the

199
Eucharist – we will name ourselves as followers of the Christ, tell the story and enact
the story in the presence of the story, Jesus the Christ – the son of God.

As individuals and as a community of faith we share relationship with each other. More
importantly, we share relationship with God through Jesus Christ, in the power of the
Holy Spirit. In the coming together – in the re-membering – it is also to remember the
last time Jesus came together – re-membered – with his disciples as they shared a meal
together on the night before he died. As we re-member and remember, we do this as
Jesus did – in relationship with others and in, and as, a community. It is in the re-
membering and remembering that we make ourselves vulnerable seeking to be
transformed as the people of God in our particular context.

The celebration of the Eucharist is not only a relational event but one that also has
within it an eschatological element. We remember not only the death of Jesus but his
resurrection as well. As the gathered people of God we look to the future in hope and
expectation of what is yet to be experienced. It is in this re-membering that we
remember not only who we are in this historical moment in time as a gathered people of
God, but all those saints who have re-membered and remembered before us. We also
look forward with hope to all those who will re-member and remember with us at a
future time. Tex Sample suggests

[W]hom you gather with determines to whom you will be bonded. We are the
company we keep. This not only raises the question of the story that informs the
event, it also raises the matter of the kind of relationships induced by that event,
because the character of the gathering will determine the nature of the
relationships.\footnote{R. Moloney SJ, \textit{The Eucharist} (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 242.}

The celebration of the Eucharist is done in the company of others and in the presence of
God remembering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The celebration of the
Eucharist is not an addition to the Service of the Lord's Day. It is an essential element of the whole of the Service of the Lord's Day.

**The Subtlety of the Dance**

As mentioned previously, the task of being the Ministry Agent with the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church was not only demanding and time consuming, it was also so much more. It was enriching, fulfilling, enlightening, challenging, rewarding, educational, eye-opening and blessed. Being part of the community – the gathered people of God – and undertaking a journey with an unknown (but hoped for) destination was also a lesson in patience. Even more so it was also a lesson in humility, determination, grace, trust, risk taking and gratitude for the small miracles in life.

For a community of faith that had had an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, the Downtown Uniting Church now functioned well. People were participating in the life of the congregation – practically, relationally and liturgically. Indeed, the dynamics of the gathered people of God had changed significantly since we had commenced our dance of the liturgy together. We had also commenced the journey towards healing and forgiveness.

People were no longer intimidated by the position or role of Ministry Agent. Across the age-spectrum they willingly participated in the presentation of the week to week liturgy. Rather than remain reticent they were more out-going, even allowing themselves to laugh during the worship service. Sometimes they not only laughed with me – they laughed at me – a monumental leap forward in the building of our relationship of trust.

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The gathered people of God had begun to loose their posture of oppression and were beginning to stand tall – confident of God’s ever-present love for them.

As mentioned previously, as time had progressed the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church had found new narratives amongst them and had given them voice. As they found their new narratives and gave them their corporate voice they unintentionally undertook another rite of passage. Each week as the gathered people of God they re-membered (came together) – and remembered (recalled) through their participation in the liturgy – their faith in the one true and living God through their relationship with Jesus the Christ, encouraged and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit amongst them. As a community of faith they were partners in the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – and had embarked on their journey toward healing and forgiveness without intellectualising it or pontificating about it. They were no longer a community of faith who would forever be identified and named solely as those who lived with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. They were a people who had chosen to dance the dance even though they had not been sure of the steps or in fact, their partner. They were survivors and they were ready yet again to change not only their choreography, but also their choreographer.

**Change Can be Disconcerting**

The evolution in the dance of the liturgy that marked the movement from the “response” to the “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” was probably the most subtle of all the transitions for me to recognise as Ministry Agent with Downtown Uniting Church. And, it was probably, the most sacred. The period of time that was to ultimately mark the transition from “response” to “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” was a time of intense reflection – both theological and personal – as I tried to identify the changes that
had seemed to come upon the community of faith. The following questions all formed the basis of this intense time of reflection.

- What is it that is different about the community of faith?
- Is this a perceived or actual difference I am noticing?
- Is this perceived or actual difference a negative or positive experience?
- Is it me? Am I the one changing and not the community of faith?
- Am I doing my job properly?
- Is it time to leave?

As I spent this time in reflection I also paid particular attention to observing the interactions amongst the gathered people of God, and asked these questions

- How are the people of God reacting and interacting to and with each other?
- Are their conversations positive or negative?
- Is there any discontent developing?
- Are the gathered people of God noticing any difference amongst their community of faith? If so, what are they?
- Are they responding differently – to the liturgy, me as Ministry Agent and/or each other?

After a number of months of prayerful reflection, numerous questions and a few tears of uncertainty, my eventual response to my pondering ended up being a simple, yet profound “ah-ha” experience. The “ah-ha” was the clear recognition that the dynamics, attitudes, vocal and physical responses of the gathered people of God all pointed to the fact that the community of faith could be named differently. That is, they could be named other than a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse as they were at my time of Call into the congregation as the Ministry Agent.

It must be noted that when I use the word “simple”, I use it very respectfully. The “ah-ha" experience was one of the most profound experiences of all my time of being Ministry Agent with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church. The revelation that came in its most simple awakening was that the gathered people of God could now be named as a “healed”/transformed congregation. That is, they were interacting and
conducting themselves as a group of people who had now integrated their negative experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse and could respond and live in a manner that clearly named them as survivors. Not only had they undertaken the dance of the liturgy, they had allowed themselves to be active participants in the journey towards healing and forgiveness. They did not need my specialist skills any more.

A Personal Dance - Continued

In his book “What’s so Amazing about Grace?” Philip Yancey writes about an experience he had with a group of Christians who had been asked to meet with the leaders of the KGB at its headquarters in Russia. It is a fascinating story. However, what struck me as profound was a simple sentence at the end of a paragraph. I do not think it was meant to be as profound as I found it, probably more of a good closing sentence at the end of a point. Yancey’s sentence was simply this “[T]he past must be remembered before it can be overcome.”²⁰¹ Perhaps an in-consequential statement in light of other things he says; however, to a person with a lived experience of abuse, it is indeed a profound statement and a discomforting one.

As I have struggled emotionally, physically and spiritually with putting the pieces of my life back together I have been able to claim not only who I am as an individual, but also as a member of a family – albeit a dysfunctional, abusive and violent one. I have been able to see and understand more fully, although painfully, why my life’s choreography took the design it did. The shape of the dance of life and faith throughout my years as a young child, teenager and adult slowly began to make more sense. More importantly, I have been able to claim who I am in the eyes of God. I am not just what remains and is

left over from a violent and abusive life. I am more than that. I am a curious child, a sensitive teenager, a hope-filled young adult, a nurturing young mum, a satisfied parent and an adult learner. I am also beloved of God. I have been transformed.

The years of my life that are still ahead are unknown. I do not know what the next stage of my life will bring: maybe a life partner – maybe not; maybe more academic work – maybe not; maybe just sitting and learning more deeply to take life one day at a time. However, what I do know is that I will continue my journey of life and faith knowing that I am a transformed human being. I am happy with who I am as a person. I no longer feel that I have to apologise for my existence. Neither do I feel I need to express regret for surviving. I will make no apologies for not dying. I do not hate my parents or any of my other abusers. I am simply saddened that they chose to share their time on my journey of life and faith – my dance of the liturgy – the way that they did. I have experienced life from the perspective of a victim of domestic violence and child abuse. I have struggled through the blackness into the light of becoming a survivor. I have remembered and remembered.

As I continue to travel my journey of life and faith I celebrate the gift my adopted parents have been to my life. They continue to nurture and encourage me, even all of these years later. They constantly remind me to live my life seeking to be the person God longs for me to become. They do all of this without taking any credit for anything that I may have achieved. They have simply done it because they love me – unconditionally.

Each time my Aunt and Uncle and I come together (with or without the extended family) we re-member and remember. Each of these occasions is a celebration and an
Was there still a viability of Call to the community of faith?
Was God calling me (and the community of faith) into another space?

My deliberate theological reflection not only enabled me as Ministry Agent to name the congregation in a particular manner; it was also a significant addition to my own transformational learning. The possibility of yet another movement in the dance of the liturgy, that is, my own journey of life and faith became distinctly real.

In being able to name the community of faith as one that had been "healed"/transformed did not mean that their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse would or could, now simply be forgotten about. On the contrary their painful and negative experience would forever be part of their sacred story in their dance of the liturgy – their journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. Their now transformed experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse would be what assisted their ability to be in community with each other, any future Ministry Agents, the Church and God. Their previous negative and painful experience would always impact their journey of life and faith as well as their relationship with God as they expressed it in their particular context. However, being a transformed community of faith meant that that negative experience would also inform and enlighten their journey of life and faith into any future ministry.

Being a "healed"/transformed gathered people of God would not mean that they would never feel pain again or be exempt from it. It did not mean that they would always be focussed, energised and able to thrive and grow in numbers, no matter what. What it did mean, however, was that their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse would encourage them to remember that they were now survivors – not victims. They were a gathered people of God with a particular lived experience who, when they came together (re-membered) were reminded (remembered) that their
experience had not destroyed them. More importantly, in their coming together they were reminded that God had not abandoned them. Christ was in their midst. The Holy Spirit would remain a constant companion and source of inspiration as they continued their dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. Their identity as participants in the Good Friday story had eventuated in transformation. They were a “Good Friday” people, as well as those who had experienced their own “Easter Sunday” story. Whether I was Ministry Agent or not the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church would still re-member and remember into the future.

In re-assessing my call to the community of faith, the realisation that the congregation was now “healed”/transformed meant that I had to make myself vulnerable before God and discern if I was to stay or leave my Placement as the Ministry Agent with the Downtown Uniting Church. This was not an easy realisation, experience or process for me to undertake. I was not unhappy or discontent in my Placement. There was no obvious discontent or vocal dissatisfaction with my role as Ministry Agent that would help me come to an easy decision.

Through the process of continued theological reflection there were many questions that came to mind. These questions were not new to me. They had just changed slightly to correspond with the next part of the dance of the liturgy.

- How might a change in the Ministry Agent be perceived by the gathered people?
- What is the narrative that arises out of this possibility of change?
- What might the narrative of the congregation become if their perceived identity is changed – again?
- How much change is too much change?
- How can fear of change become hope for the future?
- Will the new structures, continue to assist and build on the new understanding of Pastoral Care if the Ministry Agent leaves?
- Will the new teamwork be extended and grown even further without the people feeling pressured and/or worn down?
What vision might I, as Ministry Agent, have and be able to offer the gathered people of God which will empower, and not disempower them through the possibility of a new Ministry Agent?

What will be the vision, optimism and hopefulness for the future?

Through this thoughtful time of theological reflection and prayer it became clear that God was indeed calling me, as well as the people of God as the Downtown Uniting Church, beyond this specific relationship of Ministry Agent and congregation. It was time to give voice to the new narrative that had developed and undertake another rite of passage.

**It is Right to Give our Thanks and Praise**

In realising that God was asking both the community of faith and me to choose new partners in the dance of the liturgy, it was important and necessary for me as Ministry Agent to find the most appropriate manner in which to name this decision to the people of the Downtown Uniting Church. However, the first task was to inform the members of the Church Council. This was done as part of the Minister’s Report at a regular meeting of the Church Council. It was not easy to tell the members of the Church Council my decision and the rationale behind it – that the community of faith was now “healed”/transformed and needed another Ministry Agent with different gifts and skills to lead them in their future ministry adventures. But I managed.

After much careful consideration the Church Council and I chose a particular service of worship in which to make my announcement. A context sensitive liturgy was prepared by me and presented along with the assistance of those rostered on for the day. Coincidentally, the Lectionary readings for the day focussed on the healing/transformation of Job and blind Bartimaeus. This service would prove to be a moment in which the faithfulness of God to past generations would be affirmed and acknowledged in the present yet again, as we continued to be the gathered people of God in the Downtown
Uniting Church who looked forward to the future surprise of the Spirit as we remembered and remembered.

Over the past few weeks we have journeyed just a little way with Job – that faithful man of God who experienced unspeakable stress and trauma in his life. The Old Testament character, who despite his moaning and groaning at God about his unspeakable circumstances, somehow managed to not only hold on to, but sustain and grow his faith and relationship with YHWH.

This week we again meet up with Job. He has experienced much – more than he ever imagined he could possibly cope with. He has learned much about himself and the faithfulness of YHWH. His faith has not disintegrated but grown with, and through his experiences. He is finally healed of his physical maladies. No longer will he be shamed by how he looks to others. His personal circumstances have also improved. He is blessed by God, as is his family in to the generations. His children will receive their inheritance – even the girls – an unheard of occurrence in his time and place. It has been a long hard journey but with the ultimate destination, comes blessing and celebration. Job is healed in more ways than one. 202

This particular worship service was also an opportunity to remind the gathered people of God, once again, of our connection with all of those saints who have chosen to name themselves as followers of the Christ throughout the centuries. Just as we had followed the Old Testament story of Job, we would also have an opportunity to ground the experience of healing/ transformation in to the time of the ministry of Jesus amongst his community context.

Our Gospel story today concerns the healing of the blind man named Bartimaeus. A beggar ostracized by his community because of his disability and social standing, he manages to attract the attention of Jesus. Rather than ignore Bartimaeus as the rest of his community does, Jesus responds to this brave man who has defied convention by asking Jesus to have mercy on him. In response, Jesus asks Bartimaeus “what do you want me to do for you?” ... Bartimaeus simply wants “to be healed”. ... Jesus honoured the faithfulness of Bartimaeus and gave him the healing he longed for. 203

In a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse the naming of the pain (as explained previously) is an integral part of the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness. The

203 ibid.
naming of the pain is no less important in pronouncing the gathered people of God "healed"/transformed. In this naming we state who we have been in order to claim who we are. It was in the naming and giving voice once again to the pain and heartache that was once experienced by the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church that it was possible to see more clearly the development of the changing narrative amongst the community of faith. In the naming of the changing narratives we are able to recognise the distinctive rites of passage that have been experienced (albeit unknowingly) by the gathered people of God. In this naming, we are in fact remembering and remembering.

Downtown Uniting Church has a lot in common with both Job and Bartimaeus. When I came to this place..., I was called into a congregation which was decimated and damaged, hurting and suffering. The gathered community was struggling to understand who they were as individuals in relationship with God, as well as who they were as the people of God in this place. Mistrust and fear were very strong emotions. Self-deprecating comments were not uncommon, especially amongst the women of Downtown Uniting Church. The tears were real, the heartache was deep, the cry to God for healing, brave and courageous. Like Job and Bartimaeus this congregation of people did not give up in their journey of life and faith. You continued the struggle of being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

...as I have reflected on the journey we have undertaken together, I realise that I am constantly amazed at how hard you have all worked, without really knowing it, to become what you are today... I am in awe of the perseverance in the faith, the generosity of spirit, the Christ-like hospitality that I have been privileged to not only experience, but have seen offered amongst each other and beyond. It truly is with enormous excitement, celebration and gratitude to God that I am able to name Downtown Uniting Church as now being a "healed" congregation - blessed and honoured by God.

But that does not mean our journey of faith has reached its final destination. Neither are our ministry and mission completed. It does not mean that we have nothing left to do in being and becoming the people of faith that God longs for us to be. There is indeed much more to do and much more to experience. It is now time to experience new possibilities with God.

But what does that actually mean? What does that involve? I am convinced that it means being willing to look beyond the present into the future to who, and what, we can become as a healed and blessed community of people seeking to bear witness to the faithfulness of God in our lives. Not only does it require prayerful contemplation, dreaming dreams and being visionaries who look and listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit, it involves taking the risk to step out of our comfort zones. This is not an easy thing to do, but there are times, as
individuals and as a gathered community, that that risk is necessary. Like Job
and Bartimaeus, the people of the Downtown Uniting Church must continue
their journey of healing by being willing to experience new possibilities with
God. And as a person called by God through my Ordination as a Minister of the
Word, I too must also be willing to experience new possibilities with God.

So it is with a sincere confidence in the faithfulness of God combined with a
deep sadness and heavy heart, that I announce I will be concluding my
placement as Minister of the Word with the people of the Downtown Uniting
Church... This has not been an easy decision to come to; however through much
prayer and reflection and many tears, I truly believe that God is also calling me,
as well as you, toward new possibilities. 204

In naming clearly their previous experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement
and/or abuse at this point of the community’s life it was possible to claim what was now
the present experience of “healing”/transformation amongst and within the Downtown
Uniting Church. In giving voice to the present experience of “healing”/transformation
we could then be encouraged to look forward to new possibilities for the future. Whilst
we re-membered in the present, remembering the past, there was an unmistakable
evidence of the eschatological hope of what was yet still to be experienced as the
gathered people of God in that particular place in the future.

The healing of Downtown is not a fluke, or something to be dismissed lightly.
Some might name it as good old-fashioned team work between the faithful
people of this gathered community and God. Some might call it a miracle.
However you choose to name it, just like Job and Bartimaeus, our journey
continues to be supported and encouraged by God. The end of one journey is
simply the beginning of another. This is a day of celebration. This is a day of
new beginnings – of new possibilities with God.
Let’s pray:
God it is with awe and wonder, humbleness and gratitude
that we recognise your faithfulness to us.
It is with the joy and excitement of celebration
that we give thanks for the healing of the gathered community of faith
that is Downtown Uniting Church.
Guide each of us as we look to the future
and undertake the journey of new possibilities with you
through our relationship with the risen Christ – Jesus your son.
Continue to call us out of our comfort zones.
Nurture us and encourage us.
Sustain us and surprise us.

204 K.L. Casey, Appendix 4.
Help us to never be afraid of becoming the people you long for us to be.
Amen.\textsuperscript{205}

\textbf{The Holy Moment of the Dance}

The dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – is a many-faceted dance. It moves, changes direction and alters its tempo ultimately taking on its own unique rhythm, style and choreography. It transforms itself and the dancer as it progresses through its various movements. The movement into the “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” is yet another transformational moment in the dance of the liturgy towards healing and forgiveness. It is neither the end nor nearly the end of the dance, but part of the ever continuous flow of the dance – the journey of life and faith.

As the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused gathered people of God of Downtown Uniting Church re-membered and remembered, that is, undertook the transformation – the rite of passage from victim to survivor – they did so reawakened to the promise that God was indeed present amongst them. In the re-membering and remembering they were reminded in fact that God is and has always been, with them the whole of their journey of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. They just may have not have realized it at the time.\textsuperscript{206} This realization can be understood visually through the following diagram.

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{205}{K.L. Casey, \textit{Appendix 4}.}
\end{footnotesize}
It is important to recognise that in the rite of passage from victim to survivor (as outlined in the previous chapter), something even more substantial occurs beyond that specific transformation. It is from this rite of passage in the movement of “response” that another rite of passage is able to be born. In this movement the victim is ultimately recognised as vulnerable. In this movement the survivor is acknowledged as one with endurance\(^\text{207}\) to keep dancing the dance of the liturgy – that is, continue the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness.

In this rite of passage the dance of the liturgy – “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” – encompasses the re-membering and remembering. More importantly, the movement from victim: vulnerable to survivor: endurance is not only encompassed in the dance of the liturgy – “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” – it is upheld, sustained, supported and maintained by God. God is in the midst of the journey. God is encouraging and enabling the movement from victim: vulnerable to survivor: endurance. God is calling the individual and/or community of faith to take the risk of staying on the journey of life and faith indefinitely in order to experience the wholeness of life God has waiting for them.\(^\text{208}\) In this movement the story telling of the community of faith takes on a different face. It is no longer the story of a

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\(^{207}\) Note: it is possible to use such words as patience, stamina and fortitude as well, as they are all elements of endurance.
disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. In this movement the story telling becomes the integrated narrative of a survivor.

Figure 9

In this specific transformation there is a convergence of the sacred journey. The coming together of the parts of the journey integrates not only life experience but theology as well. It is in the convergence of the journey that the next movement of the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – gains its inspiration and design. It is in this convergence that the participants of the journey are able to grasp that God is present amongst the gathered people of God and that God is immanent. It is also in this convergence that the participants are able to grasp that God is also transcendent, that is, beyond our ability to know or experience completely. It is in this convergence that the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse, becomes part of the sacred story of the gathered people of God. It is in this

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convergence that the re-membering and remembering also take their place as part of the sacred story of the individual and/or gathered people of God.

In this rite of passage that re-members and remembers, those that are named victim: vulnerable to survivor: endurance do not sit out the next stage of the dance. It is through the experience of integration and convergence that it is possible to perceive and realise the blessing of God. Ultimately it is the integration and convergence that encourages another movement in the dance of the liturgy, that is, the “Sending Forth of the People of God”. The sacred journey of the individual and/or gathered people of God is not ending, simply beginning in another way.
The Sending Forth
of the People of God
Bleeding and Broken from the Dance

As Ministry Agent with a gathered people of God with an experience of
disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse there are two particular Jesus stories
that speak to me concerning the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith
towards healing and forgiveness. The first of these gospel stories relates the story of the
haemorrhaging woman and is found in the Gospel of Mark.\(^{209}\) In this story we learn of
an un-named woman who suffered the indignity and trauma of excessive and
continuous heavy bleeding. What should have been a normal, physical and monthly part
of being a female had become a health and community issue. Her menorrhagia\(^{210}\) had
the physicians baffled. They could offer her no relief from her debilitating and
distressing condition.

For all of the women of that time who experienced the natural monthly cyclic bleeding
the community custom (as determined through Jewish Law) meant that until such
menstrual bleeding ceased, those women were denoted as ritually unclean. Bleeding
women were prevented from mixing with their loved ones until such time as their blood
flow ceased. They were kept apart from their friends and family, prevented from
participating in the normal activities of daily life, and required to undertake ritual
cleansing when their bleeding ceased before they could be assimilated back into the
community. In the case of the un-named woman this meant that she was ostracised and
prevented from contact from her loved ones and her community for a period of twelve
years. Like the beggars, lepers and prostitutes, the un-named woman was an un-
loveable person with an unlovely experience.\(^{211}\)

\(^{209}\) Mark 5: 21-34
\(^{210}\) A. Delbridge, et al., The Macquarie Concise Dictionary (Lane Cove: Doubleday Australia, 1982), 776.
\(^{211}\) E.S. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins
and Legal History in Mark 7 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 148.
Having tried all of the usual healing processes and procedures available to her and ultimately becoming destitute financially because she had “spent all that she had”\(^{212}\) in order to try and be integrated back in to her community, the un-named woman took matters into her own hands. Having heard that Jesus was coming her way she broke all the ritual cleanliness laws, as well as community custom and mingled with the crowd that were with Jesus. Rather than make a scene the un-named woman “came up behind him and touched his cloak.”\(^{213}\) It was not an aggressive act. It was not a demanding action. It was both an action of faith and an act of risk taking. The un-named woman did not demand healing; neither did she denigrate her community with vitriolic comment or give voice to any resentment at her everyday experience and treatment. She was not bitter. She simply touched Jesus’ clothing because she believed she could be healed.

Her risk-taking – in removing herself from the exile of her community and mixing with them as they gathered around Jesus – could have put her in an untenable and risky situation. After all, she was not only breaking with custom she was specifically breaking Jewish Law. Michael Leunig, the Australian cartoonist, could have written the following words just for the haemorrhaging woman.

\[
\text{God help us to change. To change ourselves and to change our world. To know the need for it. To deal with the pain of it. To feel the joy of it. To undertake the journey without understanding the destination. The art of gentle revolution. Amen}^{214}
\]

“Gentle revolution” is a phrase that could be used to describe the experience of the Downtown Uniting Church as they undertook their dance of the liturgy – their journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. Just like the haemorrhaging woman, the gathered people of God took risks and made themselves vulnerable before God.

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\(^{212}\) Mark 5: 26b

\(^{213}\) Mark 5: 27

each other, the wider church and their Ministry Agent in the hope of bringing restoration and transformation to their community. Their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse could have been succumbed to, but it was not. Instead, the gathered people of God took the risk to continue the dance of the liturgy. And it would be no different as they entered the movement known as the “Sending Forth of the People of God”.

So Long and Farewell ...

The “Sending Forth of the People of God” is technically that part of the Service of the Lord’s Day which indicates that the worship service is concluded. Many of us take it as our cue that the God stuff is finished and we can now have morning tea or, go home. But the “Sending Forth of the People of God” is far more than simply “so long and farewell”. Graham Hughes describes this moment as “we prepare to ‘go out’ from this space and time which has been particularly structured as a way of realizing ‘the presence of God’.”[^215] Just as we have been liturgically gathered, we are liturgically sent out to live the lives that God longs for us to live. We are sent out to regather in our other communities in the wider world to dance the dance of the liturgy beyond the life of the community of faith. We will continue the journey of life and faith and ultimately re-gather once again as the gathered people of God.

As we are sent out into the wider world we are encouraged to put our faith into action; to be active participants in living out our faith, rather than passive recipients. More profoundly, we are sent out with the blessing of God proclaimed upon us and the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith – continues. We have not reached the end of the dance – simply the beginning of another.

A New Dance – A New Dance Partner

As Ministry Agent with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church I had been called into this particular ministry because I had specific gifts and skills that would complement the gathered people of God in that particular context. My understanding of issues of abuse, my personal and professional experiences, as well as my academic training meant that we were a “good match” in terms of the ACOMP process. There was also a very strong sense of “rightness” that this was the place I was meant to be connected with personally, spiritually and professionally – one might call it a “God prompted” relationship.

Having entered into a relationship with the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church meant working with them intentionally, whilst at the same time, being aware that one day the relationship would come to an end as God called us into another place and experience of ministry. As a practitioner of ministry, action-reflection was a constant companion that accompanied me on my journey as Ministry Agent with the community of faith. Through action-reflection I was able to note subtle as well as significant changes occurring amongst the gathered people of God; changes such as

- stronger leadership amongst the members of the Church Council – less dependence on the Ministry Agent
- more obvious confidence in community leadership by congregation
- people giving voice to the questions “where are we going?” and “what should our ministry be?”
- changes in the make up of the membership of the congregation

Recognising the subtle changes as well as noting the significant healing/transformation the gathered people of God had experienced, encouraged me to look at my sense of call to the community of faith. As stated previously, through much prayer and reflection it became clear that the gathered people of God now needed a person with different gifts.
and skills to what I possessed in order for them to move further forward in their dance of the liturgy as the Downtown Uniting Church.

My unspoken goal at the commencement of my Placement with the disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith was “to do myself out of a job”. I had in fact achieved my goal. The gathered people of God were indeed now able to function, manage the day to day ministry of the community and make decisions such as who they would next call as their new Ministry Agent without my assistance or guidance. Not only was it time for the gathered people of God to make themselves vulnerable to God’s calling, it was also time for me to make myself vulnerable before God and move on from the wonderful people of the Downtown Uniting Church.

For the community of faith known as Downtown Uniting Church the movement from “Eucharist – Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” to the “Sending Forth of the People of God” was a time of sadness, excitement, reminiscing, uncertainty, expectation, planning and hope. The gathered people of God were being called beyond the choreography of this particular dance of the liturgy, in to the creation of another. What would their new dance look like? Who would be their partner? What might be the new possibilities for the people of God in this particular place? These questions would be their guide as they prepared to dance a new dance.

**Who Would have Thought It?**

One of my favourite prayers is again by Michael Leunig. In this simple prayer, using language accessible by (and to) the masses, Leunig articulates the struggle of an individual who has had an experience which has broken them. Just like the haemorrhaging woman who experiences the brokenness of her disease and the
abandonment of her community, Leunig’s character experiences the pain of suffering and brokenness. However, both the haemorrhaging woman and Leunig’s character move beyond their brokenness and take the risk to be healed. In his prayer Leunig names the pain as well as the hope of the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness when he writes

[T]hat which is Christ-like within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken. And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create.\textsuperscript{216}

Although in reaching out and touching the clothing of Jesus the haemorrhaging woman recognised herself as healed, there was more to her healing. It was not just an act of superstition, ungrounded hopefulness or “gentle revolution” that restored her to full health. Despite the crowd surrounding him and pushing against him, Jesus knew something had happened and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”\textsuperscript{217} The un-named woman, having recognised the healing she had received, could have disappeared amongst the crowd and resumed her place in society while the disciples chided Jesus for asking such a ridiculous question. But instead, the un-named woman claimed her healing and named herself as the one who had touched the clothes of Jesus. In coming before Jesus the un-named woman did not boast but made herself vulnerable and humbled herself before him. Jesus honoured her faith in front of the crowd and stated “your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”\textsuperscript{218}

In her taking the risk of being a gentle revolutionary the un-named woman was able to give voice to her narrative of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. In giving voice to her narrative she was able to receive the blessing “go in peace”\textsuperscript{219} and

\textsuperscript{216} M. Leunig, \textit{A Common Prayer} (Burwood: Collins Dove, 1990), un-numbered.
\textsuperscript{217} Mark 5: 30
\textsuperscript{218} Mark 5: 34
\textsuperscript{219} ibid.
resume her dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith toward healing and forgiveness and live the life that God longed for her to live.

Just as the un-named woman gave voice to her narrative and claimed her healing and blessing from Jesus so too, the gathered people of God in the Downtown Uniting Church gave voice to their narratives and claimed who they were as a people of faith seeking to live the lives that God longed for them to live. As they undertook the speaking of their narratives and participated (unknowingly) in their rites of passage they progressed through the dance of the liturgy and arrived at the movement that is the “Sending Forth of the People of God”. The gathered people of God of Downtown Uniting Church offered themselves humbly as disciples of the Christ and were blessed to continue the dance of the liturgy. This was not the end of the journey. It was the beginning of another. The dance of the liturgy would continue.

**Preparing for a Change in the Choreography**

The time between announcing my decision to leave the community of faith as Ministry Agent and our participation in the Service of Closure was very busy indeed. There were many tasks of ministry to complete. In the very early stages of my Placement (as mentioned previously) I had invited all of the gathered people of God to participate in the special Advent Service of Holy Communion and Prayer for Healing. Now, coming to the conclusion of my Placement I believed it was once again necessary to write a pastoral letter to each member of the congregation – young and old alike. This time the letter was not an invitation but a letter of thanks and blessing.

In writing to each of the people for whom I bore the title Ministry Agent, I offered my sincere appreciation for their contribution to my ministry at the Downtown Uniting
Church. The writing of the individual pastoral letter was also to encourage the gathered people of God to continue their personal and corporate dance of the liturgy – their journey of life and faith. The writing of the letter was also to offer them God’s blessing. Each letter was personally prepared and typed by me and contained the following words:

I hope that this letter finds you well and rested after your Christmas and New Years’ celebrations.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for being willing to share part of your journey of life and faith with me during my time as Minister of the Word with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church. I have valued our relationship over the past six (6) years. Thank you for your contribution to the worshipping life of the community.

It is hard to leave a place like Downtown. For me it is like leaving home.

The past six years have been very significant not only for the congregation, but for me as well. Thank you for your contribution to my ministry at Downtown. I have been blessed and privileged to have experienced all that I have – and you have been a part of that blessing.

It is my sincere prayer that you will be acutely aware of God’s love constantly surrounding you and encouraging you to continue becoming the person God longs for you to become. May God bless you, both now, and in the years to come.

Grace and Peace.\(^{220}\)

The letters were personalised, mentioning that person’s particular and specific contribution to the life of the gathered people of God. Each letter was signed personally by me as Ministry Agent. The writing of the pastoral letter was a small act of affirmation and an acknowledgement that we were entering a new stage of our relationship. In writing the personal pastoral letter I hoped to give voice to the significant journey we had undertaken as the gathered people of God at the Downtown Uniting Church and to acknowledge the impending changes that would occur. As Ministry Agent I would be leaving the place that I had called work and home for six years. The community of faith who came together to worship God each week would be

\(^{220}\) Note: The majority of letters contained specific personal material that varied from letter to letter and which is not relevant to this discussion.
changing as well. Not only would I be leaving but another Ministry Agent would eventually be leading the community of faith in the next stage of their dance of the liturgy – their journey of life and faith.

As I wrote the personal pastoral letter to the gathered people of God I did so aware that they had undertaken another rite of passage that I would identify as becoming “wounded healers”. 221

**Wounded Healers Don’t Limp – They Dance On!**

Henri Nouwen in his book “The Wounded Healer” defines such a person as “... the one who must look after his (sic) own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.” 222 In a gathered people of God such as the Downtown Uniting Church it is those who have the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse to whom Nouwen refers. These particular individuals, that is, those who have been wounded, are those who as they dance the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – are gradually recognised as “wounded healers”.

It is my opinion that it is most likely that the Ministry Agent more than the gathered people of God would use Henri Nouwen’s exact terminology “wounded healer”. I believe that it is more likely that the gathered people of God simply acknowledge that amongst them are particular people who have a giftedness that informs who they are as Christians in community with each other and who offer and extend their hospitality to others. This does not dismiss or demean any other expressions of friendship or

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222 ibid., 81.

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hospitality. It does, however, enrich a community of faith with a level of pastoral “knowing” more than in a “normal congregation”.223

Those with the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse know the experience of pain, isolation, abandonment and fear. Their experiences influence how they desire to share their faith and welcome others into their midst. In the case of the people of the Downtown Uniting Church hospitality became a deliberate focus of their new Mission Statement and it was stated very clearly for all to see:

We long to nurture people in their journeys of life and faith and to practise the hospitality of Jesus Christ.

Henri Nouwen defines hospitality as

... the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses ... Hospitality is the ability to pay attention to the guest.224

At the early stage of the dance of the liturgy previously defined as the “Gathering of the People of God” I could not as Ministry Agent recognise the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church as “wounded healers” – just simply as wounded. The community of faith was absorbed in their pain, unable to hold their heads erect and see the possibilities of life. However, as the people of God continued their dance of the liturgy – their journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – and entered into the movement known as the “Sending Forth of the People of God” I was able to celebrate their transition and transformation into becoming “wounded healers”. The gathered people of God could (and would) now stand tall, look at the world with different eyes and see that there were indeed new possibilities ahead for them.

223 See: previous explanation of “normal congregation” on pages 30-31.
The people who knew pain would be able to offer wisdom to others in pain. The gathered people of God who once had an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse would be able to offer wise counsel to the Church on restoration and transformative learning. The gathered people of God would be a place of welcome and hospitality, safety and nurture. How is it possible to make such confident assertions? How did I recognise this transition and transformation? I too, am a “wounded healer”.

A Slight Sprain – But I can still Dance!

In the gospel story of the bent over woman, found only in Luke 13: 10-17, once again we find an un-named woman. In this particular instance the un-named woman has been “bent over” and “unable to stand up straight” for the past eighteen years of her life. Unlike the haemorrhaging woman she does not seek healing neither does she speak. She is simply noticed by Jesus. John Nolland notes

[O]nce he has seen her, Jesus takes the entire initiative in the woman’s restoration: he tells her that God’s release has come for her and lays his hands on her … Her restoration is immediate, and she gives glory to the God who stands behind her deliverance.\(^{228}\)

The focus of the complete story in Luke 13: 10-17 is not necessarily upon the un-named woman, but rather Jesus’ interaction “with the leader of the synagogue”.\(^{229}\) However, the “bent over” woman herself speaks loudly to us when discussing the experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse of an individual and/or community of faith. The un-named woman has borne her affliction for eighteen long years, looking downwards, unable to experience what it means to stand tall and proud; to look her

\(^{225}\) Luke 13: 11  
\(^{226}\) ibid.  
\(^{228}\) ibid.  
\(^{229}\) Luke 13: 14
peers in the eye, to see the vista that is living fully within her community. Her world view has been limited to only that which she can see in her “bent over” state. Her perspective on what it means to be part of the wider community is contained – restricted by her physical state and posture; her possibilities for inclusion limited by community custom and people’s ability to see beyond her disability.

For a gathered people of God such as the Downtown Uniting Church who live with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse this story speaks of the new possibilities that can accompany the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. The experience of the un-named woman resounds loudly with the experience of the gathered people of God. Their self-esteem so damaged that they cannot see hope and possibility; their heartache so intense that they are weighed down with sorrow; their sense of disconnection and shame preventing them from being and becoming the people God longs for them to be.

The blessing/healing/transformation the un-named woman received from Jesus came to her unexpectedly. The blessing/healing/transformation the un-named woman received from Jesus was not received in secret, but rather before the members of the religious and wider community. The blessing/healing/transformation the un-named woman received from Jesus allowed her to stand tall and blossom. Her experience of being “bent over” did not destroy her; it did however allow her to appreciate fully the extent of the blessing/healing/transformation she received from Jesus. She found her voice and “began praising God”. ²³⁰

The Closure of Ministry service conducted at the Downtown Uniting Church acknowledged my time as Ministry Agent with the gathered people of God. It was not about me. This special time of celebration was to give thanks to God for the dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness that the people of faith of the Downtown Uniting Church and I had shared together. This special time of celebration was also to acknowledge liturgically the change in our relationship. It was also a time in which we could name the previous pain, celebrate the remarkable journey we had undertaken and give thanks for the blessing/healing/transformation received from God along that journey. This was not the end of a journey but the exciting beginning of another.

As part of the “Sending Forth of the People of God” a ritual of Service of Closure was enacted. As part of that ritual, the symbolic handing over of the Church Roll for the Downtown Uniting Church was followed. To the gathered people of God I offered the following words:

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
you called me to minister with you,
and charged me to preach the Word,
preside at the sacraments
and to oversee the pastoral life of the congregation.
You will call another minister in my place
and I must lay down the tasks you committed to me.
I, therefore, hand this pastoral list to you
with the of names of the people for whom I have cared,
and ask you to continue to care for these people,
and in due time, to share it with my successor.

231 Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, “Order of Service for the Closure of Ministry: A Liturgy in which the Presbytery, the Minister of the Word (or Lay Pastor) and the Parish, Acknowledge the Completion of a Settlement” (Sydney: UCA Assembly, 1991), unpublished paper.
A Personal Dance - Continued

Imber-Black and Roberts remind us that “[R]ituals bestow protected times and space to stop and reflect on life’s transformations.”232 The gathered people of God and I had undertaken the specific ritual through the “Closure of Ministry” liturgy. The community of faith of Downtown Uniting Church would take responsibility for the next stage of their dance of the liturgy – without me. Their journey of life and faith would continue informed by their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The pastoral care that they would offer amongst the gathered people of God – and to those they were yet to meet – would be shaped and strengthened by the reality that they were now “wounded healers”. The dance of the liturgy was not over; it was simply ready to begin, yet again.

After a lifetime of making sure I never strayed from my designated life path, new possibilities now loom on the horizon waiting for me to reach out to them. I, too, will undertake yet another ritual, that is, “looking for a new job”. The dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith has not been completed by me, though its direction has altered. Rather than remain a passive recipient of the life that was offered to me by my parents and other abusers there are now new possibilities that require me to be an active participant in my dance of the liturgy – my journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. There is now a new attentiveness to the journey – an attentiveness which becomes aware of a physical lightness. No longer am I feeling “bent over” as if I am burdened with an invisible and heavy load to carry; I am able to stand tall and look the world in the eye and see the opportunity for new possibilities. Like the un-named woman in the story in the Gospel of Luke I am now able to stand upright – no longer

stooped, broken and silently ashamed of being alive. I have found my voice and am able to sing the praises of God. I am also able to love me.

Nearly forty years since they came into my life my adopted parents remain constant encouragers of me and my dance of the liturgy. There is no pressure to be anyone other than who I am – a participant in my dance of the liturgy – my journey of life and faith. My “sister” is still my closest friend and confidant. We still laugh and share our stories. Both my Aunt and Uncle and my sister acknowledge that my life experience has informed who I am as a Ministry Agent, a mother, friend and teacher. They celebrate that I am a “wounded healer” – even if they do not understand the term as much as Henri Nouwen. Each time we come to the end of our time together they offer me some new words of encouragement and blessing. These words, simple and heartfelt, remind me to keep on the dance of the liturgy – my journey of life and faith.

**What Goes Around – Comes Around**

The noted Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) once said “[A] journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”\(^2\) and I would most enthusiastically agree with him. However I would choose to place the ancient proverb in to the post modern context and re-phrase it this way:

The dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness – begins with a single step.

For the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church their dance of the liturgy did indeed commence with a single step. It may have been a nervous, tentative, unsure step, but it was most definitely a single step!

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\(^2\) Unable to cite original source.
Our time together as Ministry Agent and gathered people of God of Downtown Uniting Church had now come to an end. Our time together in this specific relationship was over. However, the dance of the liturgy – for either of us – was not. We would part blessed (and called by God) to continue the next phase of our journey of being the people God longed for us to be. As we drew our time of being together to a close – in worship and as the gathered people of God – as ministry practitioner and community of faith – we joined together in the words of mission and dismissal. Together – though separate and apart – we would look toward the new possibilities that God would present to us. The dance of the liturgy was not over, simply beginning again.

![Receiving the blessing to continue the dance of the liturgy](image)

Leader: God longs that we demonstrate mercy to each other.

ALL: Jesus yearns for us to experience grace.

Leader: The Holy Spirit desires that we share our faith.\(^{234}\)

ALL: Let each of us be eager and on the ball; willing and excited; optimistic and hope-filled as we look forward to new possibilities with God.

Leader: The blessing of God, gatherer of the people, be with us all as we leave this community for another.\(^{235}\)

\(^{234}\) K.L. Casey, *...Of Ash and Rainbows... A Resource Book of Words for Worship* (Toongabbie: K.L. Casey, 1999), 70.

\(^{235}\) ibid.
Conclusion
**Story Telling has a Place of Significance**

The narrative of the Downtown Uniting Church has not found its completed voice. It never will. Indeed, the narrative of this particular gathered people of God continues to grow and develop, change and be redesigned as they continue on their journey of life and faith. They are no longer a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused people as they were when we first met. They are no longer victims. They are survivors.

Having been given permission and encouragement to tell their stories of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse the people of the Downtown Uniting Church are now looking for the new story in their midst. The community of faith are not passively sitting back waiting for something to happen to them. They are active co-composers with each other in creating their new narrative. The stories they will tell of themselves in to the future will change as they experience what it means to be a community of faith which has received significant healing/transformation and which chooses to continue on the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. It is a journey that will continue as long as there is a gathered people of God worshipping in that place. Their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse will always be a part of the sacred story of the Downtown Uniting Church.

For the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church the desire to be a faithful people of God continues to sustain them. Steadily and with time, their confidence to persist to be the people of God in their particular context will continue to grow and increase. Receiving permission to speak of their painful experience both during the time of our ministry together and subsequently, has helped ease the pain (and
shame) of their experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. It is no longer a secret; neither is their significant healing/transformation.

Never Too Busy to Dance the Dance of the Liturgy!

Since the time of our Closure of Ministry service the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church have been very busy. Once again they have undertaken the very important task of preparing to call a new Ministry Agent through the ACOMP process. They have gathered – come together and given voice to their desire to continue the journey of being the people God longs for them to be. They have opened themselves – their hearts and minds – before God. They have prayed together naming themselves as people who choose to continue their journey of life and faith in relationship with Jesus the Christ. They have lamented that they can no longer financially afford to have a full time Ministry Agent and confessed their apprehension of the future. What will it look like? Who will lead us? The actions and process that the people of the Downtown Uniting Church have undertaken in addressing these issues once again clearly corresponds with and mirrors the “Gathering of the People of God” in the Service of the Lord’s Day.

The gathered people of God have listened for God’s wisdom and word for them in their context. They have sought God’s leading as to what type, shape and form of ministry they should concentrate on as they look toward the future. Prayerfully and reflectively they have listened to God’s leading as to whom they should call to be their Ministry Agent and have responded. The people of the Downtown Uniting Church have continued to make the connection to the “Service of the Word” in the Service of the Lord’s Day as they listen for God’s leading and prepare to respond.
With the assistance of the ACOMP process the community of faith has eventually made
the decision as to who their new Ministry Agent will be. They have issued the invitation
(Call) to the Ministry Agent and asked them to join them on their dance of the liturgy
and be a part of the community of Downtown Uniting Church. The gathered people of
God have given thanks for God’s faithfulness to them in the past and are looking
forward with anticipation and hope to the future and what it will bring. They have re-
membered and remembered once again. The community of faith that is the Downtown
Uniting Church have given voice to the “Eucharist: Great Prayer of Thanksgiving” as
they reveal the name of their new Ministry Agent.

For the community of faith that is the Downtown Uniting Church the ACOMP process
is completed until the next time it is needed. Permission to extend a Call to the new
Ministry Agent has been received and acted upon. The Church (through the ACOMP
process) has said to the gathered people of God (and the new Ministry Agent) “go and
do God’s work together.” Their relationship with me as Ministry Agent and practitioner
is completed. The relationship with the ACOMP process is finished. The time without
an incumbent Ministry Agent has also come to an end. The connection with the
“Sending Forth of the People of God” in the Service of the Lord’s Day has been
established. It is time once again to ‘regather’.

The community of faith will gather again for the Induction of the Ministry Agent and
the dance of the liturgy will continue, yet again. However, this time the dance will not
be as a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith. Rather, the
dance of the liturgy will be as a gathered people of God who have received significant
healing/transformation and who will keep on the journey of life and faith empowered,
transformed and encouraged to continue the journey of being the people God longs for
them to be. The dance of the liturgy will take its shape from the shape of the Service of
the Lord’s Day and it will be danced with the tenacity, uncertainty, creativity,
determination, energy, passion, nervousness and enthusiasm that comes with having a
new dance partner.

Figure 10

The Church Must Listen to its Hurting and Broken People

The privilege of working with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church as a
practitioner of ministry has left me with a passionate belief that the Church must be
proactive in offering liturgical and pastoral sensitivity, resources, assistance and
encouragement to its individuals and communities of faith with an experience of
disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. The experience of being in ministry
with the gathered people of God of the Downtown Uniting Church has also confirmed
my belief that the Church can offer liturgical and pastoral sensitivity, resources,
assistance and encouragement if it is willing to train specialist Ministry
Agents/practitioners to work in and with these damaged, sensitive and specialised
contexts.

Beyond my own voice and those voices of the gathered people of God of the Downtown
Uniting Church (and other such communities of faith), Marjorie Procter-Smith speaks
profoundly to the Church as she pleads with it to hear the voices of its disempowered,
disenfranchised and/or abused individuals or communities of faith through the
following words “[T]he church needs to learn to say not only ‘Yes, Amen’ to God’s
righteousness, but also 'No, this must not be' to injustice." Whilst speaking directly to the subject of domestic violence, her comments are no less important to the discussion of "Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse".

The Uniting Church in Australia can be commended for its willingness and determination to be a place of safety for its people (female and male, young and old) – both as individuals and as communities of faith – especially in the area of sexual misconduct. Its Regulations and Code of Ethics are meticulously prepared; clear and precise as to the consequences of any inappropriate behaviour resulting in sexual misconduct perpetrated by its specified Ministry Agents, employees, volunteers, members and adherents. However, individuals and communities of faith disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused by the non-sexualised abuse of power by a Ministry Agent and/or a congregant in a position of leadership need to feel that the Church takes their pain seriously as well. These individuals and communities of faith must be able to tell their stories of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse in order that they are set free to commence the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. Their dance of the liturgy must not be impeded or in fact prevented by the preference of the Church to place their situations, circumstances and experiences in the 'too hard basket'.

The disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused individuals and/or communities of faith must hear the Church say 'this is wrong – this should not happen – we must do something'. The disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused individuals and/or

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communities of faith need to know that the Church takes their pain seriously enough to revisit the Regulations and Code of Ethics and to look for ways of naming the pain and helping its people to think theologically about issues of abuse. The Church must be willing to acknowledge those places in the Regulations and Code of Ethics that need revision and/or in fact do not exist. The Church must acknowledge the gaps in the Regulations and Code of Ethics – concerning all abuses of power – which prevent justice from occurring.

The Final Word

"Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse” has attempted to bring to the attention of the Uniting Church in Australia specifically and the wider Church in general, the historical place and role of narrative in the Christian tradition and the impact story telling has in enabling the journey towards healing and forgiveness to commence especially for individuals and/or communities of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. It has also named the significant role rites of passage play in the transformation of disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused individuals and/or communities of faith as they enter into the journey towards healing and forgiveness.

The writing of this dissertation has shown clearly the connection between the shape of the liturgy as seen through the Service of the Lord’s Day and the journey towards healing and forgiveness that takes its form in the dance of the liturgy. It has also revealed the correlation between the journey of healing and forgiveness of an individual survivor of abuse and that of a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse.
As a practitioner of ministry I have brought to the church's attention the remarkable restoration/transformation experienced by the Downtown Uniting Church which mirrored the shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord's Day. It could be argued that an implication of this dissertation is the need for the Church to train specialist Ministry Agents in order that they are able to assist individuals and communities of faith enter into their dance of the liturgy – the journey of life and faith towards healing and forgiveness. Without specialist training in areas of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and abuse the ministry practitioner is not only at risk of burn-out themselves, but they are at risk of further damaging the individual and/or community of faith. I have also established the obligation upon the Church to assist its ordained and lay people to think theologically about issues of abuse – both that of sexual misconduct and more specifically in the context experienced by the Downtown Uniting Church – the non-sexualised abuse of power. Any theological discussion and training must also include the subject of forgiveness.

Through telling the story of the Downtown Uniting Church I have demonstrated that context specific and sensitive liturgical resources can be developed for use in a community of faith with an experience of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse. I have demonstrated how I have used context specific and sensitive resources in an actual community of faith and noted the benefits of preparing such context sensitive Bible Studies and worship resources.

The role and ministry of "After Pastor" is a new concept within Australian church language and culture though it is an emerging one in the US.\footnote{A.F. Wells-Goodwin, "After Pastor Churches," \url{http://www.afterpastor.org/} "After-pastors are serving churches where previous clergy misconduct has taken place, it may be of a sexual nature, regarding financial matters or any violation of the sacred trust. This violation has the potential to create unhealthy dynamics within the local church. Distrust of the current pastor, lack of trust in the denomination, poor communication and decisions that get changed outside of the official meetings are but a few of the}
dissertation will bring to the fore the necessity of embracing such a role within the Uniting Church in Australia. This dissertation could be the basis for the future development of the role of “After Pastor” within the Uniting Church. The story of the Downtown Uniting Church shows what can be achieved with a disempowered, disenfranchised and/or abused community of faith when the Ministry Agent is trained in and aware of issues of abuse. The dissertation lays the foundation for designing a model of training for “After Pastors” based on the liturgical motif of the Service of the Lord’s Day.

The liturgy reflects our life. The nature and shape of the liturgy as found in the Service of the Lord’s Day nurtures the Christian life. Through participation in the liturgy we are nurtured, restored and transformed through Christ. Such transformation is mirrored in the shape of the Service of the Lord’s Day from lament and confession to hearing the good news and being renewed and transformed to live life honouring God through our relationship with Jesus the Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In order to facilitate the use of this dissertation in such a manner, I intend to:

1. forward copies of this dissertation to the General Secretaries of the UCA Assembly and the UCA NSW Synod; and
2. request in a covering letter accompanying the dissertation, that the UCA Assembly and the NSW Council of Synod consider constructing a Job Description for an “After Pastor Trainer”; arranging for suitable funding for such a position and making an appointment at the beginning of the next funding period.

An “After Pastor Trainer” could develop a model of training based on the work of this dissertation and the liturgical motif of the Service of the Lord’s Day. The dissertation presenting symptoms ... This web site is intended to provide after-pastors with information and support about serving wounded churches, resources for this unique ministry and a forum to offer supportive guidance. Comments, suggestions and reflections may be submitted to this site by e-mailing at: afterpastor@yahoo.com
could be required reading for Ministry Agents training to become "After Pastors", that is, it could be included on the course reading list.

Ministry Agents could apply or be identified to undertake this training and receive appropriate accreditation upon completion. Such appropriately accredited "After Pastors" would be available to Synod Placements Committees for strategic placement in congregations where significant abuse has occurred.

"Broken Glass and Angel Kisses – From Lament to Celebration: connecting liturgy and pastoral care in the journey of healing and forgiveness for a congregation that has experienced abuse" encourages the Church to look beyond the matter of sexual misconduct and recognise that any and all abuse of power – non-sexualised abuse of power included – is wrong and unacceptable in any of our faith communities. This dissertation calls the Church to encourage the stories of disempowerment, disenfranchisement and/or abuse to be told by the hurting individuals and/or communities of faith in order that the dance of the liturgy can be danced and the journey toward healing and forgiveness, undertaken.
Appendices
Appendix 1:

Downtown Uniting Church – Elders/Leaders Retreat Day – Day 2

Settle in – get to know you better…
   3 things about the person on your right that you already know
   3 things you just found out – introduce them to us.

1. Question: What are your roles as Elders/Leaders 15 mins.


3. Question: What is your experience of pastoral care as a member of the Downtown Uniting Church congregation since you first began attending?
   - Has it always been a positive experience?
   - What made it a positive experience for you?
   - Have you had a negative experience?
   - What made it a negative experience?

Take the time to reflect/journal or draw your experience/s. 20 mins.
Share with the group as you are able. 15 – 30 mins.

(Break)

4. What is our goal/aim for pastoral care at Downtown Uniting Church?
   (A proposed model of pastoral care – the Pastoral Care Web)
Explanation/Discussion/Practicalities

The task: To determine the best way forward (in pastoral care) for Downtown Uniting Church.
   - How do we go about the task?
   - How do we determine numbers of carers?
   - Are there any limitations i.e. age etc.
   - Involvement of newly Confirmed as encouragement?
   - Do we include all on rolls – or only attendees?
   - How do we incorporate children?

Prayer – in the group you have been working with during the day pray for any (or all) of the following:
   - The members of the Downtown Uniting Church congregation and their families;
   - The (wider) community of Downtown
   - Those who participate in the various groups (congregational and outside groups);
   - Those who lead the various groups (congregational and outside groups);
   - Those who may feel called to be carers;
   - The Elders/Leaders (in your group and other groups);
   - Minister
Appendix 2:

Week 1:  "Walking to Golgotha – A Lenten Bible Study"


Setting up:  The people gathered to be seated in a circle around a table in the centre. On the table is a cloth, with four purple (4) candles around a large white Christ candle. Light all candles. Also on the table are some pita bread and a chalice.

Welcome & Prayer:

Introduction & Background:

† Explain the symbols on table

† In our Bible Reading, we will hear how Jesus gathered with the disciples for the celebration of the “Passover” (explain “Passover”). The time Jesus spends with the disciples is a time of reflection, of being in community, of naming issues, and being honest. It is a time of sharing in relationship with others, as well as sharing food; it is a time of preparation. We are gathered together as a community of people, in relationship with each other, through our individual and corporate journey in the Christian faith. We are part of the Church universal. Together we are preparing to participate in the Easter story through our reflections on the Word of God, as the gathered people of God, and especially, as a community of faith. We are also preparing ourselves as individuals, through prayer, reflection, and discussion of these Lenten studies.

† Give a brief explanation of the history/beginnings of “Lent” within the Christian tradition.

† Ask people to find a comfortable position, and perhaps, close their eyes. Listen to the bible reading as instrumental music plays in background.

† When music and reading are completed allow two minutes of silent reflection.

Bible Reading:  Luke 22: 1-23 (NRSV)

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. 2 The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. 3 Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; 4 he went away and conferred with the

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238 “Passover” or “Pesach” is one of the Pilgrim Festivals and begins on the 15th day of Nissan in the Jewish calendar. The main rituals celebrated at “Passover” are related to the Exodus from Egypt after 400 years of slavery (refer: Exodus chapters 1-15). The name Passover refers to the fact that YHWH (or God) passed over the houses of the Jews when slaying the firstborn of Egypt. A most significant part of Passover is the removing of leaven from Jewish homes. By doing this Jewish families remember the fact that their ancestors left Egypt in a hurry, not leaving time for their bread to rise. It is also a symbolic act to remove puffiness (i.e. pride & arrogance etc) from the soul. For further interesting information on Passover see: www.ort.org/ort/museum/passover.htm.

239 J.G. Davies ed., _A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship_ (London: SCM Press, 1986), 299. Note: Lent is an English word that means Spring. ‘It’s origin probably lies in the in the formal and final period of preparation of candidates for baptism at Easter with which those undergoing penance rapidly became associated. With the atrophy of both of these it became transformed into a period of general devotional preparation for Easter for all.’ Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Palm Sunday. It lasts for a period of forty days.
chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. 5. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. 6. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present. 7. Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8. So Jesus sent Peter and John saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” 9. They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” 10. “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters 11. and say to the owner of the house, “The teacher asks you, ‘Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” 12. He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” 13. So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. 14. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16. for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17. Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18. for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19. Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20. And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. 21. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” 22. Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this.

†

Divide into groups to discuss the following questions:

1. In remembering the Exodus experience of their ancestors, each Jewish family and community participated in the Passover; a time in which the people re-covenanted, re-assessed, and renewed their relationship with God. The symbolic act we share in, as a gathered people of God, the Eucharist (Holy Communion), is enacted in this reading from Luke 22:1-23 with Jesus and the disciples. How does our participation in the festivals of the church such as Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday and Easter bring us together as a community?

2. In the reading, Jesus names not only his future suffering, but also the fact that he knows he is going to be betrayed by one of his disciples. The secrecy, out of which Judas Iscariot plots his betrayal, is named as an issue which will affect the future life of the gathered community. As you reflect on this reading discuss how you, and in turn your faith community, deal with issues of pain and hurt.

3. In “Walking to Golgotha”, we are undertaking a journey of discovery. It is a journey with Jesus, and the disciples, where we will become intimately aware of the spoken and unspoken issues of that community. It is not necessarily a pleasant, or, comfortable journey. However, it is a journey where we will learn about ourselves as individuals, and as a community of faith. In the light of this knowledge, what makes you uncomfortable about this passage of Scripture? Is there anything that is comforting to you?
Re-gather into large group:
† Time permitting, share any responses to the questions discussed in small group.

Closing:
† read: **A Lenten Reflection**
  Deep in thought, my head bowed
  I sit with ash upon my forehead –
  the sign of the cross visible to the world.
  Silent reflection brings forth soul searching
  and I realise a sacrifice should be made.
  Dilemma strikes and perplexed, I ponder my predicament.
  Will I sacrifice watching television? How can I?
  That’s how I relax when I get the time...
  Will I sacrifice lovely skinny cappuccinos? No,
  that’s how I am sociable with those who need me...
  Will I sacrifice almond milk chocolate? I just can’t,
  it gives me energy after a long draining day. Maybe,
  I should simply sacrifice my doubt,
  and let God get on with being ... God.

  ***

  God of ash and rainbows,
  awaken within us life-bringing seeds of hope.
  Startle us with the beauty of your renewing love.
  Water us with the gentle rain of your Spirit.
  Show us the creative possibilities within us.²⁴⁰ Amen.

Candles:
Blow out first of the purple candles. Leave others burning.

Blessing:
Say together the Mitzpah Benediction:
  May the Lord watch over you and me
  whilst we are absent one from the other. Amen.

²⁴⁰ K.L. Casey, *Of Ash and Rainbows... A Resource Book of Words for Worship* (Toongabbie: K.L. Casey, 1999), 84. Note: Although this reflection is now published in this resource book, it was first written specifically for the Downtown Uniting Church as part of the Bible Study “Walking to Golgotha” which remains unpublished.
Appendix 2

Week 2:  “Walking to Golgotha – A Lenten Bible Study”


Setting up:  The people gathered to be seated in circle around a table in the centre.  
On the table is a cloth, with four purple (4) candles around a large white 
Christ candle. Light Christ candle and three purple candles.  
[optional – small container of flowers]

Welcome & Prayer:

Introduction & Background:
† Revision of week 1
† Explain the symbols on table
† Share some information about the Mt of Olives. A copy of a map will assist the 
people to gain a better idea of the placement of Mt. of Olives in relation to 
Jerusalem.
† If it is possible, turn out the lights leaving only the light of the candles that are 
burning. Read the Luke passage by torch light as instrumental music plays in 
background. When music and reading are completed allow two minutes of silent 
reflection.


39. He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the 
disciples followed him. 40. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray 
that you may not come into the time of trial.” 41. Then he withdrew from them 
about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, 42. “Father, if you are willing, 
remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” [[43. Then an 
angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. 44. In his anguish he 
prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling 
down on the ground.]] 45. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples 
and found them sleeping because of grief, 46. and he said to them, “Why are you 
sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”
47. While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called 
Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; 48. 
but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of 
Man?” 49. When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 
“Lord, should we strike with the sword?” 50. Then one of them struck the slave 
of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” 
And he touched his ear and healed him. 52. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, 
the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have 
you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? 53. When I was with 
you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your 
hour, and the power of darkness!”
54. Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s 
house. But Peter was following at a distance. 55. When they had kindled a fire in 
the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56.
Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” 57. But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58. A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” 59. Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” 60. But Peter said, “Man I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. 61. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62. And he went out and wept bitterly.

†

Explain the significance of Jesus being betrayed by Judas with a kiss i.e. kiss was a sign of greeting by a friend. Here it is used to betray that friend. Note: in Luke & John’s version of this story Judas does not get to actually kiss Jesus (as he does in Matthew and Mark).

†

On a chalk board or butcher’s paper write in any order the following words:

crowd, alone, asleep, in prayer, greeting, betrayal, violence, healing, swords, peacemaker

†

Ask people to break into pairs and find the verses which relate to the above words. Explain that the purpose is to note the contrasts in the reading.

Remaining in groups of two, discuss the following questions:

1. In verse 42 Jesus names his heartache, and asks God to “remove this cup from me” but determines “not my will but yours be done”. In verse 48 Jesus stops Judas short by acknowledging that he knows Judas intends to betray him with the sign of friendship, a kiss. In verse 53 he reminds those who come to seize him that he has been in the temple with them “day after day” and that they had never needed swords before in their dealings with him. Honesty, and straight talking, are once again integral to Jesus in this reading of Luke 22.

What place does honesty have in our relationship to each other, as the gathered people of God?

2. Peter’s denial of Jesus in verses 57 to 61 is in complete contrast to the honesty and straight talking of Jesus.

In what ways do we, as the gathered people of God in this place, allow our denials to speak louder than our honesty?

3. The humanity of Jesus is very real in this story (i.e. verse 42), so is his humility (i.e. verse 41), and his honesty.

As we continue “Walking to Golgotha”, in what ways might we be able to exhibit these characteristics to each other, and the wider community?

†

If time permits, share some insights with the larger group.

Closing:

†

read: My Gethsemane

Surrounded by my closest friends;
alone, and isolated,
I stand contemplating a future I understand
and yet, can't fully comprehend.

250
Quiet questions probing the recesses of my mind.
"Why";
a word often forming in my deep subconscious;
while simultaneously,
internal heartache explodes within my body -
pain crushing my heart
as I realise the ultimate consequence
of my decision to remain
in my Gethsemane. 241

Candles:
Blow out the second of the purple candles. Leave others burning.

Blessing:
Say together the Mizpah Benediction:
    May the Lord watch over me and you
whilst we are absent one from the other. Amen.

241 K.L. Casey, ...Of Ash and Rainbows... A Resource Book of Words for Worship (Toongabbie: K.L. Casey, 1999), 85. Note: Although this reflection is now published in this resource book, it was first written specifically for the Downtown Uniting Church as part of the Bible Study “Walking to Golgotha” which remains unpublished.
Appendix 2

Week 3: “Walking to Golgotha – A Lenten Bible Study”


Setting up: The people gathered to be seated in circle around a table in the centre. On the table is a cloth, with four purple (4) candles around a large white Christ candle. Light Christ candle and two purple candles.

Welcome & Prayer:

Introduction & Background:
† Revision of week 2 – offer the people the opportunity to share any thoughts or questions regarding the readings from the previous weeks. Sometimes the week between sessions brings to mind issues not thought of at the time of the group meeting together.

† Explain that when the music and reading are completed there will be two minutes of silent reflection. In this time ask the gathered people to either stay in their place or find another, and write down three moments from the reading which spoke to them of either power, and/or powerlessness.

† Ask people to find a comfortable position, and perhaps close their eyes. Listen to the bible reading as instrumental music plays in background.

63. Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; 64. they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” 65. They kept heaping many other insults on him.
66. When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. 67. They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; 68. and if I question you, you will not answer. 69. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” 70. All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” 71. Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!”

23: 1. Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. 2. They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” 3. Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” 4. Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” 5. But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.” 6. When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7. And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. 9. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10. The chief priests and the
scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. 12. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

13. Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, 14. and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. 15. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16. I will therefore have him flogged and release him." (other ancient manuscripts have verse 17. Now he was obliged to release someone for them at the festival)

18. Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" 19. (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) 20. Pilate wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; 21. but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" 22. A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." 23. But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. 24. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. 25. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

Define power: a good concise definition on all aspects of power can be found in Dictionary of Pastoral Care & Counselling, R.J. Hunter (Ed.); Abingdon Press; Nashville; 1990

In groups of two or three discuss the following questions:

1. In the Bible reading from Luke 22: 63 – 23:25 power and powerlessness play a significant part in determining the roles, actions and even the future of the characters in the story.

In your group, share some of the moments of power and/or powerlessness which emerge from this reading.

2. "The misuse, not the use of power may be the most serious issue in human existence." Discuss this statement in your group.

An exercise on your own:

As we think about the issue of power and powerlessness in Luke 22: 63 – 23:25, we think about power in our own life situations. All of us, at some time or another (be it as a child or an adult), feel the impact of power and powerlessness. In a quiet place on your own, make a list of situations where you feel power in your life, and/or the situations where perhaps you might feel powerless.

This task may raise some difficult issues for some of us which we may not even be aware. Being sensitive to this possibility, if this task does make you uncomfortable, please just take some time to reflect on our time “Walking to Golgotha” so far. The exercise is aimed to raise our awareness of our own sense

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of power and/or powerlessness, and is not compulsory. Neither will the results of our thinking be shared with the larger group.

An exercise for the whole group:

1. In this Bible reading from Luke 22: 63 – 23:25 we witness power and powerlessness. From the apparent powerlessness of Jesus as he is intimidated, taunted and physically abused, through to the power and powerlessness of Pilate and ultimately, the power of the crowd. Being the gathered people of God in this place, how is our individual sense of power and/or powerlessness recognised, and acknowledged, or denied?

2. As a people who recognise in ourselves our own sense of power and/or powerlessness, our strengths and weaknesses - In what ways are we able to bring to the wider community, a sense of healing and wholeness, as it struggles with its own sense of power and/or powerlessness?

Closing:
† read: I Thought: A Prayer

I thought I would try something different today:
you know – be strong and not let the world get me down.
I’ll stand my ground and not get pushed about.

I thought I would try something new today:
you know what I mean – find my voice and name the issue.
I’ll sing my way through the day rather than remain silent.

I thought I would try another approach today:
you know – change my sense of powerlessness into power.
I’ll believe in myself, be kind to me and I will love me.

I thought I would try something different today.
you know what I mean – I’ll take the risk to trust.
Trust myself, trust the process, and trust God.

I thought I would try something new today:
you know – take a deep breath, and let my heart feel.
I’ll reach out and touch the face of God.

God of the known and unknown,
the seen and unseen:
we are always in your presence.
In our waking, and in our sleeping;
in our playing, and in our working.
In our despair, and in our hope;
in our pain and in our joy.
Nothing escapes your attention.
Hear the cries of the powerless and offer them hope.
Give them strength to continue the journey of life.
Open the eyes of the powerful
so that they see the injustice and pain they precipitate.
Invite us all to share the possibilities of life.
Possibilities of inclusion, mutuality,  
reciprocity, respect, safety and love.  
The whole of humanity waits expectantly,  
whether we know it or not.

Candles:  
Blow out the third of the purple candles. Leave one purple and the Christ candle  
burning.

Blessing:  
Say together the Mizpah Benediction:  
May the Lord watch over me and you  
whilst we are absent one from the other. Amen.

243 K.L. Casey, ...Of Ash and Rainbows... A Resource Book of Words for Worship (Toongabbie: K.L. Casey, 1999), 86. Note: Although this reflection is now published in this resource book, it was first written specifically for the Downtown Uniting Church as part of the Bible Study “Walking to Golgotha” which remains unpublished.
Appendix 2

Week 4: “Walking to Golgotha – A Lenten Bible Study”

Luke 23: 26-49 “... a time of promise ...”

Setting up: The people gathered to be seated in circle around a table in the centre. On the table is a cloth, with four purple (4) candles around a large white Christ candle. Light Christ candle and one purple candle.

Welcome & Prayer:

Introduction & Background:
† Revision of week 3 – offer the people the opportunity to share any thoughts or questions regarding the readings from the previous weeks. Sometimes the week between sessions brings to mind issues not thought of at the time of the group meeting together.

† Explain that when the music and reading are completed there will be two minutes of silent reflection. Ask people to find a comfortable position, and perhaps close their eyes. Listen to the bible reading as instrumental music plays in background. At the end of the silent reflection time, blow out last purple candle, leaving only the Christ candle burning.

Bible Reading: Luke 23: 26-49 (NRSV)

26. As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. 28. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ 30. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ 31. For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” 32. Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[34. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” 36. The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37. and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38. There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” 39. One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40. But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41. And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42. Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43. He replied, “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” 44. It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45. while the
sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Having said this, he breathed his last. 47. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48. And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. 49. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Materials needed:
† two old pieces of wood (fence palings are ideal)
† quantity of small nails and hammer(s); drawing pins
† quantity of purple cardboard or paper cut into card size pieces, felt pens
† one or two people to volunteer to make a cross out of the wood provided.

An exercise on your own:
❖ On a piece of purple card/paper write down three feeling words that describe how you are feeling after hearing this passage from Luke 23: 26-49.

In groups of two or three:
1. We have listened to the reading from Luke 23: 26-49, watched the construction of the cross and acknowledged some of our feelings at this present moment. Share the words you have written with each other in your small group. Do not feel pressured into sharing. At all times feel free to simply "pass" on any given exercise, and move on to the next person.

2. As a small group choose three words that you would want to share with the whole group. (If the group is large choose only one word.)

After sharing your words with the whole group, pin your card/paper to the cross. It does not matter if the word has already been shared and pinned to the cross.

For the whole group:
3. We have completed "Walking to Golgotha" having reached our destination, the place of The Skull. Together we have reaccessed, and renewed, our relationship with God. We have named issues with humility and honesty, and come face to face with our own sense of power and powerlessness.

As an act of prayer: on a piece of card/paper write down something you have learned from your journey through Luke's gospel and your participation in Walking to Golgotha. Pin what you have written on your card to the cross. If you feel more comfortable, feel free to either fold or place the writing side of the card/paper facing the wood.

4. The passage from Luke 23: 26-49 brings us to the place of Good Friday. It is a reading which speaks of darkness, pain, anger, hopelessness, ridicule, and disbelief. It is however, also about promise.

As you reflect on the place of promise in this reading, where, and what, is the promise that you see for this community of faith?

How can this community of faith bring the journey of "Walking to Golgotha", the reality of Good Friday, and the promise of this reading into the wider community in the coming year?
Closing:

† read:

**Lenten Prayer:**

The journey is now complete:
weary bodies resting now at the foot of the cross.

Open our eyes that we may see with honesty our own apathy
which at times prevents us speaking out against injustice.
The journey is now complete:
we are aware of the ache which permeates each heart.

Touch our hearts that we might feel the pain of others
who long for healing and wholeness in their lives.
The journey is now complete:
anticipation of what is still to come travels through our veins.

Give us courage to hear the cries of those who struggle to be heard
in a world which overwhelms and values silence.
The journey is now complete:
our rest has prepared us to continue the journey of faith.

Encourage us not to stand at a distance
simply watching the fate of another.
Help us to be advocates for the powerless,
the voice of the voiceless
and a people who offer hope to the despairing.
We pray this in and through the name of the Christ.244 Amen.

**Candles:**
Blow out the Christ candle.

**Blessing:**
Say together the Mizpah Benediction:

May the Lord watch over me and you
while we are absent one from the other. Amen.

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244 K.L. Casey, *...Of Ash and Rainbows... A Resource Book of Words for Worship* (Toongabbie: K.L. Casey, 1999), 85. Note: Although this reflection is now published in this resource book, it was first written specifically for the Downtown Uniting Church as part of the Bible Study “Walking to Golgotha” which remains unpublished.
Appendix 3:

Session 1: "Advent Bible Study"

WE GATHER: (Large Group – 25 minutes)

Prayer:

Questions: Sharing with the person next to you
   a. What is your favourite music at this time in your life?
   b. When you were a teenager?
   c. What song best describes your spiritual journey at the moment?

Sharing some of our answers with the larger group [10 minutes]

On your own:
   d. Why did you choose to come tonight? [15 minutes]
   e. What would you like to get out of the experience of being here?

Share you answer with the larger group – only if you choose.

WE LISTEN:

Bible Reading: Luke 1: 1 – 25

1. Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,* to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. 5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. * Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. * When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. * He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' * Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.' The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. * But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.' 21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. * When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. * When his time of service was ended, he went to his home. 24 After those days his wife Elizabeth
conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ‘This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.’

WE REFLECT AND RESPOND: (breaking into discussion 2 groups – 45 minutes)

1. What do you learn from verses 1-4 about Luke?
2. What stands out about Zechariah and Elizabeth in verses 5-7?
3. Barrenness was seen as a sign of God’s disfavour and a legitimate reason for divorce. What feelings might the couple have had in light of their barrenness?
4. From 1Chronicles 23:13 what was the significance of the task for which Zechariah was chosen? Since many priests never had this opportunity what might be his feelings as he prepares for it? How about when the angel appears?
5. How would the birth of this son impact Zechariah and Elizabeth? What was to be the mission of this son? Why would Zechariah doubt?
6. How were the people feeling and what did they think about Zechariah being mute?

Something more personal to reflect on: (remember sharing is always optional)
- Do you now or, have you ever felt spiritually barren?
- Can you relate to Zechariah and Elizabeth? If so, in what ways?
- With which character in this story can you relate? Why?
- Have you ever doubted God? Would you like to share some of that experience?
- As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, how might we prepare others to come to know of God’s love for them?

WE RE-GATHER AND GO:
Song: Christ be our light

Prayer:

Blessing:

Appendix 3

Session 2:  “Advent Bible Study”

WE GATHER:  (Large Group – 25 minutes)

Prayer:

Questions:  Sharing with the group – [10 minutes]
  a. Any new insights discovered during the week about Session 1?
  b. Any questions from Session 1?

Sharing with the person next to you – [15 minutes]
  c. How did you learn about the “facts of life”?
  d. Who do you call when you have good news to share?
  e. What songs do you sing in the shower?

WE LISTEN:

Bible Reading:  Luke 1: 26 – 56

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.’ 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ 34 Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ 35 The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.’ 38 Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’ 46 And Mary* said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. 49 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 50 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 51 His mercy is for those who fear him 52 from generation to generation. 53 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

261
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, 
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, 
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, 
in remembrance of his mercy, 
according to the promise he made to our ancestors, 
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'
50 And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

WE REFLECT AND RESPOND:  (breaking into discussion 2 groups – 
45 – 55 minutes)

1. How does Gabriel’s word to Mary compare with what he said to Zechariah? 
2. How does Mary respond differently than Zechariah? 
3. What expectations must have been raised in Mary? What risk is she asked to take if any? 
4. How does Elizabeth’s pregnancy encourage Mary? How is Mary “blessed” and encouraged? 
5. For what does Mary praise God in the song of 46-55? 
6. What contrasts does she make in verses 51-53? How do these reflect Mary’s feelings about God? 
7. How will Jesus fulfill the themes of this song? 
8. What would a diary from this 3-month visit reveal? 

Something more personal to reflect on: (remember sharing is always optional) 
- What do you think it means to doubt and fear God? 
- Has there been a time when you were fearful but believing? 
- How did God meet you in that place of fear? 
- Of the attributes of God celebrated in Mary’s song, which do you appreciate the most? Which challenges you the most? Why? 
- How can we invite people this Advent to know the God of justice and mercy?

WE RE-GATHER AND GO: 
Song: Christ be our light²⁴⁶ 

Prayer: 

Blessing: 

Appendix 3

Session 3: “Advent Bible Study”

WE GATHER: (Large Group – 25 minutes)
Prayer:

Questions: Sharing with the group – [10 minutes]
a. Any new insights discovered during the week about Session 2?
b. Any questions from Session 2?

Sharing with the person next to you – [15 minutes]
c. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
d. Did you realise that dream?
e. What is/was the best part of Christmas for you?
f. What is/was the worst?

WE LISTEN:
Bible Reading: Luke 1: 57-80

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’ 61 They said to her, ‘None of your relatives has this name.’ 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’ And all of them were amazed.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 64 Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 65 All who heard them pondered them and said, ‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. 66 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’
The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

**WE REFLECT AND RESPOND:** (breaking into discussion 2 groups – 45 – 55 minutes)

1. How did John’s birth fulfill the words of the angel in verses 13-17?
2. How did the neighbours and relatives respond to these events? How does all this begin to promote the gospel – good news?
3. As Zechariah’s neighbour what would you be thinking about his new son?
4. What are the things Zechariah praises God for? How do they compare to Mary’s list?
5. What, according to Zechariah’s song is the purpose of salvation?
6. How does this song show God’s unfolding plan from OT days to the coming of the Messiah?

**Something more personal to reflect on:** (remember sharing is always optional)

- How did you first become a disciple of Christ?
- Who has helped you continue your journey of faith? Have you ever wanted to give up the journey?
- Of the promises listed in this song, which one is most relevant to you at this time in your life? Why?
- Do you recognise God’s plan for you in your life at this time?
- During this Advent how could we encourage someone to “hear” the good news?

**WE RE-GATHER AND GO:**

**Song:** O Come, O Come Emmanuel

**Prayer:**

**Blessing:**

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Appendix 3

Session 4: “Advent Bible Study”

WE GATHER: (Large Group – 25 minutes)
Prayer:

Questions: Sharing with the group – [10 minutes]
a. Any new insights discovered during the week about Session 3?
b. Any questions from Session 3?

Sharing with the person next to you – [15 minutes]
c. What Christmas traditions do you have?
d. How are they different to when you were a child?

WE LISTEN:
Bible Reading: Luke 2: 1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

WE REFLECT AND RESPOND: (breaking into discussion 2 groups – 45 – 55 minutes)

1. As Mary waits to deliver her child, what might she be thinking about the promises made in 1:30-35?
2. How does the shepherd’s experience compare to that of Zechariah’s and Mary’s?
3. God could have chosen anyone for the angels to visit. Why the shepherds?
4. How does this relate to Mary’s song?
5. How does Mary respond to all of this?
6. How might Luke 1 & 2 really be her story?
Something more personal to reflect on: (remember sharing is always optional)

- God appeared to Zechariah, Mary and the shepherds when they were doing the ordinary things of their everyday lives. How can we talk about spirituality in this context?
- Does God speak to you in your everyday context? How? (if yes)
- Why do you think others did not hear the angels singing?
- How can we be open to God’s surprise in our lives?
- Advent is a time of preparation and waiting for the coming of the Christ-child. How will you do this during the coming year?

WE RE-GATHER AND GO:

Song: **What child is this?**  

Prayer:

Blessing:

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Appendix 4:

Over the past few weeks we have journeyed just a little way with Job – that faithful man of God who experienced unspeakable stress and trauma in his life. The Old Testament character, who despite his moaning and groaning at God about his unspeakable circumstances, somehow managed to not only hold on to, but sustain and grow his faith and relationship with YHWH.

This week we again meet up with Job. He has experienced much – more than he ever imagined he could possibly cope with. He has learned much about himself and the faithfulness of YHWAH. His faith has not disintegrated but grown with, and through his experiences. He is finally healed of his physical maladies. No longer will he be shamed by how he looks to others. His personal circumstances have also improved. He is blessed by God, as is his family into the generations. His children will receive their inheritance – even the girls – an unheard of occurrence in his time and place. It has been a long hard journey but with the ultimate destination, comes blessing and celebration. Job is healed in more ways than one.

Our Gospel story today concerns the healing of the blind man named Bartimaeus. A beggar ostracized by his community because of his disability and social standing, he manages to attract the attention of Jesus. Rather than ignore Bartimaeus as the rest of his community does, Jesus responds to this brave man who has defied convention by asking Jesus to have mercy on him. In response Jesus asks Bartimaeus “what do you want me to do for you?” Interestingly it is the same question he asked of James and John last week. Bartimaeus’ response is very different to that of James and John. Bartimaeus simply wants “to be healed”.

Despite his debilitating personal circumstances, Bartimaeus although blind, recognises Jesus in his messianic role, that is, as the son of David. The disciples however, were not as observant. They were blind to this revelation and were still struggling to come to terms with this concept. Jesus honoured the faithfulness of Bartimaeus and gave him the healing he longed for.

Downtown Uniting Church has a lot in common with both Job and Bartimaeus. When I came to this place in ..., I was called into a congregation which was decimated and damaged, hurting and suffering. The gathered community was struggling to understand who they were as individuals in relationship with God, as well as who they were as the people of God in this place. Mistrust and fear were very strong emotions. Self deprecating comments were not uncommon, especially amongst the women of Downtown. The tears were real, the heartache was deep, the cry to God for healing, brave and courageous. Like Job and Bartimaeus this congregation of people did not give up in their journey of life and faith. You continued the struggle of being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. You may or may not be aware that on ... this year, I commenced day one of my sixth year with you as Minister. It most certainly does not seem that long since day one. And as I have reflected on the journey we have undertaken together, I
realise that I am constantly amazed at how hard you have all worked, without really knowing it, to become what you are today. As I talk with my colleagues I find myself overwhelmed with pride when I speak of the people with whom I share the task of ministry in this place. I am in awe of the perseverance in the faith, the generosity of spirit, the Christ-like hospitality that I have been privileged to not only experience, but have seen offered amongst each other and beyond. It truly is with enormous excitement, celebration and gratitude to God that I am able to name Downtown Uniting Church as now being a healed congregation – blessed and honoured by God.

But that does not mean our journey of faith has reached its final destination. Neither are our ministry and mission completed. It does not mean that we have nothing left to do in being and becoming the people of faith that God longs for us to be. There is indeed much more to do, and much more to experience. It is now time to experience new possibilities with God.

But what does that actually mean? What does that involve? I am convinced that it means being willing to look beyond the present into the future to who, and what, we can become as a healed and blessed community of people seeking to bear witness to the faithfulness of God in our lives. Not only does it require prayerful contemplation, dreaming dreams and being visionaries who look and listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit, it involves taking the risk to step out of our comfort zones. This is not an easy thing to do, but there are times, as individuals and as a gathered community, that that risk is necessary. Like Job and Bartimaeus, the people of the Downtown Uniting Church must continue their journey of healing by being willing to experience new possibilities with God. And as a person called by God through my Ordination as a Minister of the Word, I too must also be willing to experience new possibilities with God. So it is with a sincere confidence in the faithfulness of God combined with a deep sadness and heavy heart, that I announce I will be concluding my placement as Minister of the Word with the people of the Downtown Uniting Church in the new year. This has not been an easy decision to come to; however through much prayer and reflection and many tears, I truly believe that God is also calling me, as well as you, toward new possibilities.

It is without hesitation or exaggeration that I am able to say to each of you gathered here that my time with you has simply been profound. I feel enormously blessed and honoured by God to have had the privilege of being a companion on your journey to healing and wholeness. I have learned so much and your contribution to my life and ministry can never be overstated. It is an honour to be the Minister of Downtown. The day will come when I leave that role behind, but the affection I carry for each of you in my heart with remain with me for the rest of my life.

This news does not mean that our journey comes to an end today. There is much to do before my closure of ministry service in .... The soccer presentation today for a start with over 200 people coming for lunch and the kitchen not quite finished! There is the blessing of the new kitchen next Sunday and a morning tea
extravaganza to try it out: Kid's Club, Silver Circle, and all our other activities. There is also Advent and Christmas and the beginning of a new year to contemplate.

The healing of Downtown is not a fluke, or something to be dismissed lightly. Some might name it as good old-fashioned teamwork between the faithful people of this gathered community and God. Some might call it a miracle. However you choose to name it, just like Job and Bartimaeus, our journey continues to be supported and encouraged by God. The end of one journey is simply the beginning of another. This is a day of celebration. This is a day of new beginnings – of new possibilities with God.

Let's pray:
God it is with awe and wonder, humbleness and gratitude
that we recognise your faithfulness to us.
It is with the joy and excitement of celebration
that we give thanks for the healing of the gathered community of faith
that is Downtown Uniting Church.
Guide each of us as we look to the future
and undertake the journey of new possibilities with you
through our relationship with the risen Christ – Jesus your son.
Continue to call us out of our comfort zones.
Nurture us and encourage us.
Sustain us and surprise us.
Help us to never be afraid of becoming the people you long for us to be.
Amen.
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