

Join Me in the Commons:

Towards a Contextual Urban Ministry Education Model for Anchorage, Alaska

by

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## **Declaration**

I, Joel Kiekintveld, student number 15078142, hereby declare that this dissertation, “Join Me in the Commons: Towards a Contextual Urban Ministry Education Model for Anchorage, Alaska”, is my own work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

I declare that I have obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. This approval is found in Appendix V.

I declare that I have observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria’s code of ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.



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Joel Kiekintveld

August 2019

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to all the people faithfully and incarnationally loving their cities around the world. You are “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

## **Acknowledgements**

No one achieves anything alone. I would like to express my gratitude to the following people:

The Trinity, who have created, sustained, inspired and guided me in all of life and in this endeavour. It is a pleasure to join in the dance.

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'I always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in prayers.'  
(I Thessalonians 1:2)

- Joel Kiekintveld



## **Abstract**

The largest city in the state of Alaska, Anchorage, does not house a urban ministry training program or seminary for theological education. Furthermore, the city needs transformation, as it does not reflect the perfect urban found in the vision of the eternal city described in Revelation 21 and 22. This thesis explores how an urban ministry education, contextually relevant to Anchorage and focused on transforming both the participants and the city, can be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing, ministering and acting in the city. In pursuit of answering this question, I employ Richard Osmer's practical theology questions and Julian Müller's narrative approach to practical theology research. I interviewed 38 pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage in order to gain their understandings of ministry and the shape of the practice of ministry enacted in the city as well as their perceptions of the city. I used the data from those interviews and the available literature to assess the historical and cultural realities, local theologies, ministry climate, perceptions of the city, and ministry praxis of pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage. I also interviewed urban ministry practitioners from around the U.S. and the world to understand how urban ministry education is being practiced in other cities.

From that research, I created a proposal for an education program and explored the type of environment needed to develop the relationships such a program would need. I propose that a commons approach to education be developed, in which the community maintains the shared resource of training and seeks to embody the transformation of the city.

**Key Concepts:**

- The Commons
- Urban Ministry
- Theological Education
- Planetary Urbanisation
- Cities
- Pastors
- Ministry Leaders
- Colonialism
- Community
- Narrative Practical Theology

### **List of abbreviations**

3D – Three-dimensional

AFACT – Anchorage Faith and Action Communities Together

APF - Anchorage Peacemaker Fellowship

ANCSA – Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

ARCS – Alaska Rural Communications Service

ATS – Association of Theological Schools

CCDA – Christian Community Development Association

CUME – Centre for Urban Ministerial Education

GLAAD - Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation until 2013, now simply know as GLAAD

HIV/AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

IHOM - Institute for Healing of Memories

ITF - Incarnational Training Framework

LGBTQ+ - used throughout to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender queer, pansexual, asexual, cisgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender fluid, gender-neutral, and intersex communities.

MSG – *The Message* translation of the Bible

NIV – New International Version of the Bible

PITS - Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress

POW – Prisoner of War

PTSD – Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

SCUPE – Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education

SEM – Social Ecological Model

UMPS – Urban Ministry for Pastoral Students

U.S. – United States

UTC – Urban Training Collaborative

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

### I. Background

Ray Bakke (2011) writes, “In my biblical study, I discovered the Bible begins in a garden, but ends gloriously in the eternal city.” This progression, while clear when looking at the opening and closing pages of the Bible, is not so readily apparent in the lived experiences and understandings of everyday Christians. In a city such as Anchorage, Alaska, where mountains are nearly always visible on the horizon, the ocean is close at hand and the wilderness surrounds (and possibly defines) its locale, the alluring tendency to believe God is in the “quiet and safe open spaces” and not in the “noisy and crowded urban pavements” (Kritzinger 2014:1) is a real temptation.

It was in this context that Parachutes Teen Club and Resource Center hosted the Anchorage Evangelical Pastors Lunch in early 2014. At those gatherings the custom is for the host to ask the question of the day. As an employee of Parachutes from 2001-2018 and the director at that time, I was host for the day and asked, “Do you consider your ministry urban?” Out of the dozen or so pastors gathered, all answered no, except a Korean pastor and a Filipino pastor who each noted the diversity of Anchorage. The overwhelming sentiment stated by the remaining participants – all of European heritage – is that it is difficult to see Anchorage as urban for a number of reasons. Their perspective echoes other statements I have heard Anchorage residents make over the years, leaving me with the impression that many residents of Anchorage see the city as a suburb of the wilderness – a place where one works and sleeps while waiting to return to, or experience, the “real” Alaska.

The responses of those gathered around the table at lunch that day are quite curious in light of the assertion made by Henry Drummond that “Christianity is the religion of cities” (2008:12). In his sermon titled *The City Without a Church*, originally published in 1893,

Drummond draws attention to Revelation chapters 21 and 22 and the arrival of the New Jerusalem, the city of God at the end of John's vision. John gives his readers a glimpse of the perfect city of God that is coming at the end of all things. A city where God is dwelling among his people (Revelation 21:3), where there are no more tears and suffering because the old order has passed away (Revelation 21:4), a place where God is making everything new (Revelation 21:5). The New Jerusalem is a vision of the perfect urban that descends from heaven (Revelation 21:10), in which there is no church (Revelation 21:22) because God is dwelling perfectly with his people. A city where all are perfectly safe (Revelation 21:25) and every need is supplied (Revelation 22:1-2). A city filled with healed nations from all of the earth living in harmony (Revelation 22:2) and there would no longer be any curse of sin (Revelation 22:3).

The Book of Revelation is part of the scriptures that are often referred to as apocalyptic, a term that conjures up images of disaster, destruction and the end of the world. However, David Dark (2002:10) explains, "We apparently have the word 'apocalypse' all wrong. In its root meaning, it's not about destruction or fortune-telling; it's about revealing." Dark is not alone; Tasleem War (2011:1) notes the definition from antiquity, "the word apocalypse means a revelation or revealing the shape of things to come". In Revelation chapters 21 and 22, John reveals what the future city of God looks like and gives us a model of what our current earthly cities should aspire to be. "Apocalyptic shows us what we're not seeing" (Dark 2002:10).

The city of Anchorage bears little resemblance to the New Jerusalem vision of John the revelator. Anyone who takes a realistic look at the city will see this. But a realistic look is the proper beginning. "Thinking through what we mean when we say "realistic" is where apocalyptic begins" (Dark 2002:10), because naming the unseen, such as the powers with which we struggle (Ephesians 6:12), is part of the apocalyptic. "If these powers are the boot

that, to borrow Orwell's phrase, press down upon the human face forever, apocalyptic is the speech of that human face," writes Dark (2002:10). As Dark (2002) describes, the role of the apocalyptic is to:

Maximize the reality of human suffering and folly before daring a word of hope (lest too light winning make the prize light). The hope has nowhere else to happen but the valley of the shadow of death. (p. 10)

What are the powers pushing down on the face of Anchorage? Can the suffering and folly be named as we move toward hope inspired by the heavenly city?

## II. The City of Anchorage

Clearly the city of Anchorage – and every other city in the world – is not the perfect city of the future that we see in the closing scene of Revelation. God is not dwelling perfectly with his people in such a way that the city has no church. In fact, Anchorage has many churches. Jesus has not made all things new or put an end to all the things that bring tears to our eyes because the old order has yet to be abolished. The curses that are abolished at the end of Revelation, brought upon humanity in the Fall, are still here. However, this reality does not mean that God is not dwelling with his people in the imperfect city of Anchorage. We live in the time between. Jesus has already become “flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood” (John 1:14 - MSG) but has not yet returned to take us to the rooms he has prepared for us in his Father's house (John 14:1-4). What is the shape of this in-between time in Anchorage? Here is a glimpse.

### *Demographics*

The United States Census Bureau identifies two classifications of urban areas: Urbanized Areas (UA) are defined as areas containing 50,000 or more people; Urban Clusters (UC) are defined as containing a minimum of 2,500 but less than 50,000 people. The United

Nations also uses these classifications (United Nations 2005). By this definition, 80.7% of the U.S. population lived in urban environments based on the 2010 census with 66% of Alaskans living in urban environments (44.5% in UA and 21.6% in UC) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Although these population-based guidelines are the federal standard, this is only one way to define a city. Anchorage has the lowest population density of any the 100 Largest Urban Places in the U.S. at 133 persons per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau 1998), but only New York State has a higher percentage of its population living in one city. Anchorage's population density is notable largely due to the contrast between Anchorage and the rest of Alaska.

The nations have gathered in Anchorage, but it is a long way from the healed and harmonious existence in Revelation 21 and 22. The population of Anchorage is extremely diverse. One of every 11 Anchorage residents was born abroad and during the 1990s the immigrant population of Anchorage grew by 50% (O'Malley 2007).

University of Alaska Anchorage Sociology Professor Chad Farrell and his colleagues developed a diversity index equation that has revealed some notable statistics regarding diversity in Anchorage. First, Anchorage ranks tenth among small metropolitan areas (30th out of 336 metropolitan areas nationwide) for overall diversity and is the only U.S. metropolitan area with sizable (greater than five percent) African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native populations. Second, Anchorage is fifth overall with respect to Native American/American Indian population percentages, and 17th overall for Asian/Pacific Islanders. Third, the numbers show that the Anchorage neighbourhood Mountain View is the most diverse in the country. Based on the index, Anchorage Census Tract 6 (Mountain View) scores 96.3 out of a possible 100 in its diversity (McCoy 2013). That neighbourhood boasts the top three most diverse census tracts in the entire nation (Basu 2016).

Anchorage's diversity is most evident in the Anchorage School District, where 110 languages are spoken by students (Anchorage School District 2019). Farrell's work highlights that the city is home to the three most diverse high schools, the four most diverse junior high schools, and the nineteen most diverse elementary schools in the entire nation (Tunseth 2015). In fact, Wonder Park Elementary School in east Anchorage boasts a diversity score of 98.5 in Farrell's index which means "the school's 345 students are an almost unheard of mix of all ethnic groups" (Tunseth 2015).

The diversity of Anchorage comes with issues that are present in all cities with diverse populations. Alaska as a state has a history of racism most vividly seen in the treatment of indigenous people; in particular, in the imperialism present in the education and mission efforts of the early and mid-20th century (Bates & Oleksa 2011; Napoleon 2005; Dauenhauer 2004; Oleksa 1992). It is notable that only one of the 55 delegates of the State's Constitutional Convention in 1955 was Alaska Native. Of further note is the internment of Alaska Native and Japanese-Americans throughout Alaska during World War II, including an internment camp in Anchorage (D'Oro 2016), as well as post-war government-sponsored indentured servitude on St. Paul and St. George Islands continuing until the late 1970s (Mercurieff 2016).

The issues of racism are not relegated to the past. Following a high-profile incident in January 2001 when Alaska Native individuals were targeted by white youth shooting frozen paintballs, a series of discussions were held by the Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights launched an investigation, resulting in a report titled *Racism's Frontier: The Untold Story of Discrimination and Division in Alaska*. Published in April 2002, the report noted:

The state of Alaska, with its diverse population and vast geographic area, faces many unique challenges, several of which have civil rights implications. While the state's history is a short one, the history of its indigenous people dates back thousands of years, creating a division

between culture, tradition, and “progress,” and resulting in a racially charged environment. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2002:20)

The racially charged environment described in the report does not stop at the city limits, and considering the diversity of the city, racism may be more acute in Anchorage.

In an *Alaska Dispatch News* article, “Yes, Anchorage and Alaska are rich in diversity, but what about equality?”, author E.J.R. David (2015) noted that in the midst of all of the racial and ethnic diversity, Anchorage has not achieved equality. David highlighted how the candidates in the recent mayoral race did not reflect the diversity of the city (of the twelve candidates, all were white and only one female) and how the city assembly also fails to represent the city’s diversity. David (2015)<sup>1</sup> also stressed other areas of inequality by noting:

In addition to the power imbalance, there are also other types of racial disparities such as in education (e.g., grades, graduation rates, dropout rates, highest degree completed), health (e.g., suicide, alcoholism, diabetes, hypertension), the justice system (e.g., incarceration rates), socioeconomic status (e.g., income, types of jobs) and other areas.

These inequalities based on race, ethnicity, economic status and other social factors contribute to the makeup of the city and reflect the tensions that exist within its population.

### *Violence, Crime, and Safety*

The safety of the New Jerusalem, exemplified by the fact that the gates of the city never close, is not the reality of Anchorage. In 2010 Anchorage was listed as the fifth most dangerous city in America by Forbes magazine.<sup>2</sup> In part due to the spike in violent crime the city underwent in 2015 (Shedlock 2015), national newspaper *USA Today* (Stebbins et al. 2016) declared Alaska the most dangerous state in the nation. In 2016 and 2017, the city experienced its highest murder totals in history (Andrews 2017; Boots 2018; and Demer & Andrews 2018) and it was also reported that the State of Alaska leads the nation in gun-related deaths (Millard 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> David, an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Alaska Anchorage, explores more fully and more personally the realities of Anchorage and Alaska’s diversity and inequality in his book, *We Have Not Stopped Trembling Yet: Letters to My Filipino-Athabaskan Family* (2018).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/efel45mde/anchorage-alaska> (Accessed 12 July 2019).



It is not just murder or gun violence that makes Anchorage unsafe. Anchorage experiences a great deal of sexual and domestic violence. The *Anchorage Press* reported:

- 1 out of 3 women in Anchorage experience stalking.
- 1 out of 13 are experiencing violence, sexual and physical, or have in the past 12 months.
- Out of every 100 women, in their lifetime spent in Anchorage, 32 will experience sexual violence and 39 will experience physical assault.

That's women, we have not explored the statistics for little girls, defined as under the age of 12.

Rape in Alaska is 2.5 times the national average. It is six times the national average if you are child — girl or boy. (Nosakhere 2018)

In a poll published by the *Alaska Dispatch News* in January 2017, 62% of those polled, who had 30 years or more of residency, reported feeling that crime had gone up in the past year (*Alaska Dispatch News* 2017). The struggle for safety in Anchorage, as expressed in the reality and perception, makes clear that the experience of the citizens of Anchorage is different than the citizens of the New Jerusalem.

### *Needs and Tears Still Falling*

In the new City of God there are no more tears, the curses handed down since the Fall are removed and the abundance of God takes care of all of the needs of the citizens. In Anchorage, tears still fall, the curses remain and everything has not yet been made new.

“On a given day, there are around 1,100 homeless people in Anchorage, according to data from the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness” (Hughes 2018). That would comprise roughly half of the State’s estimated homeless population of “2,016 experiencing homelessness on any given day” (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, n.d.).

Homelessness in Anchorage is somewhat different than other U.S. cities:

Unlike other metro areas where the homeless congregate on streets and under bridges, Anchorage is a vast municipality of 1,961 square miles crisscrossed with recreational trails abutted by woods, parks and expansive stretches of nature — an area slightly smaller than Delaware. The topography lends itself to a rugged form of homelessness that locals call “camping”. (Hughes 2018)

The University of Alaska Justice Center (2009) reported that, of those suffering on the streets in Anchorage:

- Nearly 14% have chronic substance abuse issues.
- Over 7% are victims of domestic violence.
- About 6% are [military] veterans.
- Approximately 11% are severely mentally ill.
- Nearly 3% are unaccompanied youth under the age of 18. (p. 3)

If one looks at the demographics of those experiencing homelessness in Anchorage it is clear that many tears are falling in this city by those experiencing substance abuse, violence, mental illness, and economic challenges. Substance abuse rates in Alaska are high. The most recent data from the State of Alaska Mental Health Board shows that Alaskans, both male and female, drink heavily and binge drink at rates higher than the rest of the country (Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse 2015). Alaskans also use illicit drugs at a higher rate than the rest of the U.S. (Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse , n.d.). Those seeking treatment discover “There are only 14 publicly funded detox beds in [Anchorage], which falls far short of the average 60-90 requests for those beds made daily” (Hackler et al. 2019).

As noted in the previous section, domestic violence is a piece of the overall violence in the city. But violence is not the only domestic issue. Covenant House, Anchorage’s youth homeless shelter, reports serving 349 youth in the Covenant House Youth Engagement Center during 2017 (Covenant House Alaska 2018:8). Covenant House staff report that “Alaska has the highest rates of child abuse and neglect in the nation – we see this every day in the young people who seek sanctuary at our shelter” (Covenant House Alaska 2018:4).

It is not surprising to see that 11% of the homeless population in Anchorage is mentally ill when one considers that “Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Alaska's only public psychiatric hospital, is often at capacity and patients can wait days in an emergency room before being admitted” (Jones and Jessee 2017). Adding to the situation is that:

[Alaska Psychiatric Institute] and other designated inpatient facilities are largely where people end up when access to adequate community-based services is lacking. The last default option is the Department of Corrections where 40 percent of the admissions have significant behavioural health issues. (Jones and Jessee 2017)

Finally, the military veterans that make up sixty percent of the homeless population highlights that another group is shedding tears in the city. Politicians and the U.S. Government often make statements ensuring that veterans will be cared for after their service, but many struggle upon returning to civilian life. Tsai and Rosenheck (2015) looked at 31 studies published between 1987 and 2014 on veteran homelessness risk factors and reported:

The strongest and most consistent risk factors were substance use disorders and mental illness, followed by low income and other income-related factors. There was some evidence that social isolation, adverse childhood experiences, and past incarceration were also important risk factors. Veterans, especially those who served since the advent of the all-volunteer force, were at greater risk for homelessness than other adults (p.177).

These factors all point to the reality that the heavenly urban reality descending from heaven as seen by Saint John is not a reality for homeless veterans in Anchorage.

The abundance of the New Jerusalem is represented through the vision of the water flowing from the throne and the tree of life in a perpetual state of provision in Revelation 22. This vision shows the economy of heaven. That economy is not the economy of Anchorage where those experiencing homelessness are not having their needs met. The perfect safety of a city where the gates never close is not the contemporary condition of Anchorage, which experiences violence of all types. The healed and harmonious relationship of all nations shown in Revelation 21 and 22 is not the current case in this diverse city.

### III. Research Question

The day I asked the question, “Do you consider your ministry urban?” to the pastors gathered for the Anchorage Evangelical Pastors Lunch it was reflecting a five-year journey in which my understanding of the city, personal theology and ministry praxis was transformed. During those five years I received training from the Center for Transforming Mission (now

Street Psalms) and Bakke Graduate University, which shifted how I see (understanding of the city), how I think (personal theology) and how I work (ministry praxis).

I had lived in Anchorage for 14 years before returning to school, but my experience in ministry and education in my master's program transformed my perspective. Before, I had a one-dimensional view of the city as simply the geographical location of my existence. That perspective transformed into a three-dimensional view of the city as playground, classroom, and parish. When I teach this concept, I often use the analogy of 3D movie theatre glasses, which change the typical single-dimensional viewing experience into a multi-dimensional experience. Prior to my master's degree coursework, it had not occurred to me that the work I was engaged in was urban in nature or that one's view of the city affected how that work was carried out. I had a very flat, single-dimensional view. Seeing the city as playground, classroom, and parish switched how I thought about Anchorage. Instead of viewing it as simply a geographical place, I began to understand it as a place that was my teacher, my playmate, and my pastor. This vision of a playground where one could learn from the city and collaborate with others to minister to the needs of the community was invigorating.

Not only did my understanding of the city expand three-fold, but also my thinking about theology was redirected. I grew up and received my undergraduate education in the Calvinist and Kuyperian Reformed tradition. My theology, prior to my master's studies, was reflective of that schooling and upbringing. In that tradition, theology is very much done in a systematic way from "above". The direction of this theology is from the top down with the sovereignty of God as the starting (and often ending) point for all theological pursuits. While I had been questioning this approach for some time in light of the suffering, misfortune, and injustice experienced by the youth we served at Parachutes, it was my exposure to liberation theology that changed the direction of my thinking. Liberation theology is done from "below" with a direction that was bottom up. Part of this shift in theological orientation was

experiencing and embracing theology as something you do, not something that you believe. Instead of understanding ministry as originating from a set of stated beliefs, I began to see how the activity of mission informs – or even creates – belief. The key piece that reordered my thinking was understanding that the starting point of theology is people – in my case, at the time, youth who were high-risk and street-involved in Anchorage that are often seen as the lowest, least, and last, if seen at all. Understanding theology as starting with the experiences and questions of real people and moving toward God as opposed to beginning with doctrine about God and trying to make those beliefs fit with the experiences of real people was life giving to me.

Furthermore, the education I received from Street Psalms exposed me to theology that is concerned with peace making. The daily reality of working in an environment that is sometimes violent and with youth effected by violence<sup>3</sup> made penal substitutionary atonement suspect. The idea that God would require violence to create an environment for a relationship with him to flourish (particularly violence against his own son) sounded hollow in light of the suffering caused by the violence around me. I found myself drawn to the work of Rene Girard and to the Anabaptist tradition that offered a non-violent atonement theory rooted in mimesis<sup>4</sup> and a way of living peacefully through non-resistance<sup>5</sup> and love. These

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<sup>3</sup> First, the youth served by Parachutes live in a world filled with violence. Many of the youth are frequently involved in fights and/or have witnessed violent acts in the home and elsewhere. Second, the first eleven years of its existence Parachutes Teen Club and Resource Center was housed in the Dimond Center Mall (Alaska's largest shopping mall). That mall has been known for violent activity. During the time Parachutes was at Dimond Center, there were four fatal shootings. In 2005 alone, two fatal shootings and another firearm incident took place in the mall.

<sup>4</sup> In the work of Rene Girard mimesis is "the compulsive tendency of mankind to imitate others' desires, so that what is really desired and sought for is whatever is desired and sought for by others. The intrinsic value of the objects of our desire is not as relevant as the fact that the very same objects are the targets of others' desire" (Gallese 2009:22).

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hauerwas (2007:221) offers some enlightenment on the difference between pacifism and nonresistance when he writes, "Pacifism suggests a position that can be abstracted from what it means to be a disciple of Jesus...[that] understand[s] nonresistance to be the refusal to respond to evil in kind, but to resist evil by using the weapons provided by the Sermon on the Mount". This ethic of love and nonresistance takes the form of counter-cultural practices such as economic understandings far beyond charity that include common property and mutual aid, social justice, opposition to military service and lethal violence of all kinds, and tax protests. At the core of this element is the biblical concept of *shalom*. *Shalom* is the Hebrew word for the perfect peace of God and is tied to God's desire to restore his entire creation to the peace it had in the Garden of Eden. This belief finds its expression in many different ways that reach into all areas of life. While the Anabaptist notion of nonresistance sounds as if it is a lack of action or protest, nonresistance is much more than pacifism or being passive; it is the desire to see God's *shalom* present in all areas of life and seeks to bring this about not through violence or assertion, but through a faithful witness to biblical truth. Thus, nonresistance prohibits the use of physical violence or the participation in violence, but does not eliminate involvement in non-violent protest and resistance.

ideas also redirected my thinking and complemented the orientation of thinking of theology as coming “from below”.

These two shifts in my thinking – moving from a one-dimensional to 3D vision of the city and the reorientation of the direction of theology – profoundly affected my practice of ministry and how I work. Prior to these shifts, my teaching was grounded upon a lecturing format, based on a firm (and misguided) belief that I had important information that I needed to transmit to those I was teaching. This type of teaching was marked by little understanding of the youth I was seeking to teach. My ministry practice engaged primarily the direct needs of the youth with some limited interest in transforming their minds but contained no larger vision of how that work fit into Anchorage. Using the categories proposed by Father Benigno Beltran, my work was engaged at the level of *civitas* (focused on the body) with a bit of the second level of *polis* (focused on the mind) but held no interest in the symbolic universe (soul) of the larger city (Beltran 1987, cited in Hillis 2007:73-77). Seeing in 3D and thinking from the bottom-up shifted my teaching from a lecture format to a dialogue-based contextual Bible study format, highly informed by Bob Ekblad (2005, 2011), Miguel De La Torre (2002), and Gerald West (2011 & 2015). The practice of seeking to ask “beautiful” questions, as outlined by Rocke and Van Dyke (2010 & 2012:78-88), also became a prominent part of my ministry. Their understanding of beautiful questions is rooted in an assertion made by the poet E.E. Cummings (1968:332): “Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question.” Of this practice they explain:

We have come to believe that beautiful questions actually do reveal beautiful answers. If Christians really believed that beautiful questions are far more important than well-crafted answers, our mission with marginalized people groups would be far more effective. (Rock and Van Dyke 2012:77)

I began to incorporate “beautiful” questions into all aspects of my ministry, ranging from daily conversations to organizational leadership. In asking these questions, the instructor is often seeking to bring the participants into a place of liminal space where they can make new

discoveries and where their struggle to understand is as important as what they come to understand. These practices marked the shift in my thinking from the possessor of knowledge to one seeking to learn from the city as my classroom and from its inhabitants as my teachers (Ruthruff 2010).

Borrowing from the field of organizational development, the transformation I underwent could be described as “second order” change (Bartunek & Moch 1987; Bartunek 1984). “First order” change is characterized by small, incremental adaptations to present ways of thinking and interpreting. It is change that can be reversed easily, does not require new learning and does not achieve transformation. Second order change is radical in how deeply and thoroughly it changes one’s understandings and worldviews. In this type of change, new learning is necessary and causes transformation that is not reversible. The transformation I underwent was certainly second order. My entire way of seeing the world was shifted in a way that I could not return to my previous understandings.

These shifts in my thinking about the city, direction of theology and my ministry practice were the result of education that took place in a community and was deeply rooted in the context and ministry of each of the participants in the master’s cohort. This education utilized an approach to instruction which capitalized on the knowledges of the entire cohort as well as the curriculum and hidden curriculum (Kentli 2009).<sup>6</sup> Using a model of theological education that deviates from the traditional and most common practice of graduate schools and seminaries in the United States,<sup>7</sup> Parachutes Teen Club and Resource Center partnered with the Center for Transforming Mission (now Street Psalms) to host six

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<sup>6</sup> “School curriculum is generally accepted as an explicit, conscious, formally planned course with specific objectives. In addition to this didactic curriculum, students experience an ‘unwritten curriculum’ described by informality and lack of conscious planning. It is also significant for the development of critical pedagogy. This refers to a ‘hidden curriculum’ that includes values, intergroup relations and celebrations that enables students “socialization process” (Kentli 2009:83).

<sup>7</sup> Traditional master’s level theological education in the United States has been largely a matter of programs the required that students do their work in a residential environment. Instruction has predominantly taken place in classroom setting with the curriculum drawn almost exclusively from the academy. The interlocutors of this type of education tend to be exclusively the professors and other graduate students with limited input from other voices. Online and distance education are changing this paradigm, but the change is happening slowly.

intensives<sup>8</sup> from September 2009 to April 2012. These classes were likely the first focused on urban ministry in Alaska. The classes served as staff training for Parachutes and Joel's Place, a teen centre in Fairbanks, Alaska, and were offered to the larger community.

Participants were made up of four persons that were pursuing a Master of Arts in Global Urban Ministry/Leadership<sup>9</sup> and a dozen or more participants who were not seeking a degree.

The intensive participants engaged with a curriculum which provided the opportunity to read and understand the Biblical text through an urban lens and from below. The intensives also provided lenses to see the city, such as the aforementioned playground, parish, and classroom. The participants studied the theological loci of Christology, missiology, missional pneumatology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and urban sociology. Another dimension of the intensives was practical ministry training in the areas of reconciliation, lament, prophetic imagination, as well as family history and social dynamics. Finally, the intensives provided spiritual formation to those that participated. Students were encouraged to consider how the content and the experience was drawing them closer to God, and through the practice of journaling, asked to reflect on how God was present in their lives. This blend of theological instruction (education), practical skills (training), and spiritual reflection (formation) made the intensives transformational for the participants. The impact of the intensives is noticeable not only in Parachutes and Joel's Place, but also in partner organizations such as Covenant House Alaska and Crosspoint Community Church.

The instructional method and hidden curriculum created a community that was seeking to learn together in conversation. The instructor(s), master's level students, and those participating for personal learning and enrichment were all on an equal footing and contributed to the learning by bringing their experience and thoughts to the conversation.

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<sup>8</sup> These six intensives comprised the first half of the degree with the remaining coursework being done via distance education through Bakke Graduate University.

<sup>9</sup> The degree changed names during the course of study. I graduated with a Master of Arts in Global Urban Ministry, and the other three students in the cohort received a Master of Arts in Global Urban Leadership.



The result was a community rooted in deep relationships and love, something Parker Palmer (1993:31) calls a community of troth.<sup>10</sup> This community reflects the type of true community noted by Miroslav Volf (1996:98), in his book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.*, Volf offers a definition of Christian community based on Genesis 4:1-11. The first murder in scripture, the story of Cain and Abel, might seem like a rather odd place to uncover an insight into community. In fact, a surface reading may fail to expose the corporate truth found in the questions God asks Cain. After killing his brother over understandings of worship and God's favour, Cain is interrogated by God, "Cain, where is your brother?" Cain asks in return, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Volf's (1996:98) hermeneutical interpretation of this brief encounter is that "life in community means sharing a common social space and taking responsibility for the other".<sup>11</sup>

Looking back, it is clear that the instructor(s) and the participants of the intensives – by sharing a common space and caring for each other and our city – created a commons. While no one involved would have used this term at the time, it is clear in looking at the definitions of a commons used by David Bollier (2011) and Peter Barnes (Walljasper 2010), that this is in fact what happened. Bollier (2011) states, "[A] commons arises whenever a given community decides it wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard for equitable access, use and sustainability." Barnes (cited in Walljasper 2010:10) says, "The commons means simply: places we share, systems we share, ideas we share, culture we share". While not the stated intent, the intensives created a common language among a community of people that agreed to journey together in a certain way. In effect, the intensives created an urban ministry educational commons.

My experience with the transformational nature of urban ministry education on my ministry and the other participants convinced me of the impact that this type of training could

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<sup>10</sup> Troth is defined by Parker Palmer (1993:31) as a "covenant with another, a pledge to engage in a mutually accountable and transformative relationship, a relationship forged of trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks".

<sup>11</sup> I have previously written on community (Kiekintveld 2012, 2014a, 2014b) and this section is informed, in part, by this previous work.

have in Anchorage if accomplished on a larger scale. The development of urban ministry education contextually designed for Anchorage and using the resources present in Anchorage<sup>12</sup> could serve to be the catalyst for personal theological and ministry practice transformations. Such individual transformations could change how ministry is done in Anchorage and could, in turn, transform the city.

In a city struggling to understand itself, caught between its urban reality and its wilderness identity, the question cannot be, “Is Anchorage a city?” (the question at the heart of the question, “Do you consider your ministry urban?”), but rather how can Anchorage become more like the New Jerusalem in Revelation? Could Anchorage be transformed by a community of truth learning together in a commons and seeking the peace of the city (Jeremiah 29:7)? Through that community, could a vision for the city be produced that moves us toward that perfect city where God is dwelling and no tears fall, where the vulnerable are safe, needs are supplied, and relationships between different people groups are healed because God is making all things new?

For me, the experience of the intensives reflected Hauerwas and Wilamon (1993:84) who state, “We can only act within a world we can see”. My entire ministry and my way of seeing the city changed. That experience and the possibility of a similar training for the entire city is the impetus for this study. Thus, ***the primary research question in this thesis is: how can urban ministry education, contextually relevant to Anchorage and focused on transforming both the participants and the city, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city?***<sup>13</sup>

While ministry education is available in Alaska and a growing number of models for urban ministry education exist in the U.S. and abroad, Anchorage presents a unique challenge. As a city, Anchorage is comparatively much smaller than the cities that have the

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<sup>12</sup> The one thing that concerned me about the intensives was the reliance on instructors from outside of Anchorage.

<sup>13</sup> The original question, posed in my research proposal was, “How can a transformational training, contextually relevant to Anchorage, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city?”

predominant urban ministry education programs. The cities that offer such education have populations greater than a million – at this point, a program in a city of Anchorage’s size is unknown. After examining the prominent urban ministry education programs in the United States (Villafane, et. al. 2002; Fuder 2001; Villafane & Cox 1995; Elliston & Kauffman 1993), it is clear that urban ministry training in those locations typically developed out of a need felt in a Christian community within a particular urban environment. The existing urban ministry programs are rooted in their local contexts.

Any local training must function and originate locally as a reality of practical theology. Müller (2004:296) notes, “Practical theology cannot function in a general context. It is always local, concrete and specific.” Woodley (2012:104) echoes Müller, “Indigenous models tend not to categorize theology as a subject, but even if they do, it’s generally recognized that all theology is done in, for, and by the local community.” Therefore, the research question of this thesis, as an act of practical theology, must produce a product that is not simply borrowed from another context but is local, concrete and specific, something done in, for, and by the local community. In developing a local training every part needs to be rooted and grounded in the realities and experiences of those ministering in the city of Anchorage.

The limited theological education resources that exist in Anchorage threaten this local and specific focus. A few Bible colleges are operating in the state, but there are no consistent, on-going graduate level programs being offered aside from a general Master of Christian Ministry program at Wayland Baptist University.<sup>14</sup> No programs focused on urban ministry are present in Anchorage or Alaska. The urban ministry training programs examined are nearly all tied to an institution(s) of higher learning with specific urban ministry programs and can offer students degrees. Those programs’ proximity to colleges

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<sup>14</sup> On-line and distance education programs exist, some with local cohorts, but none are based in Alaska. Wayland is a multi-campus university and its Masters in Christian Ministry is offered in the same format at all its campuses lowering its connection to the specific context.

and seminaries creates access to educators and experts who are located in the context, something not readily available in Alaska. This challenge will be considered as the research question, focused on developing urban ministry education, is answered.

#### IV. Research Objectives

In order to answer the primary research question: How can urban ministry education, contextually relevant to Anchorage and focused on transforming both the participants and the city, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city?, a series of sub-questions will need to be addressed. The overarching questions that will guide this project are based on Richard Osmer's (2008) understanding of the practice of practical theology: What is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

In exploring the question of what is going on, the sub-questions are: What are current ministry understandings in Anchorage? What is the perception of the city held by pastors and ministry leaders? What is the shape of ministry practice in the city?

To answer the question of why is it going on, the sub-questions are: What are the historical and cultural realities that inform the ministry understandings, perceptions of the city, and ministry practice of pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage? What are the local theologies that inform the ministry climate, city perceptions and ministry praxis?

To determine what ought to be going on, the sub-questions are: What type of education does the context dictate? What kind of relational environment will need to be fostered in order to facilitate transformational ministry training? What model of education can be created that is able to be effective and sustainable in this context?

Finally, to answer how might we respond, the following sub-questions were examined: What models of urban ministry education exist? How might the practice of urban

ministry and theological education in other locations inform the development of urban ministry education in Anchorage?

In light of the primary research question and these sub-questions the research objectives of this thesis are:

- 1) Describing the current understandings of ministry in Anchorage, the perceptions of the city held by those ministering, and the shape of the practice of ministry enacted in the city.
- 2) Assessing the historical and cultural realities as well as the local theologies that inform the ministry understandings, ministry climate, perceptions of the city, and ministry praxis of pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage.
- 3) Determining what type of education program might be formed and sustained. Also deciding what kind of environment for developing relationships that will support the establishment of that program.
- 4) Testing and verifying the acceptability of the proposed training program.

## V. Journeys into Practical Theology and Urban Ministry

It should come as no surprise that this thesis has grown from the soil of my life experience. I can trace my involvement in practical theology and urban ministry using my personal story, in similar way to how Elaine Graham (2017) uses her autobiography to trace the development of the field as a whole. In doing so, I am aware that I am practicing and participating in the reflexive turn (Graham 2017:5) in practical theology.

### *My Journey into Practical Theology*

In my undergraduate work at Kuyper College, my education for ministry was focused on ministry practice, yet no practical theology was explicitly taught. Theology was limited to

a couple of classes on systematic theology. This explicit curriculum decision sent the clear implicit message that theology was something you learned and gave your assent. Theology was not an embodied practice. Following graduation, my early years of doing ministry were focused on practice with very little purposeful theological engagement or reflection. When I returned to schooling for my master's degree, rooted in my experience in ministry, the idea of interacting with my work theologically began to develop though I would not have called this practical theology.

Bonny Miller-McLemore (2010) defines practical theology as having four areas:<sup>15</sup>

Practical theology as a term refers to at least four distinct enterprises with different audiences and objectives...it is a *discipline* among scholars and an *activity of faith* among believers. And it has two other commons uses; it is a *method* for studying theology in practice and it is a *curricular area* of subdisciplines in the seminary. (2014:5 [*italics original*])

Miller-McLemore elaborates (2014):

Each understanding points to different spatial locations, from *daily life*, to *library* and *fieldwork* to *classroom*, *congregation*, and *community*, and, finally, to *academic guild* and *global context*. The four understandings are connected and interdependent, not mutually exclusive, however, and reflect the range and complexity of practical theology today. (p. 5 [*italics original*])

In my life and ministry, I have engaged in each of the areas of practical theology identified by Miller-McLemore.

As a lifelong participant in Christian communities and congregations, I have engaged in practical theology as an activity of faith in daily life. As both a member and a leader, I have participated in these communities as they “try to embody their understandings of the Bible, doctrines, and rituals of the Christian heritage” (Poling 2012:9-1). Put another way, I have been part of “believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in everyday life”

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<sup>15</sup> Miller-McLemore (2012:7) has also stated practical theology has five misunderstandings: “(1) practical theology is a marginalized discipline with a confused identity; (2) the problem with practical theology and theological education is the clerical paradigm; (3) practical and pastoral theology are interchangeable terms; (4) practical theology is impossible to define or, inversely, can be defined simply (e.g., study of the relationship between beliefs and practices); and (5) practical theology is largely, if not wholly, descriptive, interpretative, empirical, and not normative, theological, and in some cases (dare I say) Christian”.

(Osmer 2014:495). I have done this for over 25 years as a youth pastor, pastor, elder, faith-based non-profit leader, and church member.

My education for ministry in my undergraduate studies and continued training for ministry through workshops and seminars has been largely an exercise in the curricular area of study, located in the classroom. This was, and is, a matter of “theological education focused on ministerial practice” (Osmer 2014:495) and engagement with the “traditional disciplines of pastoral care, worship, ethics, systematic and historical theology, biblical theology, etc.” (Poling 2012:9-2).

In my studies as a graduate student and, in particular in this thesis, I am focusing on the two remaining areas of practical theology: as a discipline and a method for studying theology. As Miller-McLemore (2014: 5) denotes, these two areas of practical theology are located in the library and the field and monitor the global context and the greater work in the academic guild that goes by the name practical theology. Rather than using the term “discipline”, Osmer (2014:495) prefers to refer to it as the “way of doing theology used by religious leaders.” This methodological understanding is something echoed by Poling (2012:9-1) as “a method for studying Christian practices in library and field”. As a student I have engaged in this practice of studying the lived faith of Christians, seeking “religious knowledge in the service of a larger *telos*’ (end or aim) of enriching the life of faith in the world...toward the end of divine flourishing in human life and the world” (Miller-McLemore 2010:1742). It is this type of practical theological study and practice that Miller-McLemore observes is “pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain the first three” (Osmer 2014:495).

In the pursuit of supporting the rest of what goes by the name practical theology, practical theologians perform a number of tasks:

They explore the activity of believers through descriptive study and normative assessment of local theologies. They seek to discern common objectives among ministerial subdisciplines

and in the study of theology more generally. They study patterns of integration, formation, and transformation in theological education and vocational development. They seek methods by which students, faculty, and ministers might bridge practice and belief, such as ethnography, narrative theory, case study, or hermeneutical circle of description, interpretation and response. They develop theologies of discipleship, ministry, and faith, using secular sources, such as social sciences and literature, in addition to scripture, history and doctrine. (Miller-McLemore 2010:1742)

This thesis is a work that falls into this category of practical theology. The following pages engage in all four of these tasks used by this subset of scholars identified by Miller-McLemore. The study undertaken here explores and describes some of the practices of Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders. It brings to the surface insights into the local theologies present in the city. In doing so, the commonality between pastors and ministry leaders – as well as the places where they are divided – are brought to light. Furthermore, the study seeks to engage how the practice of ministry might have a common objective of transforming the city through the use of education.

In particular, this thesis employed the use of a narrative approach to practical theology, developed by Julian Müller (2004). This thesis also employed a hermeneutical circle, in this case Osmer's (2008) circle, as a guide. In addition, this thesis operates transversely, engaging in "meaningful communication between the diverse disciplines" (Müller 2013:3). This engagement informed a conversation of practical theology in a local context by drawing on sources beyond what was gained via the narrative approach and the hermeneutical circle such as the literature of urban studies, theology, history, and Biblical scripture.

In light of all of this, if asked to situate myself in the field of practical theology, I would continue to locate myself where I started, in the practice of ministry. I am not an academic at heart; rather, I am a practitioner who is primarily concerned with the practice of ministry in the local context, but who values theologically reflecting upon that practice.



### *My Journey into Urban Ministry*

Similar to my journey into practical theology was my journey into urban ministry. My undergraduate education resulted in a degree focused on church-based Christian education, youth ministry and evangelism. During my undergraduate education, I did not think much about or train for urban ministry. My early ministry years were spent in the suburbs pastoring almost exclusively middle class and upper middle class youth. When I began to work for Parachutes, ministering in community with high-risk and street-involved youth, I still thought about my work primarily as youth ministry. The work itself and the reflections on the work led me to seek further training and education, which led me to urban ministry. Those practicing urban ministry felt like kindred spirits. The shared experience of working among marginalized communities and the similar issues we were facing fuelled that connection.

I was educated in urban ministry in a particular way, through a cohort tied to an educational institution. This is not the only way one can be educated for urban ministry.

David Frenchak (2004) summarizes urban ministry education in the United States:

Historically, training for urban ministry has been outside the well-established seminary and official academic leadership development programs of most Protestant denominations. Such limited opportunity for education and training for urban ministry remains true today. With few exceptions, urban ministry and urban ministry training receive, at best only very limited resources from the ecclesiastical system. Preparing for urban ministry is most often seen as “specialized ministry;” therefore, opportunities for faith-based education and training stand apart from and often are outside of the established faith-based educational system. (pp. 235-236).

This is true despite that we are now living “In an urban society that requires those doing ministry anywhere, whether professional or lay, to understand the dynamics and dimensions of the contemporary urban environment” (Frenchak 2004:236).<sup>16</sup> After stating those realities

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<sup>16</sup> Frenchak is writing nearly twenty years after others were asking about the role of urban ministry training in the seminary. Dennis, Day and Peters asked, “Should urban ministry constitute a theological discipline in its own right or should it be more intentionally woven throughout the entire curriculum?” (1997:41). Agosto inquired, “Are denominational and agency leaders willing to say to our seminaries that urban theological education should not just be an appendage to traditional programming, but that it should be at the core of what we do in all our ministry training?” (1996:99). It was also noted, at that time in the U.S.: “[o]nly one-third of ATS accredited seminaries in this country offer (much less require) courses concerned with ‘urban ministry’” (Kemper 1997:51) and that “in the West (with its notable paucity

Frenchak gives a general overview of the urban faith-based training since the 1960s. He divides his overview into four groups: exposure/orientation, academia, community organizing, and community development.

In post-World War II America, cities experienced the phenomenon of white flight, “a significant population shift, as Whites (along with their churches and institutions) moved out to the suburbs and southern African Americans and Hispanics migrated into the inner cities” (Frenchak 2004:237), as well as the civil rights movement, and ‘unprecedented levels of unrest and revolt’ (Frenchak 2004:237). Into this environment ‘action-training’ centres sprung up around the country, such as the Urban Training Centre for Christian Mission in Chicago (Frenchak 2004:237). These action-training centres used an action/reflection model of training focused on experiential learning (Frenchak 2004:238), because for “White and/or middle-class students who wanted to minister in urban environments, it was [...] a crucial first step to witness and identify with a reality very different than their own” (Frenchak 2004:237-238). This focus on exposing and orienting interested ministers from outside the urban context to that context often became an end in itself. Frenchak notes the critique of Younger (1987), “oftentimes participants did not move far beyond the exposure and orientation phase” (2004:238).

The second of Frenchak’s four groupings of urban ministry training is programs found in academia. He groups these programs into two categories: consortia and partnerships between individual schools and an urban ministry program. The consortia approach had its genesis in the Urban Ministry for Pastoral Students (UMPS) program at Ashbury Theological Seminary in 1973, which was a “3-year, eight week summer program for students from eight evangelical seminaries in the Midwest” of the United States (Frenchak 2004:239). That program placed students in urban ministry internships and drew from the students’

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of seminaries beyond California), the states of Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Washington have large cities and no home-based seminaries with urban ministry courses” (Kemper 1997:54).

experiences to foster discussions of politics and theology in light of the urban context (Frenchak 2004:239). While the UMPS program ended after funding ran out, the consortia approach continued with similar programs in major cities in the U.S. through the 1970s and 80s (Frenchak 2004:239). Frenchak (2004) notes:

The only consortium program of theological education for urban ministry begun during this time and still operating today is the program in Chicago. The Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE), which traces its roots to the earlier UMPS program, continues to offer its twelve member schools contextual and experiential education, including academic course work integrated with urban ministry internships. (p. 239)

Frenchak explains that SCUPE added other programs such as Nurturing the Call, a program which allowed interested students to take classes prior to enrolling in a seminary that could be transferred for credit, as well as a Master of Arts in Community Development degree with the University of Chicago (Frenchak 2004:239-240). In 2015 SCUPE underwent an eight-month strategic planning process, changed its name to OMNIA Institute for Contextual Leadership and redirected its focus to global leadership training and consulting. It no longer reflects the model being addressed here (OMNIA Institute for Contextual Leadership, n.d.).<sup>17</sup>

In regard to the second of the academic models – partnerships between ministries and schools – Frenchak (2004:240) states, “Many academic programs of urban ministry studies were initiated either by individual schools or church-related agencies in the major cities in partnership with academic institutions.” This approach is exemplified by the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Boston campus (Frenchak 2004:241). The program “offers graduate-level courses primarily for the in-service training of both Spanish- and English-speaking pastors and church leaders” (Frenchak 2004:241), at times and locations convenient for participants.

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<sup>17</sup> Agosto (1996:94) observes, “Historically, there have been only a handful of well-established, long-term urban theological education programs.”

The third category of urban ministry education observed by Frenchak is community organizing. Frenchak (2004:241) notes the community organizing was a part of early action-training models and some academic approaches such as SCUPE. As its own model of training it traces its roots to Sal Alinsky's organizing that included Catholic and Protestant communities (Frenchak 2004:241-242). This model developed because "religious institutions have a variety of intersection points with community organizing" (Frenchak 2004:242), such as "inspiring, affirming, and motivating marginalized people for positive change" (Frenchak 2004:242) and "the common goal of developing the social/human capital and vital networks essential to creating liveable, just, and free communities" (Frenchak 2004:242). Frenchak (2004:242) offers the Gamaliel Foundation, in Chicago, as an example of this model. The Gamaliel Foundation helps to:

[S]elect and hire a professional organizer who can identify potential leaders and guide the activities, [and by] providing retreats and educational events that teach participants the basic concepts of organizing and the skills needed to interact personally with political, corporate, and institutional leaders. (Frenchak 2004:242-243).

Frenchak (2004:243) states of the fourth urban ministry training model, "Most recently, the practice of urban ministry throughout North America placed significant emphasis on community and community development." After noting that "urban ministry is more than community development" (Frenchak 2004:243), Frenchak (2004) explains:

The case for understanding urban ministry as community development begins with a very basic proposition: God created life to be lived in harmonious community. This theological proposition provides the basis for all religious dialogue and efforts for community building, community organizing, and community development that are not focused on gain of power. It provides the foundation and philosophical base for determining the content of community training, investment, and work for all humane and faith-based efforts aimed at revitalizing community. (p. 243)

This common good approach to urban ministry overlaps with the academic world in programs such as the Campolo School for Social Change at Eastern University in Philadelphia and the Master of Arts in Community Development degree from North Park University in Chicago (Frenchak 2004:243). One leading example of this approach to urban

ministry training is the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), which is “a network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities wholistically restored” (Christian Community Development Association 2019).

Frenchak’s overview of urban ministry training models in the U.S. is corroborated by Clinton Stockwell (1994). Stockwell (1994:47) notes the action-training centres and the community organizing efforts of urban ministry pioneers in the 1960s. In the 1970s through the 1990s he highlights urban youth evangelism programs, the academic consortium, the academic partnership in its varied forms, and community organizing (Stockwell 1994:47-53). In addition, books on urban ministry training (Villafane et al. 2002; Fuder 2001 & 1999; Villafane & Cox 1995; Elliston & Kauffman 1993) also reinforce Frenchak’s categories. These texts also express a preference for academically tied training and, rootedness in the local context and/or local church with participants receiving, first-hand exposure or immersion into the urban world for those from other experiences, and partnerships.

My master’s degree program was an academic partnership approach to urban ministry training. It was a partnership between ministry organizations in Alaska, Parachutes and Joel’s Place; Street Psalms, an international training organization; and Bakke Graduate University, an academic institution. The only other model of urban ministry training present in Anchorage, using Frenchak’s four categories, is community organizing. Anchorage Faith and Action Communities Together (AFACT) is a faith-based community organizing group in the city that has been operating since 2003.

## VI. Research Methodology

This thesis draws on two approaches to the method and practice of practical theology. The first is the approach taken by Richard Osmer in his book *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (2008). The second is Julian Müller’s narrative practical theology.

### *Osmer's Four Tasks of Practical Theology*

The exploration of the research question, and this entire thesis, were guided by using the practical theology methodology of Osmer (2008). Osmer is considered a leading scholar in the field of practical theology (Root 2014:23) and his “model is currently one of the most widely used models for doing research in practical theology” (Woodbridge 2014:90). The basic practical theology questions that comprise Osmer’s (2008:4) methodology are: “What is going on?” (descriptive-empirical task), “Why is this going on?” (interpretive task), “What ought to be going on?” (normative task), and “How might we respond?” (pragmatic task).<sup>18 19</sup>

Osmer (2008) explains these four tasks this way:

- *The descriptive-empirical task.* Gathering information that helps us discern patterns in and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.<sup>20</sup>
- *The interpretive task.* Drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.
- *The normative task.* Using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from “good practice.”
- *The pragmatic task.* Determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into reflective conversation with the “talk back” emerging when they are enacted. (p. 4)

These questions and tasks create an interrelated form of research, explained by Sung Kyu Park (2010):

In this model, descriptive-empirical research firstly investigates what is happening in a particular field of social action. Secondly, the practical theologian interprets what has been discovered. Thirdly, the normative process offers the theologian guidance that is explicitly theological, drawn from the sources of Christian truth such as Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. The final, pragmatic process constructs models of Christian practice and rules and art. Here, the practical theologian seeks to suggest guidance to individuals and communities about how they could carry out certain practices. (p. 3)

<sup>18</sup> I chose Osmer’s four questions due to their applicability to the question being asked by this thesis and the narrative direction of the research. However, I do want to note the helpfulness that the pastoral cycle (Holland & Henriot 1983) and the Street Psalms Community cycle of action, reflection, and discernment (Garcia 2012) which provide the constant cycle of “*practice – theory – practice*” movement that Müller sees as part of doing theology seriously within actual contexts (Müller 2004:295).

<sup>19</sup> Osmer’s questions are similar to questions I learned in my graduate work, particularly in the Street Psalms intensives: “Where are we?”, “Who is here?”, “What is the problem?”, and “How can we fix it?”. These questions were adapted by *Street Psalms* from Middleton and Walsh (1984) and N.T. Wright (1992) became missiological questions. My fellow students and I were asked to consider our context by asking those questions. I developed these questions into a series of discussions with youth that helped them explore their personal histories (Kiekintveld 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Osmer defines these terms this way: “An *episode* is an incident or event that emerges from the flow of everyday life and evokes explicit attention and reflection [...] A *situation* is the broader and longer pattern of events, relationships, and circumstances in which an episode occurs [...] A *context* is composed of social and natural systems in which a situation unfolds. A system is a network of interacting and interconnected parts that give rise to properties belonging to the whole, not the parts” (2008:12).

Park (2010:3-4) notes that Osmer's questions are similar in practice to other practical theologians such as Lartey's "pastoral cycle" (2000), Browning's *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1995), and Pattison and Woodward's "conversation model" (1994). Osmer (2008:10) sees his approach to practical theology, like those just listed, as a hermeneutical circle with the four tasks interacting and having mutual influence, something that distinguishes practical theology from other branches of theology. Osmer (2008:11) adds, "Often, thus, it is helpful to think of practical theological interpretation as more like a spiral than a circle. It constantly circles back to tasks that have already been explored". Osmer (2008:4) clarifies, "I make no claim to originality in my description of these tasks".

Osmer's four tasks of practical theological interpretation (presented as four questions) are sometimes referred to as the "consensus model" (Root 2014:27; Hastings 2007:12).

Andrew Root (2014) explains this process by first looking at the descriptive and interpretive questions:

The descriptive task asks, *what is happening?* And uses tools of thick description to answer it. These tools could include case studies, questionnaires, appreciative inquiry, participant observation, and so forth. The interpretative asks, *why is it happening?* And places the descriptive findings in conversation with frameworks that seek to explain the phenomenon experience and explained. These usually are cultural, psychological, or anthropological frameworks. (p. 23 [*italics original*])

Osmer's descriptive and interpretative questions serve to ground practical theology "unequivocally in concrete and lived contexts" (Root 2014:24). Root (2014:24) warns that practical theology must continue to practice and value these two tasks as part of theology and not give into the temptation to "take off the theological hat when doing descriptive and interpretative work...succumbing to the logic of the university (its birth mother that never wanted it)". Root (2014) notes:

When this happens, the descriptive and interpretive tasks become locked in epistemology...and escapes ontological articulations that touch on concrete and lived ways people lean into the mystery of reality itself, a reality bigger and more than socially constructed constructs. (p. 24)



Osmer's normative and pragmatic questions offer an opportunity for discussion and disagreement on how they are used in light of their application being strongly tied to how the field of practical theology supports the academy and the congregation (Root 2014:25). Root (2014) writes:

While I would argue in the scholarly frame practical theology has given its most direct attention to description and interpretation, it has not forgotten its pragmatic and performative mandate. Practical theology has not been shy about distinguishing itself from a pure sociology and anthropology by asserting that it is interested not only in describing and interpreting the world, but in changing it. (p. 25)

In light of this, Root notes that some dismiss practical theology as either normative sociology or normative anthropology.

Practical theology has a normative commitment to pragmatic action (Root 2014:25), which is the pragmatic task. "To seek to change things is to make some normative assertion about the deficiency of the present and the new direction the future needs to take" (Root 2014:25-26). The action in answering the questions of what ought to be going on and how might we respond has often taken an ethical direction, something Root sees as flattening out divine action and reducing the conversation to simply "pragmatically engaged ethics" (2014:26). He proposes that this question be used "not only in an ethical frame, but also in a revelatory one" (2014:26). With Root's (2014) proposal comes a set of questions to reframe the normative task:

*What ought to be happening (What ways should we perceive of reality, ourselves, the church, our practice, and conceptions of God?) now that God has encountered us?  
What ought to be happening now that we have experienced the event of God's encounter? I might change this question to, Now what? (p. 26, [italics original]).*

Root adds that the "ought" cannot only be defied moralistically and epistemologically (Root 2014:26). Rather Root sees the "ought" "[a]s an encounter, as an ontological reality, as the unveiling of God's being next to our own. What ought to happen now that the Spirit has come upon us (Acts 2)?" (Root 2014:26). While Root is writing about a Christological perspective on practical theology, his point is well taken that the normative function should



not be allowed to remain locked in ethics, but engaged in a revelatory approach.

Osmer (2008:12) also sees practical theological interpretation as a “bridge concept”, due to the interconnected nature of the discussion. It is interconnected in the way that practical theological interpretation is present in the subspecialties of the field of practical theology (Osmer 2008:12-13). It is further interconnected in the way practical theological interpretation is done in both the academy and in ministry practice, both using the same basic method (Osmer 2008:13-14). Lastly, it is interconnected in the way that “[m]inistry in its various forms is interconnected” (Osmer 2008:15). In this last interconnection, Osmer points to Miller-McLemore’s “living human web” (1993, 1996, 2008), noting that because humans are interconnected:

[P]astoral care, thus, does more than offer healing, sustaining, and guiding to individuals in need...it attends to the web of relationships and systems creating suffering through ministries of compassionate resistance, empowerment, nurturance, and liberation. (p. 16)

Lastly, Osmer turns to the matter of hermeneutics. Osmer (2008:18-20) draws on the work of Charles Gerkin, who describes the pastor as a practical theologian in the congregation and as an “interpretive guide”. Osmer (2008) explains that a pastor acts as an interpretive guide by:

- *Preunderstanding*. This comprises the interpretive judgements and understandings with which we begin interpretation; they come to us from the past.
- *The experience of being brought up short*. This is the experience of running up against something in our investigation that calls into question some facet of our preunderstanding.
- *Dialogical interplay*. To allow the text, person or object to reveal itself to us anew, we listen for its “voice” and open ourselves to the “horizon” it projects. The concept of a horizon is a visual metaphor. It indicates the farthest point that can be seen from a particular vantage point. In Gadamer, it indicates both the scope and the limitations of a particular point of view. Interpretation, thus, is like a dialogue in which there is back-and-forth interplay between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text, person, or object being interpreted.
- *Fusion of horizons*. Like a conversation, interpretation yields new insights when horizons of the interpreter and the interpreted join together. Both contribute something.
- *Application*. New insights give rise to new ways of thinking and acting in the world. (p. 23)

The pastor then, as interpretive guide, guides congregations to be communities of

interpretation – a community that “embodies a particular understanding of the Christian tradition in its ritual actions, practices and beliefs” (Osmer 2008:24). Second, the pastor serves as an interpretive guide in situations of being brought up short by “entering into dialogue with people when life brings them up short, helping them to rework their interpretation of self, marriage, church, work, or political commitment” (Osmer 2008:24-25). Finally, the interpretive guide pastor, guides “dialogue between theology and other fields of knowledge” (Osmer 2008:25). Osmer (2008:25) notes, “Facilitating dialogue between theology and other fields is important in the congregation’s interpretation of events unfolding inside and outside the church”.

Osmer’s approach to practical theology is very pastoral and finds its location in the local congregation, something (among other concerns) that he has been criticized for (Smith 2010; Woodbridge 2014). However, his congregational focus should come as no surprise, since this is what he set out to do, writing, “the same structure of practical theology interpretation in academic practical theology characterizes the interpretive tasks of congregational leaders as well” (Osmer 2008:12). Osmer contributes to the field by bridging the practices of practical theology in the academy and practical theology in the church. Root (2014:27) writes of Osmer’s method and perspective, “Osmer explains that these four core tasks explicate what academic practical theologians do. But he hopes that these four core tasks connect to those directly in the practice of ministry.”

### *Müller’s Narrative Practical Theology*

The second method employed in this thesis is the narrative practical theology approach of Julian Müller. Müller’s approach to practical theology was a “new comer on the methodological scene of the 1990s” (Dreyer 2014:4), and has over the years “become very influential, at least in the South African context” (Dreyer 2014:4), during a time when Müller

and others at the University of Pretoria “established a school of thought that is recognized internationally today” (Büchner & Müller 2009:44). Today many of Müller’s “postgraduate students in practical theology, having been trained in this narrative practical theology approach, use it for their master’s or doctoral research” (Dreyer 2014:4).

Because practical theology involves people, it has always involved stories.

Ganzevoort (2014) writes:

Although in some sense narrative approaches in practical theology have been developed only recently, one could claim that there is a long and intrinsic history of their relationship. Religious practices that form the core material for theological reflection in practical theology are often directly related to narratives. In one way or another human stories are connected with stories of and about God. (p. 114)

Demasure and Müller note that “[p]eople act in the world and tell stories about it” (2006:411). Elsewhere Müller states “[s]tories are always about people and people are our primary concern – living people in real contexts” (2017:87). As true and seemingly simple as these statements are, in recent years practical theology, like other fields, has undergone a narrative turn.

Ganzevoort has outlined the narrative turn in practical theology (2014). He first highlights the two distinctions on reasoning made by Jerome Bruner. The first “is the logical or paradigmatic mode which seeks to convince by arguments and truth” that “transcends the local and particular by identifying the absolutes or the general” (Ganzevoort 2014:115). The second is “the narrative mode which seeks to convince by lifelikeness... locates experience in time and place and focuses on the particular” (Ganzevoort 2014:115). Moving from Bruner, Ganzevoort next highlights Stephen Crites, who offered the understanding:

We live our lives from day to day, but we understand our life as if it were a story. Our collective identity, history, and religious tradition are likewise structured as stories. This is a matter of “mimesis” or representation of the external reality in our mind and knowing. (Ganzevoort 2014:116)

The next contributor highlighted by Ganzevoort (2014) is Ricoeur, highlighting his three mimetic representations:

First there is a “world behind the text,” consisting of the context, events, and background of the narrator (be it a biblical writer, contemporary individual, group, and so on). Second, there is a “world of text,” the texture of carefully interwoven elements that together create a sense of meaning. Third, there is a “world in front of the text,” the proposal of a possible world for the reader to live in, inviting her or him to respond. This triple mimesis describes how we come to understand our life and world and also how we relate to the texts from our spiritual tradition. (p. 116)<sup>21</sup>

Ricoeur, according to Ganzevoort (2014), contributed an expanded understanding of narrative by:

[M]oving away from a modernist view of knowledge as the direct representation of an objective external reality. Instead, knowledge, discourse, and action are seen as social constructions, interpretations of the world and ourselves that try to make sense of that reality while engaging with others who form the “audience” for our stories. (p. 117)

Ricoeur’s move away from objective realities and toward social constructions is also at the heart of Julian Müller’s narrative approach to practical theology (Müller 2004, 2011; Demasure and Müller 2006; & Dreyer 2014). Park in outlining an approach to postfoundationalist practical theology research explains that “The basic tenet of social constructionism is that people construct realities together” (Park 2010:5).

Müller (2004) explains his approach to narrative practical theology:

I feel connected to both the paradigms of postfoundationalist theology and that of social-constructionism. These two paradigms developed in different fields, both aiming at the same objective though: *a third way*, a way out of being stuck in modernistic or foundationalist (fundamentalist) science and theology on the one hand, and the fatalism of some post modernistic approaches, on the other. (p. 297 [*italics original*])

Foundationalism finds its epistemology in “holding of a position in an inflexible and infallible manner; invoking ultimate foundations on which to construct the evidential support system of various convictional beliefs” (Park 2010:1). In contrast, nonfoundationalist (post modernistic) thinkers reject the “traditional rationalist or empiricist definition of truth as an isolated correspondence between the self and the world” and that “ideas are privileged as the authoritative basis of human knowing” (Park 2010:1). Furthermore, “meaning is never fixed objectively or apprehended in context-free theories, but is always local or contextual [...] a

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<sup>21</sup> A similar approach is taken by Gerald West in his work on contextual Bible study, looking at the text through three lenses: behind, on, and in front of the text that seeks to investigate the past, present, and the text itself (West 2007: 7-11).

groundless web of interrelated beliefs” (Park 2010:1). August and Müller (2011) write of postfoundationalism:

I have looked at both of these approaches and prefer a postfoundationalist approach, appealing to praxis instead of a claim for universal validity or multiversal rationality. I wanted to argue for some sort of postfoundationalist epistemic structure that would allow for certainty. This socially constructed interpretation is geared towards a postfoundationalist approach, continually influenced by social and linguistic conditions. Listening to many voices enabled me to pay attention to the stories of people in real life situations. Instead of generalizing, I am able to reflect on embodied people rather than abstract beliefs. Postfoundationalism acknowledges contextually the crucial epistemic role of interpreted experience and paves the way for interdisciplinary conversation. (p. 3)

It is this third way and its focus on context that allows Müller (2004:296) to state: “Practical theology is only possible as contextual practical theology.”

The practice of “listening to many voices” (August and Müller 2011:3) speaks to the transversality of Müller’s approach. Van Der Westhuizen (2010) explains:

Transversality provides us with different ways to look at issues or disciplines that are legitimate and is a process that has integrity. It is due to this understanding of shared rationality that a discipline such as theology can be public and contribute meaningfully to the interdisciplinary discussion. (p. 2)

It is not just the community of voices inside the academy Müller is concerned with, he wants to hear a variety of voices in a specific situation as well.

The narrative or social-constructionist approach on the contrary forces us to firstly listen to the stories of people struggling in real situations, not merely to a description of a general context, but to be confronted with a specific and concrete situation... The practical theologian in this case, is not so much concerned with abstractions and generalisations but rather with the detail of a particular person’s story (Müller 2004:293).

Based in postfoundationalism and social-construction, Müller developed a method of doing practical theology. Dreyer (2014) writes of Müller’s approach:

A narrative practical theology should be developed from a very specific and concrete ‘moment of praxis’ that is local, embodied, and situated. Practical theological knowledge is local knowledge, dealing with specific persons in their particular contexts. The formulation of a theory of praxis is seen as being too far removed from the real world. Hence, the task of the researcher is to assist the ‘co-researchers’ (research participants) to develop their own interpretations of their stories and to help them create alternative (life-enhancing or ‘preferred’) stories. (p. 3)

Müller is concerned that without being tied to the concrete, local, embodied stories and experiences of people, practical theology creates theoretical abstractions (Dreyer 2014:3).

In a recent article Müller (2017:86) describes practical theology as an “in-between discipline”, “located in a fragile, vulnerable space between various disciplines”. In this vulnerable and fragile space, “[a] suitable metaphor would be the *ecotone* (cf. Müller 2011), which is the territory of the mutations and the hybrids” (Müller 2017:87, [*italics original*]). Müller (2017) explains that this reality has consequences:

With a little imagination, one can see that this in-between land with the great variety of social interaction is a dangerous land. It is a space for new life and new development, but not without sacrifice. The development of mutations and hybrids in the *ecotone* space is the result of power struggles and suffering. If the practical theologian positions her-/himself in this region, this inevitably implies a choice for a kind of theology that sides with the underdog, the marginalized, and the powerless. It goes beyond the safe and powerful philosophies of the academia. This is a choice that takes us to real embodied people; it is a choice for contextuality and locality, and a choice for intervention and action. (p. 87-88 [*italics original*])

Müller’s approach, in seeking to enter into the stories of real people, draws the practical theologian into the reality of the context and the larger world. When employed:

This position strips away the illusion of expert knowledge and of arrogance from us. It, therefore, leaves us vulnerable and fragile. But when we embrace this weak position, it becomes our strength. (Müller 2017: 88)

Müller’s narrative practical theology research methodology is practiced using seven movements (Müller 2004, 2017 and Dryer 2014). He bases these movements, in part, on a quote from Van Huyssteen (1997:4) which often appears next to Müller’s movements (2004 & 2005) in his articles:

A **postfoundationalist theology** wants to make **two moves**. First, it fully acknowledges **contextuality**, the epistemically crucial role of **interpreted experience**, and the way that **tradition** shapes the epistemic and nonepistemic **values** that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be **God’s presence** in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to **point creatively beyond the confines of the local community**, group, or culture towards a plausible form of **interdisciplinary conversation**. (2004:300, Van Huyssteen cited by Müller [*emphasis added by Müller*])

In outlining his postfoundationalist practical theology method, Müller uses Van Hussteen’s work to create a framework in which he ties his seven movements to Van Hussteen’s thoughts in three sections.

Müller places the three movements in a section titled “context and interpreted

experience” (2004:300). In the first movement, one describes a specific context (Müller 2004 & 2005). Müller (2017:92) notes that this is done “not from a faked “objective” position, but from a personal perspective, and therefore, with the inclusion of one’s own story”. The second movement has the practical theologian listening to and describing the in-context experiences (Müller 2004:300). In the third movement, the practical theologian makes interpretations, which are described and developed in collaboration with “co-researchers” (Müller 2004:300). Of co-researchers Müller (2017:86) writes, “This way of doing practical theology takes the experiences of ‘co-researchers’ seriously and conducts research with people rather than on them.” The co-researchers are those whose stories and experiences are listened to and interpreted (with their input) and who are also the primary beneficiaries of the research because it is tied to their embodied experience and practice.

The second section “traditions of interpretation” (Müller 2004:300), includes the fourth movement. In this movement, one describes the experiences of the co-researchers, paying particular attention to how they are continually informed by traditions of interpretation (Müller 2004:300).

The third part of the framework “God’s presence” (Müller 2004:300) includes the fifth movement (Müller 2004:300). This movement is one where the practical theologian reflects on the religious and spiritual aspects, especially God’s presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation (Müller 2004:300). Demasure and Müller write (2006:416), “Practical theology happens whenever and where ever there is reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God.”

“Thickened through interdisciplinary investigation” (Müller 2004:300) is the fourth section of the framework, which includes the sixth movement. The practical theologian describes the experiences as “thickened through interdisciplinary investigation” (Müller 2004:300) by considering input from outside the context and the discipline of practical



theology. Müller (2005) argues for a transversal approach:

[I]t is precisely these shared rational resources that enable interdisciplinary dialogue, and are expressed most clearly by the notion of transversal rationality. In the dialogue between theology and other disciplines, transversal reasoning promotes different but equally legitimate ways of viewing specific topics, problems, traditions, or disciplines, and creates the kind of space where different voices need not always be in contradiction, or in danger of assimilating one another, but are in fact dynamically interactive with one another. (p. 77)

Under the final section, “point beyond the local community” (Müller 2004:300), one develops alternative interpretations that point beyond the local context to the larger world (Müller 2004:300). Müller (2005:77) writes, “This way of thinking is always concrete, local, and contextual, but at the same time reaches beyond local contexts to transdisciplinary concerns.”

Müller (2017) compares the seven steps of his practical theology approach to that of liberation and feminist theologians:

It is interesting to note that we find the same language in the narrative approach, in liberation and feminist theology, and in postfoundational philosophy and theology. It is a language that emphasises:

- The local context as the prime source of knowledge;
- The stories of the marginalised;
- Transdisciplinary rationality, and
- Real people instead of general phenomena.

This language helps us connect to both the local and the general [...] (p. 91)

He does this in contrast to Western theologies, drawing on the five points Frostin (1988:3) uses to differentiate liberationist and feminist from Western theologies.<sup>22</sup>

Müller’s approach to a narrative practical theological method, which is “clearly a very interesting and sophisticated research model” (Dreyer 2014:3) is not without its criticism as well. Dreyer (2014:3-4) points out two areas of concern. First, “there is little reflection on the narrative aspect of this research model” in Müller’s writings (Dreyer 2014:3). Second,

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<sup>22</sup> Müller (2017:90) outlines Frostin’s (1988:3) “five points in which liberation and feminist theologies differ from mainstream Western theologies”:

- Social relations and not ideas are the starting point of theology. Emphasis is on the people who ask the questions. For instance, the emphasis would first be on poor people and not on poverty as an ethical issue.
- Perceptions and ideas about God concentrate on power relations. On whose side is God?
- Theology is done in a world of conflict. Issues regarding race, class, gender and wealth that create conflict have to be scrutinised.
- The previous points make it clear that theology needs new tools. Philosophy underpinning systematic theology is insufficient. Thus the methods of the social sciences have been embraced in order to study social groups, power structures, injustices, and so on.
- The organic connection between theories and praxis is highlighted, not only on an epistemic level, but also on the methodological level.



“[v]ery little information is given on how the “stories” are to be analysed and interpreted” (Dreyer 2014:3). It is clear in looking at Müller’s articles (cf. 2004; 2005; 2017) and those of his students, often co-authored by him, (cf. Loubser & Müller 2011; August & Müller 2011) that the preferred approach is to present the seven-step methodological approach and the specific ways it was carried out in the individual study.

Dreyer, in response to these concerns, notes the importance of the co-researcher in Müller’s process. Dreyer (2005) quotes Müller (2005:84):

[T]he researchers are not only interested in descriptions of experiences, but also and foremost in their (co-researchers’) own interpretations. The researcher in this phase does not, in the first instance, look for data, but for meaning / interpretation given by the co-researchers.

Dreyer (2014) states of this use of co-researchers to ground the method that,

One of the methods to be used is interpretation conducted in ‘constant feedback loops and in collaboration with “co-researchers”’ (Müller 2005:84). How this is to be achieved is not discussed. (p. 4)

Dreyer (2014:4) then notes that Müller does mention the development of an alternative interpretation. Dreyer (2005) quotes Müller (2005:86) again that this process:

[W]ill not happen on the basis of structured and rigid methods, through which stories are analysed and interpreted. It rather happens on the basis of a holistic understanding and as a socialconstructionist process in which all the co-researchers are invited and engaged in the creation of new meaning. (p. 86)

It is clear that Müller is concerned primarily that the co-researchers stories and interpretations are the foremost concern in any practice of his model and that the specific methods used should facilitate that priority. The use of the circle of a constant cycle of “*practice – theory – practice*” (Müller 2004:295 [*italics original*]) to ensure that the co-researchers are engaged is vital in this model.

### *Contextual Theology*

Müller’s use of the cycle of “*practice – theory – practice*” (2004:295 [*italics original*]), something he describes methodologically as “the circle of practical wisdom”

(2004:296), brings to mind the practice of contextual theology. Müller's cycle moves back and forth between practice and theory. It could be seen as a form of contextual theology, as it uses a cycle to understand what is happening in a community and to develop a response.

Osmer also uses a cycle to practice his practical theology in a way that is somewhat reflective of contextual theology. A connection can be made between Osmer's questions and the pastoral cycle of Holland and Henriot (1983:8), as Riley and Danner-McDonald (2013:28-29) have done using questions similar to Osmer's.<sup>23</sup>

Holland and Henriot proposed the four-part pastoral cycle, also called the circle of praxis, that is used in contextual theology. The pastoral cycle includes insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning (Holland & Henriot 1983:8).

Kritzinger explains that Cochrane, de Gruchy and Peterson expanded Holland and Henriot's cycle to seven points "by adding elements of prior faith understanding, church analysis and spirituality" (Kritzinger 2002:149). Kritzinger, in turn, brought it back down to a cycle of five (2002:149). Kritzinger called his five movements: involvement, context analysis, theological reflection, spirituality, and planning (2002:149). There are other variations as well, but for the discussion here I will stick to four-part cycle of Holland and Henriot.

Holland and Henriot (1983:10) explain of their cycle, "we must move from issues...to explanations of *why* things are the way they are". Similar to practical theology, the pastoral cycle seeks to act within a specific context (Holland and Henriot 1983):

Insertion: Locates the geography of our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities. What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they are responding – these are the experiences that constitute primary data. We gain access to these by inserting our approach close to the experiences of ordinary people.

Social Analysis: Examines causes, probes consequences, delineates linkages, and identifies actors. It helps make sense of experiences by putting them into a broader picture and drawing connections between them.

Theological Reflection: A effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analyzed experience in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teaching, and the resources of

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23 Riley and Danner-McDonald (2013:289-29) use the questions "What is happening here?", "Why is it happening?", "What does it mean?", and "How do we respond?".

tradition. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation raises new questions, suggests new insights, and opens new responses.

Pastoral Planning: In light of experiences analyzed and reflected upon, what response is called for by individuals and by communities? How should the response be designed in order to be most effective not only in the short term but also in the long term? (pp. 8-10)

With both Müller and Osmer deeply committed to the local and specific context, and both seeking to understand that context using a cycle reflective of Holland and Henroit's pastoral cycle, the connection to contextual theology is clear.

However, one needs to be careful in simply concluding that practical theology and contextual theology are the same. Bevans (2018:42) asserted, "Every practical theology is a contextual theology, but not every contextual theology is a practical theology." Bevans (2018) explains:

Contextual theology is a way of doing theology that takes seriously both the experience of the past (the record of divine revelation in the scriptures and the tradition of the Christian people) and the experience of the present (what might be called the "context" in which present-day Christians live, work, and minister). (p.35)

He then clarifies what is meant by context. For Bevans context includes the personal and societal experiences of a person; the community of which a person is a part; the social location of the person; what culture a person is a part of; and the social change that has been, or is, being experienced (Bevans 2018:35).

In contrast, Bevans writes, "In practical theology one begins from an experience or a practice" (2018:42). In this case a pastor is starting with something that happened or is happening in their congregation and then seek to understand why the "action did not 'work,' or why, despite the seeming failure, she or he as a minister did indeed do the right thing" (Bevans 2018:42). Further analysis and reflection results in a response to the situation or confirmation that the action taken was correct or incorrect. This further analysis and reflection may result in new practices (Bevans 2018:42). In this way, practical theology is focused on a specific situation or practice of ministry, while contextual theology has a larger scope and is looking at the broader context.

There is some overlap between contextual and practical theology. Bevans (2018:42) speaks to the connection between practical theology and contextual theology via the pastoral cycle: “Of the six models that I propose in *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002), the only one that is completely a practical theology is the ‘praxis model’.” He strengthens this connection by shared interest in context (Bevans 2018:43):

For contextual theology, a context functions as a dialogue partner – together with scripture and tradition – in articulating a particular explanation of the faith, working out a certain practice, or making sense of a particular experience in light of faith.

This focus on the dialogue with a specific context, scripture, and tradition is consistent with the approach of both Osmer and Müller, as is the use of process. Bevans (2018) comments:

Contextual theologians understand that theology involves not so much content (although it certainly has content) as process. The aim of theology is not to work out a system that is enduring so much as to meet everyday experiences with faith – and to express that faith in terms of everyday experience. Theology is an ongoing process. It is a *habitus* of praying Christians, of reflective ministers, and believing communities. (p. 35)

In these two ways – attention to a specific context and the use of a process to understand that context and then act – the practical theology methodology of Osmer and Müller proves to also be a practice of contextual theology as well.

### *Müller and Osmer Fused*

The exploration of the research question throughout this entire thesis used the basic practical theology questions developed by Richard Osmer as its structure. In seeking to understand the specific context of Anchorage and what is taking place in the city as it relates to the research question, I employed Müller’s seven movements. Müller’s seven movements and Osmer’s questions are roughly correlated as follows: movements one through three seek to answer the question “What is going on?”; movements three and four answer the question “Why is it going on?”; movements four through six inform the answer to the question “What ought to be going on?”; and the final movement correlates to the question “How might we



praxis. Neither are interested in generating abstract generalized ministry theories, but are focused on understanding the local situation and seeking effective ministry praxis and change in that location. While Osmer refers to the bridging work of the practical theologian and Müller speaks of transdisciplinarity, both are seeking to have a local conversation in dialogue with a larger conversation from different perspectives. As previously noted, both Müller and Osmer practice their practical theology method in a cycle that is consistent with contextual theology.

Osmer and Müller deviate from one another in a couple of key areas. Osmer sees the practical theologian – in particular, the pastor in a congregational setting – as the interpretive guide. In this role, the pastor is seeking to interpret what is taking place and translating that to the group. This is in contrast to Müller who sees the group, the co-researchers, as helping to interpret the matter at hand and shape its meaning. Another area where Osmer and Müller are not in harmony is the location in which the research is taking place. Osmer finds the practice of his method largely in the local church congregation setting while Müller sees the practical theologian using his model as being drawn toward the marginalized. This is readily apparent in Müller's work using the model in relation to those experiencing HIV/AIDS (2004 & 2005).

While Osmer and Müller's approaches have similar movements and do not conflict with each other, both models offer important nuances. For this reason, I used both in the development of this thesis. These approaches were chosen because they best suit the nature of this inquiry – seeking to understand the personal stories and experiences of pastors and ministry leaders in the specific context in Anchorage so that a local, contextual form of ministry education might be developed that, in turn, can change in the city.

I used Osmer's questions as an overarching guide to inform my approach to this project and to serve as a framework for this thesis. I used Müller's approach in the way that I

collected and utilized data from Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders. I choose this approach for a number of reasons.

First, the simplicity of Osmer's questions provides a clear direction for how to organize the work of answering a practical theology question, such as the one being asked by this thesis. While Osmer's strength is the big picture questions, it is Müller's specificity that "narrative practical theology should be developed from a very specific and concrete 'moment of praxis' that is always local, embodied and situated" (Dreyer 2014:3) that resonates with this project. Müller's intensely local and relational approach to research outside of the parish or congregation suits this investigation well. Müller is intent on understanding the current situation from the experiences of those in the context and recognizes that the "moment [practical theology] moves away from the concrete specific context, it regresses into some sort of systematic theology" (Müller 2004:296), rather than practical theology.

Müller's understanding that those interviewed are co-researchers also fits well with the relational understanding of transformation this project sets forth. The real power of this project is in the potential to offer it to those pastoring and leading in Anchorage as a way to think about theological education in the city and how Anchorage might be transformed into a place that more closely reflects the city of God in Revelation. Müller's understanding that this method of practicing practical theology draws one closer to the marginalized is something that speaks to the nature of transformation needed in Anchorage.

Finally, though intently locally focused, Müller encourages interdisciplinary exploration and has a concern for specific interpretations that might benefit the larger conversation outside of the local context. This approach also fits well with this thesis due to the use of literary study to inform the local context and the hope of offering something to the larger discussion of practical theology and theological education beyond Anchorage.

To better explain how these methods were employed, I will follow the format Müller uses in his articles (2004, 2005 & 2017), adding in each movement how they relate to Osmer's four questions.

### *Methodology Applied to this Study of Anchorage*

#### A specific context is described

The context of this research is the city of Anchorage, Alaska in the United States of America. Secondly, and more specifically, the context is the Christian ministry community of Anchorage and how they understand the city, ministry climate and praxis of ministry in the city.

#### *Methods used:*

- Interviewed 38 pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage.
- Explored literature to understand the broader context and history of Anchorage.
- Interpreted interviews and literature on a social-constructionist basis.

Relation to Osmer: "What is going on?"

#### In-context experiences are listened to and described

I completed empirical research, based on the narrative approach. I listened to and recorded the stories of 38 pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage in order to gain an understanding of the in-context experiences. Perceptions and general understandings from the stories of pastors and ministry leaders help describe the current understandings and practices of ministry in Anchorage.

#### *Methods used:*

- Interviewed 38 pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage, considering them "living human documents" (Gerkin 1984) in a "living human web" (Miller-McLemore 1993, 1996 & 2008) and as "co-researchers"<sup>25</sup> (Müller 2004).

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<sup>25</sup> Dreyer (2014:5) notes this in his discussion of Müller's narrative approach, "The primary beneficiaries of research are the co-researchers and not the academic community". This is certainly the case in this project.



- Analysed interviews for patterns and insights into the context in Anchorage.
- As the researcher, considered my own experiences of ministering in Anchorage for over 20 years.

Relation to Osmer: “What is going on?”

Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with co-researchers

As a researcher, I was not only interested in describing the experiences of pastors and ministry leaders, but also in their interpretations as co-researchers. In this step, the researcher is looking beyond the data for meaning expressed by the co-researchers.

*Methods used:*

- Chose co-researchers who, as a group, comprised a broad representation of the racial/ethnic, religious, and ministry diversity of the city in order to gain as complete an understanding of Anchorage as possible.
- Examined interviews with the co-researchers, looking for expressions of meaning.
- Gathered co-researchers into a focus group to review preliminary findings of the data and to give them the opportunity to express concerns as well as offer insight.
- Engaged co-researchers in a pilot educational experience and asked them for feedback to gain their understanding of the experience.
- Planned to make the final version of this thesis available to all co-researchers.

Relation to Osmer: “What is going on?” and “Why is that going on?”

A description of experiences as it is continually informed by traditions of interpretation

Osmer (2004:302) writes, “There are specific discourses/traditions in certain communities that inform perceptions and behaviour.” History, culture and the global nature of urbanization informed the perceptions of those interviewed for this thesis. I engaged the discourses/traditions that surfaced in the research by researching in the literature the aspects of history, culture and urbanization relevant to Anchorage.

*Methods used:*

- Examined the interviews with pastors and ministry leaders for patterns of issues that spoke to larger historical, cultural and urbanized factors.

- Revisited research narratives and re-examined them through literature with an eye to the global context, larger culture and history of the narrative.

Relation to Osmer: “Why is that going on?” and “What ought to be going on?”

A reflection on the religious and spiritual aspects, especially on God’s presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation

I listened for the “co-researchers” religious and spiritual understanding and experiences of God’s presence in the context” (Müller 2004:303). This was done in a social-constructionist process and also with the understanding of what local (contextual) theologies might be present.

*Methods used:*

- Listened to interviewees’ narratives for experiences of God.
- Interacted with those clues (explicit and implicit) to uncover the local (contextual) theologies present.
- I was aware of my own understanding of God’s presence in the context being described.

Relation to Osmer: “What ought to be going on?”

A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.

Müller (2004:303) writes, “Interdisciplinary movement is part and parcel of practical theology. It includes the conversation with other theological disciplines and with all the other sciences.” In this study, I draw on theological resources from multiple theological sub-disciplines as well as resources from urban studies, history, sociology, and science in an effort to integrate all of them into an understanding of the context.

*Methods to be used:*

- Completed literature study.
- Interviewed ten urban ministry practitioners in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Relation to Osmer: “What ought to be going on?”

### The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community

Root (2014:25) asserts that practical theology wants to change the world, not just describe it.

Müller (2004) notes:

Practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experiences... The bold move should be taken to allow all the different stories of the research to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community, not in an effort to generalize, but to deconstruct negative discourses. (p. 304)

Root states that this is a revelatory action of “unveiling” (2014:26), like Dark’s apocalypse (2002), a prophetic action of seeing a new possible future that is different than the current reality. In envisioning a new reality for Anchorage and a new model for theological education, that interpretation may inform discussions beyond this local context.

#### *Methods used:*

- Studied Biblical, literature, and theological resources to create a proposed theological education model and also a new vision for Anchorage.
- Conducted a pilot theological education experience and sought feedback from the participants/co-researchers.

Relation to Osmer: “What ought to be going on?” and “How might we respond?”

## VII. Scope of Study

The research for this thesis was conducted in the city of Anchorage. For the purposes of this study, the city of Anchorage was defined as the geographical area that extends from the intersection of Arctic Valley Road and the Glenn Highway to the north, the intersection of the Old Seward Highway and the Seward Highway to the south, the Chugach Mountains to the east, and Cook Inlet/Pacific Ocean to the west. I interviewed ministry leaders drawn from this geographical area, which excludes the outer reaching and more rural areas of the

Municipality of Anchorage such as Eagle River, Girdwood, Peter’s Creek, Birchwood, and Eklutna (figure 2). The focus concentrated on urban area of the Municipality that is seen as the City of Anchorage.

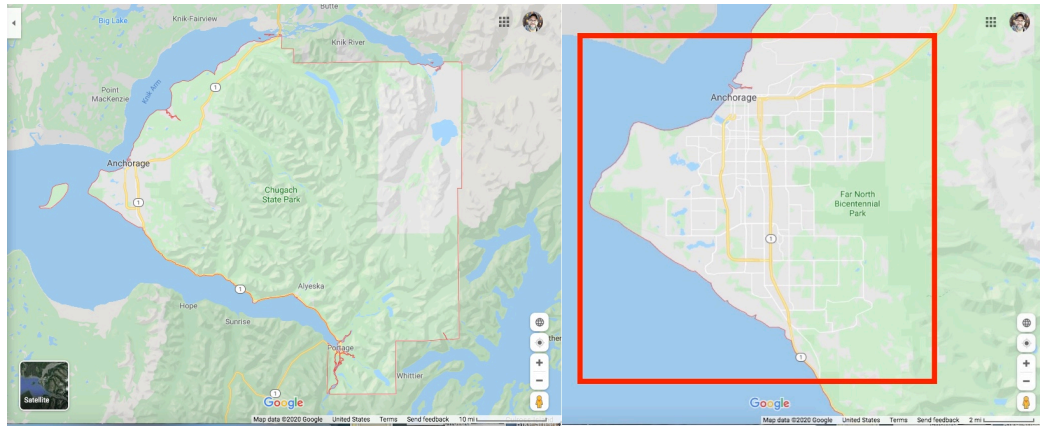


Figure 2.  
Municipality of Anchorage (left) and the scope of study, the city of Anchorage (right).  
(Google 2020, red box added by author)

As a work of practical theology, this project used a narrative practical theology methodology, as described above, to develop and propose a theological training program for Anchorage, Alaska.

## VIII. Contribution

The principal contribution this project makes is to the ministry community in Anchorage. The primary beneficiaries of this research are those members of the ministry community who engaged as co-researchers and whose stories provided the bulk of the research data and set the direction of this project. The findings of this thesis can serve to inform those practicing ministry in Anchorage of the current understandings of ministry in Anchorage, the perceptions of the city held by those ministering, and the shape of the practice of ministry enacted in the city. Furthermore, this thesis proposes a new direction for

theological education in the city and offers a vision for how the city might be transformed to reflect the model found in the last pages of the New Testament (Revelation 21 & 22). This project is the first of its type in Anchorage and offers a unique resource to the ministry leaders of the city.

This project also proposes using the commons<sup>26</sup> as a model for local contextual urban theological education, which creates a possible new direction for both the commons and local ministry education. It is not new for education to be seen and practiced as a commons. Some consider public education working as a commons (Walljasper 2010:8) and home schooling functioning as a commons (Wittel 2018:205). However, the enclosure of both public education (Hepburn 2004) and higher education (Cornwall 2017; Cody 2013; Brown 2000), largely because of the need for additional funding sources, displays that not all education is being practiced as a commons. In light of this financial pressure, this enclosure is likely to continue.

In the United States, theological education also operates behind an enclosure due to issues of access. Despite the proliferation of online options, pursuing ministry education in one's own context is limited by the location of a school or program that could provide this type of training. Furthermore, theological education, like nearly all higher education, is often prohibitively expensive. The opportunity to be educated in one's own context, in community with those also ministering in the city, in a way that is low-cost and accessible – such as how education in a commons takes place – is rare. The ability for a local community to join together and manage the resource of theological education in common for the benefit of all is not only a transformational idea, but a revolutionary one. Moving away from the monopoly on theological education held by the academy to a shared community model could serve to

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<sup>26</sup> The commons is an understanding of how a community holds and manages a common resource. It includes 1) the commonly held resource, 2) a community choosing to actively hold and manage that resource, and 3) the way that resource is managed and sustained which can include rules, regulations, systems and methods.

open up the possibility for theological training not just in Anchorage, but in other cities as well.

Finally, practicing theological education as a commons moves the practice of education away from the Cartesian idea that knowledge is a substance (Brown & Adler 2008:19) that is “transferred to the student via various pedagogical strategies” (Brown & Adler 2008:18) to a practice where “understanding is socially constructed” (Brown & Adler 2008:19). The practice of theological education shifts from “I think therefore I am” to “we participate, therefore we are” (Brown & Adler 2008:18). This change in educational practice is consistent with Parker Palmer’s (1993:31) call for “communities of truth” in response to the anti-communal competition (Palmer 1993:26-30) so common in education today.

Another contribution of this project is to the community of ministry educators around the world who are also seeking to discern a direction for their location. This project serves to provide to them a way of considering the commons as a vehicle for theological education. This research may prove to be especially helpful to theological educators in other smaller cities like Anchorage that also have limited theological education resources.

Finally, this thesis examines the commons from a Biblical position. The original commons is found in the opening pages of scripture as the community of God, Adam, and Eve worked together to manage the common resource of the garden and all of creation. God established the expectations and rules of that commons. In the end, Adam and Eve did not adhere to those rules and the commons was depleted and enclosed. The depletion of that commons ushered in all of the ways that the created world is now depleted. The arrival of sin thrust the world into the divided and broken humanity we see all around us. The depleted commons is exposed in racism, colonization, human fighting and warring of all kinds, competition, selfishness, and greed. The fact that tears are falling in our world from those whose needs go unmet, from those for whom safety is a concern, from those desperately

seeking the escape of substance abuse, and those being abused serves to inform us that things are not how they are supposed to be. The original commons, the perfect garden of Eden is depleted in every way.

The Bible also ends with a vision of a new commons. In that commons, seen by John in the closing pages of Revelation, the depletion of Eden is overturned. In that Holy City, tears are no longer falling because all of humanity is living together in a healed harmony. All the needs of the people are being supplied and they are living in perfect peace. In this final commons, God is dwelling perfectly with his people as he did in the beginning. This vision of the commons is the goal for the transformation of Anchorage and the cities of this world as we seek to transform a depleted world into the vision of God's perfect urban reality. This Biblical approach to the commons and to city transformation is a final contribution this thesis makes.

My hope for this thesis is that it will help move theological education, trapped behind the enclosures of location, cost, and accreditation from a disembodied, distant and out-of-context academy to the commons. As understood Biblically, the commons is a model for theological education where communities can draw on the resources they already possess. By drawing on the experiences and expertise of its residents, participants of this commons are empowered to transform Anchorage and cities beyond in such a way that they reflect the City of God envisioned in Revelation.

## IX. Summary of the Introduction

The city of Anchorage is not the city that of God we see in Revelation 21 and 22. While God is dwelling in Anchorage, as he is everywhere (Psalm 24:1 and Isaiah 6:3), the city is not the picture of healing and wholeness of St. John's vision where all needs are met, where every tear is wiped away and all things are being made new. The city of Anchorage,

like many cities, struggles with how a diverse population lives together. The city is violent and riddled with crime, causing the residents to feel unsafe. Some residents struggle just to see their basic needs met. It is a city in need of transformation.

The apocalyptic, unveiling vision of the final chapters of the Bible prompts us to consider how we might reveal what is hidden in the here and now of the city, and how we might transform our cities into a city like the one in St. John's vision. In this thesis, I will unveil the reality of Anchorage through the stories of those ministering in the city as well as through the literature about Anchorage. From those, I will consider how theological education that leads to action might provide a way to demonstrate a new way of living together in Anchorage and transform the city.

This thesis is the story of a city. It is the story of the ministry leaders of Anchorage. It is an attempt to re-envision the story of the city. By grounding this thesis in story, I will work as a practical theologian, using a narrative approach so that the story remains a part of all that is explored, analysed, written about, proposed and implemented.



## Part I: “What is going on?”

## Chapter 2: Pastor Joe: A Composite Narrative of an Anchorage Pastor

Bonnie Miller-McLemore (1993, 1996, 2008) writes about the need to practice practical theology – pastoral theology in particular – in the reality of a “living human web”. Her proposal is tied to her realization that, while pursuing her own education, she had never taken a pastoral care course (1993:366) and that “none of my graduate courses had required a text by a woman or by a person of color” (1993:366). Because of this, she proposes a different way forward that “bridges the gap between the academy and the church” (Miller-McLemore 1996:10) and “shifts toward context, collaboration, and diversity” (Miller-McLemore 1996:13). Miller-McLemore (1996:21) traces the field of pastoral theology from a focus on the individual and individual responses to pastoral care to a understanding that those in ministry can “no longer ignore an author’s or parishioner’s identity and cultural location”.

Miller-McLemore (1996:11) notes that pastoral theology, up until the mid-1990s, had “learned a great deal from psychology about understanding and respecting the inner experience of others”. From this grew Charles Gerkin’s (1984) *The Living Human Document*, which appeared while the field was wrestling with, “how pastoral theology could be both a genuinely theological and scientifically psychological discipline” (Miller-McLemore 1993:366). Miller-McLemore (1996) writes:

His answer, which proposes a dialogical, hermeneutical method of psychological and theological investigation of human experience as the primary text of pastoral theology, became one of the most well-liked and commonly endorsed characterizations of the field. (p. 11)

Miller-McLemore (1993, 1996, 2008) proposes that an individual, rather than being read as an individual text, must be read as a “living human web” that is part of a “wide

cultural, social, and religious context” (1996:14).<sup>27</sup> Miller-McLemore (1996) explains this “three dimensional net”:

A “living human web” cannot be simply “read” and interpreted like a “document.” Those within the web who have not yet spoken must speak for themselves. Gender, feminist, and black studies all verify the knowledge of the underprivileged, the outcast, the underclass, and the silenced. If knowledge depends on power, then power must be given to the silenced. (p. 16)

In a sense, Miller-McLemore displays a move from an isolated individual to an individual in community and also seeks to see the context as a dialogue partner (Bevans 2018:43).

Throughout this thesis, I will be seeking to examine not only the individual stories of those interviewed, but also the web in which those stories are situated by using the context as a dialogue partner. With over forty hours of interviews with Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders, it is impossible to tell each story individually in any way. In an effort to understand the themes present in the stories, I examined the interviews looking for commonality and then took those common themes and wove them back together into one story that represents much of what I heard from the co-researchers. I call this re-storied narrative “Pastor Joe: A Composite Narrative of an Anchorage Pastor”.

The “Pastor Joe” story was written originally using my understanding of the data from interviews with Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders. The narrative was changed after the focus group observed a lack of passion and compassion in the story. What follows is my effort to compile a single narrative from the interviews conducted and the feedback of the co-researchers. The story is not meant to depict any single Anchorage pastor or ministry leader but meant to offer a narrative look into the themes that occurred in the interviews. It is presented here as a narrative introduction to the data and data interpretation.

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<sup>27</sup> Writing later, Miller-McLemore (2008:12) notes: “Initially the need to recognize diversity within the living human web arose because of the presence of women, people of color, and those of diverse sexual orientation in the graduate classroom and clinic and new awareness of social problems of sexism, racism, and heterosexism. Today we face a growing religious diversity among students and related prejudices, fears, and differences of belief and practice. Religious groups today are not just divided over biblical interpretation and beliefs but also over major social issues, such as gay and lesbian rights, women's roles in family and society, war, gun control, and so forth.”

*The Story*

Monday morning tears began to flow down Pastor Joe's face as he continued to cut a space in the berm of snow next to his driveway. The snow stood nearly five feet high and he was running out of places to push what fell on his driveway almost daily in recent weeks. As he was cutting into the bank to open up a place to park the newly arrived white stuff he was listening to a podcast. The voices streaming into his ears were discussing the Lord's Supper. What had triggered the avalanche of emotion was the person being interviewed stating that what is beautiful about the communion table is that "we're all guests at the table, Jesus, is the host" (Katt 2017c). Pastor Joe thought about the communion table the night before at his church. Faces of the people of his congregation flashed slowly through his mind, taking his focus off both the shovelling and the podcast. One of the great joys of his ministry was the Lord's Supper. He loved seeing each of the members come to the table and the image of them being called there by Jesus as guest...everyone a guest...was triggering deep emotion.

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Pastor Joe sits down at his desk Tuesday morning with a cup of coffee. He turns on his laptop. As he waits for it to boot up, he gazes out the window at the Chugach Mountains in the distance, its peaks and hills, covered in a deep blanket of snow and gleaming in the late-winter sun, just past the edge of town. He grabs a mug – imprinted with the school crest of his alma mater Biblical Theological Seminary, Hatfield, Pennsylvania – and leans back in his chair, allowing his mind to wander to the hiking and backpacking he and his family had done in those same mountains last summer. He strains but can still make out the place a trail climbs a windswept face of Wolverine Peak. Thoughts of those trails, thin ribbons of dirt tromped down by a multitude of hiking boots and lined with wildflowers, stretching from parking lot to peak, bring a smile to his face.

Joe puts his feet up on his desk, leans back in his chair, and closes his eyes to bask in the warmth of the morning sun pouring through his window in sharp contrast to single digit temperatures just beyond the glass, and yields his mind to the summer memories now flooding his consciousness. He pauses to reflect on the vivid mental movie of a manic 100-mile drive down to the Russian River to fish for salmon during the midnight sun hours, a trip squeezed between an evening church board meeting and a far too early morning worship committee meeting the following day. He takes a long draw from his coffee mug and thinks to himself that he's not getting any younger and chuckles about how the worship planning meeting the morning after that red salmon dash to the Kenai Peninsula had left him so tired he was barely present while the outline of the coming Sunday's sermon spilled out from his mouth to those gathered for the planning of the liturgy. That sermon, which was inspired by the dog-eared copy of *The 5 Love Languages* (Chapman 2000) that sits on top of his worn brown leather Bible on his desk, was conceived the night before somewhere between his second and third fish around 2 AM. It occurs to him that it was on this same dash that he and Bill, the chairman of the church board and fishing partner, finally got the chance to talk about the church becoming more engaged in the city...somehow.

Just as Joe's next summer memory – a weeklong camping trip with Jan, his wife, on the Denali Highway without the kids – began to play in his thought theatre, his cell phone buzzed and startled him back to the present. After rifling through his tattered and repaired North Face jacket looking for his phone, Joe saw that the text was a reminder of a meeting he had later in the day downtown. He was excited to talk to Rita, the director of the Downtown Mission, about how his church might get more involved, but sighed, thinking about having to drive down the hill and across town for the meeting and then having to search for parking downtown. He set the phone down, logged onto his laptop and began the business of the day.

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DING! DING! The meeting reminder of Pastor Joe's cell phone chimed. He finished the e-mail he was writing – setting up a coffee with the church's youth pastor to discuss ministry training options – and closed his laptop. *That should be a short conversation*, he thought as he grabbed his coat. As he picked up his keys he felt a twinge of anxiety over the prospect that Randy might want to leave. Walking out of the church building, he paused to let the secretary know he was headed to a meeting at the Downtown Mission and that he would be back later.

As he stepped out the door and zipped up his coat against the cold, the building of the parish across the street caught his eye. As he walked he made a mental note to set up a coffee with Pastor Evelyn. *I really like her*, he thought, *we should be talking more often*. Here they were serving churches across the street from each other and less than a quarter mile apart, yet they rarely ever talked. It was true that the two congregations didn't totally agree on doctrine and some other issues, but there was common ground. They had both been part of the Love Alaska event a few years ago and the two ministers saw each other often while preparing for the festival, a weekend gathering with speaker Luis Palau in Cuddy Midtown Park (Herz 2014). *When was it that Evelyn and I last had lunch?* he mused to himself. He couldn't recall anything other than that it was a warm day in the spring. *It's just so hard to keep up with colleagues, what with all the busyness of running a church – the caring for the flock, the weekly cycle of services and all the other commitments*. Joe got tired just thinking about it.

As he finished walking to his truck, unlocked it and climbed in, he thought about the meeting downtown. He wasn't really sure what to expect. The director of the Downtown Mission had called him and invited him down for lunch. He had met the director, Rita, a couple times at the Evangelical pastors gatherings but didn't really know her. He was grateful for the opportunity to connect with her and maybe figure out a way for his congregation to partner with the mission. As he pondered the nature of the meeting he

guided his four-wheel drive truck through the icy ruts of the onramp and onto the Seward Highway northbound. Once on the highway and up to speed, the crystal clear sky and the height of the overpass afforded him an uninterrupted view of Denali, the tallest mountain in North America on the distant horizon. He enjoyed the beauty for a moment as the words of Psalm 36 came to mind, *Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep.* Soon he returned to mulling over the coming meeting. *I really hope lunch is at a restaurant and not with the homeless in the soup kitchen,* he thought, *I never know what to say to them. I've always been uncomfortable with people unlike me – help me Lord.*

After trolling the streets for a short bit looking for an open parking space Joe settled on parking in the JCPenny parking garage. While there are other options for parking, his Dutch heritage typically drew him to this garage due to the free first hour and dollar-an-hour rate after that. Each time he parked here the stench of the stairwell triggered the memory of the tour of downtown he had gone on when he first arrived in Anchorage with one of the outreach workers from the youth homeless shelter. He'd learned on that outing that the parking ramp is often used by those in need of shelter as a way to get out of the elements. Being both from a warm climate and a loving home Joe found it hard to put himself in the shoes of the youth that lived on the street. *That has got to be a rough life.* But he recalled what that youth outreach worker had said, *the youth on the street are most often there because it is better than the situation they are fleeing.* It was a sobering thought and it punctuated why Joe wanted his church to get involved in ministering in the city.

The roads were in pretty good shape today and he had actually arrived downtown early. *I've got some time. I'll get a cup of coffee so I'm not too early,* he devised a plan to himself. Soon he was standing in line at Kaladi Brothers Coffee, across the street from City Hall, Joe picked up a copy of the newspaper someone left lying on a table while he waited for

his drink to be set on the bar. “Woman Found Dead Near Ship Creek,” proclaimed the lead story. Joe shuttered a bit as he reads about the police investigation of the body of a young woman that was discovered by a jogger near the dam of Ship Creek, a popular fishing location in the summer and an area not frequently trafficked in the winter. Investigators were not letting out too many details, but foul play was clearly a part of this young woman’s demise and it was being classified as a homicide. *What is going on? This city is getting so violent*, he mused. The few details that were listed asked the public for help in uncovering any details of the woman who had moved to Anchorage from Bethel only a few weeks before, looking for work.

‘Joe!’ the barista chimed from the bar. Moments later Joe was walking down 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, steam coming from his mouth, nose, and the cup in his hand – he looked like a steam-powered robot as he strode down the sidewalk. Motivated to walk quickly by the cold, Joe covered the handful of blocks to the soup kitchen in record time. The receptionist directed Joe to wait for Rita downstairs in the cafeteria. *I guess it won’t be a restaurant today*, Joe surmised. He walked down the stairs taking the last sip of his latte. Settling into a seat on the back wall, comfortably away from the lunch line, Joe observed the people who had flooded through the doors for a warm space to rest and a hot meal. He tried not to make eye contact with anyone because he didn’t want to appear to be a poverty voyeur. It wasn’t long before an Alaska Native man, walking with a limp, asked if he could take the seat across the table.

“I’m Harold,” the man stated and stuck out his hand. Joe reached out, shook it, and introduced himself. They exchanged small talk for a bit during which Joe shared that he is a pastor.

“What kind of Christian are you? I’m from a long line of Moravians back in Bethel. Have you ever been there?” Harold asked.

“Well, I’m not Moravian, but it’s the same Jesus,” Joe quipped, and they both laughed. He then finished his answer sheepishly, “But, I’ve never been off the road system I’m afraid.” Joe felt a twinge of regret as he spoke, rooted in the fact that he’d lived in Alaska for over a decade and had never made it to “the bush” even once. As Joe listened to his inner dialogue, Harold took a drink of his coffee and a couple of bites of his salmon chowder before the conversation continued.

The silence was broken when Harold shared, “I come down here nearly everyday; it’s like my job. You people, it’s your job to do stuff like this, and my people, it’s our job to show up and accept it.” Joe was taken aback by the bluntness of his new acquaintance and the critique of the help being offered to those in need. *Was he saying it’s white people’s job to do charity and the Natives to accept it?* he wondered to himself. He wanted to respond, but Harold changed the subject.

“Did you see the dogsled races last week?” he blurted out. Joe, not ready for that question, just nodded. Harold continued on, “Can you believe that? A 66-year-old great-grandmother winning the world championship! Wow!” Joe had fallen in love with sled dog racing since moving to Anchorage and never missed a day of the Open World Championships each February during the city’s Fur Rendezvous winter carnival.

“That was something”, Joe responded, “after twenty years off to win it again. It was awesome.” The two men began to compare notes on the race. Joe liked to watch the race at the start/finish line on Fourth Avenue and Harold was a Cordova Street Hill regular. They had just begun speculating on the Iditarod when Rita walked up.

“Pastor Veld, it’s good to see you again,” Rita effused.

“Good to see you as well,” Joe shot back as he reluctantly stood to leave. “Harold, I’ll be looking for you at the Iditarod start,” he said as he shook his new friend’s hand.



After a quick tour of the facility, Joe and Rita worked their way through the food line making small talk and ended up back at one of the picnic tables. They sat down. Each bowed their heads and said a quick prayer before taking a bite of their salmon chowder. The chowder was amazing! As he was savouring the second bite, Rita got to the point, “Pastor Joe, I remember you mentioning at the Pastors Lunch a few months ago that you are looking for a way to get your congregation engaged in the city somehow.”

Joe took his time finishing his bite before answering, “That’s true! I just would love to see us serving people in need. What did you have in mind?”

Rita paused, “As you know the Soup Kitchen is a ministry that is supported by churches and the community. But I didn’t ask you down here for a donation – though that would be accepted.” They both laughed. She continued, “I was thinking that if your congregation was looking for a way to get involved, this might be it.”

“I can certainly ask about a donation, but I was thinking about something a bit more hands-on,” Joe shared.

“Joe, in a ministry like this, it works this way: if you want to be involved the most important thing is to give your time, the next thing you can do is give your voice, and the last thing, if you have to, is writing a check. We feed people here, that is what people see, and, frankly, what they think of when they hear our name. We also have showers and laundry, a women’s shelter, and lots other services – including worship. But look around this room the soup is great, but the smiles are better. We see the people who most often go unseen in this city. We know their names. We care for them. We eat with them. I’m looking for people for cooking, cleaning, and most importantly conversation,” the words passionately flowed out of Rita’s mouth. Then she directly asked, “So what will it be? Time, voice, or a check?”

While Joe knew of a few people in his congregation that volunteered at the mission, like Terry who went down weekly and had for years, the congregation was best described as

supportive, but not really involved in any of the ways Rita had outlined. In fact, if he had to guess he was pretty sure that most of his congregation didn't give much thought to the mission, poor people or the northern areas of town, including the downtown, Fairview, and Mountain View neighbourhoods, if they could get away with it.

“Like I said, I'd love to be involved here as a congregation, but it's not just up to me.” Looking for something to guide him he asked, “Can you tell me what other churches are involved and what that involvement looks like for them?” The list of churches recited by Rita elicited varied responses. There were those that Joe knew and felt comfortable with. Some of those churches (like Pastor Evelyn's) had been partners on previous events and projects. However, some of the other churches she mentioned sent a different reaction coursing through his body. *I'm not sure we can partner with them*, he thought, *We don't agree on anything!?!* However, the involvement varied a great deal and Joe was encouraged that his church would be able to find a spot that worked for them.

The conversation ended with some discussion about what giving time might look like for Joe's congregation, as well as using one's voice on behalf of those in need of the Downtown Mission's services. A donation was never brought up again. As Joe walked out the door he waved goodbye to Harold.

Back in his truck, Joe pondered the opportunities as he drove south back to the church and up the hill in the early afternoon sunshine. He wondered what might come of it. He was excited to get this going and only minimally concerned about partnering with folks who held a different understanding of faith. He weighed whether the church budget could handle direct support of the Downtown Mission on a regular basis. But it was the part about using the congregation's voice that concerned him most. Speaking out on the behalf of the homeless and vulnerable could quickly turn political. He'd seen it before. A song lyric from the recently past Christmas season popped into his head:

And perhaps we give a little to the poor  
If the generosity should seize us  
But if any one of us should interfere  
In the business of why there are poor  
They get the same as the rebel Jesus. (Browne 1997)

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As Joe typed up the council agenda he added to the outreach section the opportunity to be involved with the Downtown Mission. After some quick proofreading he sent the agenda off to the elders along with the rest of the reports and information for the meeting later in the week. Just then he heard a knock on the door.

“You got a second?” said the voice connected to the knock.

“Yep,” Joe shot back, recognizing the voice of Randy, the church’s youth pastor. Randy asked if Joe had heard that the local professional hockey team, the Alaska Aces, were shutting down operations at the end of the season. They each briefly commented on the departure being a sign of the times. During the entire interaction Randy fidgeted nervously. Finally blurting out, “I think I have to step down as youth pastor.” Joe, drawing on all he knew and had discovered about counselling people, tried not to look shocked.

“Okay, Randy, what led you to that conclusion?” he responded calmly.

“Well, you know I’ve been thinking about going to school for ministry, and Amy and I decided that means leaving the state. There is just not much here for training and I want to get my degree.”

Joe remained calm on the outside, but inside he was recounting the number of youth pastors the church had lost to the same conclusion – Randy being the third he knew of. He also flashed through his memories of Randy, first as a junior high school kid going off to his first youth camp, then as a high school senior playing in the church worship band, then as a young adult leading the teen group and finally how he and Amy looked on their wedding day. Randy had grown up in the church. Randy’s desire to leave was an organizational problem, and a personal one for Joe. Randy was raised up as a leader and now, like the other two

previous youth pastors, and others, was following the call to ministry, by leaving the state for academic education. Joe knew that each of the previous times a youth pastor left that he felt lonely without a colleague in the building, and that the church struggled with the loss.

“Randy, I’m sure you’ve thought this through and have your heart set on it. Have you considered our denomination’s school of ministry? You could stay here and get some training,” inquired Joe.

Randy’s answer was simple, “I just really want a degree. The School of Ministry is fine. I’ve gotten a lot out of the couple classes I’ve taken, but in the end, I’ll have nothing to show for it. I know you keep telling me that you learn much more on the job than in the classroom. I get that. You’ve been an amazing mentor, but I feel like if I’m going to make this a career I need to get a diploma.”

“Well, Randy, I believe that mentorship and on-the-job-training is key, but it sounds like your mind is made up. How can I help?” Joe responded with a heavy heart.

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Early in the morning a couple of days later, Jan set a plate of scrambled eggs down on the table and reminded Joe that his daughter has a cross-country ski race that afternoon at Kincaid Park, but Joe was lost in thought. He mindlessly began to eat the eggs, staring at his iPhone. He was reading a long string of email responses to the board meeting information he had sent out the day before. Most the responses were purely administrative, but there was a fair amount of discussion about the Downtown Mission idea. Bill, the board chairman, was thrilled that they were going to discuss getting involved. He had been wanting the church to “get its hands dirty” for a long time and was growing impatient. However, Bill was in the minority. Lots of questions were filling Joe’s inbox. Some were simple logistics, but some questioned the value of being involved. Linda, an outspoken elder, was unclear on why their suburban hillside congregation would be getting involved downtown. She wanted to know

why they weren't talking about helping people in their neighbourhood. One of the deacons expressed concerns over safety and putting members in contact with "those types of people". Others expressed concerns that the congregation had no training for this type of ministry and that it would be much more prudent to focus on the spiritual growth of the people in the church before we reach out. One elder simply asked, "Can't we just write a check?" *All I want to see is our people involved in the city...to meet people like Harold...to minister like Jesus. Why does that have to be so hard?* he thought. Joe's mind spun as he finished his breakfast.

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Later in the afternoon, after visiting a member in the hospital, Joe was again in his truck, this time heading out to Kincaid Park to see his daughter race. As he drove from midtown out to the park he passed a number of churches. Joe prayed for the congregations as he passed each. He'd picked up the habit of these "drive-by" prayers a number of years ago after a friend shared that he often prayed this way. Today he was struck by the diversity of churches he passed. There were lots of different expressions of Christianity, but after reading recent newspaper stories about the racial and ethnic diversity of the city, Joe was struck by that type of diversity in Anchorage churches as he drove. He glanced at the clock to ensure he didn't miss his daughter's start time and when his eyes returned to the road he noticed the Filipino Bible Church go by on his left. He remembered seeing someplace that Filipinos represent the largest Asian American subgroup in the State of Alaska and are the largest racial minority in the city of Anchorage (O'Malley 2014). His next thought, other than a fleeting desire to stop at Tastee Freez, was a question, *How is it that I know so few people that are different than me in a city this diverse?* It wasn't the first time Joe's conscience had queried him on this question. He had even attended a couple of events put on by The First Alaskan's Institute to try to understand the Alaska Native perspective better. *What was it*

*that they said at that training?* he strained to jog his memory, *Right! The shortest distance between two people is a story.*

As he drove by the ski trail maintenance bunker and crested the hill, the cross-country ski stadium came into view and thoughts of his daughter's race pushed out the rumination on the diversity in Anchorage and Joe's self-reflection. As he jumped out of the car and pulled his hat down tight over his ears to fight off the chill of the breeze coming off Cook Inlet, the announcer called the varsity girls to the start line. *Just in time*, Joe thought.

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Thursday night Pastor Joe walked into the meeting room at the church to a buzz of discussion. While a couple of the dozen leaders gathered were engaged in small talk, the others were having the type of before (or after) meeting discussions that are often where the true work of church governance takes place. The topic that had most of them excited was the proposal that the church become involved at the Downtown Mission. Still others were engaged in discussing the rumour that Randy was leaving as youth pastor and how they would care for the youth without him if it were true. As Pastor Joe sat down he took a deep breath. *This might be a long meeting*, he thought to himself. As he did, Bill began to call the meeting to order.

At the end of the evening no decision was made on Joe's proposal to get involved at the Downtown Mission. Joe shared the time, voice, and donation idea Rita had shared with him. The board had a great discussion. They were going to look into making regular donations and talked about lots of ways to get involved, but had settled on talking with Terry (the member who volunteered each week) for ideas. No discussion of using the churches voice really took place and Joe was not surprised by this, though he was pleased by the progress of the conversation.

As the meeting drew to a close Pastor Joe spoke up. “One of my teachers in seminary liked to summarize the teaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by saying, ‘The Jesus in you is greater than the Jesus in me.’” He continued, “To me that means that we need each other to begin to fully understand who Jesus is.” *He thought briefly about meeting Harold.* Going on he said, “No matter what we do about being involved at the Downtown Mission, the reality is we need the Jesus in them to complete us. They are our brothers and sisters.” With that, he prayed and the meeting came to a close.

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As the music played gently in the background Joe began the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. Soon the congregation was coming one-by-one to the table to receive the elements. As each person walked up Joe gazed at all the individual faces and was reminded again of that Bonhoeffer summary, “The Jesus in you is greater than the Jesus in me.” These were his people, his community, his Jesus. He felt a tear begin to slowly slide down his cheek. *We are all guests at this table, with a wonderful host,* he thought grateful for Jesus and the Jesus in the people the congregation.

Joe’s tears continued through the institution of the sacrament. Feeling overwhelmed by the beauty of the body of Christ he looked around the room and invited them to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus ending with, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

## Chapter 3: Research Data Generated

To begin the process of apocalypse – revealing – of the city of Anchorage so that a new vision of the city can be cast, interviews were conducted with leaders from across the city. I was interested in hearing the stories of these ministry leaders and pastors in order to describe the context of Anchorage and gain their perceptions of the city, understandings of ministry in Anchorage, and thoughts about the shape of ministry in this context. Those interviews took place between 14 April 2016 and 3 February 2017 all across the city. The data gathered painted a picture that is in contrast to the city of God from Revelation.

Adding to the picture provided by the interviews was further clarifying information obtained in a focus group. This meeting of the co-researchers took place 15 February 2017 and served as an important part of shaping the re-storying of the narrative and my understanding of the Anchorage context.

### I. Chapter Background

During the period of time that I was interviewing Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders, the State of Alaska and the entire country of the United States was undergoing a disorienting and tumultuous year. Anchorage was experiencing its highest murder rate on record, the State of Alaska was descending into an economic recession and the country was enduring an extremely divisive presidential election.

The year 2016 proved to be the most violent on record for the city of Anchorage. Over the course of the year, a record 34 murders took place in the city (Boots 2016a). The number was in sharp contrast to just 13 murders in 2014. However, the homicide rate was trending up, with a doubling of that number to 25 homicides in 2015. The previous high for



homicide was over twenty years prior, in 1995, when 29 persons were murdered in the city. This trend was noted by the former Chief of Police Mark Mew, “The homicide rate in Anchorage has always run between 12 and 24...that was sort of the rule of thumb. We rarely did better than 12. And we rarely did worse than twice that.” (Boots 2016b). As homicides climbed during 2016 it took its toll on the city. Boots (2016a) noted this collective effect in a year-end story in the *Alaska Dispatch News* on the murders:

For many, it was the year the city's violence hit home, even if they didn't personally know any of the victims. The killings happened in nearly every corner of Anchorage: from an Eagle River apartment complex to a normally quiet south-side subdivision.

People were shot to death at a gas station, in a beloved park in the heart of the city, on a scenic beach where people go to look at the mountains.

In September, the death of a man in the middle of a busy intersection shut down an elementary school and a middle school while police investigated the killing.

Together, the homicides pose a question for Anchorage: What made 2016 so deadly?

Additionally, a recent poll showed that 71.1% of Anchorage residents viewed crime as higher in the past year (*Alaska Dispatch News* 2017). Clearly crime and violence were a big story in 2016 and an issue on the minds of the city's residents.

On a state-wide level, the big news was the economy. In February 2016, Moody's Analytics declared that the State of Alaska was in recession (DeMarban 2016a). Throughout the year, the news of the economic downturn continued to come out, culminating in the revelation in October that Alaska had the highest unemployment rate in the United States at 6.8%, nearly two points higher than the national average that month of 4.9% (DeMarban 2016b). The current recession is being fuelled by a two-year drop in crude oil prices and subsequent cut backs in the energy field. Closely tied to the downturn in the oil industry is the budget crisis it causes for the State of Alaska. Alaska coffers are highly dependent on revenue generated by crude oil production (Herz 2016a). With oil prices low, the State in a budget crisis, and consumer confidence low across the state (Falsey 2016), the result is that

many in the city were nervous about the future of Anchorage. Things are not likely to turn around soon as the recession is projected to last into the near future (Wohlforth 2017c).

Election years in the United States are often notable and contentious. However, the 2016 presidential election was unique in its raucous nature. Jason Szep (2016), a political writer for Reuters News, stated, “The 2016 U.S. election was unprecedented in the way it turned Americans against each other, according to dozens of interviews in rural United States and across some of the most politically charged battleground states.” He goes on to explain:

In a recent Reuters/Ipsos survey, 15 percent of respondents said they had stopped talking to a family member or close friend as a result of the election. For Democrats, this shoots up to 23 percent, compared to 10 percent for Republicans. And 12 percent had ended a relationship because of it. (Szep 2016)

Bacon, of NBC news offered this analysis of this division:

America has long been deeply-divided politically.

With the exception of Bill Clinton's 1996 victory and Obama's in 2008, recent national elections have been very close. Democrats bitterly protested the 2000 Supreme Court decision that helped ensure George W. Bush won that election. Down in a very close race, John Kerry refused to give his concession speech the night of the election in 2004, like Hillary Clinton this week. Mitt Romney's defeat in 2012 was narrow and some pre-election surveys had shown him ahead.

What has shifted—and became more apparent during 2016 and was cemented on Tuesday—is the nature of that divide.

Many of the defining arguments of elections from 1980-2012 were about national security and the size and role of the federal government. Republicans tended to be more skeptical about expanding programs while more assertive about deploying U.S. military power abroad, while Democrats were more pro-government and anti-war.

Now, the political divide is much more about culture, identity and race. (Bacon 2016)

Shedding more light on the situation, Samuelson (2016) of the *Washington Post* quoted political scientist Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute: “It’s not just polarization, it’s tribalism. People on the other side are enemies, not just adversaries, who threaten your way of life.” In a similar way Julian Zelizer, Professor of History and Public Affairs at Princeton University, stated before the election, “More and more Americans live in

distinct partisan worlds and are unwilling to venture into new territory” (Zelizer 2016). It is clear that the election did nothing to change this reality.

In his post-election coverage for the *Anchorage Daily News*, Herz noted that “[t]his year's presidential results showed that America was a deeply divided nation, and the same goes for Alaska” (Herz 2016b). Commenting on the city:

Anchorage was sharply split by neighbourhood. With a few exceptions, the further north you go, the more the results tilted toward Clinton. The trend stopped abruptly at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, which voted strongly for Trump. South Anchorage precincts tended to be solid for Trump. (Herz, 2016b)

This divide became very clear to me on a personal level during and immediately following the election. I twice found myself at odds with a long-time volunteer for Parachutes over issues from the election. During both interactions, one in person and the other via social media, it was clear that not only did we differ in our views of the issues, but were having a hard time seeing each other's positions at all. These interactions came after working together for years in drop-in without any discord. It became a clear symbol to me of the pervasive the division in the country.

These three realities – one local, one state-wide, and one national – offer a backdrop to the interviews I conducted with the pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage. Each offers a challenge to ministry in the city moving forward and shines a light on the larger context in which these interviews were conducted.

## II. Anchorage Interview Demographics

In addition to studying the context of Anchorage through the written sources available, I interviewed Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders about their personal stories to better understand what is going on currently and to uncover why it is going on. These interviews were conducted in an environment that saw the interview subjects as “living

human documents” (Gerkin 1984) that are part of a “living human web” (Miller-McLemore 1993, 1996 & 2008) and engaged in this research as “co-researchers” (Müller 2004).

From the stories in the interviews of these ministry leaders and pastors, I was able to describe the context of Anchorage and gain their perceptions of the city, ministry in Anchorage, and the shape of ministry in this local context. In order to gather a representative sample of those ministering in the city of Anchorage, I consulted the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life Religious Landscape Study released in 2015 to better understand the overall religious environment in the city. Every attempt was made to ensure that the group of 38<sup>28</sup> ministry leaders was diverse with respect to race, ethnicity and gender, in keeping with the demographics of Anchorage as reported in the U.S. Census data for Anchorage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Furthermore, I was concerned that marginalized voices were represented at the table (Dreyer 2014, De Beer 2014a).

Using my interview notes and recordings, I reviewed the material looking for trends in responses to the questions and seeking to see themes that emerged. Each participant was also asked to fill out an online survey providing demographic information. From my analysis of the interviews and the responses to the survey, I developed the following findings. I also re-storied some of the themes into a composite story of an Anchorage minister called “Pastor Joe”, which was included in the previous chapter.

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<sup>28</sup> I originally proposed and conducted 40 interviews but was unable to secure permission from two participants to use their data in this thesis.

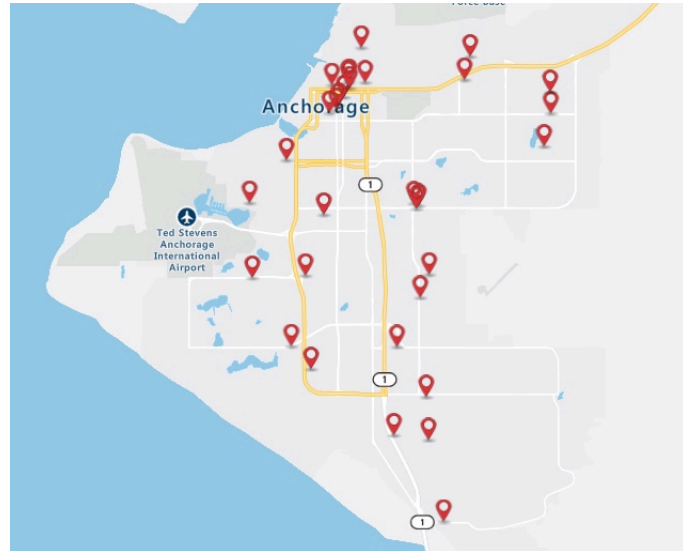


Figure 3.  
Location of Anchorage Interview Subjects Churches and Ministries

The ministry leaders and pastors who agreed to be interviewed represented a range of ages (figure 4). Of the 38 participants, 21.05% (8) were 21-40 years old, 50% (19) were 41-60 years old, and 28.95% (11) were over the age of 60. The greatest number of participants in a single five-year span were the seven interviewees who were 51-55 years old. While there was an adequate range of ages of those interviewed, the majority were 40 years old or older.

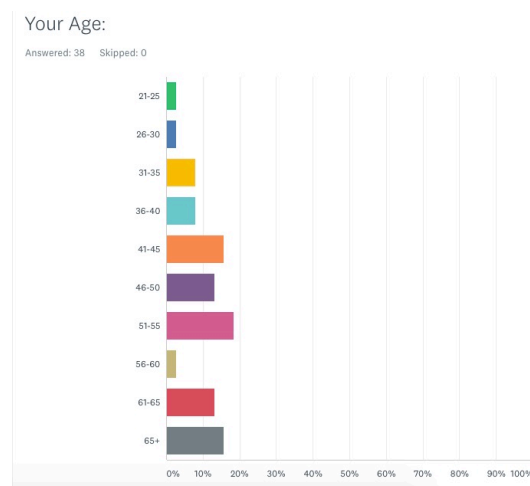


Figure 4.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Age Breakdown

According to the 2018 Census estimates, the city of Anchorage has a population that is split evenly between males and females. The difference is a matter of a two percent majority of male citizens (male 51%, female 49%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Participants in the interviews were not as equally balanced. Of those interviewed, 31.58% (12) were female and 68.42% (26) male (figure 5). The fact that this area of the study does not more closely reflect the population of Anchorage is largely because the pastorate continues to be a male-dominated field with some denominations and churches continuing to allow only male clergy. The 2015 National Survey of Congregations by Faith Communities Today shows that just 8.6% of the congregations surveyed have a female senior or sole clergy leader (Faith Communities Today 2015).

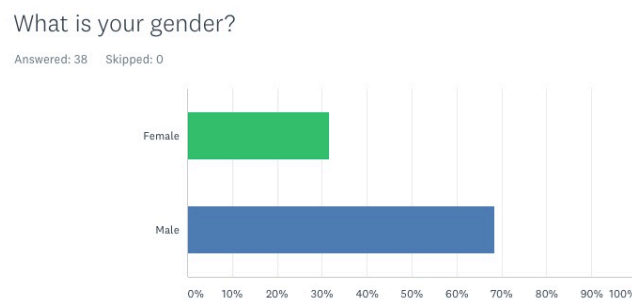


Figure 5.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Gender Breakdown

As noted in chapter one, the city of Anchorage is one of the most diverse cities in the United States.<sup>29</sup> The 2018 Census shows an ethnic breakdown that is roughly 64.5% White/Caucasian with the remainder a diverse mix of races (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Participants in the interviews for this project were 64.86% (24) White/Caucasian. A complete breakdown (figure 7) shows a close correlation between Anchorage Census numbers and participants in the study.

<sup>29</sup> This assertion is based on the work of University of Alaska Anchorage Sociology Professor Chad Farrell (Tunseth 2015). See also pages 4 and 5 of this document.

Your Race:

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1

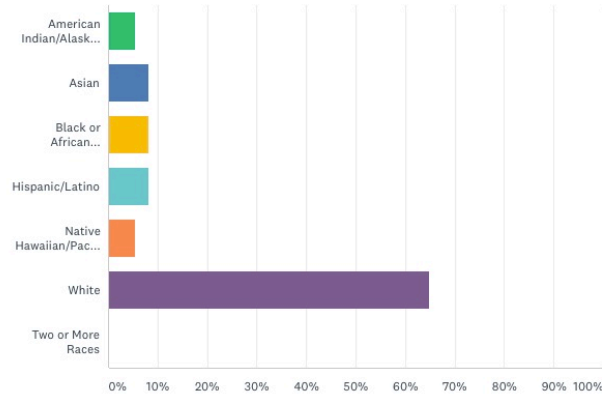


Figure 6.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Race Breakdown

The interview participants also reflected the Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study data about Christians in Alaska (Pew Research Center 2015). However, it is interesting to note that the Pew data only offers numbers for White, Black, Asian and Latino, but does not report numbers of American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander and is not specific to Anchorage, but rather is reporting on the racial makeup of Christians across the entire state. However, it is clear that the racial makeup of the interviews conducted with Anchorage ministry leaders and pastors for this project are reflective of the racial makeup of the city.

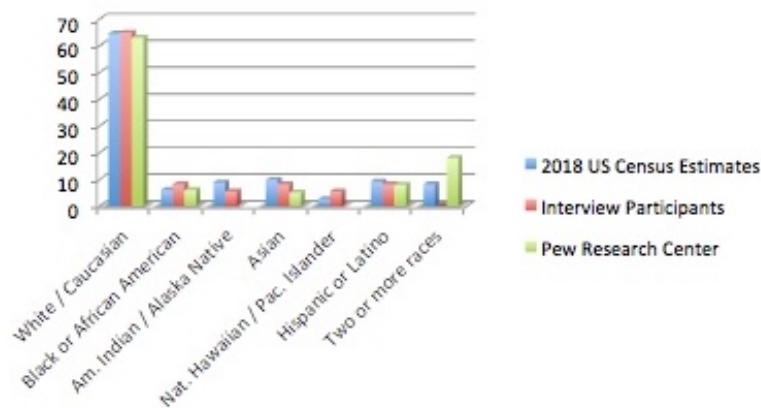


Figure 7.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects, 2018 Census Estimate & Pew Research Race Comparison

Participants in the interviews possessed a high level of ministry experience. Of those interviewed, 50% (19) had ministry experience of 21 years or more and over 28.94% (11) had over 26 years of experience. However, the level of experience ministering in Anchorage specifically was the inverse of total ministry experience. Of those participating, 47.36% (18) had 10 years or less experience of ministering in Anchorage and 78.94% (30 out of 38 respondents) 20 years or less experience in the city. Nine participants, nearly a quarter (23.68%) of those interviewed had five years or less experience ministering in the city. Only 10.52% (4) had 26 or more years serving Anchorage.

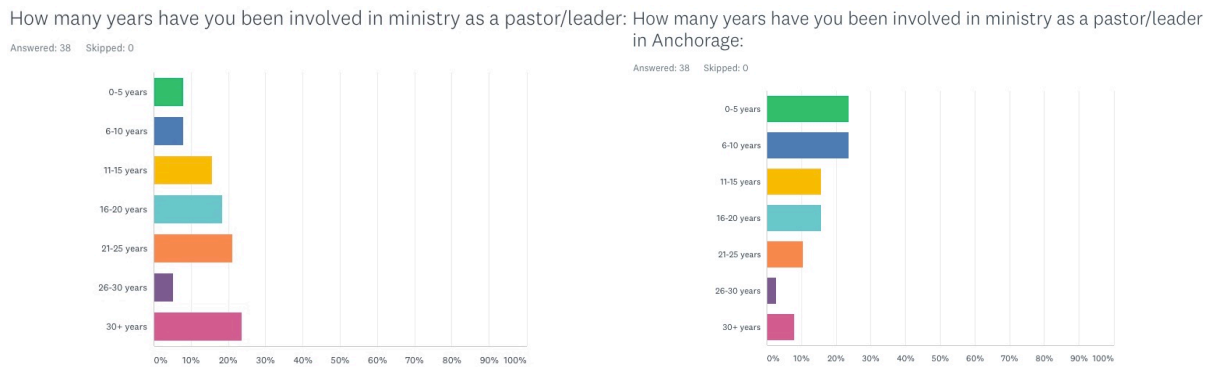


Figure 8.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Ministry Experience

The vast majority of interview subjects (73.68%) described their ministry as church when given the choice between church, para-church, denominational, non-profit, social service, and chaplaincy (figure 9). These answers are self-disclosed. One key anomaly is that two of the interview subjects are in roles overseeing a denomination in Alaska. Had that been reflected in this data, the percentage of those working in church settings would drop from 73.68% (28) to 68.42% (26) and may be a more accurate reflection of the survey participants. Likewise, an additional respondent is not currently serving parishes but engaged in work on behalf of the Archdiocese. Once again, if that response was moved into the denominational category, the percentage of those interviewed serving in a church setting would drop to 65.78% (25). Another irregularity is that the category of chaplaincy had no



respondents; however, I know that at least one interview subject is a police chaplain in addition to his pastoral duties. Regardless of the small inconsistencies and my speculation, those participating in the interviews were split between those working in churches and those in other forms of ministry in a manner that reflects the reality of the city. While data on the percentages of churches and other ministries is not documented simple observation reveals that the city has many more churches than faith-based Christian ministries of other kinds and the vast majority of those ministering in the city are pastors in a local church.

Please select the type of ministry that best describes the ministry you are currently involved in from the list below:

Answered: 38 Skipped: 0

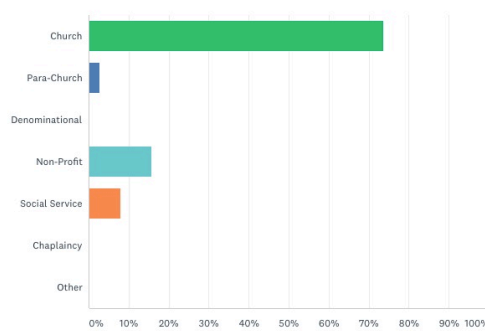


Figure 9.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Ministry Roles

Understanding the religious makeup of Alaska can be accomplished in a couple of different ways. The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study reports that 62% of the Alaskan population identifies as Christian, 31% as unaffiliated (religious “nones”), and 6% belonging to non-Christian faiths (Pew Research Center 2015), Looking at the 62% who identified as Christian, the breakdown of the Christians in Alaska shows roughly a 60/40 split between Protestants and all other Christians. Catholics comprise about 25% of the Alaskan Christian adherents with the remaining followers of Jesus split evenly between those of the Orthodox tradition and the Mormon Church.

In a recent presentation, the Right Reverend David Mahaffey, Bishop of Sitka and Alaska who heads the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Alaska, cited the Association of Religion Data Archives 2010 study, noting that the three largest Christian groups by denominational

affiliation in Alaska are the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Mormons (Mahaffey 2017).<sup>30</sup> This assertion reflects the high-level of division and diversity within the Protestant church in Alaska. When looking at Protestants in Alaska as a group, they comprise a large portion of the state’s religious landscape, but when each individual group or denomination is broken out, then the picture is much different.

Please select the denomination/faith group you are currently a member of from the following list:

Answered: 38 Skipped: 0

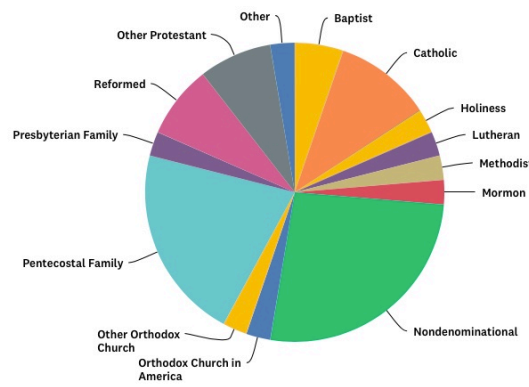


Figure 10.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Denominational Affiliation

The pastors and ministry leaders that participated in the interviews for this project reflected the diversity of the Christian faith expression in Anchorage but did not match exactly the breakdown of the city. Members of the four major groups in the city participated (figure 11), but the vast majority of the respondents came from the Protestant tradition. A representation more reflective of Anchorage was limited by the willingness of ministry leaders and pastors to participate in the interviews. Another limitation was my limited number of personal contacts outside of the Protestant Evangelical community. For this reason, the findings of the research will reflect a stronger input from the Protestant

<sup>30</sup> In a follow-up e-mail Bishop David commented: “My personal opinion...when I saw the stats was that the Orthodox are both underreported and inaccurate (they only show us with 40 churches and we have 90, that’s an inaccuracy on a large scale). Mainline Protestants are 35.5K, Catholics 51K, other includes mostly Mormon at 41K, hence my reasoning. You can disagree if you like, but the researchers were evangelical Protestants, so I believe that skews the numbers.”

community, especially Evangelicals. While this true, it is my contention that it does not affect the themes present in the interviews.

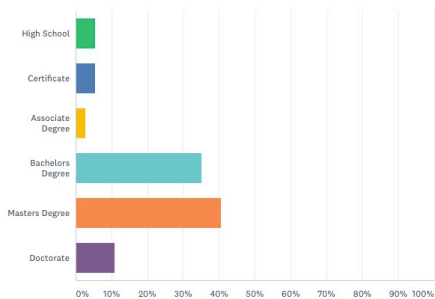


Figure 11.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Faith Tradition Affiliation

As one might expect, the education level of those ministering in Anchorage interviewed for this project is high. Of those interviewed, 89.47% (34) hold a college degree of some kind and half (19) hold a graduate-level degree. Only 10.52% (4) had formal education that did not include college (high school or certificate) with a mere 5.26% (2) having high school education alone.

Please select the highest level of education you have completed from the list below:

Answered: 37 Skipped: 1



Do you have a certificate(s) and/or degree(s) specifically in the field of ministry?

Answered: 38 Skipped: 0

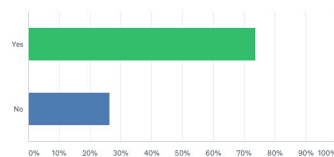


Figure 12.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Education Level

When compared to the average Christian in the state of Alaska, as reported by the Pew Research Center, participants are much higher educated than the majority of the average persons in the pew throughout the state. While the interview subjects were highly educated,

the vast majority received their education outside of Anchorage or even Alaska.

Interestingly, only 5 respondents (13.16%) pursued higher education with ministering in Anchorage in mind.

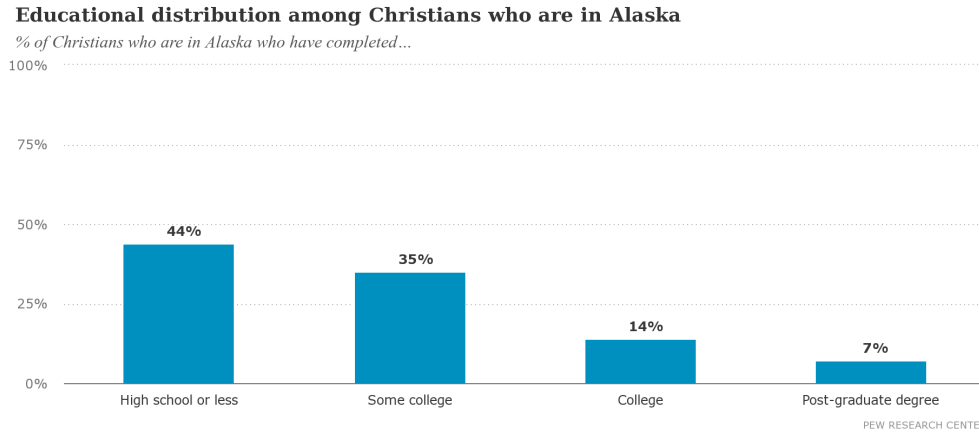


Figure 13.  
Education Level Among Alaskan Christians  
(Pew Research Center, 2015)

### III. Anchorage Interview and Focus Group Data

At the completion of the interviews, I invited the Anchorage interview subjects to attend a focus group to review the preliminary research findings. Of those interviewed, 12 persons (31.58%) attended this event. The makeup of the group reflected the interviews in the area of gender with 66% of attenders being male and 33% female. In the area of race, the focus group lacked the diversity of the interviews with 83.3% of those attending being white and 16.6% from other races. Over a two-hour period, the participants were asked to offer their insights and correctives to the preliminary research as presented. The focus group offered further insight about the availability and quality of training for ministry, mentoring, ministry climate, the urban nature of the city of Anchorage, and the composite story of an Anchorage pastor (the “Pastor Joe” story).

### *Training/Education*

When asked about ministry training<sup>31</sup> options available in Anchorage, the interview subjects offered a wide range of answers. The top answer was Wayland Baptist University, a Baptist General Convention school based in Plainview, Texas but with 13 U.S. campuses, including two in Alaska: one in Anchorage and one in Fairbanks. Wayland also has an affiliated campus at Moffat Bible College in Kenya and many online programs. While interviewees gave Wayland as the number one training option in Anchorage, it is interesting to note that no one interviewed holds a degree from that institution and only one person mentioned taking classes at the local campus while another mentioned taking classes online.

The second highest mentioned option for training was something that was a strong theme across many interviews – mentorship. The theme of mentorship fits well into the independent nature Alaska and speaks to the desire of the interviewees to learn from their peers and those with experience in the city.

While mentoring was the second most mentioned training option by interview subjects, it was also a strong theme when questioned about their personal experiences of being trained for ministry and also asked about transformational experiences that prepared them for ministry. When conducting a follow-up discussion about training options during the focus group, I asked about mentoring. In a quick hand raise poll, I discovered that all 11 focus group participants were currently involved in mentoring and six out of the 11 had been mentored as part of their training. One participant noted that there are two types of mentoring: the first type is to help lay leaders in the local church and the second type is being mentored to be a clergy mentor. It was noted there is a tension here because if someone decides to pursue clergy training, this nearly always takes them away from the local church.

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<sup>31</sup> In informal conversation in the U.S. the terms training and education are often used interchangeably. More specifically, training is focused on the transference of concrete skills while education is concerned with opening up students to new ways of thinking, new paradigms, new ways of seeing. Because of the way that the questions were asked, and the context of this mixed use of the terms, responses include both training and education. The proposed program in the “How Might We Respond?” section is focused on education. That being said, a holistic approach that addresses the head (education), hands (training), and heart (formation) would provide the best possible response.

Another participant spoke about mentoring being a “fancy word for discipleship”. He mused that maybe mentorship is a downgrade from discipleship and expressed that all of what a pastor does should be discipleship.



Figure 14.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Training Options

The third most common type of training option was online and distance education with a variety of programs mentioned. The remainder of the top ten responses was a range of formal and informal education experiences. These ranged from conferences, workshops, and church-based and denominational training on the informal end to specific schools on the formal end with a few options that were non-descript. Interestingly, scoring in the top ten was also personal devotions and personal study as well as serving at the local church, which may fit into the strong mentorship theme or reflect a possible church-based bias of those interviewed.

What brings the data to life is the comments that accompanied the specific training options. Participants noted the lack of options when including the following statements in their responses: “there is not a lot here”, “not a lot of seminar options” and “I would love to see more training here”. Overall, a feeling that training in Anchorage is not readily available

permeated the answers. A third of those interviewed (34.21%, 13 respondents) made some comment about there not being much in the way of training in Anchorage.

When the focus group reflected on the question “Can you walk me through the ministry training options - both formal (such as schools, institutes, seminaries, colleges) and informal (such as seminars, consultations, trainings, classes, etc.) available in Anchorage and in Alaska?”, one participant noted, “There is not a lot and what there is is not on par.” Another questioned, “Can Biblical studies even be done in Alaska?” Even in the case of the Orthodox Church, which has a seminary in Kodiak, it was noted that a graduate degree could not be achieved in Alaska. After discussing this situation in pairs, one group mused that what is expected of a pastor in the last 40 years has changed. While it was once – and may be in some circles still – expected that the pastor would have a graduate degree, what is more important to churches is that the pastor is successful and able to lead and grow a congregation regardless of educational level.

I want to note two developments that took place after the completion of the interviews. First, in the months after the interviews took place a cohort of students in Anchorage did a year of classes with a local instructor through Western Theological Seminary. After this first cohort, there were not enough students to continue in Anchorage, though some are continuing through distance education. Second, as this project drew to a close, Anchorage Grace Church began a master’s level program based in Anchorage, connected to The Master’s Seminary (Anchorage Grace Church, n.d.). Interestingly, this offering is only for men. The Master’s Seminary website shares its “A Legacy of Faithfulness” which states, “The Master's Seminary exists to advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ by equipping godly men to be pastors and trainers of pastors.” (The Master’s Seminary 2019). While the addition of a master’s level theological training program is welcome in Anchorage, one has to wonder if this particular program will serve to unite the

church or further divide it due to the position of training only men. It clearly will do little to provide a more balanced gender equality in the church in Anchorage. These two programs are the most recent in a string of seminaries that have established distance education programs in Anchorage, none of which have had long-term success. Previous attempts to establish similar seminary or master's programs were mentioned in a handful of interviews.

While the answers to the question on ministry training was often answered by noting the undergraduate colleges available in the state (Wayland Baptist, Alaska Bible College, Alaska Christian College, and the University of Alaska system), those answers were focused on someone going into ministry, which was fitting with the question being asked. When the discussion turned to continuing education for those already possessing an undergraduate degree or graduate training in ministry, it was often noted how little was available in this area. It may be helpful here to think of this issue using the lens of formal and informal education.

### *Issues Facing Anchorage*

Each of the interview subjects was asked to answer the question, "From your perspective, what are the major issues facing the city of Anchorage?" The response to that question generated a long list of issues in the city. When I combined and compiled similar responses, themes emerged with substance abuse (47.37%, 18 respondents), homelessness (34.21%, 13 respondents) and the economic situation in Alaska (31.58%, 12 respondents) as the most common issues.

Following those top three were a litany of issues, some of which are hot button issues in the culture and church today, such as LGBTQ+<sup>32</sup> or same-sex marriage and issues of racial

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32 GLAAD (known as the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation until 2013), an organization in the U.S. that monitors the media on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues, uses the term LGBTQ+ as an acronym to represent the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in its most recent *GLAAD Media Guide* (2016). In recent years, people have proposed adding other letters to the acronym, in order to create greater inclusion such as LGBTQ+IA+ (Gold 2018). In this thesis, the term LGBTQ+ is used throughout to refer to the



diversity. Other issues were less contentious, such as the city needing Jesus and affordable housing. Unexpectedly, a “me first” or selfish attitude appeared as the seventh most mentioned issue. Maybe even more surprising is that the issue of violence was in the compilation, but much lower in the top ten than one might expect. This was despite Anchorage experiencing its most violent year in 2016 and the reality that one in four women in Alaska will experience domestic violence in their lifetime (Restino 2013). If I compiled subcategories of violence that were mentioned (sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.) together, then violence would appear as the second most common response.

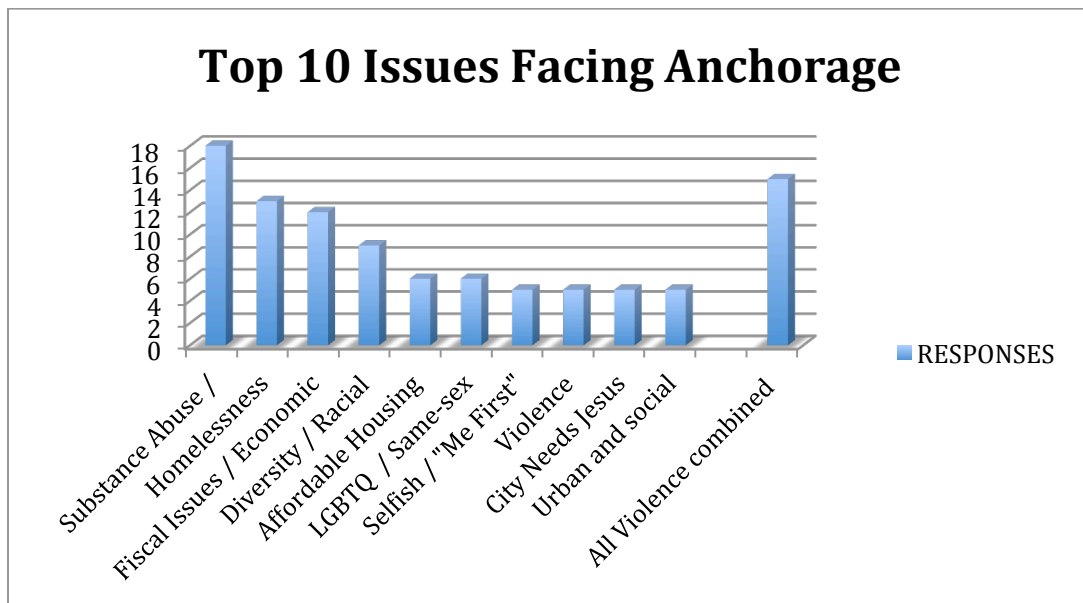


Figure 15.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Issues Facing Anchorage

In light of the issues facing the city of Anchorage, I asked interviewees to describe how prepared they felt for ministry in the city of Anchorage as it relates to issues. The overwhelming sentiment was summarized by one participant when she said, “In the natural, NO, I’m not prepared, in the spiritual, YES!” Those that specifically felt prepared for the issues in Anchorage expressed being trained by those serving people closest to the issue(s).

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lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, pansexual, asexual, cisgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender queer, gender fluid, gender-neutral, and intersex communities.

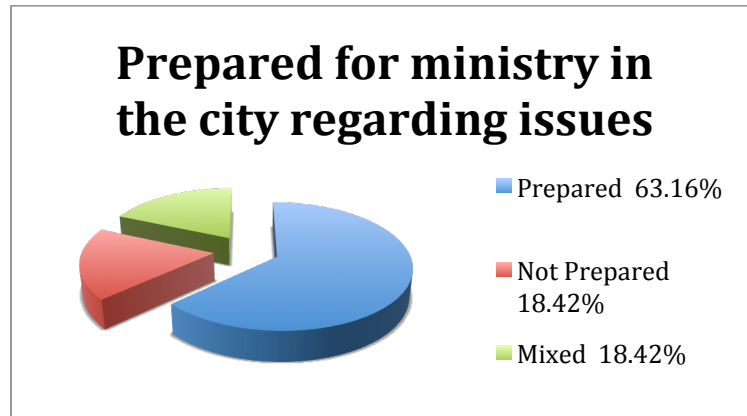


Figure 16.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Preparedness for Issues Facing the City

### *Ministry Climate*

Of those interviewed, 52.63% noted division in the ministry climate of Anchorage. It was expressed by some that there was improvement being made in this area and highlighted by many that there is a desire to be more connected. Words such as siloed, scattered, isolated, and clique were common descriptors. While interviewees gave examples of people and groups working together (AFACT, Evangelical Pastors Lunch, Interfaith Council, etc.) the compilation also revealed that a strong theme of separation between groups and people over theology, politics and issues was present.<sup>33</sup> Interviewees gave a variety of reasons for this theme of separation. Of those interviewed, 7.89% (three respondents) suggested busyness, a reason that is easily believable when looking at their answers to how they spent a typical week as a ministry leader. One respondent used the analogy of meerkats to explain the climate, noting that everyone is busy working away with their heads down but not looking up to see each other and build relationships. Another interview subject expressed that people are too caught up in their own calendars. Another explanation offered was competition, which was expressed by seven interviewees (18.42%).

<sup>33</sup> Two interview subjects commented strongly that Anchorage had a better, more cooperative ministry climate than previous cities they had lived/ministered in.

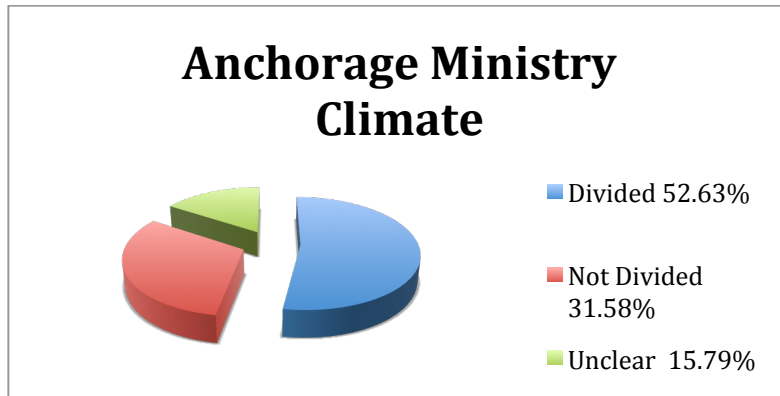


Figure 17.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects Observations of Ministry Climate

It is interesting to note that in this section of the interviews some specific examples of attempts at unity were offered by those interviewed. One of these examples was the Luis Palau Love Alaska Festival that took place in June 2014. This event was a large weekend-long concert and evangelistic event that was sponsored by a reported 175 congregations and 40 organizations in Anchorage and had a budget of \$750,000 (Herz 2014). The event was preceded by a six-month long season of service where local churches and individual believers were involved in service throughout the city. It was noted that this event was a good example of what might be possible to do together, but others expressed concerns over the event’s long-term effect. Interviewees also made comments about the disappointing effect of the event in fostering long-term unity and cooperation. The prevailing feeling was that this was a nice attempt at unity, but in the long run produced little or no fruit in terms of unity.

The area of ministry climate generated feedback and discussion from the focus group as well. After revealing to the group that more than half of those interviewed noted that the church in Anchorage is divided in some way as it relates to interacting and ministering together, one respondent observed that across the city Christians come together to serve the people of the city together at events like the Thanksgiving Blessing. She expressed that, in her experience, people will get together to serve but it is often rather difficult to get organizations or churches to join together.

The Church of Anchorage, a group of mostly evangelical churches that was active in the city in a number of ways since the late-1990s but in recent years has undergone some transformation<sup>34</sup> was also a theme in the interviews. Focus group participants centered their comments on the potential of this movement as well as uncertainty about its current direction. One comment linked the dissolution of this group to a loss of unity.

On the subject of ministry climate in Anchorage, two participants commented hopefully. One shared, “Most people are eager for faith community engagement in making it (the city) better...the city is eager for the faith community to act like Jesus would, Christ-like activists.” Another expressed, “The Church is becoming more the church than it’s ever been in Anchorage.” Others noted a divide between the unity of Christians in general and organizations when they stated, “People will cooperate, but not churches.” Finally it was noted that ‘in order to work together you need to make it happen’ and that “a visionary could get them (ministries, churches, and their leaders) together” when discussing what might change the climate in Anchorage.

Other possible explanations for the division in the ministry climate, in addition to busyness and division over issues and theology, were competition and the independent nature of Alaska. It was noted by one interviewee that ministers in Anchorage are mostly men and that the competitiveness may come in part from that. Others thought the independent nature of Alaskans, indicative of a frontier environment, is a/the source of the division.

### *Understanding of Anchorage as Urban*

The final question of each interview with Anchorage ministry leaders and pastors was “Can you share with me the ways you do, or do not, view your ministry as ‘urban’?” Answers to this query were varied and exposed the unsettled perception Anchorage residents

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<sup>34</sup> The name was changed to Christian Leadership Network, but that too is now defunct.

have of the city. Only 14 respondents (36.84%) said that their ministry was urban, with the majority (50%) expressing an answer that was a mix of urban and other. Two of those asked replied that their ministry was not urban (5.26%) in any way and another three (7.89%) gave an answer that was unclear. Most answers focused on the respondents' experience of ministry as urban or non-urban, but when answering in physical terms the older and poorer neighbourhoods in the northern third of the city were seen as the urban parts of Anchorage. It was also the issues stereotypically associated with those areas such as poverty, substance abuse, density, and diversity that were seen as urban. Overall a reluctance to view Anchorage in its entirety as urban was clear in the majority of the responses.

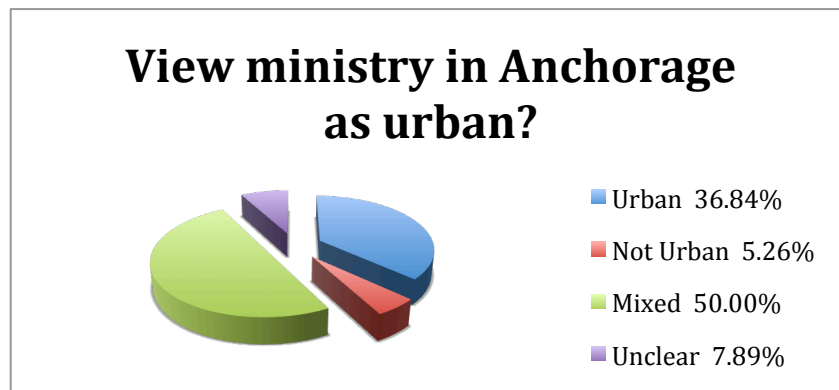


Figure 18.  
Anchorage Interview Subjects View of Their Ministry as Urban

Once again, the individual responses to this question offer the best insight into the data. Noting the urbanized nature of the world, one interview subject answered, “Everyone’s ministry is urban in a sense...the world is so much smaller now.” However, this comment was in contrast to those that stated things such as “there are a lot of rural people in this city”. Others offered thoughts on how much the city had changed, one saying, “When I moved here in 1990, Lake Otis Parkway (the major street the church is on, now a four-lane road) was a dirt road.” Another said, “The Alaska I arrived in was much more self-reliant...there was an “in this together” attitude that has broken down.” Some interviewees specifically talked

about the contested nature of the city of Anchorage. One observed in a way reflective of many others' thoughts, "I think Anchorage is the worst kind of city because it has all the urban problems, and all the sub-urban problems, and half of the rural problems." Not focusing on problems but instead on the larger nature of the city, one leader expressed:

I think Anchorage is trying to decide if we want to be a small town and stay a small city or if we want to become a major metropolis. That issue undermines what we do about homelessness, what we do with job security, what we do with revenues, and all that stuff. What I am seeing is that Anchorage still wants to be considered a small city that is family friendly, that is neighbourhood friendly, when it is really growing to be a major metropolis and with a major metropolis comes homelessness, comes addictions, comes poverty. I think we got spoiled for the last twenty years, since the '80s, in Anchorage of having money flowing and not having to deal with the struggles of lower class. And I think what we are facing now in the non-profit sector is a fleeting upper class that funds all these projects and a growing lower class. We are seeing a growing need and less funding, and that is going to be a problem for non-profits and faith communities in the future...As a city that is making this decision, "Are we going to be a small city or are we going to allow ourselves to grow?", we have got to start thinking about what are other jobs we can bring to Anchorage? What are other ways we can expand our businesses in Alaska and in Anchorage? [...] Our city has to decide where we go because obviously oil is not going to sustain Anchorage, let alone Alaska, for a long time.

In these quotes, one can see that the contested nature of the city of Anchorage was a strong theme in this section of the interviews.

The focus group added more insight into understandings of Anchorage as urban. After noting that 50% of those interviewed saw their ministry as a mix of urban and non-urban, with another 5.26% saying it was not urban at all, the focus group participants contributed to a clearer understanding of this phenomenon. It was observed that Anchorage has a broad cultural experience and this does not lead to a uniform understanding or experience of the city.

The focus group also noted that in many places urban is defined by a core with rings of suburbs that extend out from it like a bulls eye. Anchorage lacks this type of configuration and it was suggested that this might contribute to the mixed understanding of the city as an urban location.

It was expressed by the focus group that the city functions as the hub of the state and this is a contributing factor to the mixed understanding of Anchorage as urban. One participant painted the picture of how Anchorage is a place you can't avoid in the state when traveling or in need of many services (particularly medical).<sup>35</sup> Offering a slightly different take, one participant noted that the city itself is not urban, but that his congregation lives a very urban lifestyle. He summarized by saying, "The city is not urban, but my congregation is."

Reflecting on quotes from participants that observed that Anchorage has changed a great deal in the past 30 years, one participant expressed that "it's only going to get worse". He supported this statement by noting the very progressive attitude of the people in the city as well as the reluctance (or inability) of state legislature to address the issue of falling state revenue tied to the decline in oil production. He continued, "It is like a wave is coming at us and we don't even see it."

Following these thoughts on the nature of the city, I shared that I have begun to think of Anchorage as a "suburb of the wilderness". I explained this term, highlighting the city's close proximity to the wilderness. I quipped that my understanding is in part because you never hear anyone talk about moving to Alaska because they want to live in the city and further explained that Anchorage often functions as place where people live, work, and sleep until they can get back to the "real Alaska" for recreation, adventure, or to live. I was corrected quickly by two long-time residents of the city. One shared that when the city was flush with money during the mid-1970s and early 1980s during the – "pipeline era" – the vision of a "suburb of the wilderness" I was explaining was exactly what those moving to the state from other areas of the United States were looking to build. They wanted the wilderness with "a little bit of the city", she explained. She noted such projects as the Performing Arts

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<sup>35</sup> The participant used a local musician's adaptation of the song made famous by Hank Snow, "I've Been Everywhere," (Mack 1959) in which the list of cities the singer has been to includes a string of Alaskan locales and "Anchorage, Anchorage, Anchorage, Anchorage, Anchorage".

Centre, which brings Broadway shows and national entertainment to Anchorage, but concluded that this is not the experience of everyone in the city. Following on that insight, another participant continued to redirect me. She shared that my “suburb of the wilderness” idea was true in the ways the previous person had stated – that for outsiders coming to the state from other places in the USA they wanted that – but for rural, predominately Alaska Native people, coming to Anchorage to live was most definitely “moving to the city”. These were helpful corrections to my understanding about how different groups are thinking about the city. I recalled a conversation with a Samoan pastor the week before in which I asked him why Pacific Islanders are leaving the tropics for Anchorage’s sub-arctic climate. His answer was, “Money.” As he shared, it became clear that these newcomers to the city were seeing Anchorage as a land of opportunity. In both this exchange and the focus group, the picture of “suburb of the wilderness” was recalibrated as not *the* vision residents have of Anchorage, but *a* vision residents have of the city.

#### IV. Practitioner Interviews

In order to better understand the best practices of contextualized urban ministry education, I interviewed ten leaders engaged in urban ministry education from across the United States and outside of the country. These leaders represented five countries (South Africa, Guatemala, Kenya, The Dominican Republic and India) as well as four states inside the United States (Michigan, Washington, California, and Colorado). Nine of the interview subjects were male, with only one female respondent. I did not ask for full demographic information from these interviewees, as it was not the purpose of this part of the project to study the practitioners themselves, but rather to gain an understanding of the training taking place in multiple and diverse locations. The interviews of global ministry training practitioners took place between 24 August 2016 and 5 January 2017.



These interviews informed my answering of the questions of what ought to be going on and how might we respond. In a few cases, these interviews aided me in the “the development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community” (Müller 2004:300).



Figure 19.  
Practitioner Interview Subject Locations

In these interviews, I inquired about the models and methods the practitioners are using in their contexts, as well as how those trainings were created or developed in their city. I inquired about the effectiveness of the training and how they see it transforming their city.

Following these interviews I used my interview notes and recordings to review the material, looking for trends in their responses to the questions and seeking to see themes that may emerge. I did not seek to re-story these interviews in the same way as I did with the primary interviews of ministry leaders in Anchorage.

Of the ten practitioner respondents, eight expressed that training offered in their context was developed in response to a community need or as the result of a conversation over time in their community. One respondent didn't address this issue and another noted that any type of training offered in a more formal way has been met with a lack of interest. Seven out of the ten (70%) of practitioners interviewed expressed in some way that their work was to connect people, network or build bridges.

Interestingly, a few of individual responses also echoed the Anchorage interview data. One respondent, when speaking of his own ministry training and the mentorship he received remarked, “Always take someone with you.” Another practitioner noted that a challenge to training is that pastors are very busy. It was also noted in one interview, when asked about his vision for the city, that all of what he hoped for his city needed to take place in the context of relationships.

### V. Pilot Project

After analysing the stories of ministry leaders in Anchorage as well as considering the training in the practitioners’ cities around the world, I created a pilot project. This pilot was an experiment with what contextual/urban ministry education may look like in Anchorage.

On 12 and 13 May 2017, eleven people participated in a Friday evening and Saturday seminar event. The pilot was called *City of Joy* and focused on helping participants see the city of Anchorage through different lenses. I invited all 38 interview participants as well as others in the city via direct invitation, social media, email, and other advertising to this learning opportunity. Three of the Anchorage interview participants choose to participate in this pilot learning opportunity. The rest of the participants comprised five interested lay leaders and three other ministry leaders in the city. The group included five females and six males. Ten of the participants were of European descent and one was of Asian descent. I knew all of the participants and had a previous relationship with them. The majority also knew each other and had pre-existing relationships.

The pilot was called *City of Joy* and took the form of a one and a half day intensive. Friday evening took place in a classroom setting and introduced the idea of how one sees the city. This discussion covered how people see Anchorage and why it is hard to see Anchorage as a city. The session included seeing the city through a number of lenses: anthropologically;

in light of the resurrection; from below; using the metaphors of playground, classroom and parish; as a mirror; as a collection of relationships; and as contested space. Participants were also introduced to the practice of mapping the hurt, heart and hope of the city.

Day two of *City of Joy* was a walking fieldtrip of downtown Anchorage. It was a hands-on opportunity to view the city using some of the lenses discussed on Friday night as well as an exercise in mapping the hurt, heart and hope of the city. The tour began by acknowledging the grave of the first police chief in the city of Anchorage whose story was discussed later in the tour. We walked by the gravesite on our way to the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Cordova Street. At that intersection a serial killer, James Dale Richie, was apprehended in November 2015 by Anchorage Police Officers Arn Salao and Marc Patzke in a violent confrontation that left Richie dead. At this location we discussed the hurt of the city around violence and, in light of the fact that Richie and Officer Salao had attended the same high school during the same years, we noted the relationality of the city as well. One of Richie's victims was a member of the church I pastor and was a client of a couple of the ministries present. We also held a moment of blessing in this space, remembering the victim and praying for the peace of the city.

The second stop was the Downtown Soup Kitchen/Hope Center where the group was able to map a place of hope in the city as well as explore a couple of the lenses of the city like city as mirror and the city as parish.

The third stop was the Statehood monument overlooking Ship Creek. This location gave us the opportunity to consider the city's history and origin, as well as the role of the federal government and the military, all of which you can view from this overlook. Here we asked how the history of the city affects how we see it.

The fourth stop on the walking tour was the alley near 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and E Street, the location where the first police chief of Anchorage was murdered just a month and a half into

the job. Here we once again considered the hurt of the city and also asked if violence is embedded in the heart of Anchorage.

The next stop was the Captain Cook monument. This statue, commemorating the “discovery” of Anchorage by this British Explorer gave us a perfect setting to consider the hurt of colonization and racism in Anchorage. In light of the make-up of the group, we used this location to use the mirror lens to ask how this statute reflected our privilege in the city. We also considered the diversity of the city using the lens of the city as classroom, asking what we can learn, and from whom.

For the sixth location on the tour, we stopped at Holy Family Cathedral (5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and H Street), the site of the oldest church building in Anchorage. We took this opportunity to talk about how the church is, or is not, functioning as the hope of the city and once again talked about the city as parish.

Due to time running out, we made brief stops at Town Square and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, both of which offer more ways to explore the city. In particular 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue gives one the chance to discuss the contributions of Alaska Native and female members of the community. One can see the history of the indigenous people of Anchorage in the basket weaving pattern in the brick of the street and the name of the Convention Centre, Dena’Ina. The parking complex across the street from the Convention Centre is named for Carolyne “Linny” Pacillo who’s family owned one of the last independent gas stations in Anchorage. She became a folk-hero in the city (along with her sister) for acting as “parking fairies” plugging peoples expired parking meters. The parking garage on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue is adorned with famous Statehood founders Bob Atwood, Bob Bartlett, Ernest Gruening, and Bill Egan. They were part of the 55-member (49 male delegates and six women) Statehood convention in 1955 that drafted Alaska’s constitution and set up its adoption as a state in the United States. While the mural utilizes over 500 smaller images (including all to the statehood convention delegates) to make

up the pictures of the four men listed above, none of the female delegates are featured in such a way. This block provides a great opportunity to consider whose voices are present in the classroom of the city and the relational nature of sharing the city with a diverse population.

I conducted a survey after the pilot training in order to assess the participants' experience in the pilot, the appropriateness and applicability of the information and their desire for future training similar to the pilot. Participants were extremely positive about *City of Joy*. Nine of the ten participants that completed the survey rated their experience as very positive with one stating it was somewhat positive. All of survey respondents said they would recommend the class to a friend. All reported that the experience helped them see the city better and that it provided them tools they can use while ministering in Anchorage. Half reported yes when asked if they'd be interested in future learning experiences like *City of Joy* and the other half responded maybe.

The responses of these surveys gave an indication of the effectiveness of the training in preparing leaders for ministry in a more urban-informed way. In keeping with the *practice – theory – practice* cycle the survey offered insight into the acceptability of the proposed training program. A report on the pilot appears in Appendix II.

## VI. Summary of Themes from the Data Generated

The data generated by the Anchorage interviews was apocalyptic in that it revealed a picture of the city as viewed by mostly church-based ministry leaders from around the city. The themes that emerged give shape to the present reality of Anchorage, a reality that interview participants described as divided and broken. In short, it was confirmed that the city of Anchorage is not the city of God from the Book of Revelation.

The co-researchers gave insight into the issues facing the city. There was general agreement about issues facing the city such as substance abuse, homelessness, violence

(when all types are combined), and affordable housing. These issues hint at the breakdown in humanity and the dominance of an economy that is not fostering either protection or provision for all of its citizens. This is in contrast to the great city of Revelation where all are cared for and safe.

The co-researchers also expressed division. The divided ministry climate in the city was expressed in differences in opinion over issues, including “hot button” issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and, to a lesser degree, busyness and competition. The interview respondents were also divided in how they understand the city, holding a wide range of understandings of Anchorage as urban, not urban, or a mix, with no real consensus. These divisions, among those called to reflect and work toward the city of God that is coming, underscore how broken Anchorage is. The lack of wholeness even in the Christian community serves to exemplify the need for the healing of all the nations that St. John saw in the final city.

There is hope that a new vision for the city can be formed. In their interviews, the co-researchers reported a nearly unanimous belief that there is a need for more educational opportunities in Anchorage. A strong preference for mentorship and other forms of on-the-job training (highly relational methods) was clear in the responses, as was the fact that very few had accessed the local faith-based colleges as part of their education. The pilot project confirmed that there is an appetite among lay leaders and some professional leaders for education. It is suggested from the pilot that education opportunities focused on how to understand Anchorage and minister in her context is desired. Furthermore, the pilot underscored the key role relationships play in the development of learning opportunities. These twin desires mixed together offer hope that a new vision of the city can be formed. If Anchorage ministry leaders can relationally learn together, overcoming division, then the possibility of a new vision for the city exists.

The practitioner interviews revealed that most often local urban ministry education is rooted in a need that has surfaced in the community. This fits with the need for more training opportunities in Anchorage that the Anchorage interview subjects and pilot participants expressed. As 70% of the practitioners stated, networking or connecting people reinforces the relational nature of this type of training. Here again it can be seen that relationships are key in the education of leaders, and in responding to the needs of the city.

The city of Anchorage is not the coming city of God, but there is hope here. If those ministering in the city, who are currently divided, can be brought together to learn and envision a new future for the city, transformation could take place.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

### I. Personal Reflection on the Anchorage Interviews

During the course of the interview process, I began to reflect on a couple of things I had noticed in myself as the process developed. First, was my gratitude for the pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage. Second, was a two-pronged conviction about my interactions in the city as it relates to racial diversity and religious diversity.

I walked away from each of the interviews being truly grateful for the time spent together. Anchorage is being served by gifted, passionate, and compassionate ministry leaders and pastors who love Jesus. Of the interviews I conducted, 20 were with people I had never met before and another six were with people with whom I was only minimally acquainted. Many of these interviews were secured by e-mailing the subjects out of the blue. This cold-call approach was well received and an overwhelming number of the persons contacted agreed to be interviewed. I am personally blessed and enriched by the willingness of each of these leaders to speak with me.

Lining up interviews with pastors and ministry leaders outside of my racial and ethnic heritage proved the most challenging. In particular, Hispanic and Native Alaskan pastors proved difficult. I remember thinking at one point that I could have *easily* interviewed 38 white male pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage. That thought hit me like a ton of bricks. The pondering was equal parts embarrassment and analysis. The embarrassment stemmed from my lack of relationships with pastors who are not from the same ethnic and racial heritage that I am from. Here I am in one of the most diverse cities in the country and I have largely only cultivated relationships with pastors who are like me. My reflection was particularly embarrassing when I considered that for the past 15 years I'd been serving a high percentage of Alaska Native at Parachutes and had not made a single friendship or



acquaintance with an Alaska Native pastor in that entire time. The analysis part of my reflection was to consider the issues of power in the city. In a city as diverse as Anchorage, we have a city leadership that is not reflective of the city. The Anchorage Assembly (city council) is not reflective of the population. Currently, the Assembly is made up of 11 members. During the time I was compiling the research for this thesis nine members were men of European decent, one was a woman of European decent, the remaining member was an African American woman. This situation reflects my experience with pastoral leadership in the city.

The most visible and controversial Christian pastor in leadership role in the city of Anchorage over the past forty years has been Dr. Jerry Prevo of the Anchorage Baptist Temple, one of the largest Protestant churches in the city. That church has been politically active and vocal in city issues for decades yet has a pastoral staff with a similar diversity to the city council. However, it is not just the leadership of individual congregations that are active in the city that lack diversity, it is also the groups of pastors seeking to work together across the city. It has been my experience in the 24 years I have been living and ministering in Anchorage that the majority of the pastors at any meeting I attend are white and male. I believe a factor in this reality is that white pastors are often from congregations that are wealthy enough to have a full-time pastor while other groups cannot afford to pay a full-time pastor and are in a situation where their pastor is bi-vocational. This actuality would make attending mid-day meetings or being involved in citywide projects difficult. I also think this situation is aggravated by a few non-white congregations being pastored by white ministers. Furthermore, one Alaska Native ministry leader shared with me that when someone asked him years ago if he had ever considered being a pastor he said no because that was “a white thing”. My embarrassment over the lack of my own personal connections with pastors and

leaders racially and ethnically different than myself as well as the power dynamics of pastoring in the city have given me a lot to think about moving forward.

I was similarly challenged by my own inability to break out of the Evangelical community. While both of the churches I have attended and served in the city of Anchorage would be viewed as Evangelical, in recent years my personal theology and understanding of Christian practice in the world has left me uncomfortable, not with the idea of Christian witness in the world, but with the label of “Evangelical”. The recent presidential election and the constant news coverage of how “Evangelical” voters were voting left a particularly bad taste in my mouth. That being said, it was clear to me during the interview process that, like racial and ethnic associations, I was not very well connected outside of the evangelical world. While I found it relatively easy to line up interviews inside the evangelical tradition and to a lesser degree Protestantism in general (I lack relationships in the mainline Protestant tradition), connecting outside of the evangelical world was more difficult. It became clear to me in this process that while I feel informed and enriched by teachings from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, I have not moved from that knowledge in my head into practical relationships in the real world.

The process of interviewing the pastors and ministry leaders of Anchorage has pushed me to a greater appreciation for the broad expression of faith in the city. I am deeply blessed by all the ways Christ and the church are at work in the city. This process has also challenged me to consider my own way of acting in the city. If I am going to be able to lead and facilitate in the city, it is imperative that I be able to foster relationships beyond the Evangelical and Protestant enclave and my own racial and ethnic group.

## II. Division and Hope Over Issues

In his book *The End of White Christian America*, Jones (2016) notes three issues that point to a changing landscape in the United States, devoting a chapter to each: politics, family (defined by the debate over gay marriage), and race. In the top ten responses to the question asking what are the major issues facing the city, Anchorage ministry leaders and pastors responses were concerned with two out of three of the issues identified by Jones - race and LGBTQ+ rights/same-sex marriage. Partisan politics<sup>36</sup> per se did not appear in the ten most commonly addressed issues, but was present in responses to other questions – in particular, the ministry climate of the city as a factor in the division of the city. It is interesting that Anchorage is experiencing some issues of national concern and reflects the change happening in the nation. However, as affirming as it is that the city participates in this national trend – especially in a state where we pride ourselves in not caring how it’s done in the Lower 48 States – it is the two issues that the Anchorage interview data shares with Jones’ book that I find interesting. In the case of issues of race and diversity, the interest comes by examining who discussed the issue in the interviews. In terms of the LGBTQ+ issue, it was the diversity of perspectives expressed and the divisive nature of the issue that has bearing on this project.

Issues of diversity were raised by a total nine of the pastors and ministry leaders interviewed (23.68%). Of the responses addressing diversity, 55.5% came from persons that are part of historically marginalized groups. Comments on diversity in Anchorage ranged from noting it as a matter of pride and blessing to concerns about continued racism and personal stories of discrimination. One interview participant noted that the increasing diversity in the city will become an issue and pondered out loud if the church was ready for it. It was noted by respondents that, as one interviewee said, “so much ministry in Alaska is

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<sup>36</sup> Issues such as LGBTQ+ rights are clearly partisan political issues, but they were not expressed specifically as such in the interviews. Also, politics was not given as a specific issue, but a number of the issues are clearly political.

cross cultural or could be” and, as another said, “in Anchorage we have distinct ethnic groups, but not neighbourhood ghettos”.

The fact that nearly 24% of all respondents noted race and diversity as an issue facing the city would be enough to foster further exploration. That importance is reinforced by the fact that more than half of those who mentioned race were from groups commonly referred to as “minority” while representing 35.14% of the total interview subjects. By contrast, only 16.66% of white respondents mentioned race and diversity as an issue facing the city, while representing nearly 65% of interview participants. This highlights how one’s personal experience of race and diversity in the city is largely influenced by one’s own racial identity. Furthermore, it appears that the city may be experiencing a situation where that difference in experience makes it hard for us to see each other and the issues of race that need to be addressed in the city. Put simply, those in the majority in a very diverse city are far less likely to be talking about race and issues of diversity than others in the city.

In an effort to understand the conversation on race in the city of Anchorage I attended the “Second Moral Clarity Forum: Race and the American Church – Can We Talk?” on 24 February 2017. The event was held at Anchorage City Church and sponsored by Connections Alaska, a local non-profit organization working in the area of prisoner re-entry. The evening featured discussions of systemic racism, white privilege, mass incarceration, excessive police force, and religious segregation. While the panel discussion and presentations were well prepared and presented by a diverse panel of local residents and ministry leaders who are well informed on the subject, the meeting was lightly attended with only a couple dozen people present when the meeting began and swelling to just over 30 participants. While this was only one event, the lack of attendance at this opportunity for discussion does offer more evidence that a conversation around race is needed in Anchorage.

LGBTQ+ issues, particularly same sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, appeared as an issue in 15.78% of the interviews. This issue was reflected in answers in the ministry climate question as an issue that keeps the ministry climate divided. Interviewees' positions on LGBTQ+ issues and same-sex marriage varied dramatically. One participant noted the growing tension around LGBTQ+ issues and how the division on this issue in the Christian community makes the church look bad.

Division over the matter of LGBTQ+ rights and same-sex marriage was also documented in the Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study (Pew Research Center, 2015). Poll results on both same-sex marriage and homosexuality show Christians in Alaska evenly split on those issues. With Christians across the state divided on this issue, the climate for discussion once again becomes a pressing question.

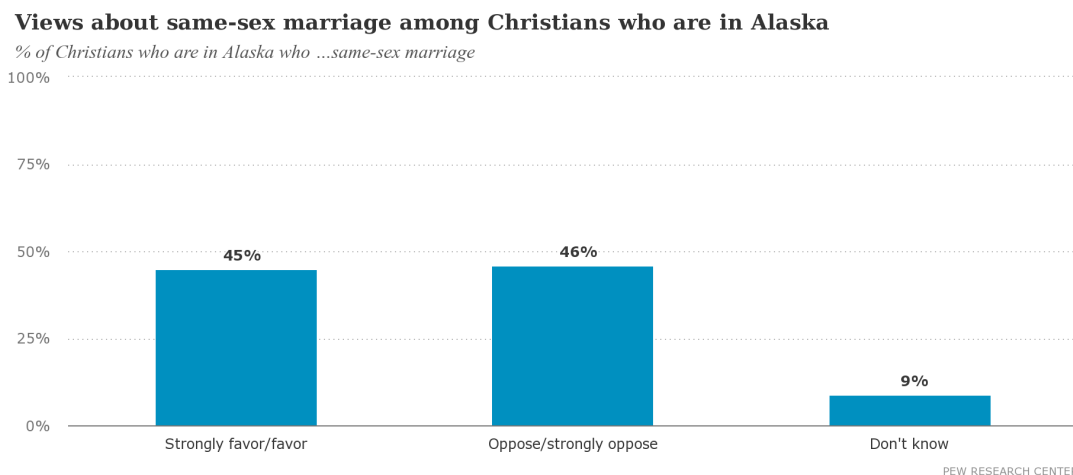


Figure 20.  
Views of Same-Sex Marriage Among Alaskan Christians  
(Pew Research Center 2015)

As noted previously, the issue of LGBTQ+ rights was brought up in 15.78% of the interviews. Those mentioning LGBTQ+ issues in the interviews represent leaders on both sides of the issue and who might be sympathetic with either Christians for Equality or the Alaska Family Council, two organizations that represent opposing views on the issue. It was also previously noted that this issue strongly divides Christians in Alaska. One interviewed

ministry leader shared that the divide over this issue has hurt the ability of the church to minister in the city.

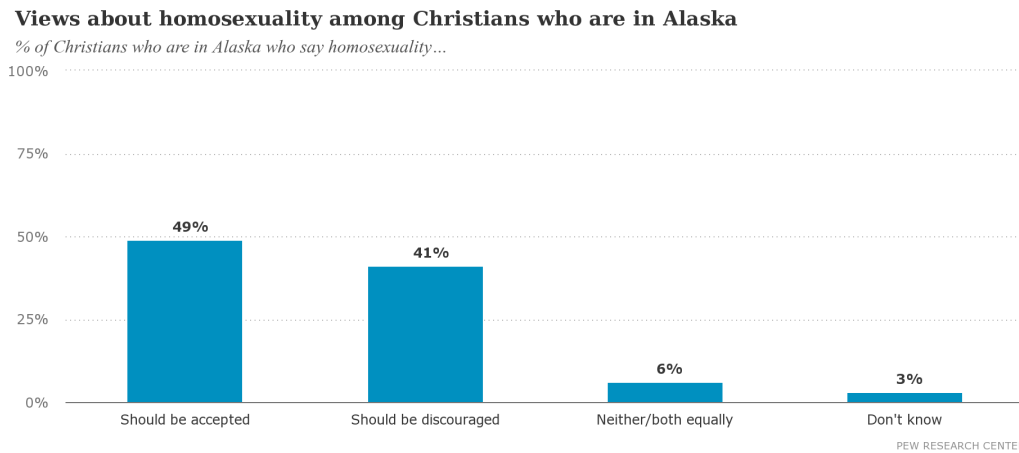


Figure 21.  
Views of Homosexuality Among Alaskan Christians  
(Pew Research Center 2015)

There are reasons for this division over issues. One focus group participant lamented the influence of Outside (a slang term meaning the rest of the United States) politics in the conversation in Alaska. Another leader shared that it seems that we get stuck on the orthodoxy of our beliefs and have a hard time moving to the orthopraxy of living out our faith. A third leader simply questioned (in reference to the LGBTQ+ issue) how politically correct the church needs to be.

One can further understand the engagement with these two issues in Anchorage by examining two meetings that were both marketed to local Evangelicals. In the fall of 2010 Parachutes Teen Club and Resource Center, and two local churches (Crosspoint Community Church, and Grace and Truth Community Church) invited ministry leaders, pastors and other interested members of the community to hear the Director of the John Perkins Center for Reconciliation, Leadership Training, and Community Development at Seattle Pacific University Tali Hairston speak. The topic of Hairston’s talk was “Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Love: An Open Discussion of the Role of the Church in Reconciliation”.

The intention of the meeting was to begin a dialogue in Anchorage about race and reconciliation. Just the organizers and a handful of people attended the meeting.

In the spring of 2012, *Alaska Family Council*, a conservative public policy advocacy group, booked a 250-seat theatre for a meeting to organize a response to efforts from a group calling itself *Christians for Equality*. *Christians for Equality* was supporting a change in Anchorage's discrimination law to include language making it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on their sexual preference. This meeting was very well attended with the theatre full to capacity. Interesting to me was the fact that a dialogue between Christians from both sides of the issue was not opened up.<sup>37</sup>

The better-attended meeting was about a controversial issue with Christians on both sides opposing each other. The poorly attended meeting was about an issue that should be on the forefront of the minds of Christians who have been given the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:11-21) and live in a very diverse place. Each of these issues provided the opportunity for Christians, in particular ministry leaders and pastors, to discuss together how best to minister in the city. However, the politicized nature of both issues makes it difficult to initiate and sustain a conversation. This reality, which the interviews highlight, underscores that there is a need in Anchorage to begin to see and hear each other.

Another area where there may need to be some work in seeing and hearing each other over differences is in the area of gender. While this issue did not come up in the responses of the interview subjects (other than one respondent noting that the competition in Anchorage may be attributed to men especially), it is notable that finding female pastors and ministry leaders to interview in Anchorage proved to be somewhat difficult. Part of this, again, may be due to my limited personal contacts outside the evangelical church circle, which is rather conservative in Anchorage with a good number of churches not allowing women to serve in

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<sup>37</sup> I have previously used the contrast between these two meetings as an illustration (Kiekintveld 2012 & 2015).

pastor or elder roles due to strong beliefs around male headship or complementarian views. Anecdotally, over the years female leaders have expressed to me that it is difficult for females to lead in the Christian world in Anchorage because they are a minority and marginalized in some circles.

In contrast to the division present in the ministry climate around the issues of race and LGBTQ+ rights (reflecting national trends) there is some hope arising from different issues. Ministry leaders did seem to agree in their responses about what issues Anchorage faces. The issues of substance abuse, homelessness, violence (when all types are combined), and affordable housing topped the list of issues facing the city. In at least a couple of cases, churches are starting to come together to address these things. One respondent commented that churches provide amazing support in terms of volunteers (160-180 per week) for a ministry that serves low income and homeless residents of the city but that churches fail to give much financially. They shared that their desire is for the ministry to be a “place where the body of Christ can be the body of Christ”, but that they would like to see more churches involved. This is consistent with what respondents shared: that Christians will work together on a common theme, but that churches as organizations will not cooperate at the same level. It appears that there is a disconnect between churches desiring for their individual members to do charity<sup>38</sup> and not for the institutions to engage at that level or in the deeper work of justice.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of this apparent reality, there is a strong agreement among churches that homelessness is an issue facing the city and one that people of faith must be engaged in.

In another sign of hope, church members are coming together to work together about solving the issue of violence in Anchorage. During the fall of 2018 three groups, *The*

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<sup>38</sup> Charity, Wolterstorff notes, is a choice and delivered not to the poor that are seen as lazy, but to those viewed as unfortunate. The giver of the charity chooses to do so as something extra, out of the goodness of their heart so to speak, and it is morally optional to offer it. Furthermore, when one does charity they expect to be thanked and the giver can place on the gift any conditions they see fit (Wolterstorff 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Justice, Wolterstorff exerts, is done with or on the behalf of those seen as downtrodden and includes elevating the condition of those that suffer, as well as working to change the laws and conditions that have caused those affected to be downtrodden and in poverty in the first place (Wolterstorff 2012).



*Anchorage Urban Peacemaker Fellowship, Activate* and a ministry called the *Worship + Justice Movement*, called the city to a worship and prayer gathering and a concentrated time of prayer for the city. The event drew 200 members of local churches to pray for the city and a dozen churches engaged in prayer during their services for a month for the city to see an end to violence. In both of these examples, it can be seen how church might be able to come together around some things on which they can agree. In this way, the division in the city's ministry climate cannot be viewed in any way as insurmountable

In the focus group I shared what I just discussed here: Jones' three issues at play in the U.S. currently that is bringing about the end of white Christian America (Jones 2016), the Pew Research Center findings that Alaska are divided over homosexuality, and the fact that two of Jones' issues – race and LGBTQ+ rights – were some of the most common answers to what issues face Anchorage. I also reviewed the fact that the Anchorage ministry climate was described as divided by 52.63% of respondents and that words like siloed, scattered, isolated, and clique were common descriptors. I further shared that the most cited reasons for the fragmentation seemed to be: busyness and the separation along theological and political lines. I added that in the area of race, issues of diversity were raised by nine of the pastors and ministry leaders interviewed (23.68%). Respondents of non-European heritage offered 55% of the responses addressing diversity. I shared that to me this signals a disconnect around who is addressing issues of diversity in the city or even seeing it as a topic worthy of discussion.

After introducing these findings from the research, the participants began to chime in. While the busyness factor was not discussed much, there was some agreement that Anchorage is affected by politics from outside the state. This was echoed by another participant on a larger scale when they commented, "With globalization, we are fed so much garbage." Outside influence was not the only discussion on this point. A discussion of the

idea of the melting pot in America was discussed. It was noted that the 11 Alaskan Native cultures in Alaska have largely been melded into one thing: “Alaska Native”. This has been both good, such as in the case of the establishing the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and increased political power for Alaska Natives, but it has also diminished the value of each of the individual cultures. It was the assertion of one participant that we need to not lose the diversity we have while seeking to be much more inclusive.

One participant offered a final thought as to why the separation exists and that was that the leaders in the city “get stuck in Orthodoxy and can’t get to orthopraxy” or, in other words, our desire for right thinking is keeping us from right acting. This perspective was backed by another participant when he noted that in a boat harbour you have lots of different colours and sizes and shape of boats but when the water rises or falls they all go with it. It was noted that the climate of the city and the issues facing it affect everyone. The same participant offered another picture. He suggested we strive to be more like the blood bank, which takes in blood from all types of Alaskans to save lives regardless of who they are.

The responses of the focus group participants confirmed that my conclusion was correct: issues in Anchorage are dividing us and making it hard to see each other, but there is hope and that there are opportunities in these issues to unite us as well.

In addition to the issues that could unite or divide Anchorage, I want to note a couple of other things. First, there was speculation that someone or something may be able to unify Christians, but little offered in the way of who or how this might be achieved. Also, two other explanations for division presented themselves in the interviews: busyness, as well as the competition. While busyness was expressed as a factor for not meeting more regularly with other pastors and leaders in the interviews, it was clear through the responses to the question about the typical workweek that the vast majority of those queried have a very full schedule. Competition remained a bit more elusive for which to get an explanation.

### III. An Urbanised Anchorage

In the interviewees' responses to the question about seeing their ministry as urban or not, there was no real consensus, other than about 50% reported their ministry as a mix of urban and something else. Some of this might be caused by personal bias on behalf of the respondents, with the term "urban" connoting "minority" people groups, poverty, and the inner city; a bias which is based on antiquated or stereotypical thinking. This is a somewhat speculative comment, but a common understanding one finds about how people think about the urban world. What is definite is that everyone sees the city, or the urban, from a slightly different viewpoint.

It is notoriously difficult to define exactly what constitutes a city and the matter is passionately debated among scholars. The lack of consensus about the nature of Anchorage is a product of the ambiguity and complexity of all cities. J. John Palen (1997:7) notes in *The Urban World*, "About thirty definitions of 'urban population' are currently in use, none of them totally satisfactory." It is likely that the difficulty in seeing Anchorage as a city, in addition to its setting adjacent to the wilderness, is the existence of a number of stereotypes or preconceived ideas. One preconception is that "urban" connotes impoverished, inner city neighbourhoods. This stereotype also is often racialized to mean neighbourhoods (or more specifically, ghettos) that are home to African American, Hispanic, or immigrant populations.

Added to the above stereotype is a North American context in which exists the lingering residue of debates from 40 years ago over how one views the city. Seeing and understanding the city often gets bogged down in a debate about the city being either good or bad. This stems from a frontier mentality where the "good life" is defined in strongly rural and agrarian terms (Ahlstrom 1972:1089). Lastly, the struggle to see Anchorage as a city might be a matter of the type of anti-urban resistance, similar to what is taking place in the U.K., as noted by Andrew Davey (2002:14-42).

Noting the historical struggle to define “city”, I propose that Anchorage is a city/urban environment when viewed through geographical, sociological (Wirth 1938), and relational (Chatterton 2010; Massey 2000) lenses. In light of the notable diversity present in Anchorage, the high population concentration (particularly in contrast with the rest of the state), and the city’s 100-year history, one can use the sociological definition of a city made famous by the Chicago School: “a city is a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of heterogeneous individuals” (Wirth 1938:8) to determine that Anchorage is, in fact, a city. However, cities are no longer defined just by their size, density, and diversity but are also viewed relationally, organically, and as a state of mind. Cities are more than simply a place or the connections and interactions of the individuals who populate that place.

Anchorage is a city when viewed in a relational sense. Ray Bakke offers a view of cities that moves the discussion beyond density, diversity and size. Bakke (1997:12) writes:

By urbanization we mean the development of cities as places where size, density, and heterogeneity are measured. We might call this the magnet function of cities, drawing humanity into huge metroplexes. By urbanism we mean the development of the city as process – that is, the magnifier function of cities, spinning out urban values, products and lifestyles into a world linked by media, even in rural and small-town places.

While defining urbanization and urbanism, Bakke offers a view of how cities interact with the world outside of their geographical limits. This relationship, as a magnet and magnifier,<sup>40</sup> is clearly apparent in Anchorage and its effect on Alaska.

The magnet effect of Alaska’s largest city is seen in the migration from rural parts of the state into urban areas. The rural areas of the state are largely populated by Alaska Natives. A study commissioned by the Alaska Federation of Natives, *Status of Alaska Natives 2004*, noted that 42% of Alaska Natives currently live in urban areas, a percentage that could reach more than 50% by 2020 (Institute of Social and Economic Research 2004:1). The report also noted that “the fastest Native population growth since 1970 has been in urban

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<sup>40</sup> Jim Perkinson explains this magnet and mirror effect as consumption and enculturation. The city voraciously consumes resources of every kind drawn from far beyond its borders and exports a self-important culture (Perkinson 2001).

areas, boosted by thousands of Natives moving from rural places” (Institute of Social and Economic Research 2004:1). Interestingly, 18,805 Native Alaskans moved to urban areas from remote rural areas between 1970 and 2000, with 8,607 moving from other less remote rural areas for a total of 27,412 to urban areas (Institute of Social and Economic Research 2004:3 & 2-40). The migration also accelerated over the 30 years of the study with 7,292 leaving remote areas between 1970 and 1980, 9,109 in the middle decade, and 11,011 from 1990 to 2000 (Institute of Social and Economic Research 2004:3 & 2-40). Anchorage’s population grew during the same period (1970-2000) from 126,385 to 260,283 (CensusScope, n.d). With the influx of people moving from rural Alaska, other places in the U.S., and Anchorage’s immigrant population increasing, a metroplex has been developing since 1970.

The magnifier effect of Anchorage is also visible. With access to the Internet, rural communities are able to experience urban culture in a way like no other time in their history. Furthermore, television channels available in the rural parts of the state are provided by urban media companies based in Anchorage or Fairbanks. For example, the Alaska Rural Communications Service (ARCS) is a network of low-power television transmitters, owned and funded by the State of Alaska, which provides free broadcast service to communities across Alaska. The “local” programming, such as news programming, is broadcast originating in Anchorage. In a very real way, Anchorage is broadcasting its culture into the remote parts of Alaska.

Anchorage is relational as a city inside of its boundaries as well.

Paul Chatterton (2010) writes:

Cities are unfinished stories, and anyone who claims a right to the city has to move with this dynamic. If we inject a sense of movement and possibility into our analyses we begin to explore what ideas, social forces, class alliances and interventions actively make and remake the city. When we do this we begin to see the city not just as a static noun, but as an active verb. Cities are places; we arrive in a city centre, or at its metropolitan limits. But we cannot understand how cities are created if we see them simply as bounded entities with defined limits. Doreen Massey has made us alive to the relational construction of place, where cities

are made and remade through relations and circuits of power that stretch within, but also beyond, its boundaries. Cities, then, are living organic, conflictual entities that are constantly remade and recast in thousands of ways through everyday encounters, many of which are local, and many of which are extra-local. In different moments, new possibilities for radically different cities open up. The city, then, is an unfinished, expansive and unbounded story. (p. 235-236)

Chatterton's insight highlights that a city is not just a geographic location that is large, dense, permanent, and diverse or even defined by its relationship to the world outside its borders, but a living organism of interactions. Chatterton's thoughts are inspired, in part, by Doreen Massey (2000):

I have argued very often, in the kinds of things I've written, about places being open, and as being constellations of relations from connections from all over the world. So, if that is all true, what are cities? Well, we've decided to imagine cities as certainly open, but as what we've called 'open intensities'. They're places of particularly intense networks of social relations, if you like. Not walled, not bounded. They are constructed precisely out of the interconnections they have with other cities, and non-cities. They're swirls of particularly intense social relations, differentiated within by times and spaces. (p. 140)

In a recent debate over LGBTQ+ rights, Anchorage clearly displayed itself as a living organic entity with intense networks of social relations. Both times an LGBTQ+ rights law recently came before the city assembly, a cross section of the city of Anchorage participated in the debates (Holland 2009 & Kelly 2015a). Transgendered citizens who had experienced discrimination were testifying next to fundamental Evangelical Christians, fearful of moral decline and the loss of religious freedom, next to citizens from every perspective in between. It was a colourful and conflictual display of Anchorage as a living organism of interactions.

Whichever way one defines a city, a consensus on Anchorage's urban reality is not achievable. Rather than defining the city and agreeing on a definition, the question should be "How does one envision the city?". In asking this question one can allow for a multiplicity of perspectives, which opens up space for a process to reimagine the city together. Some urban ministry thinkers, such as Rocke and Van Dyke (2012:56-68), Ruthruff (2015:15-30),

Hillis (2007 & 2014), Bakke (1997), and Stahl-Wert (2000),<sup>41</sup> have offered their ways of envisioning the city, using lenses to view the city as playground, parish, and classroom. Often in the North American context how one views the city gets bogged down in a debate about the city being either good or bad. Another common approach to the city in the North American context are theologies that are “bent on taking the short cut from one specific urban situation to the Bible, without the benefit of the more overarching issues” (Maluleke 1995:183). Understanding that cities are “unfinished stories” (Chatterton 2010:236) and “open intensities” (Massey 2000:140) exposes the limited usefulness of lenses and overly simplistic conclusions on the nature of the city. That approach must give way to a conversation that better reflects the complexity of the city and nurtures the process of becoming “urban imaginers” (Chatterton 2010) who can offer a fresh vision (Sheldrake 2006) of Anchorage and ministry, one that brings the city closer to the vision of the city of God in the final pages of the New Testament.

This is where Chatterton and Massey prove helpful. In seeing cities as “unfinished stories” that are verbs rather than nouns, as Chatterton asserts (2010:235-236), or as “open intensities” that are not walled or bounded as Massey (2000:140) understands them, then this matter of seeing Anchorage in many different ways is reflective of the reality of the urban world today. The respondents reflect the fact that “[t]he city, then, is an unfinished, expansive and unbounded story” (Chatterton 2010:235-236). It had been my belief when I began this project that those ministering in Anchorage would need to agree that Anchorage is a city in order to be able to then properly minister in the city, but this relational understanding given by Massey and Chatterton provides a better understanding and a more realistic approach to navigating the plurality of understandings.

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<sup>41</sup> Each of these authors, with the possible exceptions of Ruthruff and Bakke, are informed or influenced by the Leadership Foundations and write from inside this movement. Also see Hillis (2014).

The responses to this question are also interesting in light of planetary urbanization. Brenner and Schmid ([2011] 2018) observe that because urbanization is happening on a new, larger scale that blurs and rearticulates urban areas and disintegrates the hinterlands. Urbanization also puts an end to wildernesses “the urban can no longer be understood as with reference to a particular ‘type’ of settlement space” ([2011] 2018:450). They explain (Brenner and Schmid [2011] 2018):

This situation of *planetary urbanization* means paradoxically, that even spaces that lie well beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries – from territories of agro-industrial production, zones of industrialized resource extraction and energy generation, “drossscapes” and waste dumps, transoceanic shipping lanes, transcontinental highway and railway networks, and worldwide communication infrastructures to alpine and coastal tourist enclaves, “nature” parks and erstwhile “wilderness” spaces such as the world’s oceans, deserts, jungles, mountain ranges, tundra and atmosphere – have become integral parts of a worldwide urban fabric. (p. 451)

In a city such as Anchorage, a city that can be seen as a wilderness city, this insight is jarring. Anchorage rests on the edge of the wilderness, but even the wilderness is now urban in some way in light of the reality of planetary urbanization. Thus, this question of Anchorage being urban or not is rendered moot because everywhere is now urban. The respondent who stated, “everyone’s ministry is urban in a sense...the world is so much smaller now” ends up being exactly right.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV. Relational Learning

It was clear in the data that there is a desire and need for more learning opportunities in Anchorage. Another strong theme in the data is the preference for training that is mentorship or apprenticeship based or has a component of practical on-the-job training. This suggests to me that pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage value learning that is relational

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<sup>42</sup> Recently, Stephan de Beer (2018:10) remarked on the difficulty that people of faith are facing in addressing urbanization: “The complexity of a whole planet being urbanised, and urban forms perpetually changing and refiguring themselves, obviously holds great challenges for the faith practices of local – and glocal – faith communities and faith movements. The slowness with which faith communities generally respond to change, and the vastness of rapid and ongoing urban change, creates an existential crisis. Theologically, we are so far removed from most of the critical urban discourses, generally speaking, that we do not even acknowledge the existential crisis we are in.”



in its orientation and would be likely to engage in education that is applicable to their day-to-day ministry. I arrived at this conclusion by considering the nature of mentorship/apprenticeship, which takes place in a person-to-person relationship and is based in day-to-day ministry realities and practice.

It is also interesting that when one examines the experience level of those ministering in Anchorage, many have a wealth of experience but much of that experience has happened outside of Anchorage. The relationship between these two phenomenon (years in ministry compared with years in ministry in Anchorage) exposes a number of realities about Anchorage. Most clearly it shows the transient nature of the city. The high level of overall experience and the lower level of experience in the city of Anchorage highlights that many residents in the city have migrated to Anchorage. These two questions also reveal that the faith leaders of the city are very unlikely to be life-long residents of the city.

Further examination of the data brings more clarity to the phenomenon of moving to Alaska from other places. Only seven of those interviewed were born and raised in Anchorage and another three were born and raised in Alaska, but outside of Anchorage. The remaining 75% of participants were born outside of Anchorage and Alaska with 24 participants born inside the United States (60%) and six (15%) born outside the United States. It is also interesting to note how the interview subjects came into their current ministry positions. Nineteen (50%) respondents worked into, or evolved into, their current positions from other work or another ministry in Anchorage. One can infer from this that something other than their current ministry service drew them to Anchorage. Half of the ministry leaders and pastors were appointed to or called (by God or man) into their ministry positions from outside Alaska.

These data lead me to believe that learning opportunities specific to Anchorage and its context could be highly valuable for those serving in the city. The pastors and ministry

leaders interviewed clearly have a strong commitment to Anchorage and passion for her residents. It was also clear that the city's pastors and ministry leaders reflect the transient nature of the city. In light of the transplanted and transient nature of those interviewed, there is a need for opportunities to interact with the history of Anchorage, the current context and the specific issues present in the city. While I believe that those ministering in Anchorage are very capable in learning the city and its history, there is an opportunity for a more concerted and organized effort in educating ministry leaders and pastors in these areas, in particular those new to the city moving here from outside of Alaska. This was echoed by one respondent who shared that a group of ministry leaders, of which they are a part, has expressed the need for an orientation for pastors arriving in Alaska to help alleviate the culture shock many experience when moving into the state.

#### V. Pilot: Relationships and Curriculum Clues

The pilot learning opportunity *City of Joy* gave a look into two important things for the project moving forward. First, it confirmed that there is a desire for learning opportunities in Anchorage that better help leaders understand the context in which they are working and how they might better serve in that context. This clarification gives direction for what a curriculum for future learning opportunities might look like.

Second, the pilot learning experience also served to underscore to me the importance of relationships. The participants in *City of Joy* were all people I was in relationship with before the pilot program and many of them knew each other prior to the experience as well. This familiarity made building a group experience rather easy where it might have proved more difficult if the participants did not know me or each other before the learning experience. Furthermore, this underscored to me that relationships are key in gathering participants into this type of education as well. My sense is that people largely choose to

participate based on the relationship(s) and the trust those relationships have built. So, in light of the *City of Joy* experience future learning opportunities will need to take into account the relational aspects of gathering and learning, as well as provide education that helps leaders better minister in Anchorage.

## VI. Practitioner Interviews: The Rhythm of the City and Training

In his book *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement*, Michael Frost (2014) encourages those seeking to “[m]ission-in-place” (2014:168) to “[E]nter into the social rhythms of your community” (2014:172). Frost’s advice to those seeking to live incarnationally in their cities is to get to know the specific rhythm of the city in which they live.<sup>43</sup> In examining the data from interviewing the ten urban ministry training practitioners, it was clear that they had all spent time listening to and understanding the beat on the street in their locations. The types of education and the form they take were rooted in the specific nature of their cities. Many of those interviewed were engaged in education that had some type of connection to the academy, but not all of the education being done was connected to an educational institution. One respondent noted that in his context, accreditation (which they do not have) would be welcome because it lends creditability and accountability to what they are doing as well as the fact that leaders in that context are specifically looking for a credential. However, another respondent stated that people in his context tend to seek out informal training and might later move to more formal instruction. These differences, as well as the fact that there was little uniformity in what was being offered in any of the locations, seeks to underscore the important work of understanding the context, the rhythm of the city, and crafting learning opportunities that best suit the context.

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Wiseman has clocked how long it takes walkers in different cities to cover 60 feet as a way to assess the pace of life, and its increase, in different cities (Wiseman 2007:268-272). In some way, this speaks to the fact that each city has a different physical rhythm at which it runs.

What was uniform in the practitioner interviews was that the educational program in each location was tailored to the place it was being offered. This fits with both Müller (2004:296) and Woodley (2012:104), who both see practical theology as intensely local. This suggests that Anchorage must then craft its own way forward in urban ministry education that is rooted in its particular rhythm.

These interviews also served to underscore that no training can happen without relationship. The strong theme throughout these interviews that networking, building bridges, and bringing people together is really about relationships at its core. This fits well with the relational type of education that the Anchorage interviewees expressed as the preferred method of learning.

## VII. Conclusion from Research Findings

In chapter three, I concluded that Anchorage is far from being the city of God shown in Revelation 21 and 22 based on the data gathered by interviewing pastors and ministry leaders in the city. I also concluded that, despite division (over race, issues, business and competition), there is a desire for education that is done in a relational setting. I suggested that if Anchorage ministry leaders could learn together that perhaps the division could be bridged and new ways of envisioning the city could be made possible.

In this chapter, in order to get a more complete understanding of “What is going on?”, I analysed the data from the Anchorage pastor and ministry leader interviews, the urban ministry practitioner interviews and the pilot learning opportunity. From this analysis, a picture of the type of learning opportunities that could develop in Anchorage became clear. Any education moving forward should be built on the rhythms of the city of Anchorage and be relational in nature. This can be seen in the strong preference for mentoring as well as the

key role that relationships played in the *City of Joy* pilot. This was confirmed by the experience of those doing similar training around the country and the world.

It is also clear from the analysis that there is a need for education in Anchorage for three reasons. First, and most importantly, it was expressed as a need by those interviewed. Second, the fact that the majority of those serving in Anchorage as pastors and ministry leaders have come to the city from somewhere else and that the vast majority did not train with Anchorage as their focus, highlights the need for opportunities to learn about and from the context. Thirdly, it was also clear that the training needs to be tied to the daily practice of ministry.

While the final city in Revelation is the most complete example of a perfected universal globalization, in our world today and in Anchorage, globalization is a much less healed and whole reality. The reality of urbanization renders the debate on the nature of Anchorage moot. However, the variety of understandings of the city underscore the indefinable nature of cities today and offers a rich opportunity to see the city in new ways.

The final City of God is one where there are healed relationships between all the peoples of the world in contrast to our current world situation. The divided nature of relationships in Anchorage reflects this. For relationships across the divides to be healed in an attempt to move toward the vision of St. John in Revelation and so that learning can take place in relationship, work will need to be done in bringing people together. Not all of the news is bad. There are opportunities to come together around other issues where some common interest exists or has been expressed. Also, there is opportunity to come together in light of the shared love for the city of Anchorage and her people. These issues may prove to be the common ground needed to come together.

According to the data, answering the primary research question in this thesis must be done with consideration to the factors of busyness and competition, while taking into account

where some agreement already exists. If that can be done, a new vision, one in keeping with the Godly vision of a city in Revelation, can be imagined together.

All of this leads me back to where this chapter started. To adapt the words of famous song: “Let there be [change in the world], and let it begin with me” (Jackson-Miller & Miller 1955).<sup>44</sup> I opened this chapter reflecting on my own shortcomings in bridging the divisions of race in the city. I noted that to facilitate and lead I will need to move beyond the familiar ground of the white Evangelical Protestant experience. Regardless of the view I or anyone holds of cities, they are made up of people. In order to transform a city, it is at the level of people that one must start. Even more it is at the level of one’s own heart. So if I assert that the faith community of Anchorage is in need of education that will transform participants and the city, then I must be ready for and seeking the same transformation in me. The key is in relationships, both for me and the city. If we are to begin to imagine a new Anchorage, one seeking to reflect the heavenly city that is coming, then I – we – must develop a new way of relating.

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<sup>44</sup>The song starts with the line: “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

## Part II: “Why is it going on?”

## Chapter 5: Gazing Historically and Culturally

## I. Seeing Historically and Culturally

Catholic theologian Robert Barron (1998:1) opens his book *And Now I See* by proclaiming, “Christianity is, above all, a way of seeing. Everything else in Christian life flows from and circles around the transformation of vision.” Ola Sigurdson (2016:151) observes of seeing that, “Sight, which we may think is a self-evident biological fact, is in fact historically and culturally conditioned.” Sigurdson draws his understanding of sight from the work of John Berger. Berger’s (1972:8) states as the opening line in his exploration of *Ways of Seeing* that “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe”. One way to think about the divisions present in Anchorage is to consider them as ways in which we are seeing or not seeing each other. In light of the fact that seeing is affected by the history and culture in which we are seeing, it is important to consider the history and culture in which we are trying to see to gain a more complete understanding.

Before that examination, I would like to first consider the matter of seeing. As noted by Sigurdson, it is easy for those with healthy eyes to take vision for granted as a simple fact of physical existence (2016:151). However, it is not the biological fact that is at play here. Instead, the consideration is what it means to see. Sigurdson notes that there is a difference between seeing and gazing. Sigurdson (2016:151) writes, “In order to separate the biological conditions for sight from the historical and cultural conditions, we can speak of the latter as the person’s ‘gaze’”. He notes that “gaze” has different meanings in different disciplines, but does not define which definition he is using in an effort to “not confine himself” (Sigurdson

2016:151) to any of them.<sup>45</sup> Sigurdson (2016:151) then states, “How we see things we turn our gaze towards is dependent on our experience and our understandings.”

Each person’s gaze is culturally and historically conditioned, this reality has affected the issues discussed in the following pages – namely race, theology and sexuality. The colonial legacy of Alaska, explored in the following pages, places one face to face with the Eurocentric colonial gaze. That Eurocentric gaze affects everything it gazes upon, including theology. In addition to the Eurocentric gaze, there is also a heteronormative gaze<sup>46</sup> that comes into play when considering the issue of LGBTQ+ rights. While the purpose of this paper is not to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, that issue is an example of the division in Anchorage and studied as such.

The colonial gaze normalized the European and North American (United States and Canada) perspective creating a “monopoly on dictating subject-object positions” (Massad 2004:10).<sup>47</sup> Famously Edward Said stood this norm on its head in *Orientalism* (1978). Massad observes, “engaging a partial reversal of European ontological authority, wherein Said, the Oriental, could act as a subject studying Europe” (Massad 2004:10). In doing that, Said upset those who are accustomed to a Eurocentric worldview:

Their discomfort is animated by Said’s imputed arrogance in occupying the ontological position of a subject with a piercing, albeit nonobjectifying, gaze focused on Europeans and their systems of thought—a gaze to which Europe and its American manifestation remain highly resistant and with which they are uncomfortable. (Massad 2004:10)

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<sup>45</sup> Sigurdson passes along to the reader the summary of gaze offered in Sturken and Cartwright (2001:355-56 and 72-108, which I pass along here as well because of its usefulness.

<sup>46</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper but there is also the male gaze to consider as well.

<sup>47</sup> In addition to the objectification and othering of the colonial gaze, it also served to feminize, or make effeminate, those being gazed upon. Fraiman (1995:818) observes, “As many have observed, the tropes Said mapped so unforgettably in *Orientalism* veil the East in a cluster of ‘feminine’ attributes. It is mysterious, sensual, beckoning, undisciplined, and naturally subordinate to a West imagined in correspondingly ‘male’ term.” She adds that Said in his later work observed this was true also in Africa, Australia, and other colonized places. Fraiman further points out in the work of Suleri (1992:16): “[T]his gendering of the colonial encounter persists in counter narratives protesting the ‘rape’ of colonial peoples and places. She argues further that the ‘colonial gaze’ may actually regard the colonized less as female than effeminate, and the result may therefore be feelings of sexual panic in the male colonizer. From the perspective of the Third World male, however, to the extent that his resistance is mediated by imperialist frameworks, it hardly matters whether he is constructed as ‘woman’ or ‘effeminate’ man, for in either case his normative masculinity is called into question” (Fraiman 1995:818).



This becomes even more insidious when one considers how Michael Foucault theorized the gaze using the “[p]anopticon, the perfect prison, where the controlling gaze is used at all times as surveillance. This model posits a relationship between power and knowledge” (Evans & Gamman [1995] 2005:15). This understanding of the gaze being in relationship to power and the knowledge comes a bit more into focus when understood that Foucault’s panopticon creates a situation where “prisoners learn to internalize their supervisors’ inspecting gaze” (Evans & Gamman [1995] 2005:20). This creates space for a discussion of power dynamics, and how values are transferred from those gazing to the object of the gaze (Evans & Gamman [1995] 2005:20). Thus, when speaking of the gaze in the context of colonization, one must be careful with its use. The legacy of colonialism, where normative view was (and continues to be) established through the inspecting gaze of Eurocentric superiority that transfers the colonizers views onto the object of the gaze, has created a complex situation.

One such complexity is the long-lasting effect the colonial gaze has had on theology. Speaking on the *Homebrewed Christianity Podcast*, Randy Woodley (Sanders 2012) sheds light on the Eurocentric gaze in theology and how “the West comes with its own sense of white superiority in everything it does”. Woodley (Sanders 2012) states:

Let’s just look at theology as a good example [...] compartmentalization really comes out of the enlightenment and the scientific approach - separating categories into theoretical and philosophical. So now we have practical theology and philosophical theology. See, there is an example of living out of reality – not living into the whole [...] So European theology is all these categories [...]

European theology is just that. It is a contextual theology for Europe. But, we have basically said, “No, that is theology.” And then everything else – Liberation, Black liberation, Latino, Native, Womanist, Feminist – those are all sub-theologies that are exotic data. [They are] nice to think about, but the real stuff is up here and we’ve got it in all the right categories [...] Most western folks don’t mind dabbling in these things, but when you talk about changing the whole structure then their ire gets up. They really get upset, because the structure is universalized, and if there are going to be categories they are going to be their categories. So we’re not just talking about adding Native theology, or Indigenous theologies, we’re talking about disrupting the whole structure – re-scrambling the whole thing – and saying European theology, Western theologies, those are one theology of many.

George Tinker (2011:193) agrees with Woodley when he states in the abstract of an article calling for the decolonization of Lutheran theology: “Christianity as we know it in the United States is essentially a European ethnic religious movement, one that has necessitated decolonizing processes as it has spread into the formerly Euro-colonized global world.” One can see here the reach of colonization into theology. Here too there is a need for caution, as this is a part of the totalizing effect of colonization.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, in light of the division present in Anchorage LGBTQ+ rights (used as an example of the division over issues) one must consider the heteronormative gaze.

Hubbard (2008:645-646) notes:

Heteronormativity is a term that captures the imposition of certain beliefs about sexuality through social institutions and social policies. These ideas concern a ‘normative heterosexuality’ in which it is assumed individuals’ sexual identities conform to a social norm of heterosexual love, sex and reproduction. Far from being one sexual choice among many, this stresses that heterosexuality is culturally hegemonic, with the reproduction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary an important structuring device subordinating the homosexual at the same time that it institutionalizes the heteronormal.

Academic articles are now using the term heteronormative gaze (cf. Wieringa 2012:516, Gouws 2011, Sasala 2018) to describe the heteronormativity of a culture impressed on those who do not fit the norms of heterosexuality, similar to the colonial gaze. The reality of this emerging understanding of the gaze is part of the LGBTQ+ rights debate.

The use of gaze, while flawed in a number of ways, is used in the following pages as a term that means to look past the surface to what lies beneath. In an effort to understand the ways we are seeing each other in Anchorage I will turn a gaze toward what might be causing divisions around race and ethnicity, issues, business and competition in Anchorage. I will turn that gaze toward the history and culture of these areas so that we might be better able to decipher what experiences and understandings may be behind these divisions.

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<sup>48</sup> Graham Ward (2017) has offered three steps to decolonizing theology: 1) Provincializing Western Theology in order to practice theology in the global south. 2) Translating theology into different contexts as an act of contestation. 3) Affirming by “positively acknowledging culture as being reflective of the diversity of people groups” (2017:561)

## II. Gazing on Diversity

Jeff Chang begins his book *Who We Be* (2014) not with seeing or gazing but with invisibility. In the introduction, titled “Seeing America” he states:

We can all agree that race is not a question of biology. Instead it is a question of culture and it begins as a visual problem, one of vision and visibility. Race happens in the gap between appearance and the perception of difference. It is about what we see and what we think we see and what we think about when we see [...] In 1952, Ralph Ellison encapsulated the central problem of race and American visibility. ‘I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me,’ his protagonist remarked in the famous prologue to *Invisible Man*. ‘When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or fragments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.’ (Chang 2014:2-3)

Chang (2014:4) notes that the invisibility noted by Ellison only began to change when “[p]eople of color would no longer remain invisible”. Chang (2014) observes that seeing each other is aided by the work of artists:

Here is where artists and those who work and play in the culture enter. They help people to see what cannot yet be seen, hear the unheard, tell the untold. They make change feel not just possible, but inevitable. Every moment of major social change requires a collective leap of imagination. Change presents itself not only in spontaneous and organized expressions of unrest and risk, but in explosions of mass creativity. (p. 6)

While this project is not art in the sense most would think of it (visual, musical, theatrical, etc.) and I am not functioning as an artist in those senses, I hope to offer a type of apocalyptic literary art that will unveil the colonial history of race and diversity in Anchorage.

### *Alaska, the Doctrine of Discovery, and Manifest Destiny*

The year 2015 marked the centennial of Anchorage as a city. In 1915 the U.S. government built a port and tent city at the mouth of Ship Creek, establishing it as the port for supplies and main headquarters for the Alaska Railroad. Prior to that, the sole inhabitants of the Cook Inlet and Anchorage were the Dena’ina Athabascan people. The Dena’ina Athabascan, the only coastal dwelling Northern Athabascan group, arrived in south central Alaska around 1,000 and 1,500 years ago (Cook Inlet Historical Society, n.d.). Mormon church history notes that at the time of the government’s decision to build a port only a few

non-natives lived at the mouth of Ship Creek (Jasper & Blasongame 1983:31). Nearby, on the south shore of the Turnagain Arm, sat the mining district towns of Hope and Sunrise that had been established in 1895 (Tower 1999:15). Previous to that, beginning in 1844 during the Russian colonization of Alaska, Russian traders had a summer trading post at Niteh in the upper inlet between the Knik and Matanuska River (Tower 1999:15). Notably, it was not the Russians who are credited with being the first Europeans to make contact in the area that is now Anchorage. It was British explorer Captain James Cook, remembered with a statue in Resolution Park in downtown Anchorage, who entered Cook Inlet (named after him) in 1778 and explored the area. However, the first European arrival in Alaska pre-dates Cook by fifty years. Danish-born Russian explorer Vitus Jonassen Bering, along with the Russian Alexei Chrikov, arrived in Southeast Alaska in 1741 after having sighted Alaska on a previous voyage in 1728. It is worth noting here that in 1732, Ivan Fedorov was commissioned by Peter the Great to map the Aleutian Islands and collect tribute from the native tribes. This, along with Simeon Dezhnev's exploration of the Bering Strait in 1648 (along with other Russian claims) point to earlier Russian contact in Alaska, but it is Bering that gets the credit from most historians (Oleksa 1992:81).

Bering and Cook's arrivals in Alaska, as well as the colonization of Alaska by the Russians and later the Americans, was precipitated by some church history that took place nearly 300 years before and over 5,000 miles away. In a series of papal bulls first issued in 1452 (*Romanus Pontifex & Dum Diversas*) by Pope Nicholas V and concluded in 1493 (*Inter Cetera*) by Pope Alexander VI the Catholic church provided the rulings that established and justified what is now referred to as the "Doctrine of Discovery" (Newcomb 1992:18-20). Under the Doctrine of Discovery, European Christian nations were given the permission to "take possession" of any lands "discovered" that were "not under the dominion of any Christian rulers" (Newcomb 1992:18-20). Richard Twiss (2011) notes:

[I]t was assumed under European law, that the Church had the authority to grant Christian kings title and land ownership of the infidels. Violations by the Indians of natural-law principles of the Law of Nations (as determined by European Christian countries) justified a Christian nation's conquest and colonial empire in the New World. (p. 48)

Furthermore, in the *Dum Diversas*, Pope Nicholas V (cited in the Indigenous Values Initiative 2018), encouraged Christian nations to:

[I]nvade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery. (Indigenous Values Initiative 2018)

According to Twiss (2011), these rulings led to:

[A] policy of exploration and territorial expansion (that) was called the principle of *terra nullius* – lands that were not possessed by anyone, or which were occupied by non-Europeans but not used in a fashion the European legal systems approved, were considered to be waste of vacant. (p. 48)

Mark Charles (2016) summarizes the Doctrine of Discovery as the:

Church in Europe telling the nations of Europe that wherever they go, whatever lands they find that are not ruled by Christian rulers, those people are less than human and the land is theirs for the taking. It is this doctrine that allowed European nations to colonize the continent of Africa and enslave the African people. It is also this Doctrine of Discovery that allowed Christopher Columbus, who was lost at sea, to land in a “new world” already inhabited by millions and claim to have “discovered” it. Common sense tells us you cannot discover lands that are already inhabited. (p. 149)

The Doctrine of Discovery and the principle of *terra nullius* gave European rulers and those acting on their behalf the permission and justification to take non-European land as their own and do what they wanted with the people on that land.

The Europeans that first arrived on the shores of Alaska were operating with an understanding of the world informed and shaped by the Doctrine of Discovery, *terra nullius*, and the institutionalized racism at the foundations of these beliefs. When Alaska was purchased from the Russians in 1867 for \$7.2 million (about \$0.02 per acre) it was just over 40 years after the Doctrine of Discovery had become part of the law in the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court, ruling on the case of *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823), carried forward the understanding that dominion of North American lands had been

established by European nations based on the Doctrine of Discovery and that when the United States won its independence from England it had become the nation with dominion over those lands. In the ruling, the Supreme Court:

[A]ffirmed that United States law was based on a fundamental rule of the ‘Law of Nations’ – that it was permissible to virtually ignore the most basic rights of indigenous ‘heathens,’ and to claim that the ‘unoccupied lands’ of America rightfully belonged to discovering Christian European nations. (Newcomb 1992:18-20)

This case set the precedent that Native Americans were seen to have the right to occupancy of land – “like a fish occupies water or a bird occupies air” (Katt 2017a) – but not ownership of land. This ruling made the Doctrine of Discovery into U.S. law and it “also became the cornerstone of U.S. Indian policy over the next century” (Newcomb 1992:18-20).



Figure 22.  
 John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872

In the United States the Doctrine of Discovery informed another doctrine: Manifest Destiny.<sup>49</sup> While not named until 1845, the concept was present from the very beginning of European arrival in North America (Miller 2015:95). A decade after the first English colonizers arrived at Plymouth, John Winthrop preached a sermon titled “A Model of

<sup>49</sup> This doctrine was visualized in the John Gast painting *American Progress*, 1872 (Figure 22).



Christian Charity”<sup>50</sup> on board the ship *Arbella* to a group bound for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In this sermon, published 20 years later, Winthrop argues for American exceptionalism and calls for the listeners to live in Christian charity and love together and with their enemies. In ending the sermon Winthrop does a small bit of re-translation that recasts the pilgrims in the role of Israel in the Old Testament. Winthrop preaches to his companions from Moses’ farewell as the people prepare to enter the promised land ending by saying, “whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it” (Winthrop, n.d.). This line, from Deuteronomy 30:18 (KJV) changes the word “Jordan,” referring to the River, to “vast sea.” Charles offers this commentary on why Winthrop would make this change. “[T]he colonists are at the shore of their Promised Land ready to go and take possession of it. One does not need to read far into the book of Joshua to learn that claiming the Promised Land for one group of people is literally God-ordained genocide for another” (2016:153). Thus, the implication is that America is the new nation of Israel and North America as the promised land. Thus, Native American’s are the new Philistines who are to be destroyed in order to take possession of the land. This becomes the practice as Europeans move across the entire North American continent.

The Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny have had far reaching effects on the United States, Alaska, and beyond. In particular, they have had an effect in the area of how we see one another. In short, land was taken from the Native tribes because they were seen as less than human (the same justification for the enslavement of Africans in America), and case law precedents based on the Doctrine of Discovery now protect the continued right to those lands. One can see how these understandings, still operational in the culture, affect the way we see or don’t see each other. The history of some humans as being seen as less than

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<sup>50</sup> Also known by the title “City on a Hill”.

human for the purposes of economic gain and control<sup>51</sup> has been ingrained in the history of the United States and it is a legacy still at play today.

### *Spatial and Visual Identity*

Ownership of the land was not the only issue needing to be resolved as Europeans began sailing around the globe. The new relationship to land caused another issue – the relationship to the Other. The lands being taken by European powers were inhabited by other human beings, but in order for those lands to be free for the taking, the European explorers and settlers had to construct a rationale to deal with the inhabitants of those lands. While the papal declarations that the indigenous people were pagans and less than human went a long way toward creating a justification for “discovery”, more was at play than just the act of declaring indigenous people as subhuman or non-human.

In his book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Willie James Jennings (2010) explains that by “discovering” new lands, the Europeans caused a spatial and visible problem. Jennings notes four things taking place in the era when European powers were “discovering” new lands: 1) people were being seized (stolen); 2) land was being seized (stolen); 3) people were being stripped of their space and their place; and 4) Europeans were defining themselves and the Africans<sup>52</sup> at the same time (Jennings 2010:24). Jennings argues that prior to European global expansion a person was defined in relationship to one’s space and place. Personal identity was tied to the land on which one lived or originated from. This identity, tied to land, defined oneself in relationship to the Other. However, once one begins to move out of that space or place, defining oneself and others spatially becomes impossible. Thus, one must redefine one’s understanding of self, the

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<sup>51</sup> Randy Woodley speaking on the *Replacing Church Podcast* (Katt 2017b) notes that America’s original sin is not slavery or the genocide of Native Americas, as some have claimed, but that “[t]he original sin of America is theological control...A theology that said, not only are we in charge, but we need to control everything.”

<sup>52</sup> Jennings is specifically looking at an African situation but is clearly addressing the defining of race by color in a much broader way in the chapter.



Other, and the land, using a new formula.

At the core of the issue is how one views the land and how one views the Other.

Randy Woodley (Woodley 2012 & Sanders 2012) notes that for native people around the world land is alive like humans, the birds, the animals, plant, trees, etc. As something alive, one has a relationship with the land. (Sanders 2012) Woodley (2012) states:

North American indigenous views and ancient Semitic worldviews as represented in Scripture, find agreement in the understanding that creation is sacred. To the indigenous peoples of North America, our land and all it contains is *the Holy Land*. (p. 57 [*italics original*])

However, in the European understanding, crafted in this time period, land is something to be owned and used (buy, sell, occupy, mined, logged, farmed, polluted, etc.) and this is made possible because it is an inanimate object (Sanders 2012). Woodley (Sanders 2012) states that “land is not real” for Western thinkers. He explains that in the Western European view, land (and all of the created world) “has proven to be pitifully anthropocentric and utilitarian”. (Woodley 2012:53). He notes that this extended to people, “Ultimately, a utilitarian view of creation results in wanton destruction of the earth for the purposes of material gain. This attitude often crosses the realm of nature to people” (Woodley 2012:57) and “there are some parallels between how indigenous people are treated and how land is treated” (Sanders 2012).

Once one removes relationship as the lens one sees land through, one can possess it, causing the unravelling of any identity connected to the land. Jennings (2010) explains:

The age of discovery and conquest began a process of transformation of land and identity. And while worlds were being transformed, not every world was changed in the same way. Peoples different in geography, in life, in different worlds of European designation – Africa, the Americans, Europe – will lose the earth only to find it again in a strange new way. The deepest theological distortion taking place is that of the earth, the ground, the spaces and places are being removed as living organizers of identity and facilitators of identity. (p. 39)

The idea of the land being the basis of identity is one that Walter Brueggemann notes in his book *The Land*. Brueggemann (2002) states:

Land is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith. Biblical faith is a pursuit of historical belonging that includes a sense of destiny derived from such belonging... It is now clear that a *sense of place* is a human hunger that the urban promise has not met. And a fresh

look at the Bible suggests that a sense of place is a primary category of faith. (p. 3-4 [*italics original*])

While noting the importance of physical land, Brueggemann emphasizes the importance of that belonging – which I take to mean having a relationship with the land – is the basis of identity.<sup>53</sup> Brueggemann highlights how the Old Testament Biblical narrative shows the people of God deriving who they are from a relationship with the land. This is in stark contrast to Jennings’ assertion that, in the age of discovery, identity was being divorced from the land. Brueggemann is not alone in this understanding. J. Richard Middleton (2005) comments on the implications of the Israelites’ relational and locational senses of identity when exiled in Babylon when he writes:

A people’s sense of identity, which includes their sense of calling and purpose, is deeply implicated in their sense of the world – the place or context, in the broadest sense – to which they belong. Thus, a faith crisis generated by the loss of Israel’s symbolic world inevitably led to a crisis of Israelite identity. (p. 230)

Middleton, in exploring the loss of identity suffered by exiles, gives us insight into the importance of location in identity. Physical locality was important to Israel’s identity formation. So when the relationship to the land is removed, one is left rootless and looking for a new way to define one’s identity in relation to the Other.

If, in a post-European “discovery” world, identity can no longer be relied upon to determine the basis of physical location, what takes its place? The answer is based in a shift from a spatial perception of identity to a visual one. Jennings (2010) explains:

Slowly, out of these actions, whiteness emerges, not simply as a marker of the European but as the rarely spoken but always understood organizing conceptual frame. And blackness appears as the fundamental tool of the organizing conceptuality. Black bodies and the ever-visible counterweight of a usually *invisible* white identity. (p. 25 [*italics original*])

He also notes, in relation to Africans that were colonized, the effect of this new form of identity that is no longer connected to the land but now to the colour of skin:

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<sup>53</sup> Ray Bakke (2009:31) also notes this reality: “When you ask rural kids who they are, they tell you who they are by pointing to their family and geography. When you ask city people who they are, they respond differently [...] when urban adults lose their jobs, it is also an identity crisis.” It may well be, as Bakke and Brueggemann assert, that we have lost our identity tied to the land in an increasingly urban world. However, it seems to me this loss began occurring in the age of discovery as Jennings posits.

Gone was the earth, the ground, spaces, and places that facilitated his identity, and what remained, embodied in his master, was signified and signifying reality of whiteness, not simply as his master's speech but by the very location of the master's body operating in power next to his (Jennings 2010:39).

This new reality, based solely on the arbitrary decision that white skin was good and black skin was bad, set up a new reality in which superiority was deemed in a visual way. This new sense of identity and superiority was not confined only to black and white, but across the visual spectrum of human hues. The result is that white is set up as the dominant colour and the one that should be aspired to. On the other end of the spectrum is black, the colour to be dominated and avoided. All other colours line up in the spectrum as well, but all subjugated by whiteness (Jennings 2010:31). The loss of identity defined in spatial terms was replaced by an identity defined visually. This reality is the direct result of the Doctrine of Discovery.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Comity Plan*

There may be nowhere in Alaskan history that the concept of Manifest Destiny and the organizing principle of race is more on display than in the Comity Plan and its governmental policy toward Alaska Natives. After the purchase of the Alaska from the Russians in 1867, no governor was appointed until almost 20 years later in 1884. In those years the United States had limited activity in the territory and governed first through the Army, then the Treasury Department (through what is now the Coast Guard) and finally the Navy. During and following this period, sometimes referred to as “the period of neglect”, missionaries began arriving in Alaska. While Russian Orthodox missionaries had been in Alaska since the arrival of earliest Russian expeditions, it was in this period that Protestant

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<sup>54</sup> In *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, Michael Eric Dyson (2017:44-45) notes the ugly secret that “there is not such thing as white people [...] Whiteness is slapdash, pieced together from the European identities at hand. But there is no pattern to it at all. It helped the steady climb of European cultures to dominance over the long haul of history.” While his assessment of the manufactured nature of whiteness and blackness is in line with Jennings, it is his scope that is different. Dyson (2017:45) writes, “Whiteness forged togetherness among groups in reverse, breaking down or, at least to a degree, breaking up ethnicity, and then building up an identity that was cut off from the new land. So groups that were often at each other's throats learned to team up in the new world around whiteness. The battle to become American forced groups to cheat on their old selves and romance new selves. Old tribe for new tribe; old language for new language; old country for new one [...] all with the goal: to champion their arrival as Americans.” Dyson may be on to the right idea, but this phenomenon is not an American invention and happened everywhere Europeans arrived as a colonizing and imperialistic force.

missionaries arrived in the territory.

One notable missionary was Sheldon Jackson, who arrived in Alaska in 1877 to ‘establish the Protestant Church in Alaska’ (Dauenhauer 2004:9). Jackson had four goals for the mission in Alaska: 1) avoid the Indian wars and reservations of the contiguous U.S. and the poverty and corrupt civil-servants of that system; 2) educate and convert Alaska Natives; 3) protect school graduates from exploitation at the hands of merchants and others in white society; and 4) ban and/or control of the manufacture and sale of liquor (Dauenhauer 2004:10). By 1885, in a move that was a clear violation of the separation of church and state enshrined in the US Constitution, Jackson was appointed the first Superintendent of Public Instruction for Alaska and later the District General Agent of Education (Dauenhauer 2004:13, Williams 2009:153).

Around the same time, in the mid-1880s, Jackson called a meeting with the Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal leaders of the missionary efforts in Alaska (Williams 2009:153). During this meeting, a plan was drafted to divide up the territory of Alaska between the Protestant churches engaged in missionary efforts. The Comity Agreement fit well into Jackson’s vision for the state and set up Protestant missions across the territory. Those missions sought to evangelize the Alaska Natives to Christianity but also set up schools that worked well with federal government plans to see the Indigenous people under its rule be assimilated into Western culture.

The schools established by Jackson and others during this era were informed by an ideology common at the time that Native Americans were barbarians who needed to be converted to Christianity and to European culture and ways of thinking. Smith (1967:442) reports the text of a letter written by Education Commissioner William Torrey Harris in 1901 that reads, “We have no higher calling in the world [...] than to be missionaries of our ideas to those people that have not yet reached the Anglo-Saxon frame of mind.” Commissioner

Harris gave instructions to teachers who were teaching English to “take with them such books of literature as portray in the most powerful form the ideas and convictions of the people of England and the United States” in order to “arouse and kindle the sluggish minds of the natives of Alaska with sentiments and motives of action which lead our civilization” (Smith 1967:442 – 443). It is clear from these comments that Commissioner Harris had a low view of Alaska Natives and a high view of Western culture. This view led to his instructions that the Alaska Native students under his supervision be assimilated into the Western culture.



Figure 23.  
 Comity Plan Map (Polar News Flash 2010)

Commissioner Harris was not alone in this poor view of the Native people of Alaska. Missionary Livingston Jones was an active advocate for the extinction of the Alaska Native language Tlingit. Jones wrote in his 1914 book, *A Study of Tlingits in Alaska*, that “[t]he Tlingit language is doomed to speedy extinction, the sooner the better, for the Natives. There is little in their language to merit perpetuation” (Jones cited in Dauenhauer 2004:15). Dauenhauer also brings to light O.M. Salisbury, a teacher in south eastern Alaska in the

1920s whose memoir was published under two titles in the same year, *Quoth the raven: A little journey into the primitive* (1962a) and *The Customs and Legends of the Tlingit Indians of Alaska* (1962b). Salisbury (1962) records his racist view:

It is already very clear that their language is wholly inadequate to express much in the way of abstract thought, or to communicate the fine distinctions of shades of meaning; and probably it is both cause and effect that their very limited thought has made an elaborate language unnecessary. (p. 62)

One can see the rationale of teaching English in the schools and the inherent racism present in this line of thinking. Because of this, the most noticeable practice of assimilation in Alaska was the forced use of English in schools driven by an understanding that, as stated in a report of the Commissioner of Education for the year 1896-1897:

If Natives can be taught the English language, be brought under Christian influences by the missionaries and trained into forms of industry suitable for the territory, it seems to follow as a necessary result that the white population of Alaska, composed of immigrants from the States, would be able to employ them in their pursuits, using their labor to assist mining, transportation, and the producing of food... Then the Natives has thus become useful to the white man... he has become a permanent stay and prop to civilization, and his future is provided for. (Cited in Smith 1967:442).<sup>55</sup>

This understanding of how to relate to Natives, as well as a general disdain for their language, led to policies banning the use of Native language in instruction. Dauenhauer (2004:14) notes on the practice of English-only instruction that “[p]hilosophically, the critical feature was insistence on English only as a part of the connection between Christianity and American civilization”.<sup>56</sup> In a 1888 issue of *The North Star*, Jackson’s monthly newsletter related to mission and education, Jackson prohibits the use of any books in Native languages for instruction, any teaching done in a language other than English, and requires that pupils use English exclusively in speaking and writing (Dauenhauer 2004:14). It is clear that the use of English only was a desire by the missionaries and the government to assimilate Alaska Natives into the European understanding of the world. This practice was an act of

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<sup>55</sup> This desire to educate Native Americans and Alaska Natives into workers in the workforce was the stated goal of the much later Public Law 959, enacted in August 3, 1956 and known as the Indian Relocation Act of 1956.

<sup>56</sup> Dauenhauer (2004:17) also notes the difficulty this attitude encountered in the case of one Alaska Native group, the Aleuts, who were Russian Orthodox Christians and, in many cases, bilingual: “The trouble with the Aleuts was that they never fit the stereotype. The American missionaries were set on Christianizing and educating. When they met the Aleuts, they discovered highly literate Christians, with a longstanding tradition of Native clergy. Unfortunately, it was the wrong kind of Christianity and the wrong alphabet.”

colonization made even more devastating with the effect of removing the culture of Alaska Native people.

Dauenhauer highlights this reality by contrasting the Russian and American approach to schooling and mission. He concludes of the Russians:

There is no attack in Orthodoxy on the basic worth of the individual. There is no attack on a person's language. Rather, the Church sought to instill a sense of pride in the Native language and foster popular literacy in it. Because competency in two languages was stressed, it should come as no surprise that Aleuts had the first bilingual schools in Alaska. (Dauenhauer 2004:9)

He reinforces his point by noting that existence of a trilingual (Aleut, Russian, and English) newspaper in Unalaska at the turn of the last century (Dauenhauer 2004:17).

The contrast between the approach of the Orthodox Russian missionaries and the later Protestant missions is clear in a broad sense but there were exceptions among the Protestants. Dauenhauer (2004:17) highlights the work of Presbyterian translators Willard and Kelly who wrote Tlingit grammar and translated some hymns. Orthodox priest Father Michael Oleksa (1992:180), who is largely critical of Protestant mission in this era, highlights the work of Reverend William Duncan in Metlakatla who "believed that each community should have its own schools where the children would be taught in their own language and remain at home with their parents". Maria Shaa Tlaa Williams gives credit to Jesuit priest Belarmine LaFortune, Episcopalian Robert McDonald, and Moravians John and Edith Kilbuck for learning the local languages (2009:154-155). In the end, with a few exceptions, Protestant missionary efforts amounted to government-sponsored assimilation.

In addition to the forced assimilation into Western culture, the arrival of missionaries in Alaska coincided with the Great Death, which had unintended and far-reaching effects on the original people of the state. In *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (2005), Harold Napoleon writes of the recent history of the Yu'pik people of western Alaska, explaining that the Great Death was:



[T]he 1900 influenza epidemic which originated in Nome. From there it spread like a wildfire to all corners of Alaska, killing up to 60 percent of the Eskimo and Athabascan people [...] this epidemic killed whole families and wiped out whole villages. It gave birth to a generation of orphans. (p. 10)

This massive epidemic caused a huge upheaval in the Native community. The Elders who knew the traditional ways were gone and those remaining were traumatized. Napoleon (2005:12) explains that much of the culture was lost in large part due to the practice in Yu'pik culture of *nalunquaq*, which means to pretend it didn't happen. The trauma of the epidemic that caused the loss of people and culture created a generation of survivors that were fatalists. In the aftermath of the Great Death, "survivors also turned over the education and instruction of their children to the missionaries and the school teachers" (Napoleon 2005:13) and "the survivors allowed these newcomers to take over their lives" (Napoleon 2005:18). This reality compounded the effect of the Yu'pik culture being lost because no one was teaching it to the children.

Napoleon further explains the effects of the Great Death in the years that followed. As survivors tried to cope with the loss (including substance abuse, anger, guilt, shame, frustrations, hopelessness vented through violence) by, in most cases, never speaking about it, a culture-wide Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) developed (2005:14-20). The effects of that collective PTSD is summarized by Napoleon (2005):

The survivors' children are the grandparents of the present day Eskimo, Indian and Aleut. It is these traits, these symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, which are handicapping the present generation of Alaska Native people. Several generations of suppressed emotions, confusion, and feelings of inferiority and powerlessness now permeate even the very young. (p. 20)

These results of the Great Death are still felt in contemporary Alaska.

One final indignity from this era that has lasting effects is the idea of "Indian blood". The U.S. Government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, determines one's status as an Alaska Native or American Indian by the percentage of "Indian blood" a person possesses. To this day a percentage of "Blood quantum" is printed on the identification cards issued by



the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is issued once a person can obtain a Certificate of Indian Blood. The problem with this is explained by Dombrowski (2001):

My African American students are fond of pointing out – you cannot stop being “black,” as ongoing issues of police profiling all over the United States make clear. But you can stop being “native” – meaning you can lose your right to participate as a “native” in America’s political economy (i.e., lose your right to special status participation based on prior claims to resources, rather than differences in race or ethnicity). This happens to most Native Americans who fail to maintain tribal membership in a federally recognized tribe. Like those groups who have failed to keep up the requisite cultural distinctiveness, individual natives without tribal affiliation are allowed to participate in the American political economy as persons of color, but not as people with special claims to contested resources.

All this means that the ordinary ambiguity that virtually all people feel toward their culture – toward the sources and systems of meaning in their lives – must be lived differently by Native Americans than by others. (p. 13-14)

Native American and Alaska Native activists note that this fits with the Manifest Destiny plan to exterminate Indians. A recent article posted on the website of the National Museum of the American Indian asks the question, “Will current blood quantum membership requirements make American Indians extinct?” (Zotigh 2011). The policies of over a hundred years ago are still with us today.

The effects of the colonial history of Alaska are part of the puzzle of why it is hard to see each other over the issue of race. Many of those colonial policies reach forward into Alaskan lives today.

### *Recent History*

It would be easy to dismiss all of this history as something that happened over a hundred years ago or, in the case of the Doctrine of Discovery, over five hundred years ago, or even to imagine that in a post-Civil Rights United States that matters of race are no longer issues needing to be addressed. Furthermore, it might be simple to assume that this history has no bearing on contemporary interactions in the city. Yet, the Doctrine of Discovery, first cited in the 1823 Supreme Court ruling on the case of *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (*Johnson v. M’Intosh*, 1823, 21 U.S. 543), has been cited in a United States Supreme Court ruling as

recently as 2005 (*City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*, 2005, 544 U.S. 197) in a case involving Indigenous land rights and has been more recently cited by the 9th Circuit in its case *White vs. University of California* in 2014 (*White vs. University of California*, 2014, 3:12-cv-01978- RS). Also, there are more recent examples of Alaska's strained racial history. It is not in the scope of this project to catalogue all the accounts of racism and segregation in Alaska, nor is it in the scope to fully discuss the struggle for civil rights in the U.S. or Alaska. However, a quick survey of some of the instances of on-going racism is helpful to display the history that sits behind any contemporary discussion of race and diversity in Alaska.

Writing in *The Outlook*, Sherman Rogers (1922:608) wrote, "An Eskimo walking down the streets of Fairbanks would cause a riot." This comment, while odd, is not racist in itself, but speaks to the segregated nature of the of Alaska at the time. The 1920s proved to be important to the development of Alaska Native rights in the state. On 7 November 1922 Charlie Jones was blocked from voting at a poll in Wrangell. He was later arrested after voting along with Matilda "Tillie" Paul Tamaree – Jones for illegally voting and Tamaree for inciting a non-citizen to vote. This incident and the following court case influenced the 1924 law in which Alaska Natives were granted the right to citizenship and the right to vote, nearly 57 years after the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia (Hopper 2014).

The 1940s also proved an important decade. During World War II, Alaska was the site of internment camps and evacuations of Alaska Native people.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Aleut people in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands, entire villages were forcibly removed, some never being allowed to return to their homes. In the case of the Aleuts housed in Funter Bay, the German POWs that were imprisoned just a short distance away were much better cared for than the Aleuts, who were largely left to fend for themselves (Mercurieff 2016:17-24;

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<sup>57</sup> Internment of Japanese Americans and German POWs took place in Alaska during World War II (Mercurieff 2016:17-24; KTVA 2016).

Holland 2014; *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska* 2009). In the 3 March 1944 edition of the *Nome Nugget*, an essay by teenager Alberta Adams appeared that read, in part:

I only truthfully know that I am one of God's children regardless of race, color, or creed. You or I or anyone else is not to blame what we are. But we are all proud to be what God has made us... What has hurt us constantly is that we are not able to go to a public theater and sit where we wish, but yet we pay the SAME price as anyone else and our money is GLADLY received. We are not allowed even to go to public doings, only when money is concerned for the benefit of the so-called society people of our city. (Schenck 1994)

She was writing in response to being fired from her job at the Dream Theater in Nome after expressing her opposition to that establishment's policy of the segregated seating of white, Native and "half-breed" patrons in their own sections of the theatre. The controversy continued when, soon after the essay was published, she returned to the theatre to see a film as the date of a white army sergeant. She was arrested after sitting down in the last two seats available in the "whites only" section of the theatre and taken to the city jail (*For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska* 2009).

Alaska Natives were not the only ones facing discrimination in wartime Alaska. Thanks to the work of Lael Morgan (1996), E. Valerie Smith (1993), and John Virtue (2012) the history of the Black Army Engineers who constructed the Alaska-Canada (ALCAN) Highway during World War II has been documented. The nearly 1,500 mile road, from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada to Fairbanks, Alaska was built to support the war effort in Europe (particularly the lend lease program) and as a supply route to troops stationed in Alaska. Despite making up one-third of the men who carved the road through the wilderness (a project often likened to the Panama Canal in scope and ambition) the official U.S. Army history of the Corps of Engineers "covers black involvement in a one-sentence footnote" (Morgan 1996:150). The men operated under orders from General Simon Bolivar Buckner (son of a U.S. Civil War Confederate general who surrendered to General Grant), head of the Alaska Command, who held racist beliefs and objected to black regiments being

assigned to Alaska. Buckner's objections, societal norms of the time, and the general operating practice of the U.S. Army in World War II ensured the black troops assigned to the ALCAN were stationed in the most remote areas with the intent being that they would not interact with white civilians, Indigenous people, or fellow soldiers. These remote outposts had the troops house in tents in extreme cold while white soldiers were housed in conventional buildings. In most cases the clothing given to these troops was not designed for the arctic cold. Morgan notes that the 97<sup>th</sup> Regiment built 295 miles of road and "bucked winter temperatures as low as seventy degrees below zero, living in tents, existing mainly on dehydrated potatoes, Vienna sausage, Spam, and whatever game they could shoot" (1996:158). All this while not being able to access the brand new airbases even while on leave, when leave was issued at all.

The World War II era was also an era of progress. The Alaska Territorial Legislature passed the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945,<sup>58</sup> which gives Alaska the distinction of being first place in the United State to ban discrimination based on race. It was enacted, in part due to an open letter to Governor Ernest Gruening following another open letter in the *Ketchikan Fishing News* from Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich, expressing their concern over the Douglas Inn posting on its door a sign that read "No Natives Allowed". In that letter they wrote:

We, as Indians, consider this an outrage because we are the real Natives of Alaska by reason of our ancestors who have guarded these shores and woods for years past. We will still be here to guard our beloved country while hordes of uninterested whites will be fleeing South. (Glavinic 2014)

In her testimony before the legislature, Elizabeth Peratrovich famously stated, "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind the gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights" (Glavinic 2014). Alaska's Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945 did not stop all discrimination. In 1948, the

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<sup>58</sup> This was two decades before the civil rights movement changed the practice of Jim Crow segregation in the United States at the federal level by passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

charter to develop the Saxon Subdivision, known as Airport Heights,<sup>59</sup> in Anchorage listed as its first restricting covenant: “The property hereby conveyed shall not be sold or alienated in any manner whatsoever to other than Americans of the White race” (Alaskool, n.d.).

Language such as this was common in real estate covenants in Anchorage at the time.<sup>60</sup>

Recent articles in the *Alaska Dispatch News* and the *Anchorage Press* shed light on the practice of redlining and intimidation (including the burning down of a nearly completed black family’s home in 1950) prevalent in this era and from the city’s beginning (Wohlforth 2017a & Ford 2017).<sup>61</sup> The Alaska State Constitutional Convention was held in 1955 with only one Alaska Native seated as part of the 55-person delegation (Frank Peratrovich, President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood) while Alaska Natives comprised at least a quarter of the territory’s population (Rogers 1971:4 & McBeath 2001:132).

In 1966 the U.S. Congress passed the Fur Seal Act which, in part, granted the Pribilof Island Unangan (Aleut) people of St. Paul and St. George islands the right to U.S. citizenship and the right to vote. However, it was not until 1979 that the people of island received \$8.5 million as compensation for nearly 100 years of indentured servitude to the U.S. Government as seal oil hunters and processors. The federal government would not completely leave the islands until 1983. This history is chronicled in Ilarion Mercurieff’s book *Wisdom Keeper: One Man’s Journey to Honor the Untold History of the Unangan People* (Mercurieff 2016).

The 1970s held a momentous and far-reaching change for Alaska. Following a 1968 ruling in which the U.S. government paid the Tlingit and Haida people for the 1905 creation

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<sup>59</sup> Airport Heights was the first neighborhood I lived in in Anchorage and the location of Trinity Christian Reformed Church, where I served as youth pastor for six years. The church and the parsonage were both built in the early 1950s, during the era of this covenant.

<sup>60</sup> This history is commonly not known, or ignored, in Anchorage in favor of a more positive version of the past. For example, Preston Jones’ (2010:91) comment in the book *City for Empire: An Anchorage History, 1914-1941*, “As for Anchorage, the only case of willful segregation uncovered for this study came after its period, in 1948, in the form of a covenant in the Airport Heights neighborhood prohibiting the sale of property to any nonwhite person.”

<sup>61</sup> It should come as no surprise that Anchorage neighborhoods were practicing segregationist covenants and redlining in the post-World War II era. The property valuation practice by the federal government in this era was systematically racist, using a grading system that took into account the racial and ethnic make-up of a neighborhood in the official valuation of homes and loan requests. Todd E. Robinson (2013:65-66), writing in *A City Within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan* explains: “According to the *Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual*, change in the “racial occupancy” contributed to instability and decline in property values. The FHA even described the wording for a sound restrictive covenant essentially designed to strengthen and supplement zoning ordinances.” Kenneth T. Jackson provides a detailed history of this practice in *Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration* (1980).

of the Tongass National Forest on their traditional lands, President Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. ANCSA compensated the Alaska Native people for lands taken by the U.S. Government on the basis that the United States had never won these lands in a war or signed a treaty with Alaska Native people (Hensley 2009:113 & 122). The settlement awarded 44 million acres of historically used land to Native people as well as paying \$962.5 million in compensation in trade for no further claims on the lands in Alaska. The monies were distributed to the 12 regional corporations the act created. A 13th corporation was formed later for Native Alaskans living outside the state of Alaska.

In recent years, the lingering existence of racism in Alaska has come to light. As mentioned in the introduction, as the result of investigation into January 2001 attacks in which Alaska Native individuals were targeted by white youth shooting frozen paintballs the Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a report titled *Racism's Frontier: The Untold Story of Discrimination and Division in Alaska*. That report described Alaska as “a racially charged environment” (Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2002:9) and stated:

The January 2001 paintball incident may have been the first realization among the non-Native community in Alaska that hate crimes occur, but for the Native community, the event was one more in a series of hate-inspired acts. (Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2002:2).

In an even more recent incident in March 2014, Anchorage School Board candidate Don Smith stated in a local public television interview:

There's lots of problems that have been caused by organizations like the State Department that have somehow convinced Alaskans or Anchorage residents to accept two families a month from Africa and Indonesia, totally unable to speak English, and give us the responsibility to try to educate these kids in the school system. When I was in Anchorage High School, it was about 98 percent white students, and the balance were probably Native and one or two black students in the school. Today we're 48 percent white, 52 percent other, and that clearly is causing problems. I think our numbers are dropping because we're importing all these people that aren't up to the standards that we had set for the school. And consequently it's drawing us downward, not upward. (*Alaska Public Media* 2014)

Doogan (2014a) reported in a follow-up story in the *Anchorage Daily News* a clarification to

Smith's position in which he stated:

Refugees are not paying their way when they make Anchorage their home, he claimed, because they are on welfare and do not have good enough jobs to buy homes and pay property taxes – a major source of income for the Anchorage School District.

Smith, a former Anchorage City Assembly member and state legislator, lost that school board race after a media and community backlash. He announced in 2016 that he would again run for an Anchorage Assembly Seat (Kelly 2016). In April 2017, he lost that Assembly race, finishing as the runner up and earning nearly 30% of the vote (Municipality of Anchorage 2017).

Recent Anchorage (Huntington 2014) and Juneau (Quinto 2016) newspaper articles commenting on racism underscore the situation of the on-going existence of racism in the state. In a recent article in the *Anchorage Dispatch News* reporter Charles Wohlforth quotes E.J.R. David, a professor of psychology at the University of Alaska Anchorage:

Even if we accept the myth that all of Anchorage is very diverse, we still have to look at that imbalance between power and access to resources between different groups of people that make up our city...If you look at that, you see a very clear imbalance. (Wohlforth 2017b)

Wohlforth (2017b) also reports that:

In Anchorage, school kids mix, but economic class mostly keeps the races apart. Minorities staff the big box stores and ethnic restaurants, with little chance for advancement, but are underrepresented among teachers and other professionals, government officials, office workers and elected officials.

Numbers from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey show how income divides the races here. In Anchorage, the income difference among the races is larger than it is in the rest of the country.

White families earn 52 percent more in Anchorage on average than nationally. But blacks make only 42 percent more than blacks Outside, and Hispanics, 26 percent more than their cohorts in the other states. Pacific Islanders and Asians actually make less here than they do nationally.

Anchorage may be very diverse, but in the midst of demographic change there has not been the same change in equality and the city has a long way to go to in the areas of interaction, power and fairness.

While civil rights in Alaska had made significant progress, the history of colonialism

and racism sit in the background of any discussion of race. When one adds in the experiences of the Anchorage interview subjects of continued racism, it is not as easy to dismiss the issue to the history books. The legacy of Manifest Destiny, the Doctrine of Discovery, identity based on skin tone, the national history of slavery and Jim Crow era segregation inform our understanding of the division present in Anchorage around racial and ethnic diversity.

### III. Gazing on Issues

No issue gives a clearer demonstration of the division in the ministry climate of Anchorage based on issues than the debate over LGBTQ+ rights. This issue has a long history of contention among people of faith and continues to divide pastors and leaders in the city. In gazing upon this issue, one can understand how issues divide pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage.

A proposal to extend anti-discrimination rights to homosexual and transgender individuals was first proposed in 1976 and became law through an act of the City Assembly in 2015 (Kelly 2015b). Through the years a bitter fight has raged over this change in Anchorage law with Christians on both sides of the issue (Burke 2011; Wohlforth 2016; Doogan 2014b).

I was recently sitting with a group of leaders in Anchorage seeking to start a Moral Justice coalition. The meeting was hosted by Christians for Equality, a group who describes its mission as: “Raise up a faithful voice for peace, justice & equality rooted in the Hebrew prophets & the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Christians for Equality, n.d.). The group started in 2011 as a faith-based sub-group of the One Anchorage movement, a grassroots effort supporting a proposed ballot initiative to “expand the city's anti-discrimination laws to include sexual orientation and transgender identity” (Burke 2011). Proposition 5, a ballot



measure, sought to remove the decision on LGBTQ+ rights from the hands of the mayor (Burke 2011). Anchorage mayors had vetoed LGBTQ+ rights in 1976 and 2009. The group is comprised largely of mainline church leaders and members as well as those active in the LGBTQ+ rights movement. The group has now become involved in other issues in the city, including dialogue across faith traditions and the coalition noted above.

On the other side of the issue is the Alaska Family Council, a group I have had direct and indirect contact with many times over the years. Alaska Family Council defines its mission as “to inspire biblical citizenship, equip statesmen and church leadership, promote sound policy, and elevate community dialogue” and, in order to further its vision, “to see an Alaska where families thrive, religious freedom flourishes, life is cherished, and God is honoured” (Alaska Family Council, n.d.) The group is in large part the continuation of the work Rev. Jerry Prevo has been doing in the name of conservative Christianity in Anchorage for 40 years (Wohlforth 2016). The Alaska Family Council has broad support among evangelical churches throughout the city.

Over the many years that the LGBTQ+ issue has been debated in the city, animosity has developed on both sides of the issue and also in both camps of Christians in the city. To this end, some refer to the 2009 era of the debate as “the summer of hate” (Doogan 2014b). One leader involved with Christians For Equality shared with me recently that the position of that group on the LGBTQ+ issue makes it hard for other Christians to work with them on issues where they agree. Some will participate if a different name is used, just as long as they cannot be tied to the group’s position on other issues. This distancing seems to be a common practice in Anchorage with each side not wanting to associate with believers from the other side for fear they might be guilty by association.

During the 2012 conflict over LGBTQ+ rights, Christians on both sides of the issue once again failed (with some small exceptions) to reach across the divide to dialogue over the

issue. They chose to go to battle against our brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that has left lasting effects on the city, the faith community and the image of Christians in the general population.

During the most recent fight over LGBTQ+ rights, *Anchorage Daily News* reporter Devin Kelly presented a picture of the division over this issue in an article titled “God, gender identity and public restrooms at play in Anchorage’s Proposition 1 debate” (Kelly 2018). Kelly quotes voices from both sides of the issue. From those supporting the change in the law to require that people use the bathroom of the gender assigned at birth, Kelly cites Jim Minnery, who she describes as “the president [of] Alaska Family Action,<sup>62</sup> the faith-based, socially-conservative advocacy group backing Prop. 1 along with a number of Anchorage church leaders’ as saying that gender is an ‘immutable biological condition of being male or female’ (Kelly 2018). Kelly adds, that this position is “a reflection of a religious belief held by Minnery's ministry” (Kelly 2018). On the opposite side, those opposing the law, Kelly wrote, “Other Anchorage faith leaders have offered opposing religious interpretations. Michael Burke, the pastor at St. Mary's Episcopal Church who works with a group called Christians for Equality, said Parker and Minnery were relying on a ‘narrow, literal reading’ of a portion of the Christian Bible” (Kelly 2018). This article is a microcosm of the division of Christians over this issue that has played out in public in Anchorage for over 40 years. LGBTQ+ rights are only one issue (used here as an example) but it offers a very clear example of how issues are keeping us from seeing each other in Anchorage.

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<sup>62</sup> This is a group closely tied to the Alaska Family Council.

#### IV. Gazing on Competition

It is hard to gaze on competition in ministry because so much of it is hidden. Being competitive in sports or business is seen as a good thing, but in the religious world being openly competitive is frowned upon. However, if one scratches below the surface just a bit, one's gaze can fall on ministry competition.

In the two and a half decades I have been in professional ministry, I have no idea how many times I have been asked how many people are a part of the ministry I am leading. The question was first aimed at the size of the youth group when I was a youth pastor, then it was youth in drop-in as I ran a teen outreach ministry and now that I am a pastor it is the number of people in the pews at Sunday service. It is a common question asked to pastors and ministry leaders. At the core of the question is the idea that numbers are synonymous with success.

If success in ministry, in reality or perception, can be tracked by numbers then there is a built-in competition based on generating those numbers. However, ministry is not accounting and numbers are not just numbers, they are people. Furthermore, numbers are only one way to account for a ministry's success. Despite statements to the contrary by pastors and leaders, one of the reasons for the ministry climate in Anchorage being divided is competition over people. This competition is not nefarious and calculated, but rather something ingrained in humans at their very core.

Humans are creatures of desire. If Rene Girard is correct those desires are not created from within a person, but rather borrowed, or imitated, from another. Michael Kirwan (2005:17 [*italics original*]) explains, "All human learning, and especially the acquisition of language, takes place through imitation. What Girard insists has been neglected is an understanding of imitation which is expansive enough to include *desire*." How this theory works can be understood using a triangle (Figure 24).

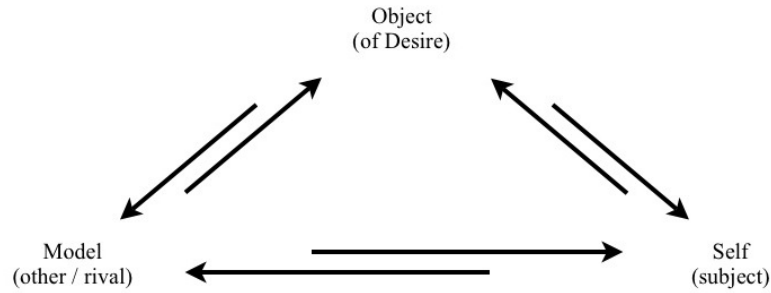


Figure 24.  
Girard's philosophical understanding of desire and imitation

If the subject and the rival both share a desire for the same object, a conflict can result. Once the self discovers in the model a desire to emulate, it will begin to seeking the object that the model values. One only needs to think of the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 to see an example of mimetic rivalry at play. In this case the object of desire is the approval of God, which puts Cain in rivalry with Able and leads to violence. This simplified version of mimetic desire and its implications<sup>63</sup> gives insight into church/ministry competition. If the object of desire is people in the pews, then leaders of churches will be drawn into competition with each other based on this desire.

So that the world is not in a constant state of violence, humans have developed ways of avoiding the violence. Girard (1986) asserts that the scapegoat mechanism – as well as prohibitions, rituals and myths – are used by society to keep violence in check. Kirwan (2005:38) explains that the scapegoat mechanism functions on the cosmic level in “the action of violently expelling or destroying a victim...channeling of violence either inward (upon a scapegoat) or outwards (upon the common enemy)”. What is fascinating is that the scapegoat mechanism appears at first to be a religious practice but is in reality a social process for avoiding violence. In the act of blaming someone, in which the community is turned against that person or groups of persons, the crisis is avoided. In using a scapegoat – a

<sup>63</sup> Carly Osborn (2016:10) notes, “Girard’s first book laid out his theory of mimetic desire. It’s called *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. (Girard 1976) In it, Girard argues that ‘great novelists’ understand that desire is mimetic. Bad novels, he says, repeat the ‘lie’ that desires are spontaneous, but truly ‘great novels’ reveal the truth.”

victim on which the cause, or blame, of the conflict can be laid – peace is restored. The outcome of this action is harmony and in the end the victim is seen as both instigator and resolver (double transference) even achieving god-like status (Kirwan 2005:39).

The city of Anchorage has a great many churches and a limited number of people. Informal estimates place the number of churches in Anchorage at around 400 congregations serving a population of approximately 300,000 residents. Studies show that between 26% (Newport 2015) and 64% (Pew Research Center 2015) of Alaska residents attend church services. The “median church in the U.S. has 75 regular participants in worship on Sunday mornings” and the average sits at 186 attenders (Hartford Institute for Religious Research, n.d.). There is also a historically low church attendance rate in the Pacific Northwest region of the country (Block 2016; Killen & Silk 2004). Taking this into account, the 26% percent of Alaskan church attendees reported by Newport seems more likely. Therefore, if one estimates that 33% of the Anchorage population attend church, then 100,000 individuals in Anchorage attend church. However, if one takes the median church size and multiplies it by the number of churches, the resulting number is 30,000 church goers in the city, only 10% of the population. While the scarcity of church goers may create competition for people to attend worship services, competition for new believers should not be a factor since between 66% and 80% of the city’s inhabitants are not attending worship services.

I believe the majority of the competition is the result of a “bigger is better” and winning-focused worldview prevalent in the Western world. That being said, it is human nature to want what we do not have; like children playing in a nursery, once someone has something then everyone else desires it too and conflict arises.

While I believe that the reality of mimetic rivalry and competition is a factor in the Anchorage ministry climate being divided, I do not believe that the practice of scapegoating is taking place – certainly not on a large scale. In the ministry climate in Anchorage, the

outburst of mimetic rivalry and direct scapegoating is averted simply by pastors and ministry leaders avoiding being in close proximity to each other so that it can neither be expressed nor addressed. Of course, scapegoating adds to the divided nature of the city. However, one must note that if ministries and their leaders were working closer together, the spectre of mimetic rivalry would raise its head and need to be understood and addressed. In the meantime, the natural tendency is competition with isolation as a form of avoiding the conflict that arises.

### V. Gazing on Busyness

Casting one's gaze on the busyness expressed by pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage is also gazing on a national trend that has been observed over the past few decades. Kirk B. Jones (2001), writing in *Christianity Today*, explains:

The busy church has become the norm in America, and with it the hurried pastor. It almost feels wrong if the church calendar has a little empty space, if members aren't involved in three or more ministries, or if we don't sense a quickened pace in our conversations, meetings, and even worship.

Congregational expectations are high, but pastors' expectations of themselves are even higher. For many, reputation, self-image, and the perception of their standing with God are at stake.

Hicks (1987) comments:

In a sense, the pastorate is the worst job you will ever love. Its demands are unreasonable, its calling inescapable, its machinery often unworkable, its concepts difficult to grasp, and the political realities of the work make "success" almost impossible to achieve. (p. 11)

The result of these expectations is busyness and long hours. In 2010 the Christian publishing house LifeWay released the results of a telephone survey they conducted of 1,000 senior pastors. The poll discovered that "65 percent of them work 50 or more hours a week – with 8 percent saying they work 70 or more hours" (LifeWay Research 2010). This data fits well with my personal experience of ministry leaders and pastors. As a young man just starting in ministry, my supervising pastor told me his rationale for the 50-55 hours he worked each week, explaining that members of the church have full-time jobs and often give 10-15 hours a

week to their church. The LifeWay survey also noted how pastors were spending their time emphasizing sermon preparation, ministry-related meetings and electronic correspondence, among other activities. However, the data showed no specific indication of the amount of time spent in fellowship with other ministry leaders or involvement in ecumenical or community projects or activities (LifeWay Research 2010).

Closely tied to the busyness is the matter of expectations placed on pastors. In an online excerpt from his book, *Being Holy, Being Human: Dealing with the Expectations of Ministry*, titled “Expectation Overload”, Jay Kesler ([1988] 2004) noted the performance pressure placed on pastors:

There's no question but that the expectations of pastors have changed dramatically in recent years... It's no longer enough for a pastor to be a scholar and Bible expositor, to preach on Sunday, and to perform such ceremonial duties as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Today's pastors are also expected to attract people to the church, administer a volunteer or paid staff, and counsel individuals with a wide range of personal problems. And if pastors can use computers to project church growth, giving levels, and how much debt the church can handle, so much the better. They also have to be warm and personable, creating that feeling of intimacy we discussed in the last chapter. No matter how large or small the church, the people coming through the doors on Sunday want the pastor to make them feel loved and important.

It is doubtful that the expectations of pastors has lightened 30 years later. Pastors and ministry leaders often labour under an unreasonable level of expectation and that drives them to a be busy. This busyness results in a pruning of activities or simply having some engagements pushed off the calendar.

One of the side effects of this busyness is a necessary prioritizing of tasks and involvements. One of the involvements that is often removed is a connection to other pastors in the area through a peer group, ministers gathering, or association, etc. One interview subject was articulate on this subject, noting that the pastors of Anchorage are doing good work but are not very collaborative. He went on to share that he sees a low level of unity and that a tipping point will be needed for pastors to move towards each other in community and before a “collective impact” model can be established. Summarizing his thoughts, he stated, “Relational unity has to get higher, before functional unity can happen.”

It is interesting to note that a 2010 study from Austin Presbyterian Seminary College of Pastoral Leaders titled *Is the Treatment the Cure: A Study of the Effects of Participation in Pastoral Leader Peer Groups* (2010) showed that pastors that participated in peer groups reaped benefits for both themselves and their congregations. According to that report, pastors that participated in peer groups saw increased participation in new members classes, worship services, as well as community service and service in the church by members (Austin Presbyterian Seminary 2010). Furthermore, the study showed that pastors who were regularly part of a peer group led congregations that had a higher level of support and engagement of youth ministry and were experiencing growth in their number of members (Austin Presbyterian Seminary 2010). These effects alone may cause a minister to consider a peer group. However, gathering with other pastors regularly succumbs to busyness and pastors remain isolated.

## VI. Conclusions from the Historical and Cultural Gaze

As displayed in the previous chapters, Anchorage does not reflect the city that is seen by John in the closing chapters of the New Testament. In that perfect heavenly city Jesus declares, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5 NIV). But in the present reality of Anchorage the history and culture of the old ways are still present and powerful.

In an effort to answer the question “Why is it going on?”, this chapter began to look past the surface of some of the ways the city is divided. In gazing on the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny the dark history of racism and colonialism that sits behind the racial division in Anchorage and Alaska was unmasked. The debate over LGBTQ+ rights in Anchorage exposed one clear example of the division in the church over issues present in the city. Competition pulled back the curtain on the mimetic nature of human interactions and busyness revealed the expectations the church puts on its leaders.



In the future Revelation city there is no church because the Lord and the Lamb are perfectly dwelling with the people and are the temple (Revelation 21:3 & 22). However, in Anchorage there are churches everywhere. In a physical sense they seem to cover the city. In a metaphorical sense, the fingerprints of the church also cover the history and culture of the city. Colonialism and Christendom, which sit behind the racial division, worked hand in hand. The church encouraged, endorsed, supported and participated in colonization. From the Papal bulls authorizing the exploration of the world, taking of land, and exploitation of people to the forced assimilation of Alaska Native's through missionary schools, the Christian church is hard to separate from the history of colonization.

It is hard to separate the church from the LGBTQ+ rights history in Anchorage. For over 40 years Christians have set up on both sides of the issue. The lasting result of the churches involvement in the issue of LGBTQ+ rights is a division that effects cooperation on other matters in the city. The LGBTQ+ rights debate has effectively split the church in two in Anchorage with little interaction between the two camps.

The expectations that churches and ministries place on their leaders creates and environment where regular meetings with others in similar positions is difficult, if not nearly impossible. Other expectations, such as a "bigger is better" mentality, breed a competitive situation that further stunts interaction and plays into the mimetic nature of human desire.

For Anchorage to reflect the perfect city in Revelation 21 & 22, the church will need to change. We cannot see the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) in a reality that is suffering from the history of colonization. To envision a new way of interacting together as all of God's people, the church must undo the damage that its complicity in racism has done.

For the church to live in the harmonious way as described in Revelation 21 & 22, there cannot be the destructive division over issues that has plagued the church in Anchorage for years. How can the followers of Jesus point to the harmony in the future perfect urban

world of St. John's vision when we are so divided? To reimagine a more harmonious church in Anchorage, we must find a way to hear and understand other's understandings, and even disagree, without rending the body of Christ in two.

If all of the needs of the people are supplied in the city of God (Revelation 22:1 & 2) then the needs of each church, ministry and leader will also be provided. In a climate where competition and busyness are abound one can infer that there is belief that God's ability to provide is limited. This myth of scarcity leads us to thinking only about how to sustain ourselves and our organizations. This selfishness plays right into the hands of the natural mimetic way our desires are created and rivalry develops. If Anchorage is to be a reflection of the city of God, we will need to trust that God can and does provide for all needs.

When considering the contextual urban ministry training that might best fit Anchorage the legacy of colonialism and racism, the deep division over issues like LGBTQ+ rights, and competition and busyness rooted in scarcity, must be considered and addressed. These factors must be added to the other things that have been uncovered as part of the direction toward: a desire for learning opportunities; a desire for relational teaching and learning methods; and the context of urbanization.

Finally, this chapter has prompted me to consider my own personal transformation. Any transformation in the city takes place first at a personal level. In the case of this chapter the questions raised have been about my own complicity in the project of Christendom. Being a white male pastor, who has always been a part of the church, has created in me blinders to how the church has done damage throughout history by using its power (often under the guise of "the truth") to do damage and maintain control. While those blinders are starting to fall off, I have a long way to go to uncover my complicity in racism and white privilege. I have also had to explore my personal feelings about those that differ from me on the issue of LGBTQ+ rights or those that I have clashed with on other issues. Last, my own

sense of competition and misplaced desires is in need of reform. I too often give into the fear that there is not enough and live in a competitive and busy way that separates me from others and exacerbates the issues facing Anchorage.

## Chapter 6: Analysing the Historical and Cultural Gaze

### I. Trauma, Colour-blindness, and Isolation

The history of race and ethnicity in America and Alaska that was detailed in the previous chapter is the history of colonization and racism. This historical reality is the backdrop of any discussion of race and ethnicity and that history has left a legacy of trauma. This legacy of trauma is true for both the victims and perpetrators of colonization and racism as well as their descendants. Speaking on the *Replacing Church Podcast* Mark Charles (Katt 2017a) states that the Doctrine of Discovery is deeply rooted in the American psyche and that it is this doctrine that forms the basis for the reality that America is a “Christian” nation. This myth is expressed in the notion of American Exceptionalism. Charles (Katt 2017a) explains that American Exceptionalism is more than mythology, but a product of trauma: “American Exceptionalism is a coping mechanism for a nation in deep denial of its genocidal history and its current racist reality”.

The problem goes deeper than denial to the core of the communities affected by the racist history of the past. The effect of the history is one of trauma. Both communities that experienced racism, as victims and perpetrators, bear the effects of trauma. Father Michael Lapsley (2012:54) in his memoir *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer* reflects on his experience with apartheid South Africa, “I began to realize that whether white people appreciated it or not, everyone, white and black, oppressor and oppressed, was a prisoner of the system”. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968) noted the need to explore the effect of racism on victims and perpetrators in a 1967 speech at the American Psychological Association annual convention:

If the Negro needs social sciences for direction and for self-understanding, the white society is in even more urgent need. White America needs to understand that it is poisoned to its soul by racism and the understanding needs to be carefully documented and consequently more difficult to reject. The present crisis arises because although it is historically imperative that

our society take the next step to equality, we find ourselves psychologically and socially imprisoned. (p. 2)

In the years since that statement much work has been done in studying the effects of trauma on a community.

Based in research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which first showed up as an individual diagnosis in the 1980 American Psychiatric Association third edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). Historical trauma is a term used to describe the “multi-generational, communal manifestation of PTSD” (Katt 2017a). Historical trauma can be found in communities such as American Indians, Alaska Natives, Holocaust survivors, African Americans and other groups that have experienced trauma and its effects as a group and as an historical reality. In an article titled *Historical Trauma as Public Narrative: A Conceptual Review of How History Impacts Present-day Health*, the authors define historical trauma as “a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance” (Mohatt et al. 2014:2).

Historical trauma is well documented and has a 35 year history of academic study. This history is documented by Mohatt, Thompson, Thai, and Tebes (2014)<sup>64</sup> who propose that historical trauma also operates as a narrative conceptualization long after the events that caused the initial trauma. One would expect that the victims of trauma and their descendants would experience effects from this trauma, what may not seem obvious is that the perpetrators of the trauma would also experience long-lasting effects.

Rachel MacNair proposes that perpetrators of violence suffer from Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS). MacNair (n.d.) states on her website:

I have called the form of PTSD which is caused by being active in causing the trauma Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS). This term is not used in the official psychiatric manual and has just begun to be studied. Some people have instead referred it as “Participation-Induced Traumatic Stress.”

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<sup>64</sup> Brown-Rice (2013) examines the theoretical foundations of historical trauma in the context of Native Americans.

While MacNair admits that PITS is in its infancy as a theory, she has been active in writing on the topic (MacNair, n.d.; 2002a; 2002b; 2007; 2015). Those working in the area of race relations such as Mark Charles have proposed that if the victims of trauma can develop historical trauma, which is complex, collective and experienced over time and across generations, then the perpetrators, who have inflicted trauma and are suffering from PITS, could in turn develop a version of historical trauma, which is also complex, collective and experienced over time and across generations. “Not only are we dealing with the historical trauma of African Americans and Native peoples, but we also have a deeply traumatized white America” (Charles 2015).<sup>65</sup> In short, both the victim and perpetrator carry long lasting effects of trauma.<sup>66</sup>

The matter of both the victim and the victimizer being traumatized is at the core of Black Theology, according to Theologian and Missiologist J.N.J (Klippiess) Kritzinger. He states in the context of South African apartheid, that:

It is one of the fundamental tenets of Black Theology that oppression dehumanizes not only the oppressed but also the oppressors. By keeping black people in bondage, white people have imprisoned themselves and distorted their own humanity. A ministry to re-evangelize white people is therefore primarily understood by black theologians as an effort to humanize them, that is, to restore the image of God in their lives. (Kritzinger 1988:202)

It is noted by Van Wyngaard (2016) that Kritzinger’s assertion, via his understanding of Black Theology, that apartheid harms white people is never well defined:

The description of how racism is harming white people does not get a full analysis in Kritzinger’s work. We are left with only brief comments arguing that racism and apartheid harm white people by keeping them imprisoned in their intolerance and fear. This imprisonment, however, does become clearer in the extensive and repetitive description of what white people are liberated for. (p. 3)

Van Wyngaard’s comments, while I am sure are more informed than mine, may miss the simplicity of Kritzinger’s statement. It may be the simple reality that racism in any form not only de-humanizes others, but also those practicing and participating in the practice of

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<sup>65</sup> This is also the position of Napoleon (2005).

<sup>66</sup> University of Pretoria PhD student Joel Aguilar is looking at historical trauma in Guatemala, calling it “collective woundedness” (Aguilar 2018).

racism. It is possible that a definition of what Kritzinger states is unneeded from a theological perspective because racism is the practice of evil and with all evil/sin the effect is those who practice and are the victims are made less human – less like the image God created us into – because of that participation. That being said, Kritzinger’s statement, as a theologian reflecting on the dehumanization of systematic racism, reflects the understanding of the trauma of perpetrators defined as PITS by Rachel MacNair.

Given the history of colonialism, the legacies of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny, slavery, assimilation and the on-going racism in the United States and Alaska, it is my conclusion that one of the reasons that we struggle to see each other is that both victims and perpetrators of racism and their descendants are traumatized and functioning out of that trauma. This historical reality and its effects, whether or not it is felt or acknowledged, sits behind our inability to see each other. Each person is living in this history and until that is acknowledged, Anchorage citizen’s vision of each other will continue to be impaired. Thus, if the victims of racism and their descendants experience trauma and the perpetrators of racism and their descendants also experience trauma, we need to discuss and address those experiences of trauma. We need to heed the words of Richard Rohr (2016): “If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.”

In addition to living out the history of racism through historical trauma and Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress, the cultural reality of racial colour-blindness and theorizing about a post-racial America are both factors. Following President Obama’s election in 2008 there was much discussion of the United States being post-racial because it had elected its first black president. This perception was based on logic that stated that if America was able to elect a president that was from a historically marginalized group, then it must no longer have an issue with race. The optimism of the moment was everywhere. Cathy Cohen (2011) observes:

[F]or many Americans, especially white Americans, the election of Barack Obama marked what they believed to be a major shift in the racial consciousness of the country, with a color-blind framework predicted as rightfully coming to dominate the racial landscape. In the wake of the election, commentators and politicians felt empowered to tell black people, and black youth in particular, that it was now time to stop the “whining” because they had no more excuses...many whites see President Obama’s election as the best example of how color blindness works, many black youth, who enthusiastically supported Obama, believe that his election reflects the desperate yearning for change in the midst of political and economic crisis. It was this desire that led whites to vote for change rather than using their votes to preserve the racial order. (p. 200)

Jeff Chang (2014) also noted how “post-racial” meant different things to different groups of people:

Sometimes when people used the term “post-racial” they were speaking about the ways that identity and pop culture seemed more fluid and permeable and less “white” and therefore cooler than ever. But to many, the term “post-racial” signified less about how to face the future than about how to address the past. For some, it signaled a desire for an end to the politics of Black consciousness...in this narrative, “post-racial” signified not only an American sense of transcendence, a victory over history, but as Gary Younge put it, “a repudiation” of claims for equality. It signified a return to whiteness...To others “post-racial” signified an end to white comfort. (pp. 276-277)

Regardless of one’s interpretation of the term, “post-racial” meant that the discussion of race was over. As Touré (2011) wrote on a New York Times opinion page:

If, as “post-racial” suggests, race no longer matters, then we no longer need to think about race or take the discussion of it seriously. In this way the concept becomes a shield against uncomfortable but necessary discussions allowing people to say or think, “Why are they complaining about racism? We’re post-racial.”

It was hard to see how “post-racial” could be true with realities like the riots in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland as well as the shootings of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, and deaths at the hands of police such as Freddy Grey and Eric Garner happening during the Obama presidency. Yet the idea of a “post-racial” persists in some quarters and functions to shut down any discussion of race. Just as “post-racial” is used in the larger context of the United States to limit discussion, my hunch is that it is also used in Anchorage as a way to limit the discussion of race.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In a similar way the diversity of Anchorage is used to deflect conversations about race. It is not uncommon in meetings to hear people talk about how diverse the city is quoting statistics from Dr. Chad Farrell (Tunseth 2015) or the number of languages spoken in the Anchorage School District as evidence. In most cases the sub-text is that Anchorage is diverse and so a discussion on diversity, race, or racism is not needed. This circular logic is an impediment to discussing the true reality of diversity in the city.



“Post-racial” is a version of colour-blindness, a larger way race is dismissed from discussion in the United States. Writing for *Psychology Today*, Monnica Williams (2011) defines colour-blindness as “the racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity”. After noting that in theory colour-blindness sounds wonderful, she highlights the limitations of this perspective:

Colorblindness alone is not sufficient to heal racial wounds on a national or personal level. It is only a half-measure that in the end operates as a form of racism. Racism? Strong words, yes, but let's look the issue straight in its partially unseeing eye. In a colorblind society, White people, who are unlikely to experience disadvantages due to race, can effectively ignore racism in American life, justify the current social order, and feel more comfortable with their relatively privileged standing in society (Fryberg, 2010). Most minorities, however, who regularly encounter difficulties due to race, experience colorblind ideologies quite differently. Colorblindness creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives (Williams 2011).

What Williams notes is that the position of colour-blindness can only be undertaken by someone who is in a privileged position.

Colour-blindness is tied to the idea of “white surprise” that Jim Perkinson was writing about well before the election of President Obama. Perkinson (1997) explains,

In one sense, surprise is the very opposite of my topic. Whiteness in North America is perhaps the least surprising thing around. Indeed, that is its very nature. It is taken for granted. Only other things — blackness, Asianness, salsa, dreadlocks, sushi, dream catchers — are “other” and thus capable of provoking surprise. Whiteness just is. Familiar. There. Home. American. Us. Not surprising at all. Not self-conscious at all. Until “we” are jolted into awareness by a jubilant brown face unable for a moment to contain its joy over O.J.'s acquittal. If you were part of that “surprised whiteness” in the aftermath of his criminal trial, pay attention. (p. 196)

Later in the same article, Perkinson (1997:200) minces no words, “Whiteness is finally something we who “are” white choose to be, because to choose otherwise would be costly”.

Elsewhere, Perkinson (2002) explains the dominance of whiteness, rooted in privilege, which enables and empowers colour-blindness:

The White middle-class male body remains the presupposition of gaze, the norm of ontology, the artifact of institutional discipline, the criterion of ethical interrogation, despite its increasing displacement from the presumption of control. (p. 174)

These assertions by Perkinson operate in the arena of whiteness studies,<sup>68</sup> but also deal with the reality that whiteness is something chosen as a protection, as is colour-blindness, and both can only be chosen from a place of privilege.

Despite the constructed and chosen idea of whiteness, the notion of a colour-blind society is not hard to find in contemporary America. Charles A. Gallagher (2003:24) explains that “national survey data suggests that a majority of whites view race relations through the lens of color-blindness”. He further elaborates:

The perception among a majority of white Americans that the socio-economic playing field is now level, along with whites’ belief that they have purged themselves of overt racist attitudes and behaviors, has made colorblindness the dominant lens through which whites understand contemporary race relations. (Gallagher 2003: 25)

With this understanding as the primary lens through which a large part of the population sees race issues, it is not hard to see how those living in Anchorage may be having a hard time seeing each other.

While the issue of colour-blindness stifles the conversation on race and ethnicity, the truth that we simply do not interact across racial and ethnic lines may be at least as much to blame. The 2013 American Values Survey from the Public Religion Research Institute reported that:

Americans’ core social networks tend to be dominated by people of the same race or ethnic background. However, the degree of racial and ethnic diversity in Americans’ social networks varies somewhat according to their particular race or ethnicity. Among white Americans, 91% of people comprising their social networks are also white, while five percent are identified as some other race. Among black Americans, 83% of people in their social networks are composed of people who are also black, while eight percent are white and six percent are some other race. Among Hispanic Americans, approximately two-thirds (64%) of the people who comprise their core social networks are also Hispanic, while nearly 1-in-5 (19%) are white and nine percent are some other race. (Cox, Navarro-Rivera, and Jones 2016)

Ingraham (2014), writing for *The Washington Post*, put it another way, “Blacks have ten times as many black friends as white friends. But white Americans have an astonishing 91

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<sup>68</sup> An overview of whiteness and whiteness studies can be found in Jay and Jones (2005), as well as Linder (2018).

times as many white friends as black friends.” Thompson (2017), writing in *The Atlantic*, chose to view it as bubbles, reporting:

Living in bubbles is the natural state of affairs for human beings. People seek out similarities in their marriages, workplaces, neighborhoods, and peer groups. The preferred sociological term is “homophily”—similarity breeds affection—and the implications are not all positive. White Americans have 90 times more white friends than they have black, Asian, or Hispanic friends, according to one analysis from the Public Religion Research Institute. That’s not a description of a few liberal elite cliques. It’s a statistic describing the social networks of 200 million people. America is bubbles, all the way down.

In reality, we cannot see each other across racial divides when we are only interacting within our own racial group.

Certainly, the history and legacy of colonialism carried in the trauma of those perpetrated on and the perpetrators and their descendants is a huge reason for the division in Anchorage around race and ethnicity. Furthermore, notions of a post-racial or colour-blind society have large implications in the discussion of race in Anchorage, but it may well be this isolated reality that is the largest barrier. How does one begin to have a conversation about race if one has no relationships with anyone of a different race to converse with? While statistics for Anchorage’s racial isolation don’t exist, it is my suspicion that interactions in the city could be expected to only be slightly better than the national average. It may be that isolation – a well-documented (on the national level) and harsh reality – drives much of our inability to see each other in Anchorage.

In 1963 while speaking at Western Michigan University, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered this thought on the isolation of the American Church, “At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation” (Archives and Regional History Collections and University Libraries, n.d.). Fifty years later not much has changed. One would hope that the church would be different in the area of racial isolation but as Smietana (2015) wrote in *Christianity Today*: “Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life, with more than 8 in 10 congregations made up of one predominant racial group. And most

worshippers think their church is fine the way it is”. It seems isolation is a keeping Anchorage residents from seeing each other, even in church.

## II. The Great Reversal

While it would be easy to view the division over issues such as LGBTQ+ rights in Anchorage as a piece of recent or even contemporary history, it is part of a division in the church that has roots that go back 100 years. In the late 19th and the early 20th century Evangelical Christians in the United States were at the forefront of social causes. Moberg (2006) explains:

Social history in England and the United States clearly reveals that evangelical Christianity played a major role in both social reconstruction and social welfare. Earle E. Cairns, for instance, had shown the profound impact evangelical Christians had upon the abolition of slavery, prison reform, humane treatment of the mentally ill, and improved working conditions for industrial laborers. They were highly instrumental in developing many concrete principles and forms of social work which prevail today. Numerous welfare societies were established by evangelicals to alleviate the effects of social evils. (p. 28)

Moberg (2006:28) adds that this was an outgrowth of revivalism that “clearly related to the fulfillment of Christian social responsibility”. At the time, the Evangelicals were reaching out with the good news in the slums and when faced with the realities of those in need “quickly added social welfare programs” (Moberg 2006:28).

Around the dawn of the 20th century this concern for the poor and others in need had become associated with the “Social Gospel”. The Social Gospel, articulated notably by Walter Rauschenbusch in his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, and *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1997) originally published in 1917, was responsible for a large amount of Christian social action and activity.

By the 1930s a shift began to take place. Driven in part by isolationist tendencies, and increased doubt in the power of humans to make progress in the wake of the First World War, denominations began to lose interest in social engagement. Along with the societal shift was the reality that the Social Gospel had emphasized social engagement and

humanitarianism as a priority of the church over the preaching of the Gospel. In 1910 when evangelist A.C. Dixon edited *The Fundamentals* (Torrey & Dixon 1910), the social approach to the Gospel found itself under attack and Christian Fundamentalism on the rise. Add to this the complexity of urban issues, and the debates over secularization in matters such as science (in particular, the teaching of evolution) and division was inevitable. By the 1940s, the Social Gospel movement was waning away.

In the end, the issue boils down to how one understands the nature of the Gospel. On one hand the Christian Fundamentalist, who in large part have become today's Evangelicals, believe that the priority of the Gospel is preaching individual salvation.<sup>69</sup> The other side of the divide are those partial to the Social Gospel, who are in large part today's main line Protestants, who continue to believe that intervention in public social needs is a matter of faith and a faithful witness in the world. Moberg (2006) explains:

In a very real sense, then, the current tensions between those who emphasize personal verses social ministries in contemporary Christendom are a continuation of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, even though details of the issues, terminology, and groups involved have changed. (p. 15)

This reality became clear to me about a decade ago teaching at a youth retreat. The weekend-long gathering was made up of two youth groups. I was asked to teach at the Saturday morning session. I chose to lead a discussion on Matthew 25. Purposely trying to create a liminal space in the youth, I started the discussion asking how someone was saved. The group offered standard, orthodox answers about believing in Jesus, making a decision to

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<sup>69</sup> This position was recently reiterated in *The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel* states: "In view of questionable sociological, psychological, and political theories presently permeating our culture and making inroads into Christ's church, we wish to clarify certain key Christian doctrines and ethical principles prescribed in God's Word. Clarity on these issues will fortify believers and churches to withstand an onslaught of dangerous and false teachings that threaten the gospel, misrepresent Scripture, and lead people away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Specifically, we are deeply concerned that values borrowed from secular culture are currently undermining Scripture in the areas of race and ethnicity, manhood and womanhood, and human sexuality. The Bible's teaching on each of these subjects is being challenged under the broad and somewhat nebulous rubric of concern for 'social justice.'" (Social Justice and the Gospel, n.d.) One of the authors of *The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel*, John MacArthur (2018) wrote, "Over the years, I've fought a number of polemical battles against ideas that threaten the gospel. This recent (and surprisingly sudden) detour in quest of 'social justice' is, I believe, the most subtle and dangerous threat so far." Not only does this statement shed light on how social justice is as a threat, but displays a disturbing lack of a broader historical understanding.

follow him, and giving your life in service to God. Then we read Matthew 25:31-46. From the text I began to push back asking why it appears in this passage that our salvation is tied to how we treat those in need. The discussion was robust. I clearly remember one of the youth getting frustrated with me because, “What those people need is Jesus. Nothing is more important than that”. I felt pretty good about the discussion and thought it had stretched the youth in an appropriate way that required them to think about Jesus’ desire for us to be serving others. A week or so after the retreat, I received a phone call from a parent concerned that I was teaching a “social gospel” and not “true” Christianity. In this interaction it is clear to see that the division explained by Moberg is a reality in the church today.

Moberg is echoed not just by my experience but also in the observation of Michael Frost. Frost (2017) makes a keen observation on the divided state of Christianity in America in a *Washington Post* article titled “Colin Kaepernick vs. Tim Tebow: A Tale of Two Christians on Their Knees” that goes beyond an analysis of those two American football players and gets to the present reality of this division:

In many parts of the world it feels as though the church is separating into two versions, one that values personal piety, gentleness, respect for cultural mores, and an emphasis on moral issues like abortion and homosexuality, and another that values social justice, community development, racial reconciliation, and political activism.

One version is kneeling in private prayer. The other is kneeling in public protest.

One is concerned with private sins like abortion. The other is concerned with public sins like racial discrimination.

One preaches a gospel of personal salvation. The other preaches a gospel of political and social transformation.

One is reading the Epistles of Paul. The other is reading the Minor Prophets.

One is listening to Eric Metaxas and Franklin Graham. The other is listening to William Barber and John Perkins.

One is rallying at the March for Life. The other is getting arrested at Moral Monday protests.

You can see where this is going. The bifurcation of contemporary Christianity into two distinct branches is leaving the church all the poorer, with each side needing to be enriched by the biblical vision of the other.

Biblical Christianity should be, as Walter Brueggemann expresses it, “awed to heaven, rooted in earth.” We should, as he says, be able to “join the angels in praise, and keep our feet in time and place.”

Sadly, with the suspicion and animosity shown toward each side of the divide by the other, I can’t see a coming together any time soon.

Frost takes two kneeling American footballers and uses that image to put his finger on the pulse of Western Christianity and offers a picture of the division between those on both sides of the Gospel verses social action divide. The churches that stand on opposing sides of the LGBTQ+ debates in Anchorage line up in very much the way that Frost outlines and consistent with the historical separation outlined by Moberg.

### III. Positive Community of Desire

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5: 44 & 45a NIV). These words of Jesus speak into division. Theologian James Alison (2010:164) says we must look at this text in its larger context by reading and examining Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV):

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

When you read this text in the larger context, the tendency to make these verses into a simple moralistic directive disappears and what becomes visible is two ways of living – or, as in Alison’s understanding, two different types of desire. Writing from a Girardian perspective, Alison (2010) notes:

Whether it is a matter of love or hate, reciprocity is the same in both cases: you are run by the social other, and you become a function of that social other. So, you love those who love you, and become more and more dependent on their approval, which means that you allow your



behavior to be shaped by their expectation, and find yourself automatically tied into having shared attitudes of contempt for those who they despise... There is nothing especially *good* about this sort of thing, which happens throughout human culture, and is simply the result of the sort of imitative animal which we are. (p. 167 [*italics original*])

This imitation of desire is the mimetic desire of Girard. It can negatively form community.

Alison (2010:165) observes, “Give people a common enemy, and you will give them a common identity.” But Jesus is not talking about this type of mimicry that leads to an us-versus-them, over-and-against type of reciprocity. Rather, Alison (2010) notes:

If the “social other” tends to teach us a pattern of desire such that what is normal is reciprocity, which of course includes retaliation, then Jesus presents God as what I call “the other Other”, one who is entirely outside any being moved, pushed, offended, any retaliation of any sort at all. On the contrary, God is able to be *towards* each one of us without ever being *over-against* any one of us. God is in no sort of rivalry at all with any one of us, is not part of the same order of being as us, which is how God can create and move us without displacing us. Whereas we who are on the same level as each other can only move each other by displacing each other. (p. 166 [*italics original*])

In this reality is the seeds of a new way of being in the world. This is where Jesus’ instruction to pray for an enemy begins to topple the destructive nature of returning hate for hate. Alison (2010:167) notes that in this instruction we are invited to “allow your identity to be given to you by your Father who is heaven” instead of those one is in rivalry with. And in doing so we are freed up to pray for them and, in doing so, we “are beginning to allow the pattern of desire which is God to enter into your life, so allowing you to recognize your similarity with your enemies, rather than exaggerate your differences” (Alison 2010:167).

In light of this reality, when one considers the issues of competition and busyness (as well as divisions over race and issues), it may be a worthy exercise to consider how one is formed by desires and where those desires come from. Are we responding out of reciprocity rooted in human desires? Can the issues of identity be revealed to see if we are gaining understanding of ourselves in the desires borrowed from others or in the desires of God?

Rocke and Van Dyke (2012:285-303) have proposed a way forward, a positive “Community of Desire”. Working from the understanding that our desires come from others, they propose that if a group could be formed that promoted and practiced positive desires –



borrowed not from each other but from God who is in rivalry with no one – then the effect would be the replication of those desires in the group. They assert that Psalm 37:4 is a Girardian understanding of desire: “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart”. They go on to say:

By imitating God who exists in ever unfolding Trinitarian desire (positive mimesis by which the Son imitates the Father, and the Father imitates the Son through the delight of the Spirit), we discover that it is quite possible to borrow our desires from others without doing so rivalistically. Non-rivalistic relationship is the wellspring of all genuine community. It is the very essence of God’s kingdom as revealed to us by Jesus. It is the essence of shalom. (Rocke and Van Dyke 2012:292-293)

By considering the nature of desire and how it creates an us-versus-them reciprocity, we can better understand how desire plays into the reality of competitiveness, busyness (which is fuelled by desires such as the desire to perform, the desire to please people, etc.) and division over issues in Anchorage. Noting the role that desire has in creating a community from a common enemy also sheds light on the conditions in Anchorage. The vision of a positive community of desire offers a possible way to overcome this situation.

#### IV. Conclusions from Analysing the Historical and Cultural Gaze

In the preceding chapters the unveiled reading of the story of Anchorage has made clear that the city of Anchorage needs to be reimagined after the model of the coming city of God in Revelation. This has been displayed in noting the violence, crime, and safety issues in the city that affect all citizens, but particularly the most vulnerable. It has also been displayed that the needs of all of the citizens are not being met.

In order to begin to rethink about how the city might be reimagined pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage were interviewed. The interview subjects agreed on some issues facing Anchorage including substance abuse, homelessness, violence and affordable housing. However, other issues (along with busyness and competition) formed the basis for a divided ministry climate. Additionally, a division over race is present. The interview

subjects displayed a desire for more learning opportunities and a preference for a relational approach to education. It is the assertion of this thesis that this desire for learning together could be the path to reimagining Anchorage and seeing transformation in individuals and the city.

Gazing on the historical and cultural realities behind those divisive issues exposed the legacy of colonialism, the lingering effect of the LGBTQ+ rights debate in Anchorage, the mimetic nature of competition, and expectations placed on ministry leaders as the historical and cultural factors for “Why this is going on?”. In this chapter those observations were analysed.

In analysing the historical and cultural background behind the issues dividing the ministry climate in Anchorage, one can understand a fuller answer to the question “Why is it going on?”. Diving deeper into the reality of the colonized past that is the history of racial division in Anchorage reveals that under this division is a community dealing with trauma that affects both those to whom racism was perpetrated against and those that perpetrated the racism. This trauma has been handed down to the descendants of those on both sides. Furthermore, the culture struggles with the myth of whiteness as the norm, a condition that allows for the dismissal of a discussion of race by the privileged because they can choose to be colour-blind to the situation. Another reason to the division over race is simply the fact that isolation between different types of people is normative.

When one further analyses the divisions that exist in the city over issues one sees that this division is not confined to Anchorage and has historical roots in the Great Reversal that took place 100 years ago. In that reversal the church divided into roughly two camps: one that seeks first to evangelize and a second that has as its first activity the practice of social improvement.

Finally, the division caused by competition and busyness were analysed from the perspective of desire. Noting that our desires are borrowed from one another, it is easy to see how competition is the result. It is also easy to see how these desires, which are hard wired to build community by being over-and-against the Other, could quickly form community around a common enemy. But if our desires can be formed from “the other Other” (Alison 2010:166), a community of desire might be able to be formed that is positive.

In order for Anchorage ministry leaders and pastors to learn together and transform the city by re-envisioning it, this matter of a positive community of desire must be taken seriously. In light of the normative nature of whiteness and the dividing legacy and reality of racism and the long-standing division in the church over the nature of the Gospel, an environment will need to be created where those of different views and experiences might be able to come together to learn together. This coming together, as difficult as it might be, would be an initial expression of the perfect urban that is prophesied in Revelation that could lead to the transformation of Anchorage.

## Chapter 7: Anchorage's Larger Context: Urbanization

Before we are able to turn to the question of “What ought to be going on?”, there is one more area to consider: urbanization. As noted in the fourth chapter, there are a vast array of perspectives and ways to look at the city but no way to define with certainty just what is the city. This difficulty was also seen in the variety of understandings of the urban expressed by those interviewed. One reason for this is that it is no longer possible to contrast the city with what is around it because everywhere is affected by the reality of planetary urbanization (Brenner and Schmid [2011] 2018:451). Since this is the reality worldwide, then it is a reality in Anchorage and must be considered.

### I. The City as Mouth

Jim Perkinson (2001), writing in the journal *CrossCurrents*, paints a bleak but honest picture of the resources used by cities:

By definition, a city represents a masked structure of dependence on various “elsewheres:” no city is able to grow its necessary foodstuffs and fabrics inside its own borders or mine its needed metals and materials from under its own feet. Rather it represents an appropriation of “carrying capacity”—the ecologically determined limit to population a defined habitat can support over time without sustaining permanent damage to its ecosystem – from beyond its own boundaries. Cities live off ecologies at a distance from their own visible architectures. In our contemporary context, that “distance” is the planet itself. The postcolonial metropole is the “center” around which multiple “peripheries” are made to dance and die. A city, in this sense, is a large mouth consuming an ever-growing torrent of resources and energies forcibly harvested from their points of “natural” origin elsewhere. And city “culture” is the set of perceptual habits and practical patterns that encode that life as “meaningful.” (p. 95)

Perkinson depicts a picture here that is in line with Brenner and Schmid ([2011] 2018:451) and Lefebvre (2003) who speak of planetary urbanization. In seeing the city as a mouth with a bottomless appetite consuming resources it cannot produce that are drawn from the entire planet, one gets a vision of the way everything is affected by the urban reality of the planet. Agrarian essayist, poet, novelist, and cultural critic Wendell Berry concurs with Perkinson.

In his essay “Out of Your Car, Off Your Horse: Twenty-Seven Propositions About Global Thinking and the Sustainability of Cities”, Berry (1993) writes:

VI. The only sustainable city—and this, to me, is the indispensable ideal and goal—is a city in balance with its countryside: a city, that is, that would live off the net ecological income of its supporting region, paying as it goes all its ecological and human debts.

VII. The cities we now have are living off ecological principal, by economic assumptions that seem certain to destroy them. They do not live at home. They do not have their own supporting regions. They are out of balance with their supports, wherever on the globe their supports are.

VIII. The balance between city and countryside is destroyed by industrial machinery, "cheap" productivity in field and forest, and "cheap" transportation. Rome destroyed the balance with slave labor; we have destroyed it with "cheap" fossil fuel. (p. 21)

What Perkinson and Berry observe – one from within a city and the other from outside a city – is urbanization. Urbanization can be broadly understood as “the social, geographical, economic, and cultural impact of cities beyond the physical area which they occupy on the earth’s surface” (Smith 2011:18). This understanding of urbanization is keeping with thinking about primate cities from an earlier era (Jefferson [1939] 1989; Smith 2011:88-91).

David W. Smith notes that “[s]ociologists speak of primate cities in contexts where a single urban centre expands to become much larger than any other city within a nation” (2011:89). Smith explains the situation in primate cities (and all cities) as three-fold. First, “the narrative of modernization, which includes urbanization as a key instrument for achievement of its goals, has resulted in the marginalization and denigration of the native peoples” (2011:89). Second, “in many countries previously under colonial rule, the cities built as the command centres of the colonial enterprise have expanded to become megacities, sucking in huge numbers of people and dominating the political and economic life” (2011:89). Lastly, “megacities across the southern hemisphere demand that we give attention to the issues of poverty and injustice that shape the lives of million city-dwellers around the world” (2011:89). In short, Smith sees primate cities as dominating their country (and, if

Perkinson is correct, the world) by using its resources – both physical and human – to maintain its physical existence and its political and economic power.

This drawing in of resources and people into the city is not a new observation.

Writing Mark Jefferson ([1939] 1989) explained:

Cities grow by excess of births over deaths and by the attraction of opportunity for employment. The opportunity for ready employment, which makes men throng to certain cities, is sometimes given by the productivity of the region... sometimes by advantageous location on lines of communication... sometimes by men who know how to turn ideas into realities. Usually several of these factors act together... Once a city is larger than any other in its country, this mere fact gives it an impetus to grow that cannot affect any other city, and it draws away from all of them in character as well as size. It is the best market for all exceptional products. It becomes a *primate* city. (p. 227 [*italics original*])

The primate nature of the city as described by Jefferson may now refer not just to the largest city in its country, but to that of the largest city in a region if the country is larger, as well as the global effect, in which all cities are drawing on planetary resources (Perkinson 2001).

Jefferson could not have foreseen globalization when first writing about primate cities 80 years ago. What can be seen in Jefferson's writing is the drawing in of resources into the city from a distance with the appetite of what Perkinson describes as a large mouth (2001). In this drawing in of resources, "the primate city is not only a manufacturing center. Typically, it is the government center, the financial center, the educational center, the intellectual center, the transportation and communication center, the manufacturing center, and the center of just about everything" (Isserman 1996:38).

Writing on the 50th anniversary of Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City* (LeFebvre 1996:147-159), Andy Merrifield (2017) expounds on this idea of cities drawing in resources and people:

The urban doesn't so much spread as it becomes the vortex for sucking in everything the planet offers: its land and wealth, its capital and power, its culture and people – its dispensable labor-power. It's this sucking in of people and goods, of capital and information that fuels the urban machine, that makes it so dynamic as well as destabilizing, because its energizing and totalizing force "expulses" (expels) people, "secretes" what Lefebvre calls a "residue." This expulsion process makes urban space expand, lets it push itself out, has it further entangle rural space, and disentangle rural life. (Merrifield 2017)

Merrifield, in reflecting on Lefebvre, adds to the picture of the city that Perkinson describes. Not only is the city drawing in resources of all kinds from beyond its borders, but it is emitting a by-product – a residue that is secreted according to Lefebvre. The city is pulling to itself in a centripetal way resources of all kinds, and in a centrifugal way – pushed out from itself – a by-product. Expanding on Perkinson’s biological metaphor (Merrifield uses a mechanical metaphor), the city can be seen as eating up all the resources with its mouth and defecating out the waste of its consumption.

The question then is what exactly is the city defecating? Once again Merrifield (2017), drawing on Lefebvre, explains:

Lefebvre says every big system leaves a residue that escapes it, that is chewed up and spat out by it. Every whole leaves a remainder. It’s an idea most forcefully articulated in *Metaphilosophy* [...] Lefebvre says that totalisations like global capitalism always exhibit leakiness, have internal contradictions that both structure and de-structure. Totalisation can never be total; it always secretes and expels a “residual element,” its Other. There’ll always be people who don’t fit into any whole, who don’t want to fit in, who aren’t allowed to fit in. They’re the stuff left over after all the metrics are totted up, after everything has seemingly been accounted for: *le reste* after *la somme*. They’re the philosophical anti-concepts, an affirmation of remainders, of marginal dregs, a growing planetary constituency. (Merrifield 2017 [*italics original*])

The defecation that the beastly city expels is the people on the margins. It is clear that people are a resource devoured by the mouth with a bottomless appetite because the city needs resources and, in the end, its primary resource is people. However, the people that are not benefiting from the wealth and growth of the city are taken in, used, expelled and pushed out of the city (literally and figuratively) to the periphery.

Jeff Chang (2016:67) explores the centripetal and centrifugal city when writing about the displacement of minorities in “creative cities”. Chang, in a chapter titled “Vanilla Cities and Their Chocolate Suburbs: On Resegregation”, reports on the residue expelled by the San Francisco Bay area and the appetite for human resources that the dot com boom and high-tech industry has created over the past 25 years. He does this by looking at the arts and

artists that have been displaced. Chang (2016) opens the chapter writing about the Bay Area's hip-hop in the mid-2000s:

For a few ecstatic summers...the left-field rap spiking the national top 5-only airwaves...had been being beta tested on the streets of Oakland ("The Town" in local parlance) and San Francisco ("The City"). In actuality much of the music was being made deep in the cut, far from the metro center, along a nowhere stretch of interstate highway heading out of the Bay between the suburbs of Vallejo and Fairfield. (p. 64-65)

Chang (2016:65) explains from there that the reason for this was a "creeping – then surging – flood of new gold-rush tech workers". Chang (2016:68) cites statistics such as the fall in African American residents in the Fillmore, Western Addition, and Bayview/Hunter's Point neighbourhoods from 62% in the 1970s to 24% forty years later and that "only 8% of white students attend high-poverty schools, while 18% of Asians and 48% of Black and Latino students do" (2016:70-71). He also tells stories such as the eviction of Latino Rene Yanez and Yolanda Lopez who "had helped found Galeria de la Raza as well as its famed Dia de los Muertos parade and...had created some of the most compelling art of the Chicano movement" (Chang 2016:66). Chang (2016) shares a letter written to Yanez in response to that eviction by performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena that reads in part:

It's like you once told me, "This city loves to preserve its murals and evict its muralists." After all, it's not only the "criminals," the homeless and the gang-bangers who are being removed from the streets to make them acceptable for the new dot.com cadre....All the "creative cities" that have managed to successfully destroy and/or evict their working class have ultimately been condemned to doom. (p. 67)

While the "doom" of which Gomez-Pena speaks goes undefined, Chang (2016) writes:

Cities are cauldrons of change, it's part of their very allure. The tech economy has turned "disruption" into a value, an unqualified good. Cities have also been havens for economic diversity, which at their best become the engines of dynamism. But these times beg the question of whether disruption and diversity are really compatible. They also force us to look beyond the boundaries of the city, into how entire regions are being reshaped into new geographies of inequality. (p. 67)

As cities expel people, the boundaries of the area affected by the city becomes increasingly vast as those cast off are pushed further and further out to the margins physically and metaphorically. In this way, the effects of the city are far reaching in how it draws in



resources (Perkinson 2001) and in the residue it secretes (Merrifield 2017) – people are displaced and disenfranchised (Chang 2016).

Far from the Bay Area, perched on a hillside farm in Henry County, Kentucky, Wendell Berry (2010) writes about this same phenomenon as he has observed it through rural eyes:

Since World War II, the growing agricultural doctrine in government offices, universities and corporations has been that “there are too many people on the farm.” This idea has supported, if indeed it has not caused, one of the most consequential migrations in history: millions of rural people [are] moving from country to city in a stream that has not slackened from the war’s end until now. And the strongest force behind this migration, then as now, has been economic ruin on the farm [...] The farm-to-city migration has obviously produced advantages to the corporate economy [...] But these short-term advantages all imply long-term disadvantages, to both country and city. The departure of so many people has seriously weakened rural communities and economies all over the country [...] At the same time, the cities have had to receive a great influx of people unprepared for urban life and unable to cope with it [...] When the ‘too many’ of the country arrive in the city, they are not called ‘too many.’ In the city they are called ‘unemployed’ or ‘permanently unemployable.’<sup>70</sup> (p. 105-108)

A world away in Kenya the story is much the same. Obudho and Aduwo report that “[u]rban areas in Kenya are predominantly inhabited by men and women with rural upbringing” (Mugambi & Ojwang 1989:71). The centripetal and centrifugal city, sucking and expelling, can be viewed from both the rural and urban contexts.<sup>71</sup>

While not normally viewed as a “creative city” and far different from the Bay Area, Anchorage functions as a primate city within the state of Alaska and one can observe the effects of the centripetal and centrifugal action of the city. While it is nowhere near the largest city in the United States, Anchorage is situated in the state of Alaska which, in terms of landmass, is larger than many countries. At over 1,700,000 sq. km, Alaska is the roughly the same size as Iran or Libya and about 500,000 sq. km larger than South Africa. In light of its size, detachment from the contiguous United States, colonial past, and economy rooted in resource extraction Anchorage can be feasibly seen as primate city. In the country-sized state

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<sup>70</sup> Kelly Malone (2016) explores this shift in *Rural Migration and the Development of Urban Cultures in the United States*.

<sup>71</sup> Lefebvre (2003) also uses the image of “implosion/explosion” to explain this push/pull of the city, an image that has been utilized and explored by others recently – notably Brenner & Schmid (2015), Brenner (2014), and Merrifield (2013b:35-36).

of Alaska, Anchorage boasts a population that is ten times larger than the next largest city (Fairbanks, population 32,000) and houses roughly half of the population of the state. As for drawing resources from beyond its boundaries, “an estimated 90% of the merchandise goods for 85% of Alaska’s populated areas pass through” (Port of Anchorage, n.d.) the Port of Alaska, located in Anchorage. In fact, Port officials like to say, “[I]f you eat it, wear it, or drive it, it came through the Port of Anchorage.” (Port of Anchorage, n.d.). The vast majority of ships arriving at the port are from Seattle, Washington, highlighting how Anchorage draws resources from far away. Those ships are loaded in Seattle with goods from across the globe. Nearly all of the resources for the city and the state are not in any sense locally produced. As Meter and Goldenberg (2014) write:

The most critical concern Alaskans hold for the future of food is the security of its food supply. 95% of the \$2 billion of food Alaskans purchased [...] Moreover, this food is shipped through long supply chains. Essential items arrive by airplane, barge, and truck from Mexico, Europe, Asia, and the Lower 48.

It is easy here to see that Anchorage is also a city that draws its resources from far away.

The planetary urbanized world where cities are mouths that suck in resources from far away (Perkinson 2011) including vulnerable people and then secretes them as residue (Merrifield 2017) makes cities unsustainable and filled with displaced and disenfranchised people (Chang 2016) and creates an environment of conflict. In particular, space is a source of conflict.

## II. The Importance of Place

Contested space is about places, and place – urban or otherwise – has always been important biblically.

Land is a central, if not the central theme of biblical faith. Biblical faith is a pursuit of historical belonging that includes a sense of destiny derived from such belonging [...] It is now clear that a sense of place is a human hunger that the urban promise has not met. And a fresh look at the Bible suggests that a sense of place is a primary category of faith (Brueggemann 2002:3-4).

The place is important in the Old and New Testaments:

Place matters to God. Place always mattered to Jesus. The Gospel narratives distinguish the locations of Jesus and the disciples throughout their writing. Jesus knew His local audience, and His message was directed toward that audience in such a way as to connect with the people. It mattered to Him whether He was in Jerusalem of Galilee [...] From creation taking place in a garden to heaven being formed as an eternal city, where we are and what we do in each location matters (Crosscombe & Krispin 2017:32).<sup>72</sup>

While the importance of land and place in the Old and New Testament is a scriptural and historical reality, John Inge (2016:ix) notes that when he began to “research what had been written on place in theology”, he “found it to be very little”.<sup>73</sup> He is not alone; Sigurd

Bergmann (2007) notes:

In accordance with biblical and classical theology, space could and should be regarded as the Creator’s gift to the living, and place as the foundational dimension of reflecting on the Son’s incarnation and the Spirit’s inhabitation on Earth. Space and place as central theological themes, nevertheless, have been marginalized or even absent in theology for long periods of its history. (p. 354)

After finding little written on place and theology, Inge then goes on to propose *A Christian Theology of Place* (2016),<sup>74</sup> in which he writes, “Christian religion is not the religion of salvation *from* places, it is the religion of salvation *in* and *through* places” (2016:92 [*italics original*]). Inge (2016) continues:

Attention to place by the Christian community will afford great nourishment and sustenance to it [...] In allowing a sense of holy place to strengthen not only their faith but their sense of importance of place in human experience, Christians can witness to the biblical truth that our ‘placement’ is much more important than is generally imagined. It is no mere backdrop to actions and thoughts. This needs to be part of the ‘unavoidable witness’ of the Christian community. The Western world, which was once rooted in the Christian story, has lost those roots and, at the same time, lost any rootage in place. (p. 137)

Inge is not the only one calling for a theology of place as part of the Christian story.

Theology, mirroring the “space/place reflections” that have “moved out from the margins to

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<sup>72</sup> This would not be the conclusion of all scholars. John Inge (2003:48) writes, “Any discussion on the of significance of place in general and land in particular in the New Testament is bound to make reference to W.D. Davies’s study, *The Gospel and the Land* (1974). There is no other work of substance, largely because scholars do not seem to feel that ‘place’ is a category of sufficient importance in the New Testament to warrant their attention.” Inge (2016:50) concludes of Davies’s work, “Davies’s examination of much of the New Testament material, then, leads him to find in it, alongside the acknowledgement of the historical role of the land as the scene of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, a growing recognition that the Gospel demanded a breaking out of its “territorial chrysalis”. The central thrust of his study is toward a clear conclusion that land is of no importance in the New Testament.”

<sup>73</sup> Germane to the discussion here, Venter (2006:202) observes, “The neglect of space by theology, may raise the question about a possible explanation for theology’s impotence in the face of urban reality.”

<sup>74</sup> Bergmann (2007:360) observes of Inge that “Inge’s ‘Theology of Place’ does not in fact offer such a complex theology but it provides a very encouraging first step towards it, and it produces a collection of useful tools to its future construction.”

several sectors of sciences and the humanities” (Bergmann 2007:353), has been and is undergoing a spatial turn. Sigurd Bergmann (2007) states:

Theology’s reflections about space and place provide [...] not simply a new theme on a current agenda. They do, instead, represent a deep challenge and an urgent necessity for theology to become aware of its embeddedness in the existential spatiality of life. (p. 353)

This challenge has been met by Venter (2006) encouraging a Trinitarian approach to space and the city; Gorringer (2002) offering *A Theology of the Built Environment*; Knott (2005:1) undergoing the development of “a spatial methodology in order to examine religion in Western modernity”; and Prinsloo (2013 & 2015) reading Biblical texts from a spatial perspective. De Beer (2016) has called for this spatial turn to be made a reality on the ground arguing that:

[S]patial consciousness (cf. Soja 2010:17–20) needs to be very intentionally fostered theologically and in local faith communities; for people to see, understand and interpret spatiality; to dissect the myth of spatial neutrality; to understand how spaces and places are constructed socially, economically, and politically; to understand the spatiality of injustice and corresponding socio-economic exclusions; the way in which a certain understanding and working of capital ensure spatial inequities; the relationships between land, space, place and housing or ‘home’; the complicity of the church in co-constructing spatial injustice or the responsibility of the church to mediate justice spatially; and developing critical spatial perspectives, theologically, about all these categories. Spatiality indeed deals with all of life, just as theology, and therefore needs our fullest and best attention. (p. 3)

This move from space and place being merely a setting or the backdrop on which life, faith and theology happen to a critical part of both theory and practice offers real promise for addressing the physical realities of the city and its inhabitants.

### III. Contested Space

While place and land are of scriptural and theological importance, they are also a concrete and contemporary urban reality. In the current urban environment Brueggemann’s (2002:3-4) assertion that “[i]t is now clear that a sense of place is a human hunger that the urban promise has not met” is apparent on a global scale. Merrifield (2014) writes on the global nature of urban contested space, drawing on the observations of Eric Hazan (2010 &

2011). Merrifield (2014:28) summarizes Hazan by saying that Paris, in its centre, is “two million denizens of the predominantly white, bourgeois core, dancing to the tune of greedy real estate interests on the one side, and a spectacular tourist market – a Disneyland for the cultured – on the other”. Meanwhile, the real Paris “lies beyond the center, is even Paris without a center” in the suburbs that ring the city, “the ‘red belts’ of eight million predominantly black and Arab peoples, throbbing with sometimes scary and impoverished life yet always hustling on the edge” (Merrifield 2014:28). De Beer (2008) puts this global reality in on-the-ground terms:

On a daily basis, the inner-city presents a contest for space between rich and poor, black and white, foreigners and locals. Global trends are manifesting in the local inner city neighborhoods and spaces. Forces that cause exclusion globally also cause social, economic or cultural exclusion locally [...] Inner-city space is permanently contested. There is a battle between local authorities, private developers, slum lords, civic organizations, resident groups, landless groups, informal traders, drug pushers, and drug users all wanting to appropriate inner-city space for their own purposes. (p. 182)

This global contest for the urban space is something happening in Paris and in every city on a global scale but also on every block of the urban world.

Writing on the contested reality of his home city, Pretoria/Tshwane, Stephan de Beer (2014b:1) states, “Many urban spaces in the City of Tshwane have become a struggle between life and death.” That life-and-death struggle takes place in “one of the fastest growing mega urban regions in the world” that boasts 13.5 million residents (projected to double by 2055) and contains four of the 52 cities over one million residents on the continent: Johannesburg, the City of Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, and Sedibeng Municipality (Ribbens & De Beer 2017:3). Thinandavha Mashau, inspired by Kritzinger’s (2008) reading of Psalm 121, uses the images of hills and valleys to consider the contested spaces in Tshwane. Mashau (2014:2) explains, “For me the city is a creative space, which is paradoxically placed. It is a contested space where the hills in it constantly change its landscape; the hills also use their powers to hide the valleys and streams therein.” In the end, Mashau (2014:12) calls for a

levelling like the one prophesied by the prophet Isaiah<sup>75</sup> where “[e]very valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain” (Isaiah 40:4 - NIV). He does because “Christian mission in the city context should therefore be guided by God’s mission as we seek to participate in what God is already doing in world cities in bringing total transformation, justice and shalom” (Mashau 2014:12).

Mashau is not alone in seeing the spatial struggle in the urban environment as spiritual in nature. As de Beer (2008:185) writes, “Essentially, the battle for space is a spiritual battle (in the broad sense of the word). It is a battle for the soul of the city, a battle of values with profound political, socio-economic, cultural and even moral considerations.” Brueggemann (2002:4) agrees when he states, “a fresh look at the Bible suggests that a sense of place is a primary category of faith.”

#### IV. The Right to the City

While Mashau finds a prophetic imagination (Brueggemann 2001) as an inspiration in addressing the global reality of constant urban conflict rooted in the prophet Isaiah, there are others that follow Henri Lefebvre’s (1996:147-159) lead in proclaiming a “right to the city.” Writing in the late 1960s, Lefebvre coined the phrase the “right to the city” in contrast to “*the right to nature*” which “entered into social practice thanks to *leisure*, having made its way through protestations becoming commonplace against noise, fatigue, and the concentrationary universe of cities (as cities are rotting or exploding)” (Lefebvre 1996:157-158 [*italics original*]). Lefebvre (1996) is sceptical of the right to nature and what it claims about the urban:

In the face of this pseudo-right, the *right to the city* is like a cry and a demand [...] The claim to nature, and the desire to enjoy it displace the right to the city. This latest claim expresses itself indirectly as a tendency to flee the deteriorated and unrenovated city, alienated urban life before at last, ‘really’ living. The need and ‘right’ to nature contradict the right to the city

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<sup>75</sup> Walter Brueggemann (1993:3) calls the book of Isaiah “The Great urban document of the Bible.”

without being able to evade it. (This does not mean that it is not necessary to preserve vast ‘natural’ spaces). (p. 158 [*italics original*])

He then turns to what the “right to the city” is:

The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed or renewed *right to urban life*. It does not matter whether the urban fabric encloses the countryside and what survives as peasant life, as long as the ‘urban’, place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among resources, finds its practico-material realization. Here again, as a century ago, it denies and contests, by its very existence, the class strategy directed against it. As a hundred years ago, although under new conditions, it gathers the interests (overcoming the immediate and the superficial) of the whole society and firstly of all those that *inhabit*. (Lefebvre 1996:158 [*italics original*])

Merrifield (2013b:21) exerts, “Without a center there can’t be any urbanity; what was taken away must be politically reclaimed. The right to the city was the right to reclaim centrality, the right to the city as a use value, the right to reinvigorate both urban life and Marxist politics.” David Harvey (2003) explains the right to the city as:

The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire. We need to be sure we can live with our own creations (a problem for every planner, architect and utopian thinker). But the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights. (p. 1)

Lefebvre’s right to the city has become “a powerful and seductive battle cry; it has mobilized by many groups across the globe, forged fruitful alliances, and promoted courageous activism” (Merrifield 2013b:24). This blooming of many groups and causes claiming a right to the city has recently even included churches claiming a right to the city (Ribbens & De Beer 2017).

As commonplace as the right to the city as become in movements across the urban landscape, that claim of a right to the city is now being questioned by scholars like Merrifield. While the right to the city is a “a powerful and seductive battle cry” (Merrifield 2013b:24), Merrifield wonders if it is now the wrong cry on the wrong field of battle (2013b:24). He objects to it in part because it is not the city releasing people that are excluded, discriminated against, oppressed, deprived and discontented (Merrifield 2013b:25),



but rather “a democracy of society in which people have the right to create one’s own life, wherever one finds oneself” (2013b:25). Merrifield (2014:31) puts skin on this claim by again drawing his readers to the experience of Eric Hazan:

Hazan thinks the *l’insurrection qui veit* won’t erupt in central Paris: The coming insurrection will erupt on the periphery, out on the global periphery, where the dispossessed and marginalized denizens – “the dangerous classes” – will organize and mobilize themselves to create a truly “popular” urbanism, generating at the same time tensions at the centers they surround; and maybe, just maybe, one day actually “recuperating” that center. Hazan doesn’t speak of a “right to the city” as his organizing banner. For him, it’s the *political* insurrection that finds its expression in any outer propulsion; not a desire to change the government or the municipality, but to change the existing nature of society – “to change life,” as Lefebvre might have said. (*italics original*)

In the end the “right to the city” and the call for insurrection are responses to the contested space that is a daily reality of the urban world.

## V. From Concrete to Ideology

In this discussion of the current urban landscape, the understanding of cities and the urban world is shifting from an understanding based on concrete physical attributes and realities to one based in ideology. Sheldrake (2014:5) declares, “A successful city is, in the end, a state of mind that offers a vision of human community that is capable of promoting co-existence between strangers and of learning how to seek a shared code of social behavior.” Kimmelman (2016:18) shares this sense when speaking about city squares, “The perfect square, it turns out, is also a state of mind.”

Merrifield (2014), in a chapter titled “Every Revolution has Its Agora”, about a new public space being needed, states:

For the physical and social manifestation of our landscape, for its bricks and mortar, we have what most people would deem “city.” But as a political ideal, as a new social contract around which citizenship might cohere, we have something we might call “the urban”; a more expansive realm for which no passports are required and around which the people of the world might bond. (p. 80-81)

This idea of the “urban” is in line with Sheldrake’s (2014:5) city, and Kimmelman’s (2016:18) public square as a “state of mind”. Merrifield (2013a) explains:



The urban now is an ontological reality inside of us, one that behooves a different *way of seeing*: it is a *metaphilosophical* problem of grappling with ourselves in a world that is increasingly urbanized. Another ‘way of seeing’, another way of conceiving urbanization in our minds eye, is to grasp it as a complex adaptive system, as a chaotic yet determined process. As a concept, even a ‘virtual concept’, the term ‘planetary urbanization’ already connotes a shift in perspective, conjures up stirring imagery, maybe even rhetorical imagery, that is seemingly extraterrestrial and futuristic. (p. 911-912 [*italics original*])

Merrifield is not alone in calling for us to consider cities and the urban as something not rooted in physical expressions. David Wachsmuth (2014:75) asks the question, “Could the concept of the city now be ideological?”, noting that “[y]esterday’s sociological truths may become today’s ideologies”. He concludes:

What I have outlined here is a third way: to treat the city as a category of practice, as a representation of people’s relationship to urbanization processes, rather than an as a category of analysis adequate to describe these processes themselves. But in a specific sense: we should systematically interrogate the city not simply as a neutral representation, but as ideology—as a structured misrecognition that critical urban theory and practice must confront and seek to change alongside the sociomaterial forms that produce it. (Wachsmuth 2014:87)

Likewise, Brenner and Schmid (2015) seek to move the epistemology of the urban from concrete to ideology. They note that the “contemporary crisis in urban studies” (Brenner & Schmid 2015:154) has been produced by three factors:

One: New geographies of uneven spatial development have been emerging through a contradictory interplay between rapid, explosive processes of urbanization and various forms of stagnation, shrinkage, and marginalization, often in close proximity to each other.

Two: The basic nature of urban realities – long understood as singular, encompassing rubric of ‘cityness’ – has become more differentiated, polymorphic, variegated and multiscalar than previous cycles of capitalist urbanization.

Three: Closely intertwined with the aforementioned trends, the regulatory geographies of capitalist urbanization have likewise been undergoing profound, rapid mutations. (Brenner & Schmid 2015:151-153)

Brenner and Schmid see urban studies as being in a “field-transforming epistemological crisis” much like the one the field experienced in the 1960s and 1970s (Brenner & Schmid 2015:153-154). The crisis of the 1960’s and 1970s,

[I]nvolved foundational debates regarding the appropriate categories and methods through which to understand a sociospatial terrain whose basic contours and parameters were a matter of broad consensus [...] the equation of the urban with a specific *spatial unit* or *settlement type*. (Brenner & Schmid 2015:154)

However, in today's crisis, "this entrenched set of assumptions – along with a broad constellation of closely associated epistemological frameworks for confronting and mapping the urban question – is being severely destabilized" (Brenner & Schmid 2015:154). Brenner and Schmid (2015:163), after noting the fragmentation present in the field in response to this crisis as well as the reflexive possibility found in postcolonial urban studies, offer seven theses that comprise "a general epistemological framework through which this elusive, yet seemingly omnipresent condition of the contemporary world might be analytically deciphered, even as it continues to evolve and mutate before our eyes". These theses are:

Thesis 1: the urban and urbanization are theoretical categories, not empirical objects.

Thesis 2: the urban is a process, not a universal form, settlement type or bounded unit.

Thesis 3: urbanization involves three mutually constitutive moments—concentrated urbanization, extended urbanization and differential urbanization.

Thesis 4: the fabric of urbanization is multidimensional.

Thesis 5: urbanization has become planetary.

Thesis 6: urbanization unfolds through variegated patterns and pathways of uneven spatial development.

Thesis 7: the urban is a collective project in which the potentials generated through urbanization are appropriated and contested. (Brenner & Schmid 2015:163-187)

These seven theses form a summary of current thinking on the urban and in them one can see the shift in understanding from the physical to the ideological but also other realities of the current urban landscape, such as the global nature of urbanisation and the collective aspect.

Brenner and Schmid (2015) add:

In most mainstream traditions, the urban is treated as an empirically self-evident, universal category corresponding to a particular type of bounded settlement space, the 'city' [...] we argue that the urban, and the closely associated concept of urbanization, must be understood as theoretical abstractions; they can only be defined through the labor of conceptualization. The urban is thus a theoretical category, not an empirical object: its demarcation as a zone of thought, representation, imagination or action can only occur through a process of theoretical abstraction. (p. 163)

This gives support to Merrifield's (2013a:911-912) claim that "the urban now is inside of us" and Wachsmuth's (2014:87) call "to treat the city as a category of practice, as a

representation of people's relationship to urbanization processes, rather than an as a category of analysis adequate to describe these processes themselves". In the end, the urban that has surrounded all of life physically now surrounds our thinking as well.

## VI. Conclusions in Light of Urbanisation

The vision of Revelation 21 and 22 of a new perfect city is one of a truly globalized urban reality. In that perfect city, all the nations are gathered together (Rev 7:9, 21:24, 22:2) and living in harmony. The needs of the people in that city will all be supplied by the resources of the river of life flowing from the throne of God and the trees of life growing on each bank of that great river (Rev 22:1-2). This ideal urban reality holds the perfect condition for humans and the resources to sustain them.

Sitting behind the exploration of this thesis into how urban ministry education can be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city of Anchorage is the larger context of urbanisation. The globalisation of our current world is not the perfect vision of Revelation. However, the reality of a globally urbanized world speaks to many of the realities this examination of the city has uncovered.

As was previously noted, the population of the city of Anchorage is very diverse and comes from many different places across the globe. The population is also transient. These factors are important when considering the call for place to be theologically important. For a contextual learning program to be created in Anchorage, the place of Anchorage must be seen as something that is valued for its uniqueness. With people in the city coming to this place from many different locations, a sense of place must be part of developing a local program because it must be rooted in this specific place.

The fact that cities are drawing resources to themselves from great distances and then using those resources – including people – in an exploitive way creates an economy where all

needs are not being met. As was shown in this chapter, those that pay the price are the humans that the city discards. This is an explanation for the ways in which the needs of everyone are not being met in Anchorage. With the way a globalized city is designed, there are always those who end up not benefitting from the system in place. This has been noted in this exploration of the city and shows up in homelessness, the inability to afford housing, and substance abuse. Anchorage, as a globalized city, discards some of its residents in the pursuit of economic goals that differ from the economy of God. These tensions can, and do, play out as conflicts over space in the city. These economic realities also affect the nature of work and are likely a factor in the drive for churches to be successful that place increasing expectations on pastors.

Another reality of urbanisation is that it places people in increasing contact with people that are different than them. The migration to cities all over the world creates a situation where people are interacting with people of different race, ethnicity, religion, and culture on a daily basis. This expanding diversity of interaction has built into it the opportunity for conflict and, like with the economic realities, tension over physical space. Anchorage's struggles with diversity and different understandings of issues are related to this interaction brought on by globalisation.

Globalisation and its effects must be considered when proposing an educational program for ministry leaders and pastors. First, to develop a contextual urban ministry education program, one must be rooted in a specific place. Second, to understand the the gulf between the economy of the perfect urban in Revelation and Anchorage, urbanisation is helpful in understanding how people are used and misused in the globalized economy. Third, it is helpful to observe globalisation's role in interpersonal and spatial conflicts. We must add a consideration of urbanisation to the call for more learning opportunities in Anchorage

done in a relational way with the goal of transforming the city towards the goal of the city of God in Revelation.

### Part III: “What ought to be going on?”

#### Chapter 8: Searching for Relationships, Curriculum, and Transformation

##### I. Introduction

At this important turn from understanding “What is going on?” to proposing “What ought to be going on?” in Anchorage, I would like to review what the data, data analysis, historical and cultural gaze, and the analysis of that gaze have revealed thus far to put what is proposed in its proper context.

From the interviews of pastors and ministry leaders, I learned that there is a need for more training to be available in the city and a strong preference for mentorship and other forms of on-the-job training. This need for training with an understanding of the importance of relationships was also clear from the *City of Joy* pilot and the practitioner interviews. In the interviews with practitioners, it was clear that training in each of those ten different locations was based on understanding the rhythms and needs of each city with a key component also being relationships.

The interviewed pastors and ministry leaders described the ministry climate for training in Anchorage as divided. Suggested reasons for the division were a difference on issues as well as busyness and competition. A division also exists in the city across racial and ethnic lines. Respondents were largely in agreement about the issues that the city is facing such as substance abuse, homelessness, violence (when all types are combined), and affordable housing and have some common ground there, but less so on divisive issues like LGBTQ+ rights. Analysis also showed that Anchorage, though remote, is not immune from the effects of globalisation because no place is exempt from the reach of globalisation.

In an effort to better understand the findings from Anchorage and the rhythms of the city, we considered the history and culture around the divisions. This gaze and the analysis

of this gaze on the history and culture surfaced a colonial and racist history that has left its mark on the city in the form of on-going trauma, the lingering effects of white normalization, and racial isolation. It further unearthed that the division over issues sits in both a contemporary and historical reality of a church divided by the prioritizing of evangelism or social action. Finally, we discovered that the root of the competition and busyness division is a matter of mimetic desire.

The above was undertaken in an effort to answer the questions: “What is going on?” and “Why is it going on?”. The answers to those questions inform the next question that needs to be answered, “What ought to be going on?”, in order to answer the primary question of this thesis: how can urban ministry education, focused on transforming both the participants and the city, contextually relevant to Anchorage, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city?

## II. Energizing for a New Hope

“What ought to be going on?” is a prophetic question. Answering it is a visionary task of energizing the city for a new hope. In his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann (2001) explains the functioning of a prophet in three steps. First, a prophet sheds light on the present reality, which I have undertaken in the previous chapters. Second, a prophet points to a vision of what could be, which is the work of this section. Third, a prophet rejoices and remembers God’s deliverance, which should be the on-going work of the people of God, but in this case may happen sometime down the road when what is proposed is functioning and fruit is being seen from the work. In this chapter, I will outline my journey to discovering a way to energize new hope in Anchorage around the questions this thesis is seeking to address.

### *The Lesson I Must Keep Learning*

During the course of this project, I have struggled to arrive at a direction for how to energize new hope in the area of theological education in Anchorage. At the onset of the project, I believed that what was simply needed was the right curriculum and then transformation could take place. If people processed the right information, then ministry would change and the city would be transformed. This is similar to a mistake I made earlier in my career. When Parachutes opened, I thought I had lots of information (content) to deliver to the youth we would be serving. What I learned rather quickly was that entering into relationship was much more important. In a similar way, I began this project thinking about how the content that I had learned during my Master's studies, which was transformative for me and others, could be delivered to ministry leaders in Anchorage. This understanding was once again focused on content delivery.

During the course of this project, the strong theme of relationships caused me to abandon the notion of content all together and focus solely on relationships. It was my understanding that in light of all of the division the only way forward was to focus on relationships and leave the consideration of education and curriculum for another time. This also proved to be an error. While relationships are keenly important, this singular focus on the creation of space for those relationship to be developed misses two things. First, it does not answer the question proposed. Second, it holds the very real possibility that an education program would never happen. If the creation of relationships and the proper environment for those relationships to be developed is the sole focus, the question becomes: when would the right relationships or relational depth be achieved so that training could begin to take place? What has now become clear is that the truth lies not in the development of curriculum or the fostering of relationships but in pursuing both.



### *Leaving the Central Square*

While I was focused solely on the creation of relationships, I was searching for a metaphor in which to encapsulate the importance of creating space for relationships. Inspired by the city squares I had witnessed in Guatemala (Plaza de la Constitución in Guatemala City, and Parque Central in Antigua), South Africa (Church Square in Pretoria), and Costa Rica (Parque Central in Alajuela) as I travelled during the past few years, and also prompted by Town Square in my home city, I landed on the idea of the city square. For some time I continued to be enamoured with the idea of creating a “central square” metaphor to represent this need to develop relationships.

My fascination with city squares was more than just a personal connection to those places in the city. Fuelled by the work of Setha M. Low (2000) who notes the importance of the Central American plaza (often found in the form of a Parque Central) and the activity in those spaces when she states, “The plaza also provides a physical, social, and metaphorical space for public debate about governance, cultural identity, and citizenship” (Low 2000:32). She goes on to further explain:

Plazas are spatial representations of Latin American society and social hierarchy. Citizens battle over those representations because they are so critical to the definition and survival of civil society. Plazas are also centers of cultural expression and artistic display reflected in their changing designs and furnishings. And finally, plazas are settings for everyday urban life where daily interactions, economic exchanges, and informal conversations occur, creating a socially meaningful place in the center of the city (Low 2000:33).

I was also captivated by George Packer’s compelling thoughts on squares. Packer (2016) writes that squares are:

A physical pause in the urban landscape. It’s a deliberate gap that interrupts the mass and clamor of buildings and streets, breaking up the flow of daily business and creating space where people can come together, by design or happenstance. City squares are planned absences [...] Their essential feature is open space, and their essential function is sociability. Where much of the modern city is private and inaccessible, squares are for the public. People gravitate to them in order to yak, kibitz, palaver, gossip, argue, show off, watch, eavesdrop, play, protest, hustle, con, love, fight. In the case of the Italian *piazze*, French *places*, and Spanish *plazas*, the restaurants, cafes, and shops that line the perimeters encourage the ease of human encounters. (p. 183-184 [*italics original*])

He further elaborates, “City squares seem to be waiting for a crowd to fill them up – to assume a collective character and confer a public identity on private individuals” (Packer 2016:185). This perspective of seeing the city square as a pause, a void, a space to be filled, serves to highlight the people and interactions that fill the square and was an idea I could not seem to shake.

What I failed to see was that the modern world has passed the square by as a form of interaction.<sup>76</sup> Packer notes of modern squares, “In the modern world, very few squares approach the ideal of the Greek agora” (2016:194) and adds, “In newer countries, you often find two types of public square: one that is older, organic, chaotic, and populated; and one that is recent, planned, orderly and deserted” (2016:196). Yet idyllic visions of the square were something that took hold as I considered how to energize a new hope in Anchorage.

I did not notice the conflict Low (2000:33) observed that, in the plaza, “[c]itizens battle over those representations because they are so critical to the definition and survival of civil society”. I missed, or chose not to see, the reality that city squares had changed in these and other ways (constant video surveillance, barraged by advertising, filled with homeless camps, etc.) because I was content to focus on the relational space they intend to create. However, realizing these omissions about the change in the reality of city squares was not the only thing that forced me away from the “central square” metaphor.

Merrifield (2014), in a chapter titled “Every Revolution has Its Agora”, about a new public space being needed, states:

For the physical and social manifestation of our landscape, for its bricks and mortar, we have what most people would deem “city.” But as a political ideal, as a new social contract around which citizenship might cohere, we have something we might call “the urban”; a more expansive realm for which no passports are required and around which the people of the world might bond. (p. 80-81)

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<sup>76</sup> Not that all squares are no longer functioning as community and relational spaces. I spent a wonderful pre-Christmas evening with my wife in the Parque Central in Alajuela, Costa Rica in December 2018. We were surrounded by many residents of the city enjoying conversation under the glow of Christmas lights as music wafted out of the cathedral and as others watched break dancers performing to hip-hop music on the stage in another area of the park.

Merrifield, as noted above, is calling for a new space in the city as well. He is calling for a move away from the physical reality of the city to something more “expansive”. Merrifield (2014) describes that proposed space, a new agora, in this way:

The citizens’ agora is something more than the public spaces of the city, more even, than the public institutions we once knew as public – state institutions forever under fire. One reason for this is that it isn’t clear anymore what the public domain constitutes, what it is, let alone what it might be [...] There’s a consequent need to redefine not a public realm that’s collectively owned and managed by the state, but a public realm of the *cite*, that is somehow expressive of the people, expressive of the general will – a will, maybe that incorporates an affinity of *common notions* [...] Twenty-first century urban spaces of the *cite* will then be public spaces not for reasons of pure concrete physicality or centrality, nor even because of land tenure, but because they are meeting places between virtual and physical worlds, between online and offline conversations, between online and offline encounters. Space won’t be so much divided between public and private as between *passive* or *active*; between space that encourages active encounters of people and space that resigns itself into passive encounters. (p. 82-83 [*italics original*])

Merrifield’s assertion is consistent with the understanding of cities we saw when examining urbanisation. The city square (the agora) has also moved from a physical reality to one that is “between virtual and physical worlds” (Merrifield 2014:83), like the urban state of mind. This understanding weakened my hold on the central square as the metaphor to move forward with in this thesis.

The final reason the central square metaphor was abandoned is the fact that it is central. While I tried hard to justify the “central” nature of the square because relationships must be central to all we do, in the end it was untenable. The issue, while I tried to avoid it, is that as soon as the center is chosen as a location a problem arises: that of the relationship between the center and the periphery. In the words of James Alison (2003:74), “Sacred centers produce margins.” This is true not only of sacred centers, but all centers and the related periphery. Merrifield (2013a) observes this in Lefebvre’s writing in *The Urban Revolution*:

The demarcation is no longer a definitive split between strict opposites; nor is it any simple urban-rural, North-South divide. Rather separation, Lefebvre would have it, is *immanent* within the accumulation of capital itself [...] ‘in this case’, he says, ‘the frontier line doesn’t pass between the city and the country, *but is within the interior of the phenomenon of the urban*, between the dominated periphery and the dominating center. (p. 915 [*italics original*])

As both Alison from a theological perspective and Merrifield (via Lefebvre) from a sociological perspective have observed, the notion of center presents us with a problem – when there is a center there are those who are in the center and those who are on the periphery. While my hope was the “central square” metaphor might prove to bring people together over divisions, in the end it was likely to cause more separation.

In considering the pitfalls and changes of perspective I have undergone during this project, four things stand out. First, what is needed for an education program in Anchorage goes beyond merely developing a curriculum. Second, relationships are key to the establishment of a program that answers the question of this thesis. Third, relationships alone are not the answer and a curriculum must also be developed. And four, the metaphor of the central square is not the proper image to guide this project forward.

### III. The Method is the Message

My fluctuation between the importance of either curriculum or relationships reflects the observations made by Parker Palmer (1993) about his experience of balancing community and content within education:

The classroom was not a place for original inquiry but for imitation of authority, not a place for collaboration but of competition between learners [...] In my educational experience, too much of the lecturing was authoritarian, too much of the listening was unengaged, too much of the memorization was mechanical – and the ethos of too many classrooms was destructive to community. (p. 33-34)

Palmer (1993:34) follows this statement by giving “four ways in which this happens”. First, he asserts that classrooms in this conventional mode are oriented outward (Palmer 1993:34). Second, the conventional classroom is so concerned with what is “out there” that the interior reality of both the students and the teacher is neglected, it is never examined and never allowed to be known. (Palmer 1993:34). Third, classrooms are thrown together as a practical matter and not for building community and cause isolation (Palmer 1993:34). The final effect

is a result of the first three: “[w]e become manipulators of each other and the world rather than mutually responsible participants and co-creators” (Palmer 1993:34).

Palmer is highlighting the reality, in his experience, of the traditional way of doing education. In the traditional approach, the content and curriculum are of primary importance while community and self-examination are the casualties of that approach. My mistake was that in order to pursue relationships and community, I was ready to leave a discussion of content and curriculum behind and vice versa.

Marshall McLuhan ([1964] 2012:107) famously wrote, “In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.” McLuhan was writing about media in particular, but it did not take long for his ideas to be applied to education (Culkin 1967). Culkin (1967) notes that McLuhan’s assertion can be examined in four ways. First, the medium can be the object of study. We tend to focus on the content, but the medium warrants examination (Culkin 1967:52). Second, “The form of communication not only alters the content, but each form also has preferences for certain kinds of messages [...] If you don’t know the medium, you don’t know the message” (Culkin 1967:52). Third, the users’ perceptions are shaped by the medium. Regardless of the content the medium comes through (Culkin 1967:52). And finally Culkin warns that the media not only craft their message, but are shaping the consumer for that message and because the medium is often familiar this can go undetected for a long time (Culkin 1967:53). To sum it up Culkin (1967) offers this parable:

The media shape both the content and consumer and do so practically undetected. We recall the story of the Russian worker whose wheelbarrow was searched every day as he left the factory grounds. He was, of course, stealing wheelbarrows. When your medium is your message and they’re only investigating content, you can get away with a lot of things – like wheelbarrows, for instance. It’s not the picture but the frame. Not the contents but the box. The blank page is not neutral; nor is the classroom. (p. 53)

Culkin (1967:53) concludes, “We can no longer teach kids all about a subject; we can teach

kids what a subject is all about. We have to introduce them to the form, the structure, gestalt, grammar, and process of the knowledge involved.”

Palmer’s understanding of conventional classrooms is important. He sees those classrooms as places where what is taught, and how it is taught (the medium), have the outcome of creating a hierarchy of isolated learners (both teachers and students) who are not self-examining internally or connected in community externally (Palmer 1993:34). Thus, both teachers and learners are unable to be mutually engaged re-imaginings (Palmer 1993:34). Because of this, the conventional classroom cannot provide a way forward for re-imagining the city of Anchorage. What is needed is an approach to learning together where the “medium is the message”.

Content and community cannot be split and divided as a means of control (McLuhen [1964] 2012:107). What needs to be found is a method of learning together where “the form, the structure, gestalt, grammar, and process” (Culkin 1967:53) of transformation permeate the learning experience. What is needed is not a central square with its divisive centralities and peripheries but a place where the community learns together in a way that reflects the goals of the transformed city in Revelation: the passing away of the old order, the wiping away of tears, the transformation of all things, a safe city where everyone’s needs are being met and all people are living together in harmony.

## Chapter 9: The Commons

This thesis began with Ray Bakke's (2011) observation, "the Bible begins in a garden, but ends gloriously in the eternal city". Thus far in this exploration, that glorious eternal city of Revelation has been returned to repeatedly as a way to envision a reality that is different from what is experienced in the city of Anchorage. However, to further explore a new direction for Anchorage, a return to the garden in Genesis is also needed.

One can view the opening pages of the Old Testament as a commons. In the first chapter, I shared the definitions of the commons used by Bollier, Barnes, and Wittel. Those definitions bear repeating here as they will serve as an important guide as we explore both the garden in Genesis and the commons. Bollier (2011) defines a commons saying, "[A] commons arises whenever a given community decides it wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard for equitable access, use and sustainability." Walljasper (2010:10) quotes Peter Barnes' definition: "The commons means simply: places we share, systems we share, ideas we share, culture we share." Wittel (2018:204) offers this definition:

Every commons consists of three elements: (1) people who share the commons (the commoners), (2) resources that are being shared, and (3) a form of self-organization and normative framework that sets out how the common resources should be created, shared, maintained and developed further.

Added to those three definitions is the assertion of commons historian Peter Linebaugh (2008):

To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst – the commons is an activity and, if anything it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better to keep the word a verb, an activity, rather than a noun, a substantive. (p. 279)

With these definitions in mind, let's begin examining the commons and the Garden of Eden.

## I. The Garden of Eden: A Commons Created

### *Community in the Garden and Beyond*

In the opening pages of the Bible, we find an account of the creation of the world and the first humans. In this account the world is spoken into existence from a pre-creation state that was wet, dark, and “formless and void” (Gen. 1:2 NIV). From this state, God created a world and put man in charge of this world. These opening chapters of the Bible can be viewed as a commons.

The first element of a commons is commoners, the people that are in community. In the case of the Garden of Eden, those in community are Adam, Eve and God. God himself is an internal and eternal community with three parts as understood by the statement, “Let us make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness...” (Gen. 1:26 NIV [*emphasis added*]).<sup>77</sup> It is also clear in the text that humans have community among each other since no other creature was seen as a suitable helper for Adam (Gen. 2:19-20). What was needed for a partner was another human being. The social nature of humans is further reinforced in the text by the establishment of marriage as a deep expression of the human need to be together (Gen. 2:21-24). There is also the relationship between God and the first people. That relationship was one of intimacy and responsibility. God breathed Adam into existence (Gen. 2:7) and is portrayed as talking to and interacting with him (Gen. 2:15-22 & 3:8-24). Community is present in the account of the Garden in which the Biblical story starts. However, community is a theme that continues beyond the opening account of creation in scripture.

Community can also be seen in the Gospels as well. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we see this relational method shown in Jesus’ incarnation. John starts by explaining that “the Word”, Jesus, was with God in the beginning and is, in fact, God. This is a vision of the Trinity, which itself is a community.

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<sup>77</sup> Middleton (2005:55) notes, “To specify the sort of plurality involved, however, will require us to move beyond the parameters of Genesis 1 to other biblical texts that provide a clearer glimpse of the symbolic world behind these strange plurals.” Which he then does using a number of Old Testament passages of which Isaiah 6 and Psalm 8 are key.



John Franke (2009) writes that God's social nature can best be seen in the historical understanding of the relationship of the Trinity known as *perichoresis*, which:

[L]eads us to conclude of the persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are one by virtue of their interdependent relationality. The contemporary consensus concerning the relationality of the life of God brings us back to the affirmation that God is love. (p. 58)

This relational understanding of God and *perichoresis* (the dance of God) is echoed by Miroslav Volf (1996):

When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the cross. On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons opens up for the enemy; in the agony of the passion the movement stops for a brief moment and a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in. (p. 129)

In Volf's quote we see the community that is the Trinity, but also we see the ability for us to join into that community.

Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell in *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (2016) draw the reader's attention to an icon painted by Andrei Rublev in the 15th century.<sup>78</sup> The icon depicts the visit of the three angels to Abraham and Sarah under (or at least near) the trees of Mamre in Genesis 18. This icon has long been seen as more than just a depiction of that patriarchal story, but as a representation of the Holy Trinity. But it has a strange feature. There is what appears to be ancient glue in the lower middle of the artwork. Rohr and Morrell (2016:28-31 [*italics original*]) assert that there was once a mirror affixed to the icon, which means, "there is room at this table for a *fourth*. The observer. You!" In the reading of the icon, Rohr and Morrell offer that two things stand out as important: 1) the Trinity is rooted in relationship; and 2) in that relationship there is an intentional void that is created to invite the Other into the fellowship of God.

Volf (1996), observes that the Trinity is a community and that we are being invited into that divine community:

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<sup>78</sup> The icon is titled *The Trinity* (also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham* or *The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah*).

On the cross God renews the covenant by *making space* for humanity in God's self. The open arms of Christ on the cross are a sign that God does not want to be a God without the other – humanity – and suffers humanity's violence in order to embrace it. (p. 154)

Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae (1994) observes this same inviting, including, space-making action of the Trinity:

As a work of raising up believers to intimate communion with God, salvation and deification are nothing more than the extension to conscious creatures of the relations that obtain between the divine persons. That is why the Trinity reveals itself essentially in the work of salvation and that is why the Trinity is the basis on which salvation stands [...] A unipersonal god would not have within himself that eternal love or communion into which he would wish to introduce us too. (p. 248-249)

In this way Staniloae reinforces the insights of Rohr and Morrell as well as Volf – that the Trinity is seeking to extend the mutual dance of love found in themselves to humans and the Trinity is creating intentional space inside themselves, inside their community, for us. The opening words of the Gospel of John are rooted in a deep reality of community that extends from the very community found in the Trinity to us.

John then continues, explaining that Jesus created all things. John deviates briefly to shed light on the teaching of John the Baptist for two verses, before returning to Jesus and explaining that Jesus (whom he calls both “the word” and “the light”) came into the world. Then, in verse 14, John writes: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14 NIV). That verse highlights that Jesus did a very relational thing, maybe the most relational thing, and became human. In *The Message* (2005), Eugene Peterson translates this verse as, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” It was not enough for John the Baptist to teach about Jesus (content delivery), Jesus moved into the neighbourhood (relationship).

Community is central to the ministry and teaching of the Apostle Paul. He writes in a letter to the Jesus followers in Thessalonica: “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (I Thess. 2:8 NIV). In this verse we see an explanation of what can be observed throughout Paul's letters

and in the Book of Acts in the New Testament – that Paul’s missionary model was deeply relational. Paul lived among and was in deep relationship with the people in each city in which he spent time, sharing his life as well as teaching them. “Paul sought not to challenge individuals to give up vice, but preached in order to form a community” (Stowers 1984:80). He also teaches that relationships and community are important. In Romans 12 and in I Corinthians 12, Paul uses the image of the body to teach the importance of community. He tells his readers that “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:5 NIV). Writing to the Corinthians, he explains:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many [...] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (I Corinthians 12:12-14 & 27 NIV)

In these verses and many others it is clear that Paul is concerned with believers living together as a community.

In the very community of the Trinity which is extended to us, in Jesus’ incarnational action of becoming flesh and living among humans, and in Paul’s teaching to live in a way that reflects the community found in God, we can pick up a pattern – the action of God takes place in community.

Gordon Fee (1996:65), a Pentecostal scholar, states that “though entered individually, the church as a whole is the object of God’s saving activity in Christ. God is choosing and saving a people for his name.” Anchorage Russian Orthodox Priest Michael Oleksa (1992:51) explains: “No one is ‘saved’ or justified as an isolated individual. Each person is transformed in community, in and through loving, eternal relationships to others.” Adding to the chorus is Anglican Priest Tish Harrison Warren (2016:31), who adds, “God has loved us and sought us – not only as individuals, but corporately as a people over millennia.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> I have previously written on community (Kiekintveld 2012, 2014a, 2014b) and this paragraph is informed by this previous work.

Community matters to God. It mattered in the garden where Adam and Eve were invited into relationship with God and care for the newly created world. It mattered to the New Testament Christians. And we are still being invited to join into community and into God's work in the world today.

### *Managing the Garden's Resources*

The community in Genesis, consisting of God, Adam and Eve, is managing a common resource, the garden, and all of creation. This is the action of God happening in community. Middleton (2005) writes:

All human beings, male and female, are created as God's royal stewards in the world, entrusted with the privileged task of ruling on God's behalf [...] In the Genesis vision, it is ordinary people, humans (and not some elite class) who are understood to be significant historical actors in the arena of human life. (p. 204)

This can be seen in how God gives over the resources that are being managed to the stewardship of Adam and Eve:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. (Gen. 1:28-30 NIV)

And is also seen in the next chapter:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it [...] Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. (Genesis 2:15 & 2:19-20 NIV)

In these verses we can see that the resources of creation, such as animals, fish, birds, plants and trees, are being managed by a community that consists of humans and God.

The resources of the garden were declared good by God repeatedly. In the opening chapter of Genesis, God declares that an aspect of creation is good six times (Gen. 1:4, 10,

12, 18, 21, 25), before we read in the final verse of the chapter, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31). This has been called the original goodness. For example, Berrigan (2006) writes:

It will be a constant refrain, a slight but perpetrating drumbeat, or a heartbeat – the “goodness” of all things [...] From the start, goodness – beauty is the attribution and glory of all things. Their vesture, their inmost being is conferred and confirmed. And all proceeds from the original Goodness – Beauty. (p. 3-4)

All of creation, all of the original goodness, is given by God to Adam and Eve to manage. This management of resources is the second part of the first commons, the Garden of Eden. First is a community and second is a resource to manage.

### *The Rules of the Garden Commons*

The third element of a commons – rules – are also present in the Garden of Eden. Here the analogy breaks a bit from the model of a commons, in that the rules were not created and enforced by the community, but in both cases by God. Nevertheless, rules are present and we will simply examine them without delving into their development.

The rules for the garden are rather simple. In chapter one we read that God told the humans he had created them to:

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” (Gen. 1:28-30 NIV)

In chapter two, God gives the rules for the garden:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Gen. 2:16-17 NIV)

In these statements we can see the community present in the garden between God and humans as well as the resources being managed, but also the rules and expectations under which this commons is operating.

The first of the rules and expectations is that the humans are to make more humans, which amounts to an invitation to join God in his creative work. Second, they are to subdue the earth and rule over it. This act of stewarding the creation of God forms the second rule and expectation. Third, God offers all of the plants and anything that has breath to Adam and Eve as food. They are invited to enjoy the creation and have all of their needs met perfectly by it. Finally, after being invited into the expectations of reproduction, care for all of creation, and being ensured that all of their needs are met, God places one prohibition on his first people: they “must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:16-17). These then form the rules and expectations of the original commons: reproduce, steward, enjoy, and don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to study and explore the nature of these rules and expectations. In particular the rule prohibiting the eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is one that has been debated for a long time. I am simply stating that there were rules that governed the Garden of Eden that we are looking at as an example of a commons. Of course, when we continue reading the opening pages of Genesis we know that the rules were not kept.

### *The Commons Comes Crashing Down*

When we turn the page from the original goodness of the first two Genesis chapters and continue reading, we see everything change. In the third chapter of Genesis, we see Adam and Eve violating the solitary prohibition of the garden.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Gen. 3:6-7 NIV)

In these few lines we see the breaking of the rule and the beginning of how things are about to change as a result. Once the violation of this prohibition took place the perfect commons, as established by God, was in free fall.

The first thing that changes is in the relationships – the community in the Eden commons. Previously Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25) and unaware of their condition (Gen. 3:7). The fact that they cover up from each other and hide from God rather than going to meet him, on account of both being naked (Gen. 3:7 & 3:10), signals a change in interactions between the humans and also how humans are now interacting with God. A few verses later we see the community breakdown further when God tells Eve, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Gen. 3:16 NIV). How men and women interact changes after the Fall from a state of equality to one of rivalry and hierarchy. A breakdown in community, the first element of a commons, has happened.

The relationship to the resource being managed, the garden and all of creation, changes as well. The expectation to reproduce now comes with severe pain (Gen. 3:16). The command to care for creation and enjoy all of it now involves hard work (Gen. 3:19) and this will make securing the basic needs of life much more difficult. The creation – the resource itself – is depleted by being cursed and this adds to the difficulty of securing basic needs (Gen. 3:17-18).

Finally, the governing of the garden changes. Not only are there new rules and expectations – pain in childbirth, toil to provide for one’s needs, etc. – but now Adam and Eve have been removed from the Garden of Eden altogether, though not from all of creation (Gen. 3:23-24). There is a closure of the garden and Adam and Eve are barred from returning.

In chapter four of Genesis the picture of brokenness comes further crashing down as we witness the first murder. Cain kills his brother Abel in an act that highlights the breakdown in human community. The motive for murder is a jealousy stemming from whose action gained favour with God (Gen. 4:2-5), which highlights the further breakdown in community between humans and God. By the time we arrive at the sixth chapter of Genesis we read, “The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5 NIV). The breakdown in community among humans and between God and humans, as well as the depletion of the commons through sin was so complete that God declares, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7 NIV).

The extent of the destruction of the Eden commons – what is often called “the Fall” – is pervasive and has affected all of life. The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans about the pervasiveness: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Rom. 8:22 NIV). Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (2002:47) puts it this way, “As matters stand, creation still declares the glory of God, but it also declares the tragedy of fallenness, of chaos, of painful carnivorousness.” The Garden of Eden as a commons was God’s plan for human interaction, community between humans and God, and how to manage all of the resources of creation. That perfect situation of community, resource, and management was completely depleted by the intrusion of sin.

From the moment of the Fall, God has been seeking to restore the commons of creation to the way it was in the Garden of Eden. What happens in the final pages of Revelation is a return to the Eden commons. Community between God and his people is fully restored. Community among all people is restored. Once again all needs are being met.



The curses that have us crying on earth as a result of the Fall are gone and Jesus is wiping away all our tears. Things are the way that they are supposed to be and how they were in the beginning. The Old Testament prophets could see this return to the perfect Eden commons coming. The prophet Amos could see it:

“In that day  
I will restore David’s fallen shelter—  
I will repair its broken walls  
and restore its ruins—  
and will rebuild it as it used to be,  
so that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations that bear my name,”  
declares the LORD, who will do these things.

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman  
and the planter by the one treading grapes.  
New wine will drip from the mountains  
and flow from all the hills,  
and I will bring my people Israel back from exile.

“They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.  
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;  
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.  
I will plant Israel in their own land,  
never again to be uprooted  
from the land I have given them,”  
says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11-15 NIV)

Plantinga (2002:14-15) comments:

The Biblical prophets dreamed of a new age in which the wilderness would bloom and the mountains would drip with wine. They dreamed of a time when people would convert weapons of war into tools for harvest, of a time when a child could romp with a lion. In this coming time God could rejoice in his creation all over again. People could work in peace and work to fruitful effect, secure in the knowledge that no one would plunder their houses and vineyards. God’s servants would minister justice in the earth, and all the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord. (p. 14-15)

This will happen through the restorative power of Jesus Christ, who has come, and will come and is coming. But we do not yet live in this return to Eden in the Eternal City. So how do we proceed? To adapt Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 6:10, how might we see God’s kingdom come and will be done in a way that brings Anchorage (on earth) closer to the reality of the eternal city (in heaven)? The answer lays in seeking to pattern our living in a way that

reflects the original goodness of Eden and the future glory of the eternal city. One way to do this is to seek to restore the commons in a way that is reflective of both.

## II. The Tragedy and Opportunity of the Commons

While the Fall was the end of the original Eden commons and comprised a tragedy for all of humankind of which we are still suffering the effects, this is likely not the tragedy that first comes to mind when one thinks of a commons. Once one mentions the commons it becomes impossible to not discuss Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). That article, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018, was released in 1968 in the journal *Science*. It opens with a nod to the Cold War before launching into an exploration of human population growth and the finite resources of earth. Hardin's article has been reprinted countless times and cited continuously in a multiplicity of disciplines over the past five decades.<sup>80</sup>

The core of Hardin's argument (and the title of the paper) is based in a thought experiment he calls "The Tragedy of the Commons".<sup>81</sup> He lays out his reasoning beginning with, "[p]icture a pasture open to all" (Hardin 1968:1244) and asks the reader to imagine a shared pasture that is owned in common and used by multiple farmers to graze their livestock. He then asserts that if any one of the herdsman is a "rational" being, it will be in his interest to add one animal to his herd, something Hardin (1968:1244) notes will have one positive and one negative effect. The positive effect is that the herdsman who adds an animal will receive all the products and profit from that animal. The negative effect is that the commons becomes overgrazed. Furthermore, while the positive effect is profit solely for

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<sup>80</sup> "My first attempt at interdisciplinary analysis [...] since it first appeared in *Science* 25 years ago, it has been included in anthologies on ecology, environmentalism, health care, economics, population studies, law, political science, philosophy, ethics, geography, psychology, and sociology. It became required reading for a generation of students and teachers seeking to meld multiple disciplines in order to come up with better ways to live in balance with the environment" (Hardin 1998:682).

<sup>81</sup> Hardin (1968:162) uses the word tragedy "[a]s the philosopher Whitehead used it: 'The essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things... This inevitableness of destiny can only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness. For it is only by them that the futility of escape can be made evident in the drama'". Or, in other words, what makes Hardin's thought experiment tragic is that it is inevitable (Hardin 1968:162).

the owner of the additional animal, the negative effect is a burden shared by all of the herdsman (Hardin 1968:1244). Hardin's experiment ends in a catastrophe for all the herdsman as each herdsman adds additional livestock (something Hardin (1968:1244) sees as the "only sensible course") and the commons as a resource becomes devastated and unable to support the animals.<sup>82</sup> In the end Hardin (1968:1244) concludes, "freedom in the commons brings ruin to all".

Hardin spends the rest of the paper discussing if and how the tragedy of commons can be avoided. He proposes two possible solutions: "One can generalize the practical conclusion in this way: 'A "managed commons" describes either socialism or the privatism of free enterprise.'" (Hardin 1998:683). However, he admits that either might be a success or a failure because "the devil is in the details" (1998:683).

Ostrom, et al. (1999) comment on the legacy of Hardin's argument:

The starkness of Hardin's original statement has been used by many scholars and policy-makers to rationalize central government control of all common-pool resources and to paint a disempowering, pessimistic vision of the human prospect. Users are pictured as trapped in a situation they cannot change. Thus, it is argued that solutions must be imposed on users by external authorities. (p. 278)

The widespread acceptance of Hardin's conclusion means for anyone seeking to do work in the commons, the task becomes either the affirmation or contradiction of Hardin's assertions.

Hardin's assertion can be seen in the reality of the city. A city's use of resources sucked in from a distance (Perkinson 2001, Merrifield 2017) in a manner that uses people and excretes them (Merrifield 2017, Chang 2016, and Berry 2010) is a living example that the resources of a common space such as the city will be exploited and used – that people will be exploited and used. In the case of resource use in the city the tragedy takes place when actors in the city seek their own private interests and financial gain. In this way Hardin is right and

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<sup>82</sup> David Bollier (2007:5-6) explains that neoclassical economics defines this rationality as "Homo economicus [...] human beings as rational, ahistorical individuals who invariably seek to maximize their material utility through market exchange."

in the end a catastrophe develops that “brings ruin to all” (Hardin 1968:1244), or at least to many. This is furthermore exposed in the nature of contested space in the urban environment (De Beer 2008).

Hardin’s tragedy can be seen in the Fall of the original commons as well. One way to understand this is by returning to Jennings. Jennings’ (2010:24) assertion that the colonial endeavour saw people seized or stolen, land seized or stolen, people displaced from their space and place and with it their identity, and Europeans redefining themselves and others shows the totalizing effect of the Fall. Every area of the commons of the garden and the world is affected. Human relations between each other, human’s relation to the land, one’s relation to one’s own identity – all are destroyed in the Fall. There is also the breakdown in the relationship between humans and their creator. The tragedy of the Fall of the original commons is a universal tragedy and we can see the depletion left in its wake in colonization, urbanisation, and everywhere.

While “The Tragedy of the Commons” has many supporters,<sup>83</sup> there have been those that have critiqued Hardin’s assertions. Susan Jane Buck Cox objects to Hardin’s conclusion based on historical findings that the commons never existed the way it is portrayed. She explains that villagers used the Lord’s waste land by permission and only with a limited number of animals (Cox 1985:55) so that a true “pasture open to all” (Hardin 1968:1244) is not a historical reality. Ostrom et al. (1999) and Angus (2008) are critical of Hardin’s moral assumptions. Ostrom et al. (1999:279) write that Hardin’s theory is “based on a model that assumes all individuals are selfish, norm-free, and maximizers of short-run results”. Angus (2008) concurs: “Hardin assumed that human nature is selfish and unchanging and that society is just an assemblage of self-interested individuals who don’t care about the impact of

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<sup>83</sup> Feeny et al. (1990:2), comment that Hardin’s conclusion which states “freedom in the commons brings ruin to all [...] has been accorded by some the status of scientific law”.

their actions on the community.” David Bollier writing online for the *Boston Review* (2002)

takes a more basic and direct approach noting that Hardin’s commons:

[I]s frequently confused with an *open-access* regime—a free-for-all in which a resource is essentially open to everyone without restriction. An open-access regime lacks an identifiable authority and recognized property rights; the common resources are taken for sale on markets. In contrast, a real commons has a “social infrastructure” of cultural institutions, rules, and traditions, and the resources are restricted to personal (non-market) uses by members of the community. Without that infrastructure, the only operative social value is private profit for the most aggressive appropriators.

Speaking on the *Clearing The Fog Podcast* Bollier (Zeese & Flowers 2011) is even more

directly critical of Hardin’s commons:

The problem with [Hardin’s] analysis is that he was not describing a commons, he was describing an open access regime, because a commons has rules, it consists of a community, it has enforcement of its rules, it has a certain cultural ethic, it has communication with itself, it has penalties for those that break the rules, and so on.

Bollier’s thinking is bolstered by David Harvey (2011:101) who writes of Hardin’s thought experiment, “If the cattle were held in common, of course, the metaphor would not work. It would then be clear that it was private property in cattle and individual utility-maximizing behaviour that lay at the heart of the problem.” Walljasper (2010:22) writes that, “Hardin later qualified his views, saying he was referring to a situation in which there is no community involvement and no rules in governing in managing the land – which of course, means it is not a commons.”

The critiques of Bollier and Harvey bring to mind the work of Elinor Ostrom. Interestingly, Hardin gives no thought to the management of his commons as a commons in the mode of the Eden in Genesis. In that approach those managing the commons communally would seek to steward it so that it benefitted all. This approach might be more in line with the understanding of the commons and its governance offered by Ostrom in response to Hardin.

Elinor Ostrom (1990) offers a third way (common-pool resource management) to govern the commons beyond Hardin’s socialism or privatism. Ostrom et al. (1999) draw on

the work of David Sneath (1998) to conclude that a group-property approach to herding displays less land denigration than the solutions offered by Hardin (1968). Ostrom et al. (1999:278) note that “[a]lthough tragedies have undoubtedly occurred, it is also obvious that for thousands of years people have self-organized to manage common-pool resources, and users often do devise long-term, sustainable institutions for governing these resources”.

The theological work that has grown out of “The Tragedy of the Commons” has largely been focused on ecology (Kearns 2004), but there is more that Hardin could prompt than just the urgently needed discussion on earth care.<sup>84</sup> What Hardin is teasing out in his thought experiment is a matter of scarcity and abundance, which is a theme of Biblical scripture. Hardin’s tragedy is predicated on thinking that is based on scarcity. For the herdsman to be “rational” is for him to believe that he does not have enough and that the answer is more. Brene Brown (2015) says of scarcity:

Scarcity is the “never enough” problem [...] Scarcity functions in a culture where everyone is hyper aware of lack. Everything from safety and love to money and resources feels restricted or lacking. We spend inordinate amounts of time calculating how much we have, want and don’t have, and how much everyone else has, needs, and wants. (p. 26)

Brown’s understanding sheds light on the culture in which Hardin’s experiment takes place.

So does Walter Brueggemann’s take on scarcity. Writing to a North American, Western-thinking Christian audience he states:

We who are now the richest nation are today’s main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity. (Brueggemann 1999:344)

So perhaps the scarcity-based living of Hardin’s imagined commons is all too real.

Brueggemann does outline for the reader that living with a scarcity lens is not God’s intended way for people to live. Starting with the “liturgy of abundance” in Genesis 1 and the celebrations of that abundance in Psalms 104 and 150, Brueggemann (1999:345) walks the

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<sup>84</sup> It would be a worthy exercise to explore the ecological and other physical resource use in Anchorage and Alaska and then relate that to the idea of shared abundance in God’s economy. However, that is not the focus of this thesis.

reader through the Old Testament account of Pharaoh and the Exodus and the Israelites entering the promise land all through the lens of the struggle between scarcity and abundance. He concludes, “Jesus put it succinctly. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Brueggemann 1999:345). His message is what if we “came to the realization that the real issue confronting us is whether the news of God’s abundance can be trusted in the face of the story of scarcity?” (Brueggemann 1999:345). Like Bollier, Harvey and Ostrom, the theological question when considering “The Tragedy of the Commons” is how one views resources, are they managed for the good of all?

A point I find lacking in the critique of Hardin’s commons is in the area of mimetics. Hardin does not foresee in his thought experiment the mimetic nature of what he imagines taking place on the commons. If Rene Girard is correct and we borrow our desires from one another (Kirwan 2005:14-37) then the desire to add another animal is something that is mimetic, borrowed from another herdsman or other person, and not purely rational. Furthermore, Girard’s mimetic theory has shown that when two or more persons are desiring the same limited thing (such as space on the commons), they will be drawn into conflict that will result in violence or a mediation of violence through the use of prohibitions, rituals and myths, or the scapegoat mechanism (Girard 1986; Kirwan, 2005:38-62). Hardin (1998:683) simply asserts that to avoid overuse the resource must be managed by “socialism or the privatism of free enterprise”. Hardin’s sidestepping of the violence (or its mitigation through rituals, prohibitions, scapegoating, etc.) that could, and most likely would, result in his thought experiment is curious in light of Girard’s mimetic theory. Hardin seems content to remain singularly focused on the rationality of the herdsman. Hardin’s “The Tragedy of the Commons” remains ripe for examination by theologians and anthropologists who might creatively re-examine the commons and Hardin’s conclusions through a Girardian lens as some economists (Roe 1994 & [1998] 2012) and operational researchers have (Kunsch,

Theys, & Brans, 2007).

Hardin not only avoids the inherent violence in his thought experiment, he avoids the human interactions in his commons altogether. There is no consideration or suggestion that the herdsmen have any contact with each other aside from reacting to the changes in the environment caused by the other herdsmen. There is no thought given to any conversations that might take place or relationships that could exist in the commons space.

While historical, theological, and epistemological questions are raised by Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons", it is clear that any common space (or any space at all) will be managed in some way and that many spaces are contested. The management of common space may be done in the ways proposed by Hardin – socialism or privatism – with private property and the market being preferred by Hardin (1968) and his supporters or by the community using the space as outlined by Ostrom et al. (1999). Of particular interest to the topic here is managing space by the community through relationships.

Kaitlyn Rathwell (2011), in an article titled "Social Capital and the Commons", summarizes Ostrom:

Elinor Ostrom and other devoted scientists have investigated communities from all over the world and many cultures (Ostrom 1990). Their research, among many other things, identifies social capital to be a component of systems that can determine if a community is successfully living in harmony with each other and their common resource base.

Four components highlighted as key for building and maintaining social capital:

- 1) Trust - Actors trust that others will also follow rules and contribute.
- 2) Reciprocity - Actors give and take, starting with simple exchanges, for example, gifts or information of equal value.
- 3) Rules and Norms (enforced) - Actors have confidence that if another actor breaks a rule or norm, he/she/it will be punished in accordance with the community rules.
- 4) Social Networks - Bonds between individuals that create community cohesion. Information, advice exchange or collaborative ties. Networks are supportive and can cross many scales, such as local to national to global.



If, as Rathwell points out, and the data above from Ostrom shows, the management of common resource is best done in community by the establishment of rules and norms that it is in keeping with the definitions of a commons. Like the Eden commons of Genesis, a commons is a relational community managing a resource through shared values in order to sustain that resource.

### III. The Commons Yesterday and Today

The commons in one sense is an old concept. As we have seen in Genesis 1 and 2, it may be the original way of managing a shared resource and all of creation. However, the commons as a term and a concept is something that is appearing more and more in recent years. “The term may be unfamiliar, but the idea has been around for centuries. The commons is a new use for an old word, meaning ‘what we share’” (Walljasper 2010:2).

A historical example of the commons is the system of European agriculture that utilized open fields (Siefkes [2009] 2017). Bollier (2011) explains that this continues today, though not in the same way as historical Europe:

The classic commons are small-scale and focused on natural resources; an estimated two billion people depend upon commons of forests, fisheries, water, wildlife and other natural resources for their everyday subsistence.

Walljasper notes that commons range from natural resources such as clean air and parkland, to the judicial system and the internet (2010:2). He explains:

Anyone can use a commons, so long as there is enough left for everyone else. This is why finite commons, such as natural resources, must be sustainably and equitably managed. But many other forms of the commons can be freely tapped. Today’s hip-hop and rock stars, for instance “appropriate” the work of soul singers, jazz swingers, blues wailers, gospel shouters, hillbilly pickers, and balladeers going back a long time – and we are all richer for it. That is the greatest strength of the commons. It’s an inheritance shared by all humans, which increases in value as people draw upon its riches (Walljasper 2010:2).

Walljasper (2010:7-8) lists that today we find the commons in air and water, the Internet, parks, libraries, streets and sidewalks, our DNA, blood banks, soup kitchens, 12-step programs, museums, non-profit organizations, dance steps, fashion trends, government

services (such as Social Security or the National Weather Service in the U.S.), fishing, hunting, airwaves (radio, television, cell phones), holidays, sports rules, biodiversity, taxpayer funded research of all kinds, Wikipedia, recipes, bookkeeping systems, the Heimlich manoeuvre, open-source software, jokes, slang language, the oceans, Antarctica, and outer space.<sup>85</sup>

Cities as a whole are being viewed as a commons (McGuirk 2015). “The distinctive public culture of a city is perhaps the most generative yet unnoticed of urban commons” (Gidwani & Baviskar 2011:43). The right to the city is rooted in this commons approach to the city (Harvey 2012:67-88).

Another way to think of the commons is as a third way in addition to the sectors of government and the market. David Bollier explains (Bollier interviewed by Cody 2013):

Economists and politicians have long assumed that there are really only two sectors for governing things and “adding value” – the state and the market. Markets are seen as the vehicle for economic progress while the state deals with governance and everything else. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that there is another sector – the commons – that is at least as important to our lives and well being.

The commons is an alternative to the market and government as a way to manage resources.

It is impossible to catalogue all the types of commons, Bollier (2011) notes, “because a commons arises whenever a given community decides it wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard for equitable access, use and sustainability”. He also notes that commons are:

A social system for the long-term stewardship of resources that preserves shared values and community identity.

A self-organized system by which communities manage resources (both depletable and replenishable) with minimal or no reliance on the Market or State.

The wealth that we inherit or create together and must pass on, undiminished or enhanced, to our children. Our collective wealth includes the gifts of nature, civic infrastructure, cultural works and traditions, and knowledge.

A sector of the economy (and life!) that generates value in ways that are often taken for granted – and often jeopardized by the Market-State. (Bollier 2011)

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<sup>85</sup> This list is largely Walljasper’s, but with some adaptation (2010:7-8).

Christian Siefkes ([2009] 2017) explains that regardless of whether a commons is historical, a present reality, or a future vision, all commons require two things: communities and rules. Of communities he writes, “without sufficiently strong communities of people willing to create, maintain, and protect them, all commons would or did fall into disarray or become privatized” (Siefkes [2009] 2017). And on the second requirement of rules: “these communities make their own rules to protect and strengthen the commons” (Siefkes [2009] 2017). This understanding is echoed by Bollier (2011) who state, “A commons must be animated by bottom-up participation, personal responsibility, transparency and self-policing accountability.”

#### IV. Rules and the Commons

The community of the original commons in Genesis was operating under rules established by God. In the understanding of the commons we are working with here, each commons agrees on the rules that govern the commons. Ostrom (cited in Walljasper 2010) offers “Eight Principles for Managing a Commons”:

One, define clear group boundaries.

Two, match rules governing use of common good to local needs and conditions.

Three, ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.

Four, make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.

Five, develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members’ behavior.

Six, Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.

Seven, provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.

Eight, build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.<sup>86</sup> (p. 22)

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<sup>86</sup> Bollier (2011) offers a different version of these principles written as principles one can pledge to in an effort to help the commons to flourish and be preserved:

These principles, while not rules that can be lifted and dropped into any commons, are the principles Ostrom has identified with which successful commons operate. Bollier (2016) comments:

[T]he commons—at once a paradigm, a discourse, an ethic, and a set of social practices—holds great promise in transcending this conundrum. More than a political philosophy or policy agenda, the commons is an active, living process. It is less a noun than a verb because it is primarily about the social practices of *commoning*—acts of mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication and experimentation that are needed to create systems to manage shared resources. (p. 2 [*italics original*])

The localized and living process nature of the commons makes a conversation about governing the commons a bit difficult.

Bollier (2016:6) describes the commons as having three levels of discourse. The first two levels are “the commons as an unmanaged resource (Hardin), and the commons as a social institution (Ostrom).” The third level moves the commons beyond a discourse based on resources and their management to a discussion of the “*community that manages a resource by devising its own rules, traditions, and values*” (Bollier 2016:6 [*italics original*]).

While all three are needed, it is this third discourse that proves difficult for the academy:

This third level of discourse is unsettling to conventional academics because it moves the entire discussion out of the familiar economic framework based on Homo economicus, and opens the door to what they regard as the vagaries of anthropology, psychology, sociology, geography, and other “soft,” humanistic sciences. This makes it more difficult to build the tidy quantitative, mechanical models that economists and policymakers prize so highly. When there are so many idiosyncratic local, historical, cultural, and intersubjective factors at play, it

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1. As a commoner I clearly understand for which resources I need to care for and with whom I share this responsibility. Commons resources are those that we create together, that we maintain as gifts of nature or whose use has been guaranteed to everyone.
  2. We use the commons resources that we create, care for and maintain. We use the means (time, space, technology, and the quantity of a resource) that are available in a given context. As commoner I am satisfied that there is a fair relationship between my contributions and the benefits I receive.
  3. We enter into or modify our own rules and commitments, and every commoner can participate in this process. Our commitments serve to create, maintain, and preserve the commons to satisfy our needs.
  4. We monitor the respect of these commitments ourselves and sometimes we mandate others whom we trust to help reach this goal. We continually reassess whether our commitments still serve their purpose.
  5. We work out appropriate rules for dealing with violations of our commitments. We determine whether and what kinds of sanctions shall be used, depending on the context and severity of a violation.
  6. Every commoner can make use of a space and means for conflict resolution. We seek to resolve conflicts among us in an easily accessible and straightforward way.
  7. We regulate our own affairs, and external authorities respect that.
  8. We realize that every commons is part of a larger whole. Therefore, different institutions working at different scales are needed to coordinate stewardship and to cooperate with each other. (p. 3)

is well-nigh impossible to propound a standard, universal typology of commons (Bollier 2016:6).

Despite this difficulty, the matter of governing the commons – the matter of rules – is a key part of what a commons is and how it functions.

Following Ostrom's principles, when a community, defined by clear boundaries and operating from the bottom-up, is establishing a commons, it will consider its local context (needs and conditions) and determine rules for using the resource that the commons is seeking to use in common (Walljasper 2010:22). That community will take measures to make sure that those that are being governed by the rules have a say in changing or adapting of those rules.<sup>87</sup> The community will also make efforts to have authorities outside the community of the commons respect the rules put in place in the commons. The community will also put into place a way for grievances and disagreements to be settled that are accessible to all. These principles provide a roadmap to the establishment of rules for a commons, but they are simply principles that take into account:

Unique experiences, vernacular traditions, cultural values, and geographies must be recognized and privileged. The commons, then, is a language and socio-political-economic project for honoring the *particularity* of lived experience—and more, for honoring *the generative and intrinsic human value of such particularity*. An indigenous commons will be quite different from an urban commons, and both of them will be quite different from, say, the Wikihouse design community. And yet they are all commons. (Bollier 2016:8 [*italics original*])

As the establishment of a commons for training in Anchorage is developed, these principles must be attended to, as does the local particularities of the context and the resource seeking to be managed.

### *A Relational Theory of Change*

While the original commons at Creation was put in place to maintain the created order and activate God's plan for his creation, one can also see a commons as a mode of transformation. The call to reclaim the commons is a call for change. When one calls for the

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<sup>87</sup> This mirrors the often used protest slogan, "Nothing for us, without us."

reclaiming of the commons for some purpose such as public space, water rights, education, the call is to change something in the area that is in need of transformation. Even the claims of a right to the city are an admission that the city is not what it should or could be and is in need of change. With change and transformation at the heart of the commons movement and this thesis it is important to consider a theory of change.

Rocke and Van Dyke (2017:49) write of the relational reality of city transformation when they explain that relationship is the “technology of transformation”. This understanding provides a theory of change. Rocke and Van Dyke (2017:49) explain, “Cities are transformed at the same level they are created. They are transformed relationally.” They explain this understanding of change noting reality is relational (2017:49). Rock and Van Dyke see relationship as the software that the hardware of “programs, initiatives, and city serving organizations” need to affect change (2017:49). This is reflective of their work that seeks the transformation of cities around the globe. It also reflects the understandings of others’ thinking through social change.

Writing about social change, Michael Frost and Christiana Rice (2017) draw their theory of change from the Social Ecological Model (SEM). An ecological model, such as SEM, draws on “biological science and refers to the interrelations between organisms and their environments” (Sallis, Owen and Fisher 2008:466).

Ecological models of behavioral health emphasize the environmental and policy contexts of behavior, while incorporating social and psychological influences. Ecological models lead to the explicit consideration of multiple levels of influence, thereby guiding the development of more comprehensive interventions. (Sallis, Owen and Fisher 2008:465)

SEM, and ecological models in general, are often envisioned as a plant that needs soil, light, air, water, and a host of other factors to thrive. They also note that people and groups of people exist in a complex environment.

Of interest to this exploration of creating transformation in the city of Anchorage, ecological models are used to target strategies for creating change in each level of influence

(Sallis, Owen and Fisher 2008:470-474). Frost and Rice (2017) note that there are five layers of influence, which they reference as stackable containers, to explain how social change

happens. The levels are:

1. Individual Change (consciousness of self): For social change to occur there needs to be the transformation of individuals and an alignment of their beliefs and practices. This is evidenced in two key ways – awareness of self and empathy with others.
2. Interpersonal Change (commitment): Social change necessitates learning the principles and practices of peer-to-peer influence. This can only occur when the change agents have developed a high level of congruence between their own values and their actions (integrity). Having aligned these things, the individual then looks to implement such an integrated life among others. In short, when people live with congruence between their actions and values, and have empathy for others, they have significant interpersonal impact.
3. Community Change (collaboration): This third dimension emphasizes collaboration and problem solving – learning the ability to work cooperatively and effectively with others in ways that empower people, valuing their gifts and contributions. People can only learn to truly cooperate and problem solve when they have an appreciation for differences and are able to empathize with those whom they interact.
4. Institutional Change (common purpose): Changing the regulations, policies and even the informal structures of our institutions requires a significant commitment to action – a kind of call to arms, not to storm the barricades, but to commit to the painstaking process of revision and change. Leaders in this process have to understand the diversity of thought of their followers in order to inspire and motivate them. They also need to continually emphasize the commonality of purpose, working together with shared aims and values. Social change is best achieved when the majority of the members of a society or community share in the vision and actively participate in realizing it.
5. Societal Change (citizenship): Widespread societal change is only achieved through the ethical engagement and citizenship of the change agents [...] It's the goal of all good citizens to contribute toward positive change in society. (Frost and Rice 2017:120-124)

Even the most basic reading of this model of social change would lead the reader to an understanding that the SEM model, as understood by Frost and Rice, is in harmony with the assertion of Rocke and Van Dyke of the relational nature of city transformation.

Furthermore, this relational understanding of how change happens is consistent with the understanding of community presented by Volf (1996:98) – that “life in community means sharing a common social space and taking responsibility for the other”.

These models of change are consistent with how the commons is envisioned and operates. The commons is about the people in the commons working together. This is why Linebough (2008:279) calls the commons a verb, an action. Bollier (2011) observes that:

There is no commons without commoning – the social practices and norms for managing a resource for collective benefit. Forms of commoning naturally vary from one commons to another because humanity itself is so varied. And so there is no “standard template” for commons; merely “fractal affinities” or shared patterns and principles among commons. The commons must be understood, then, as a verb as much as a noun. A commons must be animated by bottom-up participation, personal responsibility, transparency and self-policing accountability. (p. 1)

In light of the commons being an emerging, or re-emerging, idea and having a widely varied expression that lacks prescription from outside the group, to say exactly what the community inside a commons should look like is a futile pursuit. What is clear, though, is that the commons, as in the Trinity, the Gospels and Paul, is based in and functions as a community. However, the commons idea is clearly rooted in the idea of change and as such offers a method that holds the potential for transformation.

## V. Enclosure and the Commons

This language of reclaiming the commons (Klein 2001, Swart & De Beer 2014, Radywyl & Biggs 2013, Bollier 2002) is often in reference to the idea of enclosure. Hardin’s commons is a discussion of the need for enclosure – the need to develop spaces under private or business ownership and intended to produce profit for the individual or corporation.

The eventual demise of commons-based systems was due to a systematic process of “enclosure”: of driving away the villagers from the commons and privatizing the formerly common resources. The commons did not collapse, they were “stolen,” as common sentiment at that time expressed it. (Siefkes [2009] 2017)

Enclosure, however, is not just a matter of history, but a present reality. Bollier (2011) writes:

One of the great unacknowledged problems of our time is the enclosure of the commons, the expropriation and commercialization of shared resources, usually for private market gain. (p. 1)

This can be seen in the way copyright walls off creativity and culture, water and land are fenced in, and in those that seek to close the open Internet (Bollier 2011:1). “Enclosure is



about dispossession. It privatizes and commodifies resources that belong to a community or to everyone, and dismantles a commons-based culture” (Bollier 2011:1) The interactions of the commons “are different from the current market exchanges grounded on enclosures that have come to dominate our lives” (De Angelis 2003:6).

Market driven enclosures are responsible for the effects of urbanisation that sees resource use of all kinds as purely for profit and cuts up the city into a series of enclosures that ensures conflict over space (Bollier 2011:1). It is this dispossession that the commons fights against. It is also this dispossession by forces bent on enclosure that must be considered when developing any commons.

The Bible speaks to this matter of enclosure. In Hebrews chapter 13 we read:

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:10-14 NIV)

In this text the author of Hebrews is drawing the readers’ attention to a couple of things: first, the atonement ritual that took place during Passover in the temple; and, second, the location of Jesus’ murder – outside of the city. Furthermore, the author of Hebrews instructs the reader that if one is seeking to follow Jesus he can be found outside the city. In other words, Jesus is not found inside the enclosures of the temple or the city, but outside of them.

The atonement ritual the author is referencing took place in the temple (the tent). The temple in Jesus’ day, known as Herod’s Temple, was a series of physical enclosures. There were areas open to women, and areas open to only men or priests (Bickerman 1947:387). In one location a sign read, “No alien may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death which will ensue” (Bickerman 1947:387). These physical enclosures reflected the ways in which women,

foreigners, and the priestly class were separated. Furthermore, God himself lived inside an enclosure called the Holy of Holies.

Catholic theologian Alison (2006) in examining atonement theory<sup>88</sup> offers an understanding of the liturgy of the atonement sacrifice that sheds light on this passage. Alison examines the atonement liturgy practiced during Passover from start to finish. Key in Alison's portrayal of this atonement ritual is the ways Jesus fulfils this ritual, not inside the enclosure of the temple or the city, but outside the walls.

Alison explains that in the atonement ritual in the temple a priest, chosen by lot, played the role of "the Son of God" and wore the name YHWH around his neck. Alison (2006:3) continues, "So, the high priest becomes an angelic emanation of YHWH; and one of the angel's titles is 'the son of God'. He sacrifices the goat that is 'the Lord', and sprinkles his blood about the place." Following the action inside the Holy of Holies:

The priest emerged from that and came through the Temple Veil. This was made of very rich material, representing the material world, that which was created. At this point the high priest would don a robe made of the same material as the Veil, to demonstrate that what he was acting out was God coming forth and entering into the world of creation so as to make atonement, to undo the way humans had snarled up that creation. And at that point, having emerged, he would then sprinkle the rest of the temple with the blood that was the Lord's blood [...] This was a divine movement to set people free. (Alison 2006:3)

The final movement of the atonement ritual described by Alison (2006) is the priest coming through the veil:

[M]eaning the Lord entering into the world, the created world – and sprinkle all the rest of the Temple, hence setting it free. After which, as the person who was bearing the sins that had been accumulated, he places them on the head of what we call "the scapegoat," Azazel, which would then be driven outside the town, to the edge of a cliff and cast down, where it would be killed, so that the people's sins would be taken away. (p. 4)

Alison (2006) then turns the readers' attention to Jesus:

The early Christians who wrote the New Testament understood very clearly that Jesus was the authentic high priest, who was restoring the eternal covenant that had been established long

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<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, Alison describes his understanding of atonement as more conservative than the commonly held understanding of the atonement known as substitutionary atonement. Of substitutionary atonement he writes: "Rather than make a mockery of this storyline, I want to suggest that the trouble with it is far too little conservative. I want to put forward a much more conservative account. And in the first way I want to be conservative is to suggest that the principle problem with this conventional account is that it is a *theory*, while atonement, in the first place was a *liturgy* [...] [A]tonement as a theory means that it is an idea that can be *grasped* – and once it is grasped, you have "got it" – whereas a liturgy is something that *happens to and at you*." (2006: p. 2 [*italics original*])

before; who was coming out from the Holy Place so as to offer himself as an expiation for us, as a concrete living out and demonstration of God's love for us; and that Jesus was acting this out quite deliberately. (p. 4)

Alison (2006:4) first supports this argument from the Gospel of Luke where Jesus says he is fulfilling the "Melchizedek agenda" by working "for the liberation, the 'atonement', or 'redemption', of the people".

Alison's second support and key connection between the atonement ritual in the temple and Jesus, is Alison's reading of the Gospel of John. Alison (2006:4) notes that in John 17: "Jesus' last speech to his disciples before his Passion is a speech based on the high priest's atonement prayer." Next Alison highlights the time table in John's gospel that has Jesus crucified on Thursday. In that timeline Jesus would have been killed at the same time the priest were killing the lambs for the Passover meal making sure not to break the bones. Jesus too will be killed without a broken bone. (Alison 2006:4). While a priest was wearing seamless robe, Jesus would have his stripped and gambled over (Alison 2006:4).

Alison also points out that the Easter story in John takes place in a garden as a symbol of the Creation being restored (Alison 2006:5). That account happens on a Sunday in a garden underscoring that Easter is the first day of a new creation (Alison 2006:5). In the tomb are angels at the head and the foot of the place where Jesus was laid. This image calls to mind the angels on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (Alison 2006:5). The Holy of Holies is now open. No more enclosure in the House of God (Alison 2006:5).

Alison's primary purpose for addressing this atonement ritual and its connection to Jesus is to offer a different reading of atonement by contrasting the liturgical roots of atonement and current theories of atonement. However, as I have noted above, Alison's insight also can serve to shed light on Hebrews 13 and the matter of enclosure.

Reading the crucifixion of Jesus through the atonement lens used by Alison, one is able to view Jesus not as one on the inside of the Jewish ritual tradition and its enclosures, but

the one doing away with them. The Hebrews 13 passage portrays Jesus by locating him outside of the city walls, outside of the temple, outside of the Holy of Holies. Jesus is living out the atonement ritual that foreshadowed the Messiah<sup>89</sup> which happens inside the city, inside the temple behind its enclosures. But He is simultaneously living out what the atonement ritual pointed to while he is being executed, outside of the city. A shift is taking place in the location of salvation.

The final verse of the Hebrews 13 passage offers one more glimpse of how Jesus is removing enclosures. In verse 14 we read: “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14 NIV). This verse points the reader’s attention to the final city, the city of Zion found in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation we see that in this final city John does not “see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev 21:22).<sup>90</sup> The process of removing the temple begins at Jesus’ death when the veil in the temple, which divided where God dwelt from the place where humanity and the rest of creation dwelt was torn. Interestingly, Alison (2006:4) makes no reference to the tearing of the veil, but rather notes its role in the atonement liturgy and also that we are, through Jesus’ death, “being called ‘through the Veil’, into the participation” in the Eucharist. This may be because the account of the tearing of the veil does not appear in John (this is intriguing since the Johnian account of Easter is dripping with imagery of the new creation), but rather is a part of the accounts in Matthew 27 and Mark 15. Regardless of the location of the veil-rending account, this action – the replacing of the temple with the Lamb – again points to Jesus’ death being a work that removes the enclosures around religion and access to God. The result of that action was the abolishment of any need of a temple

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<sup>89</sup> Alison (2006:6) notes that “[a]ll sacrificial systems are substitutionary’ and that ‘what Jesus was doing was substituting himself for a series of substitutions’.

<sup>90</sup> The gates of the new city in Revelation are also never closed (Rev 21:25), which I read as another reference to the enclosure now being open forever.

because God now dwelt among his people in a way that encompasses all of creation without any enclosure.

This enclosure-removing nature of Jesus is echoed in the work of Orland Costas. Writing on Hebrews 13 in his book *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (2005), he exegetes the writer of Hebrews through the lens of mission and develops three points. First, that “the death of Jesus outside the implies a new place of salvation” (Costas 2005:188). Second, Costas (2005:191) asserts that “the death of Jesus outside the gate implies [...] a fuller understanding of mission”. Third, he notes that Jesus death outside the gate gives “[a] new goal of both salvation and mission” (Costas 2005:193). Each of these movements is a move from an enclosed world of insiders into the world available to all. In Costas’ understanding, Jesus is breaking through and doing away with the enclosures that surrounded the Jewish faith in favour of the freedom Jesus brings outside the walls of enclosure.

The enclosure-removing work of Jesus can also be seen in the work of Ernest van Eck. While not writing directly about the Hebrews 13 passage, Van Eck’s insight into one of Jesus parables sheds light on this passage and the located reality of society in Jesus’ time. Writing about the parable of the feast found in Luke 14 from a social-scientific standpoint (Van Eck 2012; Van Eck 2013; Van Eck, Renkin, and Ntakirutimana 2016; Van Eck 2016). Van Eck (2016) explains:

The elite occupied the walled-off center of the city, the non-elite occupying the outlying area of the city, located between the inner and outer walls. Inside the city walls the elite and non-elite were physically and socially isolated from each other. The center of the city normally contained the palace, the temple and the residences of the political and religious elite – that is those with honor, status, power, and privilege. The city center, apart from having its own internal walls, was clearly demarcated from the rest of the city (the outlying area) by an additional wall. Occupation of this outlying area (between the inner and outer wall) normally was organized in terms of particular families, income groups, guilds, ethnicities, and lines of work [...the] city also “housed” a third group of people, the socially ostracized (prostitutes, beggars, tanners and other social outcasts such as lepers). People who were part of this group lived outside the outer walls of the city, and were only allowed to enter the city during the day, to (for example) look for work as day laborers. (p. 98-99)

This understanding of the city offered by Van Eck opens up the meaning of the parable of the feast and its repeated invitations, but also gives us insight into Hebrews 13. When Jesus dies outside of the gate he is in the place of residence of the “socially ostracized (prostitutes, beggars, tanners and other social outcasts such as lepers)” (Van Eck 2016:98-99). In the parable the invitation is made to all three layers of the city, thus breaking down the enclosures that separated the three groups of society physically and socially. The Kingdom of God, it seems, is not divided by these enclosures. In this parable we see that Jesus is interested in breaking down the enclosures of his day in favour of a new vision for how humans interact – the Kingdom of God. In this way Jesus and the commons are seeking to do the same thing. When we look at the eternal city at the end of time it is enclosure-free since its gates are never closed (Rev 21:25) and all are welcome (Rev 7:9 & 22:2).

## VI. Conclusions from the Commons

This thesis began with the question of how can an urban ministry education, focused on transforming both the participants and the city, that is contextually relevant to Anchorage, be created that develops in its participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city. In researching that question through interviewing pastors and ministry leaders (co-researchers) in Anchorage and those practicing urban ministry education, as well as examining the literature, and exploring the cultural and historical context, a few themes have emerged.

It has been displayed that Anchorage is not a safe city and that the needs of all residents are not being met. It is a diverse city, but there is division over race in the city. Those interviewed in Anchorage agreed that Anchorage is facing issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, violence and affordable housing. The demographics reveal a diverse city but there is division over race in the city. The interviews in the city confirmed division over race. The interviews in Anchorage also showed division in the ministry climate over

controversial issues like LGBTQ+ rights, and because of busyness and competition. These issues and divisions can be seen as a depletion of the resources of the original commons in Genesis.

In gazing deeper at those themes, one sees the legacy of colonialism and racism, the normative whiteness that allows for a “colour-blind” denial of race, as well as the isolation present in the country. By further examining the division over issues in Anchorage the historical divide over the social gospel and evangelism came to light. It was observed that the division over competition is likely caused by the mimetic nature of desire. It was also revealed that the same desires could also be used to create a positive community of desire. Finally, the expectations placed on pastors was exposed as a likely contributor to the busyness experience by pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage. Here too the depletion of the original commons can be seen.

Interviews with Anchorage ministry leaders and pastors also showed a desire for more educational opportunities in Anchorage and showed a strong proclivity for learning that is highly relational. The interviews with others practicing urban ministry education and a pilot learning experience confirmed the centrality of relationships in education of this type. Both also gave shape to an understanding that any education done must fit the rhythm of the city in which it is being done. These desires and realities are in keeping with the commons model in that they are local and relational.

In considering how to answer the question of this thesis, while keeping in mind the factors just outlined, a learning environment where the medium is the message is desired. This embodied approach is preferred to the typical approach to education that focuses on content to the detriment of relationships. In practicing education that is embodied and is living out its intended outcome – a city like the one in the last pages of Revelation – can be

both imagined and practiced by participants. This participatory approach that seeks to engage participants is also in line with the principles of the commons.

In this chapter the commons was explored as a possible way to consider doing urban ministry education in Anchorage and to transform the city. The commons was engaged in light of the first commons in Genesis. In that commons the resource of the garden and all of creation was managed by a community consisting of God, Adam and Eve. That commons was governed by rules and expectations. The humans were expected to reproduce as a way to participate in God's creativity; they were entrusted with the responsibility of stewarding all of creation; they were invited to enjoy creation as everything was given to them to provide for their needs. Finally, God gave a single prohibition – “not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:16-17) – a rule which Adam and Eve broke.

In eating from the tree that was forbidden, the commons was destroyed. The relationships between humans and between humans and God were changed and conflict introduced. Pain in reproduction, toil in caring for the earth and providing for their needs was ushered in. Finally, Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden and barred from returning. All of life was affected by this decision. The divisions present in this thesis over race, issues, competition, and busyness (likely tied to a feeling of scarcity) are results of the Fall. So too are the issues facing the city such as substance abuse, violence, affordable housing and homelessness. All of the world is not the way it is supposed to be.

The call for reclaiming the commons is a desire for change and transformation. This call is consistent with the call in scripture for a new humanity (Eph. 2:15) and the process of bringing “unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10). It is closely tied to the idea of shalom. Plantinga (2002:14-15) explains this restoration:

This webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets called *shalom*. We call it “peace,” but it means far more than just peace of mind or cease-fire between enemies [...] In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied



and natural gifts fruitfully employed, under the arch of God's love. Shalom, in other words is the way things are supposed to be. (p. 14-15 [*italics original*])

We can see shalom in the original commons in Genesis and in the eternal city in Revelation, but it is hard to find shalom in the space in between – the space in which we live. Sin has depleted all of the world and the vocation for those following Jesus is to take part in his work of transforming the world back to the shalom state God intended in the first place.

One barrier to this is the enclosure, brought to light in a previous chapter, between churches that see social justice and social action as core to their understanding of the Gospel and those that understand the mission of the church to be purely evangelical. As we have seen, Jesus transcends any enclosure that humans construct. In order to build a commons that includes leaders and pastors from all parts of the Christian world in Anchorage, this particular enclosure will need to be addressed.

A commons like that in Genesis is the goal and also the method of transformation for Anchorage. The commons, as a community, fulfils the desire for learning to take place in a relational way expressed in Anchorage. But the commons is more than that, it is the opportunity to begin to practice the eternal city in the here and now. The commons is a way to learn and transform where the medium is the message. If we are to overcome the divisions of race in Anchorage, we must form a community that welcomes all and seeks to dismantle the legacy of colonialism. If we are to heal the division over issues, we must create a community where varied perspectives are welcomed, encouraged, engaged with and valued. For the eternal city to become realized in Anchorage a positive community of desire must be created. To combat busyness and competition, the reality of God's abundance must take hold so that the fears of scarcity can be replaced. We must construct a commons with these values.

In order to make this happen, rules must be created that will manage the resource of the commons. Seeing education as a resource, the community desiring to learn together,

could address the lack of formal learning opportunities and educational institution<sup>91</sup> resources in the city by doing education in a commons. The rules established in the commons would serve to create an environment where those separated by race, issues, or competition could come together to learn and dream together.

That dreaming together could then transform the city as it moves from this rather small idea of a learning commons to envisioning how God's resources might be used to meet the needs of the entire city, particularly those that are going unmet. If God is a God of abundance, then there is enough. Enough housing so that no one need sleep on the street. Enough resources that no one's needs go unmet. Enough peace that the violence of the city can be quelled. Enough of everything. Everything can be made new! The transformation of Anchorage is possible.

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<sup>91</sup> One can view the inaccessibility of these resources due to accessibility, cost, etc., as a type of enclosure.

## Chapter 10: The Commons in Anchorage

Before I begin to propose what the commons, in particular an educational commons, in Anchorage might look like, I must note that what follows is simply that: a proposal. The very idea of a commons means that it is established by a group of people in community. The resources of a commons are shared and managed in and by a community. An individual person proposing how a commons might develop, be maintained, or even what resource they might share and manage, is not functioning as a commons at all. Thus, what I offer here is a possible way that a commons might develop in Anchorage that answers the questions posed by this thesis. The detailed suggestions that follow could appear to signal that this approach should be adopted, but rather they are offered here as a robust way of considering what a possible educational commons might look like.

It is also helpful here to remember that what this thesis seeks to construct is a local and contextual practice of theology. So not only does this chapter simply propose a direction for the commons that can only truly be created by the commons, it also proposes a commons that uses a contextual approach to creating learning that is constantly working in the loop of practice-theory-practice and grounded in the use of the pastoral cycle (Holland & Henriot 1983:8ff). This is to ensure that the education and the actions taken are assessed and rooted in the local context.

### I. Education as a Commons

Public education in the United States is sometimes given as an example of a commons (Walljasper 2010:8). This is because it is a resource that is held in common for the common good and managed by the community. However, in recent years some have questioned if public education is truly a commons. Korsgaard (2019) explains:

The contemporary notion of commons is often connected with democratic ideals and the struggle for ‘real’ democracy. Education and schooling in this framework is thus connected to democratic aims and democratic education. Commons is connected to democratic sociality and community, and schooling is to provide the foundation for this by forming future inhabitants of the common. (p. 450)

While this is how public schooling is viewed, the reality is often different. Bollier notes that public education is undergoing a number of enclosures. Those enclosures:

[E]xclude those students who are more difficult or costly to teach -- the low achievers, those with learning disabilities, and those who may not fit in. They regard students (or their parents) as “consumers,” not as co-producers and collaborators in the educational process. Learning that cannot be measured in clear metrics (and therefore which cannot be a basis for market competition) are regarded as secondary or inconsequential. The shared commitments of a community to each other, or the need for inclusiveness and social equity, are not seen as important because, as in any market, we are all “individuals”. (Cody 2013)

Bollier is not the only one objecting. Gary Hepburn (2004:2) notes that, in the current situation of underfunded schools, “Schools are being seen as an under-exploited resource by corporations, and commercial intrusions into educational spaces are becoming more common.” In this situation schools take corporate support to pay for needed equipment and learning materials in exchange for advertising (Hepburn 2004:2).

The level of enclosure is even more pronounced in higher education. Bollier states:

Enclosures in higher education consist of corporate research “partnerships” with universities, in which the corporations essentially commandeer the research agenda, dictate many terms of the research and how it may be used, and leverage publicly funded resources for private, corporate purposes. It may also consist of treating student bodies as captive cohorts to be advertised to or given educational loans at exploitative interest rates. (Cody 2013)

Wittel (2018:205) observes that higher education has an even more fundamental problem when seeking to operate as a commons:

In order to explore the idea and the possibility of a higher education commons we need to start on a more basic level with the relation between education and a commons. The notion of an education commons is in itself rather problematic [...] resources are not equally shared in a community of education commoners. In fact, they cannot be equally shared as the very process of education is fundamentally hierarchical with teachers more likely to be on the giving end (delivering knowledge and deciding on the form of pedagogy) and students more likely to be on the receiving end of the educational process. A similar problem arises with the self-organization and the governance of an education commons. It is difficult to imagine a setting that gives students the same influence as teachers in the organization and the normative framework in educational processes.

Wittel’s observations, as well as the fact that higher education is not something, at least in the

United States, that is open to all due to high tuition costs, show how education at its higher levels does not function as a commons.

Can an educational commons be achieved? The answer is yes.

Homeschooling initiatives are a commons as they are neither organized by the market nor by the state. They are run by parent-commoners and function according to the time and labour they invest. All parents who are part of a homeschooling network (or community) invest more or less equally in such a project and have more or less equal influence in the governance of the network. (Wittel 2018:205)

The home-school approach to schooling provides a way for setting up a training commons in Anchorage.<sup>92</sup>

A home-school or home-school network is established when a community – a group of parents, students, and sometimes teachers – decide to pool their resources and provide education together for their children. The values of this education and the education itself takes place from within the community with parents (and, in some cases, students and teachers) establishing the community, the rules of governance for that community, and managing the resources of teaching and learning. In the same way, the commons proposed in this thesis to answer the questions at hand would be established by a group seeking to do training in Anchorage.

An example of how this home-schooling approach to learning among ministry leaders might work is the Urban Training Collaborative (UTC). The UTC is a partnership of Street Psalms, the Leadership Foundations, and Resonate Global Mission (Christian Reformed Church in North America). What binds this community of people together into a “dynamic global training collaborative” or, as I am arguing, a learning commons, is a commitment to “three core outcomes: 1) Gathering Incarnational leaders; 2) Training Incarnational leaders; and 3) Strengthening city-serving churches and organizations” (Urban Training Collaborative 2016). The UTC achieves these outcomes through the use of a common curriculum called

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<sup>92</sup> It is important to note that Wittel (2018:205) asserts, “Due to the highly specialized nature of higher education an arrangement similar to homeschooling is nearly impossible to set up.”

the “Incarnational Training Framework” or ITF (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017).

The ITF curriculum “[c]ondenses more than 20 years of learning [...] many dozens of leaders throughout the network have their fingerprints all over this training guide” (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:7). The ITF is a model of learning that has been developed contextually where the participants in the community operate as theologians (Schreiter 1985:18). Using a cycle of action-reflection-discernment over the years, Street Psalms as a community developed a resource – training and learning – that is open source. This training resource is managed by the community with learning taking place in different ways in different cities. What binds the community together around this common resource is a set of rules.

The rules that govern the UTC and its partners are simple. All the training that is done in the UTC educational commons must agree to seek to do three things: First, call people from scarcity to abundance. Second, call people from theory to practice. Third, call people from rivalry to peacemaking? (Rock and Van Dyke 2017:9). Anyone who agrees to seek to follow these rules is part of the community and can participate in the UTC.

The UTC is a community that is managing a common resource, using a set of rules. The resource they manage together has been developed as part of that community and continues to be adapted and used in an open source way by the community using a pastoral cycle (or circle of praxis). The UTC is using this resource and this community to train pastors and ministry leaders. The UTC provides a model, as does home schooling, that can be used as template for the commons this thesis is proposing for Anchorage.

## II. Community of Troth

The commons is based on community. But what does that community look like and how are those relationships formed? It has been shown that community is at the core of the Trinity, is displayed in Jesus’ incarnation, and was taught and lived out by the Apostle Paul.

The next consideration is what Christian community looks like and how that community might develop in the proposed Anchorage commons.

### *Christian Community*

In the understanding of Volf (Volf 1996:98) Genesis 4:1-11 provides a understanding of Christian community. At the end of the account of Cain murdering Able there is an insight about community. It is in the post-homicide questions where the truth about community is exposed according to Volf. God asks, “Cain, where is your brother?” Cain replies, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The implication of this exchange is that Cain is his brothers keeper. As Volf explains, this short question and answer teaches us that ‘life in community means sharing a common social space and taking responsibility for the other’ (Volf 1996:98).<sup>93</sup>

Volf is not alone in his relational assessment of the interrogation following the first Biblical murder. Kristin Swenson (2006:373) notes in examining the Hebrew word *ʿsmr*, translated as “keep, watch, preserve”, that there is a relationship between the use of *ʿsmr* in Genesis 2-3 and Genesis 4:1-16. When taken together Swenson (2006) asserts:

[I]t introduces three ethical implications: 1) Care for the earth is inseparable from care for other people; 2) Such care is not contingent on fair, much less paradisiacal, conditions but rather is to be undertaken even in a fractured world of misunderstanding, injustice, and disappointment; and 3) Experience of the presence of God is contingent on such caretaking. (p. 373)

Swenson (2006:380) concludes, that the answer to Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is the first time *ʿsmr* “takes another human as its object” and that in light of that:

By reintroducing *ʿsmr* as part of the question that is not answered by any character in the story, readers feel compelled to answer. When we do, we become complicit. In the process, readers are drawn to recognize a responsibility for others that is inseparable from responsibility for the non-human natural world, the “land” that we depend on. Yet the web of relationships does not stop there. Cain also learns that damaging the welfare of others damages his relationship to the greater earth and perverts his experience of God. (Swenson 2006:383)

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<sup>93</sup> I have previously written on community (Kiekintveld 2012, 2014a, 2014b) and this section is informed, in part, by this previous work.

Swenson supports Volf's understanding that the murder of Abel by Cain teaches what relationship in community looks like.

In the original commons in Genesis (Gen. 1:18-21), the community of Adam, Eve, and God shows that it is not good for humans to be alone. In Acts 2 the new followers of Jesus are living in a way that also looks like a commons. They met together daily, shared common resources, ate together, celebrated the Lord's Supper and worshiped together.

Community is important enough that the writer of Hebrews reminds readers of that letter to not give up meeting together (Heb. 10:19-25). Community is at the heart of how people are to follow God and be in relationship with him and each other. The question is how to form this community by sharing a common social space. What does the space look like and what type of community can be formed?

On its face, sharing a common social space should be simple. It is a matter of being in the same space with one another. However, people in the United States are not sharing community as they did in previous eras. Robert D. Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse of and Revival of American Community* (2000) argues that in America people are more socially disconnected now than they were in previous times. He states:

The dominate theme is simple: For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago – silently, without warning – that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities of the last third of the century. (Putnam 2000:27)

Putnum's research from nearly 20 years ago displays a larger cultural trend toward isolation that is in line with the isolation evident in the Anchorage interview data.

As Volf states there are two parts to life in community: sharing a common social space and taking responsibility for the other. It is this first step, sharing a common social space, which seems elementary but appears to be lacking. The simple act of getting people in



the same location and interacting is the first step to any relationship building.<sup>94</sup> It is my assertion that this face-to-face contact is the starting point and basic building block to any training in Anchorage as well. There is simply no substitute for sharing a common social space. We must come face to face with each other and see one another.

I have watched this happen for years at Parachutes. Each day that the doors of drop-in open, a space is created where youth, the staff, and the volunteers can share a common social space. From that a great many things have grown. First of all, relationships between those that share the space. The youth and adults' lives have become intertwined. But further, a community of faith has developed and the staff has learned a great deal about the city, its people and the issues. Over the years, the staff and volunteers have been taken captive by the faces of the youth we serve. The end result has been a culture of taking care of each other.

When one shares space regularly with others, it is inevitable that relationships will be formed and a concern and care for each other will develop. This care and concern for one another, the second part of Volf's understanding of community, falls in to the area of *agape* love. The concept of agape love is explored by William Greenway as he examines the work of Emmanuel Levinas. In light of Levinas, Greenway defines agape and introduces the idea of being seized by the Other when he writes:

Levinas holds that true philosophy begins, before any intending, resolving, or deciding on our part, in awakening (and not hardening our hearts) to having been seized by infinite concern for the flourishing of every other. This precisely describes agape. Following Levinas and Christian scripture and tradition, I identify this from-without, infinite concern for all others by which we find ourselves seized, with God ("God is love"—hardly a claim exclusive to Christianity). To be seized by concern for others is to be seized by agape/God for others. Living surrender to having been seized by infinite concern for every other is living surrender to God is faith (not to be confused with beliefs, ideas concerning faith). (Greenway, n.d.)

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<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, strong relationships, in contrast to isolation, proves to play an important role in physical health as well, according to an 80-year-old study of men done by Harvard Medical School. "The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health," said Robert Waldinger, director of the study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation" (Mineo 2017). A summary reports: "Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, the study revealed. Those ties protect people from life's discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants" (Mineo 2017).

Greenway (2015) explains that for Levinas the key to agape is being taken hostage (Greenway prefers the term seized) by the “Face”<sup>95</sup> of the Other. Greenway summarizes, “In short, *agape* beneath, behind, and around one is unveiled in having been seized in and by love for the Faces of others” (Greenway 2015:108). For Levinas this agape reality uses a spiritual language where the vocabulary of science and poetry are not adequate (Greenway 2015:104).

Being taken hostage by the Face of the Other can only take place if we are in the same space as the Other so that we can be taken captive by their Face. Key in the ability for this to happen is that one must not harden one’s self to the Other. Greenway explains (2015):

The question for freely self-creating I’s in the face of having been seized in and by love is whether or not they will harden their hearts. The I who does not harden his or her heart, but who lives in surrender to having been seized in and by love, is the I of faith. Faith is I living surrender to agape.<sup>96</sup> (p. 108)

That is to say one has to be open to the Other and the possibility that one’s encounter with the Other may end in being seized by their Face and brought into agape.

Levinas and Volf both arrive at the same conclusion. For Levinas the end product is moving beyond one’s self and into care for the Other. Greenway (2015), using Levinas’ analogy of a boy being led to the gallows explains:

In being taken hostage by the Face of that boy, the self-absorption of (the) I, and I consumed with care for self, is rent asunder. A more primordial reality, the enveloping reality of agape, passion for the boy, here manifest in violation, is unveiled. Care for the boy consumed and displaces care for self. I am now living care for that boy, hostage to his Face. (p. 102)

Volf offers his understanding, “To have a brother one must *be* a brother and “*keep*” a brother” (1996:97 [*italics original*]), that is to say, being a brother is in the act of taking care

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<sup>95</sup> According to Greenway (2015:105) “The Face is not a biological or sociocultural reality. Gender, nationality, family, height, age, and so forth are all features of one’s face (small “f”). The Face of any face is that by which I am taken “hostage” in concern. The Face is discerned in and through awakening to agape.”

<sup>96</sup> “I’s number, see, touch, hear and describe that natural world, and then I’s compare those observations (and inferences and hypotheses drawn from those observations) to other observations of the world so that the world can prove or support those observations. This describes empirical/scientific truth in the sense of correspondence between sentences and the sphere of nature. Sphere of spirit truths, however, have to do with the reality of the very I’s that do all the observing, numbering, talking and comparing. These are not truths about anything in the sphere of nature. These are truths of the sphere of the spirit discernable transcendentally in light of the appearance of the world *as such*” (Greenway 2015:92 [*italics original*]).

of each other. Thus, for Volf too, the sharing of space produces a mutual care for each other.<sup>97</sup>

In the end, the face of someone cannot capture you if you never encounter their Face. If Volf and Levinas are correct, and if the need in Anchorage is for relationships to develop so that training and transformation can take place, then the commons must create space for ministry leaders to gather in a shared social space. In that space participants can take responsibility for each other and live out an agape existence that flows from having been captured by the Face of the Other.

### *A Community of Truth*

Since the commons being proposed for Anchorage is based on learning together a learning-based approach to community should be considered. Palmer, in his acclaimed book on teaching and learning *To Know as We Are Known: Education as Spiritual Journey* (1993), advocates for a relationship-based way of learning. He begins by suggesting that the human quest for knowledge is based in two sources: curiosity and control (Palmer 1993:7). The former being an innate desire to know for the sake of knowing and the latter being nothing more than a desire to gain power and command – or at least the illusion of power and control – over the unpredictable and uncontrollable world around us (Palmer 1993:8). As a way forward, Palmer (1993:8) suggests that true knowledge must originate from a different source: love.

Knowledge rooted in love, for Palmer, is what is missing in the modern academic world. He writes:

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<sup>97</sup> The “contact hypothesis” in psychology, first proposed by Allport in 1954, provides scientific proof to Volf’s claim that community is sharing space and taking responsibility for the other. In fact, it seems that sharing space can reduce prejudice. Dixson et al. (2010:402) write: “the ‘contact hypothesis’ (Allport 1954) is now the most important—and certainly the most intensively researched—psychological perspective on how to build a more tolerant and integrated society. In their metaanalytic review, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) boiled down a long history of qualifications and supposedly mixed findings to a simple message: intergroup contact reduces various types of prejudice, and it is particularly effective when it unfolds under favorable conditions (e.g., conditions of equality, cooperation, and institutional support). Also, poll data from Gallup indicate that empathy for a group may be linked to relationship (Morales 2009) and knowing a victim has been shown to produce higher rates of giving and volunteering according to Small and Simonsohn (2007).

The failure of modern knowledge is not primarily a failure of our ethics, in the application of what we know. Rather, it is a failure of our knowing itself to recognize and reach for its deeper source and passion, to allow love to inform the relations that our knowledge creates – with ourselves, with each other, with the whole animate and inanimate world. (Palmer 1993:9)

Boyle (2017:85) concurs: “If love is the answer, community is the context, and tenderness the methodology.” Palmer (1993:26-30) further notes that our conventional education system is focused outward, neglecting the inner reality of both the student and the teacher that leads to the isolation of the knowing self into a situation where the participants manipulate each other and the world around them. That situation, marked by a stream of data and facts pushed from the teacher to the students, designed to keep the students passive and the instructor in guarded control, all done under the revered banner of objectivity, fails to create an environment where knowledge can be explored and discovered from the place of love. It creates an environment where education becomes an anti-communal competition (Palmer 1993:26-30).

Seeking to find a way for truth to spring from the source of love, Palmer offers a different way. Noting that the Germanic root of the word “truth” is the word “troth”, Palmer (1993:31) explains that troth is a “covenant with another, a pledge to engage in a mutually accountable and transformative relationship, a relationship forged of trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks”. He further elaborates that to know truth is to enter into troth with the known and one’s whole self as well as allowing one’s self to be known by others (Palmer 1993:31). It is in this definition of a community of troth that gives a direction to creating a commons for training in Anchorage.

Palmer illustrates the community of troth through the story about desert father Abba Felix. One particular encounter between Abba Felix and his students is recorded by Benedicta Ward in *The Desert Christian* (1980) and relayed by Palmer (1993:40-46). In that account Abba Felix’s students come to him and ask him for a word. Felix remains silent. After they wait quietly for a long time, Felix asks them, “You wish to hear a word?”

“Yes,” they reply.

Abba Felix answers, “There are no words nowadays. When the brothers used to consult the old men and they did what was said to them, God showed them how to speak. But now, since they ask without doing that which they hear, God has withdrawn the grace of the word from the old men and they do not find anything to say, since there are no longer any who carry their words out.”

When the students hear this they respond, “Pray for us, Abba” (Palmer 1993:40-46).

Palmer draws a few conclusions from this ancient story as a way to illustrate his central point that the world of education might be better viewed as a spiritual journey rooted in love and truth than the isolation brought by conventional education's foundations in competition, control and curiosity. First, Palmer highlights Abba Felix's response. In his response, or lack of one, Palmer (1993:42) notes that Abba Felix “leads his students into a wordless world”. This silence is the effect of students that do not do what their teachers are instructing them to do (Palmer 1993:42). He quickly contrasts the Abba Felix's response with the conventional practice in education where the application of what is being taught is of no real concern of the instructor and knowledge is divorced from the practice of one's life (Palmer 1993:42). Furthermore, it is noted that Felix does not just automatically respond to his student's request, but calls them out for their desire for mere words, rather than the reality of life (Palmer 1993:43). Felix gives them silence instead of a word hoping to point them to the truth through self-reflection (Palmer 1993:43).

Palmer notes the two-fold responsibility of the teacher in the truth relationship. He points out, “the root meaning of ‘to educate’ is ‘to draw out’ and that the teacher's task is not to fill the student with facts but to evoke the truth the student holds within” (Palmer 1993:43). Being aware of that, Palmer (1993) continues:

If we let our teacher-self speak without allowing our learner-self to listen and follow, our own truth, our truth with ourselves, will be broken [...] the risk of becoming speakers of large and

powerful words we fail to follow in the living. When that happens we lose our truthful words. (p. 44)

In Abba Felix's response we see that the desire for the truth is rooted in the fabric of one's life, whether that be the life of the teacher or the student, and is a necessary component of education as protected by the community of troth.

Palmer also draws the reader's attention to the response of the students. The students hear both Abba Felix's silence and his assertion that "[t]here are no more words nowadays" (Palmer 1993:41) and respond by asking for prayer (Palmer 1993:45). Palmer (1993:45) highlights the contrast of the students asking for a word at the start of the account and ending the encounter asking for a different type of word. In this Palmer notes that two things are revealed. The students display that they are taking responsibility for the reality revealed by their teacher's words. Second, the request for prayer highlights the impasse they have reached in their education (Palmer 1993:45).

In the Christian tradition we note that truth is relational. Jesus said that he was the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6-14). If the truth is contained in a person, then truth must necessarily be relational. Thus, truth must be pursued in a relational way – in community. That community, to be an authentic witness to the truth, must be a community of troth (Palmer 1993:31) where accountability to the relationship between truth and praxis displayed by Abba Felix is the norm and the relationship between those seeking truth, both teacher and student, are also relationships of troth.

### *Taking Attendance in the Community*

If there is to be a community of troth, who is in the community? Another way to ask the question: who gets to bring their knowledge into the commons that is being proposed? Furthermore, if the training is being done in a way that is concrete, local and specific as well as from the bottom how shall that be done?

Foth, Odendaal and Hearn (2007) express the common understanding of epistemology in writing about their proposed “View from Everywhere”. They write:

Traditional epistemologists operate under the assumption the certainty is only achieved by stripping away all but the bare reasoning required to make inferences; thus rendering the social, historical and economic context of the knower irrelevant. The perspective of this knower is a ‘view from nowhere.’ (Foth, Odendaal & Hearn 2007:1)

Foth, Odendaal and Hearn seek to create a perspective of knowledge that is from everywhere.

This stands in contrast to Nagel, whom they reference, who understands that to seek

knowledge we must “get outside of ourselves, and view the world from nowhere within it”

(Nagel 1986:67). Nagel is not alone in this position. Emile Durkheim contrasts the “local

imprint borne by religious and lay belief with the universality of science” (Shapin 1998:5),

when he writes, “Religious beliefs in the less developed societies show the imprint of the soil

upon which they are formed; today, the truths of science are independent of any local

context” (Durkheim 1972:88).<sup>98</sup> This contrast and the call to objectivity, is something that

was against truth in the understanding of Palmer. Palmer (1993) explains:

The untrained mind of premodern times did not rely on factual observations and logical analysis but on the subjective faculties – emotion, intuition, faith [...] if the problem with primitive knowledge was the over identification of the knower with the known, our problem is the estrangement and alienation of the two. (pp. 25-26)

This detachment of the knower from the known Palmer (1993:29) exerts is “institutionalized

in our educational practices, in the ways we teach and learn”. It is this presumed

“estrangement” between the knower and the known that Foth, Odendaal and Hearn address

when they suggest a ‘view from everywhere’ (2007) in contrast to Nagel, Durkheim and

others.

Drawing on the feminist critique of Juli Eflin (2008) who “raises legitimate concerns

about epistemologies that have their roots in masculine preferences for decontextualized

rationality” (Foth, Odendaal & Hearn 2007), Foth, Odendaal and Hearn (2007:4) express

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<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that Shapin has explored the influence of location in science and writes that “over the past two decades broadly geographic sensibilities have become prominent in the academic study of science” (Shapin 1998:5).

that, “[w]hat this view fails to recognize is the wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and experience collectively and privately held in each urbanite”. In other words, the traditional epistemological approach to knowledge that seeks to view truth as objective misses the knowledge that could be learned from viewing the entire city and all its inhabitants as teachers and the entire city as a classroom.

Foth, Odendaal and Hearn proposed that the “view from everywhere” is an epistemological perspective that opens up the discussion to all the voices of the city. In using this approach those seeking to learn from the classroom of the city would “become aware of the limitations of viewing the city as a ‘closed’ system of social, economic, and cultural interactions bounded in space and defined by a common view of what is ‘truth,’ what is ‘legitimate’” (Foth, Odendaal and Hearn 2007:7). They propose the use of the metaphors provided by Amin and Thrift (2002):

*Transitivity*, that reveals the permeability and porous nature of city process, relations, and interactions. *Rhythms*, created through multiple movements, experiences, and interactions. And finally, *footprints*, the evidence left by history, daily movement and outside networks (Foth, Odendaal and Hearn 2007:6 [*italics original*]).

The call to view the city as a “view from everywhere” recalls the Social Ecological Model that takes into account the complex layers of a context in seeking social change. Here that same conciseness recognizes that the individual is in relationship with other individuals, communities, institutions and the greater society. In each of these layers of interaction(s) is knowledge we can learn if we avoid being paralyzed by objectivity and are open to the stories of those around us with whom we share the city.

De Beer asks the question, “Whose knowledges shape the city?” (De Beer 2014a). De Beer draws the reader’s attention to an Old Testament verse (Eccles. 9:15 NIV) that reads, “Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.” In this verse the author of Ecclesiastes is stating that some voices in the city are more valuable than others – that some voices are considered



worthy to be listened to while others, just as wise, are forgotten. In this case, a poor man had the knowledge needed to save the city. Of this man De Beer (2014a:218) states, “[He] represents an epistemological challenge raising the question of whose knowledges shape our city, which knowledges are regarded as valid?” In asking these questions de Beer (2014a:226) seeks to “advance a community-based urban *praxis*, proposing that – alongside the visions of consultants, politicians, and the private sector – cities need to re-envisioned from below and from within”.

If the man in Ecclesiastes 9:15 had his voice lost in the city because he was poor and therefore marginalized, where shall we look to find a Biblical example where a multiplicity of voices were invited to give input? I would suggest we look at the city of Antioch in the New Testament.

In Acts, Luke informs the reader that “[t]he disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26 NOV). This verse alone does not inform us of how diverse voices were present or listened to in Antioch. However, the context surrounding this verse is enlightening. Throughout Luke’s gospel and in its sequel, the Book of Acts, the definition of who is included in the family of God – who is in/out – increasingly expands. Alison (2014) sheds light on this expansion:

The fact of [Jesus’] resurrection was much more than the demonstration of the existence of an afterlife [...] It was the vindication from On High that the whole of the religious and political structure that had put him to death was under judgment from God. In other words, that he, Jesus, who had looked, to all extents and purposes, like a blasphemous and seditious transgressor, had been *telling the truth* about who God is in his teaching. This means that anyone at all, from any nation under the sun, who can perceive that he or she has been in some way involved in the sort of false and violent construction of goodness or badness which Jesus up-ended, can be forgiven for this, and so can enter into participating in the life of the Living God without any special external markings. (Alison 2014 [*italics original*])

This expanding of the boundaries of who is in and who is out begins even prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection, although Alison is right that it is an implication of the resurrection, one need only to take a survey of Luke’s writing to understand this expansion. In Luke’s gospel women play a prominent role; disciples are chosen from the uneducated (fisherman)

and despised (tax collectors); those with leprosy are welcomed; the sick and demon possessed healed; sinners and prostitutes serve as dinner companions; Roman Centurions and Samaritans are held up as examples of faith; and Jesus is anointed, not by a priest or a prophet, but by a sinful woman. The kingdom of God is even expressed in outcast terms when it is compared to undesirable things like yeast and weeds. In Acts the story moves from the remnant of disciples in the upper room to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost with its focus on the church becoming multilingual to ultimately the full inclusion of the Gentiles. In the first ten chapters of Acts, the church moves from being multilingual to multicultural (Bakke 1997). Rebecca I. Denova (1997) writes of Luke and Acts:

Therefore, the ‘message’ of the Gospel (i.e., Luke’s ‘theology’) remains consistent between the first book and Acts, in that the entirety of Luke’s narrative reveals the ultimate divine plan of universal inclusion. Luke did not abandon scriptural tradition when he included salvation for the Gentiles; he had anticipated it as inherent in the larger story of Israel. (p. 19)

Luke’s inclusive kingdom vision comes into play in a robust way in Antioch. In Antioch, according to Bakke (1997:145), “Luke’s Pentecost story climaxes with the establishment of the Antioch church, the first large city-center church” which was also the first multicultural church. Bakke (1997:146) notes:

Barnabas built a pastoral team that consisted of: Simeon the Black (an African), Lucius of Cyrene (A North African), Manean (possibly a slave of Herod’s father), Saul of Tarsus (native of Asia Minor, the land bridge to Europe), and Barnabas himself (from Cyprus). So the first large city-center church we know anything about had a five-person pastoral team from three continents. This is the climax of Pentecost.

So then, Antioch becomes the first multicultural church and the first place that followers of Jesus are called Christians.

The voice of the poor man in Ecclesiastes 9:15 provides for us a cautionary tale (De Beer 2014a), but Antioch, and its praxis of multiple voices, offers to us a model for inclusion. In that city<sup>99</sup> the expanding inclusive nature of the Gospel came into full expression and

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<sup>99</sup> Sharon Betcher (2014:172-173) explains the Antioch context: “[T]he urban milieu of Antioch was, for the majority of inhabitants “who existed to provide services,” hardly conducive to well-being. With a population density exceeding that of contemporary Mumbai or Calcutta (Antioch was the third elite city in the Roman Empire), amidst xenophobia and filth, laborers could not expect the universalism of the Empire to provide them with a social identity or integrate them into its civic religion.”

warranted the coining of a new name. Furthermore, Antioch shows us that a multiplicity of voices, rooted in a diverse city is not only an expression of God's kingdom and a vision of the eternal city to come (Rev 7:9), but an example to us of who is welcome in the commons when seeking to uncover the wisdom – the knowledges – of the city. In Antioch we see the embodiment of diverse voices seeing from everywhere (Foth, Odendaal and Hearn 2007).

Greg Boyle (2011) gives a picture of this radical inclusivity of God:

No daylight to separate us. Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. The prophet Habakkuk writes, "The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment and it will not disappoint... and if it delays, wait for it." Kinship is what God presses us on to, always hopeful that its time has come.<sup>100</sup> (p. 190)

It is this radical inclusion, and this hope, that should mark those who seek to see the commons as a way to learn together in Anchorage.

### III. Rules for an Anchorage Commons

#### *A Habitus for the Commons*

Herbert Anderson states in an article titled "Seeing the Other Whole: A Habitus for Globalisation" (1999), that in relation to "the Other" we most often are not seeing the Other. This matter of seeing one another – the Other - is not just a matter of race, or division over issues, but spills into other areas as well. In his article Anderson (1999) states the universal need for seeing each other in the globalising world this way:

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<sup>100</sup> Volf (1996:301) explains, "With the Lamb at the center of the throne, the distance between the "throne" and the "subjects" has collapsed in the embrace of the triune God." Alison (2013b:28) speaks of the same concept, "Because Christ occupies this place in freedom, and because Christ likes us, we can have a strange sense of being in on the centre; he has made it a place not to be feared. At the same time, it is no longer a specifically sacred space, and therefore no longer a frightening place. Thus, in another way, there is no centre at all any more: the centre is everywhere, including where I am. Perhaps Pascal was getting close to this when he described nature as a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

The issue we face in our time is a simple and specific question: *how we shall regard the Other?* It is a question that claims us with some urgency because human difference is no longer hidden by geographic distance or behind cultural and religious imperialism. Encounters with diversity that once were the province of missionaries, the adventurous, the open-minded, or those too poor to live where they wished are unavoidable and irreversible dimension of daily living for more and more people. (p. 3 [*italics original*])

In answering this question, he begins by outlining three ways to understand the Other: “the Other is *not me*; the Other is *not like me*; the *proximate Other* who is like me but different from me” (Anderson 1999:3-5 [*italics original*]). The first way of understanding the Other is rather basic, and even obvious; the Other is someone who is not me. In this sense every single human is Other. In this understanding, one must realize that not only is everyone else Other, but that they too are also the Other as well since no one else is them (Anderson 1999:3-4). The second way of understanding the Other is a slightly more complex – it is anyone that is different than me. This understanding is based on a lens of who is in and who is out of the group in which one perceives themselves a member. Since no one is exactly the same the criteria for inclusion or exclusion is based on one’s understanding that they themselves are the norm and that anyone whose appearance, or actions, or is in some way different than them is Other (Anderson 1999:4). The third understanding of the Other is the most complex – the Proximate Other who is like me but somehow different from me (Anderson 1999:4-5). In this understanding the “qualities of Us and Them are mixed” (Anderson 1999:4). Anderson (1999:5) puts it this way: “The *proximate Other* is problematic because he or she is too different from us to be comfortable and too alike to be disposed of” (Anderson 1999:5 [*italic original*]).<sup>101</sup> Regardless of the perceived difference in the Other, when we view those different than us as Other the opportunity for dialogue breaks down.

In contrast to the practice of Othering, Anderson offers a “habitus for globalisation” (Anderson 1999). With the effects of globalisation as a starting point, he offers us a possible

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<sup>101</sup> This would serve to explain the bitter division over LGBTQ+ rights among Christians in Anchorage.

direction in how to interact with the Other. He writes, “One consequence of globalization has been a blurring of these boundaries between Us and Them that have divided people for centuries” (Anderson 1999:4). With people living in closer proximity to the Other, it becomes imperative that people form a new way of viewing our differences or, as Anderson (1999:5) asks, “What should be our disposition toward the Other?”. Anderson (1999) begins explaining his habitus this way:

Modern thought tends to regard theology as a theoretical science about God, there is a strain since the Middle Ages that identifies theology as *habitus*, ‘a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals.’ (Farley 1983:35) I understand *habitus* to be a practically oriented disposition of the human soul formed from general spirituality, shaped by disciplined meditation and the study of Christian texts, informed by a careful reading of the signs of the times and the practical knowledge necessary for the work of ministry in this time. A *habitus* is not just thinking and it is more than skills. It is like learning how to do theology by heart. It is as close as breathing. It is the disposition of the soul that transcends the distinctions between intellect and affect that have often divided approaches to what is essential for ministry. (p. 5-6 [*italics original*])

He then explains what he proposes using this understanding of theology applied to the situation of globalisation. In a habitus for globalization, “four distinct attitudes precede any encounter with the Other: 1) wonder at the mystery of human uniqueness; 2) recognition of the Other; 3) hospitality toward the stranger; and 4) reconciliation as a way of living with diversity” (Anderson 1999:6). From these attitudes springs an environment in which one can engage the Other that is based on honouring each Other we encounter.

In the case of Anchorage, we need to begin to break down the barriers that divide us. Those barriers, as identified by this study are race, issues, competition and busyness. We can only hope to begin to break these barriers down by practicing the habitus that Anderson proposes. The first step Anderson proposes is a wonder at the mystery of human uniqueness. Of this initial posture, Anderson (1999) writes:

When we approach the Other with an attitude of awe and respect, we presume that persons and cultures different from me or my own culture have something to teach me [...] Whether the Other is child or spouse or the stranger in our midst or a culture alien to our own, we owe them this presumption of equal worth. This presumption overcomes fear of the stranger, engenders curiosity about the Other, and promotes the kind of disciplined listening to another that leads to understanding [...] Seeing the Other whole carries with it the possibility of

surprise. Instead of imposing our preconceptions on the Other, we are prepared to receive something new [...] (pp. 10-11)

Second, Anderson proposes the practice of hospitality toward the stranger. Of hospitality

Anderson (1999) instructs:

When we offer hospitality to a stranger, we welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our lives that has the potential to expand our world. When we disregard others or reject the stranger, we are diminished [...] Hospitality will become an increasingly important sign of the presence of the reign of God when Christianity can no longer assume a position of dominance [...] The way we welcome one another is also a sign of the generosity of God in the world. In order to value hospitality as an act of Christian discipleship, we need to foster a greater spirit of receptivity among us. (pp.11-12)

When we approach the Other with wonder and engage with hospitality, then we will begin to recognize the Other, the third movement of Anderson's habitus. It is in this step, the core of Anderson's insight on the Other, that Anderson mirrors Levinas' insight on being captured by the face of the Other and expands on this idea. On recognition Anderson (1999) shares:

[S]eeing *the Other whole* is a way of preserving the gift of otherness in any human relationship. When we realize how difficult it is to accomplish this simple task in marriage, seeing a spouse whole against a wide sky, we can begin to see why it is so difficult to honor the uniqueness of people whose color or culture or ethnic traditions or religious beliefs are very different. Honoring others means *seeing the Other whole*. When that occurs, it is possible to live together side by side as neighbors and partners with people who are Other, strangers because they are *not like me*. (pp. 12-13 [*italics original*])

Anderson explains that seeing the Other whole is not a common experience and also not without risk. This stems from the fact we tend to see in others a reflection of ourselves or someone we need to correct or change (Anderson 1999:12-14).<sup>102</sup> The risk originates from the fact that "[i]n order to see the Other more clearly, we ourselves need to be changed" (Anderson 1999:13). But the act of seeing the Other means empathizing with them.

Anderson (1999:14) writes, "empathy is the central virtue that will enable us to live side by side with partners and neighbors who are different than we are. The awareness of diversity in

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<sup>102</sup> In a similar way, in *Mission in Christ's Way: A gift, A Command, An Assurance*, Lesslie Newbigin (1987:35) writes: "In proselytism I open the door to bring another into my enclosure. In true evangelism we give room for the Holy Spirit, recognizing that it is the Spirit alone who converts, to use both us and those to whom we bear witness to bring about something new, something by which both parties are changed, and something comes into being that is a little more adequate as a sign and foretaste of Christ's universal reign. The acid test is always this: Is the evangelist ready to be changed by the encounter, or does he or she look for change only in the other party?"

our homes and neighborhood makes empathy both increasingly difficult and increasingly necessary.”

The fourth, and final step of Anderson’s habitus is reconciliation. If we are living out of wonder, recognizing and honouring the Other, offering hospitality, then what is left is to mend the divide, to reconcile. This final step is a difficult one. Anderson (1999) offers these thoughts on reconciliation (1999:14-15):

It does not move toward a hasty peace nor does reconciliation require overlooking difference or forgetting wrongdoing. What we learn from the struggle of the people of South Africa is that reconciliation is only possible if all the stories are told, all the voices heard, every position has an equal hearing. Reconciliation, I believe, must be a part of the *habitus* we embody in a global village because polarization, scapegoating, and prejudice are too dangerous today [...] It is, rather, a *habitus* or way of being in response to brokenness and violence that recognizes and responds to God’s work within us and between us [...] When our focus is on honoring the Other, hospitality and recognition are prelude to reconciled living. Hospitality is a prelude to reconciliation because it creates an environment in which trust and safety prevail [...] We are surprised by what we discover in the uncharted territory that reconciliation creates. When we meet the Other with a reconciling *habitus*, we experience transformation as we never imagined it and grace where we least expect it. (pp. 14-15)

While Anderson is speaking to the changing nature of the world due to globalisation, I believe that his insights are helpful when dealing with anyone that is Other and certainly it applies to interactions in the commons being proposed for Anchorage. In the four steps that make up Anderson’s Habitus, there is a practical approach to living in community with the Other. Anderson’s Habitus forms an outline of the type of rules that could govern the climate of the commons.

### *The Commons, No Passport Needed*

In a similar way to Anderson, Namsoon Kang talks of a cosmopolitan and passport-less theology as the way forward (Kang 2011 & 2013). While Anderson’s starting point is globalisation, Kang begins her complementary approach with the pervasive identity politics of our time. As a way of addressing the many divisions present in identity politics, Kang offers the concept of cosmopolitanism – in particular, cosmopolitanism from below (Kang



2011). She cites Ulrich Beck, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas and others in support of her statement that:

Cosmopolitanism concerns the rights and justice of *individuals* across the specific communities bounded by gender, nation-state, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth. This idea of world-citizen regards as accidental and secondary the individual markers based on nationality, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth [...] In this context, cosmopolitanism reflects a critically skeptical attitude toward a conventional concept and tradition of society, a refusal to confine one's sense of belonging to a particular polis and instead a claim to belonging to the wider human community, the universe or cosmos. (Kang 2011:261 [*italics original*])

Kang (2011:267) ties all this to the Christian scriptural tradition and the practice of theology by citing Paul where he says "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28 NIV)

and "you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (Ephesians 2:19 NIV). Of this theology she says:

Cosmopolitanism and its theological adoption is, in context, a theological response to the issues of global inequality that we are facing. I view the *impartiality* of the scope of justice and concern in cosmopolitanism as the very essence of the Christian teaching of "neighborly love," and it does not necessarily rule out the *partiality* of one's attachments and commitments. The spirit of cosmopolitanism also requires us to radically extend the category of "neighbor," to cross and transcend various borders, and to embrace every human person and, furthermore, nature itself, as our "neighbors." (Kang 2011:267-68 [*italics original*])

Kang points out that her understanding of cosmopolitanism is not from above, as was Kant's understanding of cosmopolitanism. Kant spoke of world citizenship and moving toward a "perpetual peace" in which "hospitality means the right of a stranger to not be treated with hostility when he arrives [sic] on someone else's territory" (Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, quoted by Kang 2011:263). Yet, As Kang (2011:271) asserts, "it is obvious that for Kant normative humanity is biologically both male and white". In contrast to Kant, Kang writes that cosmopolitanism is not top down but from below and is "radically egalitarian" (2011:271). Cosmopolitanism views everyone as equal regardless of race, gender, religion, and all the ways we use identity to separate in favour of a "theological



anthropology of *regardless*” rooted in the Image of God in all persons (Kang 2011:272 [*italics original*]).

Writing as part of a collection reflecting on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s contributions to theology, in particular her concept of planetary love,<sup>103</sup> Kang (2011:277) offers a theology “from the future”. Kang states that cosmopolitan theology has five characteristics:

First, cosmopolitan theology is a *theology of trans-identity*. Every identity politics should be provisional, temporal, and partial and move toward a larger community of radical equality and boundary-less inclusion, without undervaluing the significant meaning of “particular” engagement and commitment for implementation of justice and equality for all living beings. (Kang 2011:272 [*italics original*])

Second, cosmopolitan theology is a *theology of radical affirmation of the Other*, and, at the same time, a theology of *radical neighborly love*. Cosmopolitan theology invites us to fundamentally ask and refine who “the other” is and who “our neighbor” is in our time. (Kang 2011:273 [*italics original*])

Third, cosmopolitan theology is a *theology of trans-religious solidarity*. Traditional Christian theology and its practices have contributed to the construction of its religious other. Christian theology of religion and ecumenism has evolved around the issue of interreligious “dialogue,” primarily grounded on an ethics of tolerance. There is, however, what I would call an “ecumenical taboo” that one has to comply with whenever one comes to the table for interreligious dialogue. One should not raise, for instance, such questions as gender justice, sexual orientation issues, religious/theological constructions of the other, multiple forms of violence, or religious cooptation by neo/imperialism [...] I argue that authentic ecumenism and theology should be grounded in an *ethic of transformation*, and the encounter with one another should be a process of revisiting, reexamining, rechallenging, and reconstructing the very foundations of each religious discourse and practice, from the perspective of justice, as it impinges on the lives of ordinary people. (Kang 2011:274 [*italics original*])

Fourth, cosmopolitan theology is a theological discourse of *counter-empire*. Cosmopolitan theology is a theological discourse of resistance against any form of imperialism. Empire building is all about building power by creating a devalued other [...] In cosmopolitan theological discourse, theologians must fundamentally scrutinize the issue of hegemony through the construction of the other and the intersectionality of various form of hegemony. (Kang 2011:275 [*italics original*])

Fifth, cosmopolitan theology is a *theology of boundary-transcending solidarity*. The cosmopolitan theology I am proposing is a theological discourse and practice that cultivates planetary solidarity for justice, peace, and equality of all living beings. (Kang 2011:275 [*italics original*])

Kang offers in her cosmopolitan theology a vision for the future, from the future. She notes the limitations of her vision and then begins to address its forward nature:

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<sup>103</sup> According to Kang (2011:277) cosmopolitanism calls for “a “planetary neighborly love” and “deep and radical compassion” for living beings, which I believe should be the central message of Christianity.”

Cosmopolitanism is a discourse of hope and compassion that has not yet had the opportunity to actualize its utopian potential. In this regard, cosmopolitan theology is a theology from the future [...] Cosmopolitan theology envisions a new Cosmic Christ who urges us to begin a great work to live and build the Reign of God on earth. (Kang 2011:277-278)

In stating this future sense of Cosmopolitan theology, Kang addresses the utopian nature of the theology to which she is calling her readers. She also highlights the reality of the world we live in where Jesus has come announcing a new way to be human, but in which we wait for him to return and make all things new. Kang is calling us to consider living like Jesus has returned again the second time – in the future reality where all nations are gathered around the throne of God.

As a way of living into the future reality of the eternal city of God, Kang (2011:279) borrows from Derrida's idea of being "passport-less".<sup>104</sup> Derrida's idea of a passport-less life focused on living as philosophers without nationality, but for Kang it is a theological activity. She writes:

Once one comes to possess an "identity document," one is bound to the ground of that identity document, whether it be about national or religious affiliation, or a particular advocacy cause, and so on. One begins then to be "attached" to the very ground of such "identity." (Kang 2011:280)

For Kang a passport represents all the ways we are classified – "categorization, homogenization, totalization, genderization, sexualization, racialization, ethnicization, and so forth" (2011:280) – and limits our neighbors and friends to certain categories (2011:279-80).

In contrast to this, she offers a different vision:

*Theologians-without-passports* intentionally dissociate themselves from the dominate power, practice, or discourse that totalizes, categorizes, classifies an individual person into a stereotypical box, numbers, and data. *Theologians-without-passports* commit themselves to "make a contribution to the universal community," to the Reign of God, where every individual human being is equal to everyone else, treated justly, accepted fully as who one is [...] Theologians are to look to the beyond-community – beyond nationality, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, religious affiliation – because God, the Divine, who is the primary frame of reference of theologians, is for, with, in, among those living human beings. (Kang 2011:280 [*italics original*])

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<sup>104</sup> This passport-less existence is also called for by Merrifield: "There are no passports for Rousseauian citizens of the urban universe, no passports for those who know they *live* somewhere yet *feel* they belong to everywhere." (Merrifield 2014:81 [*italics original*])

In Anderson's Habitus and Kang's cosmopolitan theology we have the building blocks for the rules of the commons. We can also see these construction components at play in the New Testament.

Anderson ends his article by hinting to the reader that this Habitus is not a linear process but a cycle in which wonder is at the beginning and the end. It also reminds the reader that this matter of the Other is deeply embedded in the Gospel.

Wonder, which is so central to our disposition toward the Other, begins and ends with our awareness of the majesty and mystery of God [...] God as the Wholly Other, ONE-NOT-LIKE-ME. God is not only Wholly Other, however. In the Christian story, Jesus is the *proximate other*, the one who is LIKE-ME, BUT-NOT-LIKE-ME. Like every *proximate other*, Jesus is both necessary and dangerous. He too is different and therefore dangerous; and too much like us and therefore necessary. The incarnation of God is a necessary sign that inclusively does not require self-diminishment. Living with the "otherness" of God and recognizing the stranger both require the same capacity to honor the Other. We are sustained in this capacity to honor the Other when we recognize that God is not diminished by including human "otherness." What this means for the mission of the church is most difficult and necessary of all: a vision of faithful inclusivity. (Anderson 1999:15-16 [*italics and emphasis original*])<sup>105</sup>

In bringing us back to wonder and back to Jesus, Anderson offers the challenge of an inclusive church. Anderson's Habitus and Kang's cosmopolitan theology serve as a prophetic call for my city and the essential foundation of the commons.

#### IV. Conclusions from the Anchorage Commons

In a thesis of this nature it would be easy with the issues present to write a manifesto of how systemic change can happen in the city. However, in understanding the relational nature of change that tendency is tempered. Rock and Van Dyke (2017:49) assert that the city is transformed at the relational level. The SEM model also starts at the individual level (Frost & Rice 2017:120-124). In that model the change starts at the individual, then affects the interpersonal, the community, institutions and finally the society (Frost & Rice 2017:120-

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<sup>105</sup> James Alison (2009) refers to God using the term "the Other Other."

124). The place that change must start is at the individual level. This exploration seeks to see the city changed but is focused on the individual, interpersonal and community levels.

In order for the community of Anchorage to become more like the eternal city in Revelation, Anchorage needs to transform in regards to substance abuse, homelessness, violence and affordable housing. Also, the data shows that those ministering in the city are divided over race and the effects of colonialism. Ministry in the city is split over issues and dealing with factors like busyness and competition. I am proposing that transformation at the individual, interpersonal and community levels will take place if pastors and ministry leaders learn together in an educational commons.

In this chapter the parts of a commons – a community, the resource managed, and how that resource should be governed or ruled – were explored. It was observed that while public education is often seen as a commons, the economic pressures facing local schools and higher education have ushered in increased enclosure. The model of a homeschool collective where parents (along with students and teachers in some cases) join together to provide education for their children in a way that is created, managed and sustained by that community is a model that could be used in Anchorage for a learning common among pastors and ministry leaders.

In creating this education commons, I proposed that, rather than establish the competitive environment of a traditional classroom that fail to help students and teachers know one's whole self or be known by others, we create a community of truth (Palmer 1993:31) that roots education in community and love.

In light of the divisions present in the city, I also proposed rules for the Anchorage commons. Drawing on the Habitus of Anderson (1999), rules in the common would place value on the uniqueness of all humans, extending hospitality to all, allowing one's self to see the Other whole and be captured by their face (Greenway n.d. & 2015) and to reconcile with

the Other. Participants in the commons would develop rules with an eye toward and the cosmopolitan theology posited by Kang (2011, 2013). Kang's cosmopolitan theology encourages: a passport-less existence of seeking to be free of all the identities that limit us, radical affirmation of the Other, a trans-religious solidarity with a transformational ethic that is counter-empire in its orientation, and a boundary-defying solidarity with others. In establishing rules that are radical in their embrace of differences and seek transformation, participants could address many of the divisions present in the city and model a remedy for them.

An educational commons holds strong promise in producing a new vision of the city of Anchorage. A community actively bridging divisions and seeking to learn from each other in a loving and committed way, could build this commons with the goal of transforming the city. If we can come together to learn and hear the voices of those with whom we are not accustomed to interacting with so that we can be captured by love for them, then individual, interpersonal and community change can begin that may then change the city.

## Part IV: “How Might We Respond?”

## Chapter 11: Join Me in the Commons

## I. Building a Community

Community is at the very core of the commons. In fact, there is no commons without it. Furthermore, the type of community being proposed here needs the community to develop not just the rules to govern a resource but the resource itself. Therefore, it is important that we consider how a community might be built for this purpose.

*The Easy Way Out*

Rene Girard’s (1986) scapegoat theory, as discussed earlier, answers the question of how one stops mimetic violence. Beyond its role in quelling mimetic violence, the community-making effect of scapegoating can be seen. Richard Rohr (Bell 2016) observes that the scapegoat mechanism is “the primary principle for the formation of group and culture. You don’t have to know what you’re for, you just have to know who you are against – who doesn’t belong.” Elsewhere Rohr (2016), referencing René Girard (Girard 1986) and Gil Bailie (Bailie 1995), states “that all groups and ideologies are formed by an unconscious scapegoat mechanism”. Alison (2010:165) puts it simply: “Give people a common enemy, and you’ll give them a common identity.” Alison and Rohr note that Girard’s scapegoat theory fulfils the ancient adage “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.

Since a common enemy can create a community, the easiest way forward would be to simply figure out who the commons in Anchorage is against and build a robust community based on that distinction. In other words, create a new network by choosing a common enemy (scapegoat) and rally around that enemy or the opposition to that enemy, thus building community by defining the group as over and against another. But this would be a simple, even lazy, way out. While this approach may indeed form a community (in reality it has

formed them in Anchorage already), the ultimate end result of continuing to operate out of this model of community formation is the production of nothing but more division.

Therefore, we must take a different approach to group formation, one that is more in line with the rules proposed to govern this commons.

It would also appear to be easy to say that one could move forward by calling Christians to rally around the Gospel or the church. While this approach seems noble, it tends to elicit the same mimetic response. One practitioner that was interviewed, speaking to this matter of placing the church or the Gospel at the centre stated, “There are limits to what a church-centric movement can do.” He went on to contrast church-centric and city-centric approaches to transformational action in the city:<sup>106</sup>

When we say city-centric its like if you put the city at the center - and here's the wrinkle - and the most vulnerable at the center of that. So if we, if you, put the city at the center, and the most vulnerable, and you say, “Who wants to love the city and her most vulnerable?” what that does, when you ask the question that way, is create, you know, a big table. And it allows a lot of people to sit at that table that would otherwise never show up on the radar. If you ask the question, “Hey who wants to be a church planting movement?”, and or, “who wants to put the church at the center?,” or even as weird as it sounds – “Who wants to put Jesus and the Gospel at the center?,” the moment, [when] you phrase the question that way, then all of the sudden, [it] raises up a whole bunch of other questions, like: “Which church? Which denomination? Does it include Catholics? Is it Pentecostal? Is this Mainliners? Is this Evangelicals?” right? Who's pulling the strings here?

What this practitioner is noting here is the tribalism that is part of our mimetic existence.

Once the church, or the Gospel, or even Jesus is placed at the centre, then one starts to question what church, what gospel, what Jesus – questioning that is meant to reveal who is “in” and who is “out”. This action of drawing distinctions then begins to exclude people from participating and is an active effect of mimesis and scapegoating. That same practitioner added:

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<sup>106</sup> In *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community*, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen outline a vision for the common space of a parish that places the church in the center. Using similar language to Hardin (1968), but with a gospel-informed understanding of the relational nature of the city they outline a city square-like metaphor they call “the New Commons”. They take that term to mean, “all the dimensions of life for which everyone in your neighborhood shares a common concern” (Sparks, Soerens & Friesen 2014:95). They break this idea down into four areas of concern for the neighborhood: economic, environment, civic and education. In the center of this understanding is what they call the “Ecclesial Center”. Based in a desire to encourage the imagining of a new, more integrated, way of being the church in the world, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen encourage balance between community, formation, mission and worship.

There are limits to what a church-centric movement can do...city-centric movements, and putting the most vulnerable at the center of that, it just creates so much more running room for everybody and all of a sudden now, what was my competitor can actually now become a colleague. So it's like, "Oh, wait minute, so, maybe you're a Baptist and I'm a Presbyterian, but you love the city and the most vulnerable maybe we can work across that sort of division." But we have a way of now doing that and a way of being calibrating our relationship. Or you could even go a little bit further, "I'm a Presbyterian and you're a Catholic" that's even a bigger jump, but it still creates room for that. Right? Or even go a little bit further out, you know, maybe you're a Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or whatever, Buddhist, like "you still care about the poor?" all of a sudden that creates room for them to be at the table and a way for us to sit together.

The act of placing something of common belief and common value or concern in the center, rather than the primary identification of any one person or group creates space for what the commons is seeking to create – a situation where all are welcome and the transformation of the city, rather than personal agendas, is the goal.

What this interview subject expressed is a version of the philosophy of the Leadership Foundations who bring together "leaders of good faith with leaders of goodwill to co-labor" (Hillis 2014:XI) on behalf of the city. This principle is described by W. Wilson Goode, Sr. this way:

The divisive model of seeking solutions to problems through the lens of conservative versus liberal, faith versus non-faith, public versus private, is not helpful when people are trying to get real work done. Leadership Foundations recognize that what is required for true progress and change is to create a context in which people put aside these differences to work together on behalf of the whole. (Hillis 2014:XI)

What Girard, the above interviewed practitioner, and the Leadership Foundations have all discovered is that to build a movement in a city around difference does not work, but when a diverse community seeks to find common ground and focuses on that (in this case the city and her most vulnerable)<sup>107</sup> then the community can make progress and include many different perspectives.

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<sup>107</sup> The common ground shared by Anchorage interview participants around the issues of substance abuse, homelessness, affordable housing and violence could be a place to start.



### *Power in the Commons*

While the easy way of forming a community through scapegoating, or the seemingly easy route of gathering around the Gospel,<sup>108</sup> must be avoided in favour of a more difficult path, what cannot be avoided is power. Anyone seeking to develop a central square environment will use power in some form or another to invite, gather, create and sustain the activity of the commons. Those acts of inviting, gathering, creating and sustaining the network that is the commons boils down to power and how one uses power.

The Network Society, the new society that has emerged, as described by Manuel Castells (1996), consists of new information technologies (2000:693); globalization (2000:694); “enclosing dominate cultural manifestations in an electronic hypertext” (2000:694); “the demise of the sovereign nation-state” (2000:694); and a redefined “relationship between culture and nature” due to scientific progress (Castells 2000:694). Castells argues that these factors reacted to produce a new society – the one we are currently living in. He explains:

While this multidimensional social change induces a variety of social and cultural expressions in each specific institutional context, I propose the notion that there is some commonality in the outcome, if not in the process, at the level where new social forms are constituted – that is, in the social structure. At the roots of the new society, in all its diversity, is a new social structure, the network society. (Castells 2000:694-695)

In this new society, Castells (2011a) sees four types of power:

1. **Networking Power:** the power of the actors and organizations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives and individuals who are not included in these global networks.
2. **Network Power:** the power resulting from the standards required to coordinate social interaction in the networks. In this case, power is exercised not by exclusion from the networks but by the imposition of the rules of inclusion.
3. **Networked Power:** the power of social actors over other social actors in the network. The forms and processes of networked power are specific to each network.
4. **Network-making Power:** the power to program specific networks according to the interests and values of the programmers, and the power to switch different networks

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<sup>108</sup> It must be noted that this approach, rallying around the Gospel, stirs up the division between the evangelical and social gospel arms of the church.

following the strategic alliances between the dominant actors of various networks. (p. 773)

Each of these powers are key in the establishment and maintenance of a network(s) and in answering the question, “How might we proceed in Anchorage?”.

For the commons to become a reality in Anchorage and for the questions being asked by this project to be answered concretely and not just theory, a network must be developed. In light of this, let’s consider the four types of power. Castells explains his first type of power: *networking power*. In the lecture “Communication, Power and the State in the Network Society”, Castells (2011b) describes this type of power as “basically gate keeping power” that works through a process of exclusion/inclusion and decides who is “in” and who is “out”. This power is the power of invitation. The person holding the power chooses who to invite and who is not welcome. In considering this thesis’ proposed commons, networking power begs two questions: 1) who is doing the inviting; and, 2) who is being invited. Before those questions are answered, let’s consider the second of Castells’ understandings of power.

The second type of power in the network society is *network power*. In contrast to networking power, “[t]his form of power is not being in and out, but under a certain set of rules. So it is the power of the rules over the ruled” (Castells 2011b). If networking power controls who is in and who is out, then network power controls how those who are in a given network are expected or required to act. Castells (2011b) notes that with network power, “The fundamental form of power is the standards. The rules to be accepted once in the network.” Power is exercised by the imposition of the rules of inclusion, or put simply, “if you’re in this club, you follow these rules” (Castells 2011b).

Castells third category of power is the exploration of *networked power* that comes from the natural questions that flow out of the first two types of power. The logic goes this way: if there are networks that have been established by networking power and are governed by network power are there then networks that are more powerful than others and who has

the power in the network of networks that develops? Castells (2011a) asks the question this way:

But how does networked power operate? Who has power in the dominant networks? Power is the relational capacity to impose an actor's will over another actor's will on the basis of the structural capacity of domination embedded in the institutions of society. Following this definition, the question of power holding in the networks of the network society could be either answered very simply or simply impossible to answer. (p. 775)

The answer to Castells question of who really holds power in the network society ends up being exactly what Castells predicts. In one sense, in individual networks you can through analysis determine who holds the power. However, in the relationship(s) between networks it is impossible to know who holds power because the networks are interconnected and interdependent (Castells 2011b).

The final form of power Castells has observed in the network society is *network-making power*, the type of power Castells (2011b) sees as the most crucial and paramount form of power. At its core network-making power ask the questions, “who, and for what, makes the network – any network?” (Castells 2011b). Castells (2011a) explains his answer, saying that there are two mechanisms that allow network-making power to function:

In a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: (a) the ability to constitute network(s) and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and (b) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation. (p. 776)

Elsewhere, he elaborates:

So, in a world where networks organize power relationships, the fundamental form of power (but not the only one) is network making power. How you make a network. And you make a network by programing the network and reprograming the network, and being able to set up programs of switching with other networks which are a critical for the function of the network. (Castells 2011b)

Castells (2011b) notes of the first part that once it is programed, the network is self-replicating, adapting and flexible, because once you have programed the system, the system works. It is important to understand the second part of this type of power, something Castells calls “switching” (2011a:776). He explains switching as “the ability to connect between

different networks, the ability to adapt the different values and goals, the ability to create synergies between different networks” (Castells 2011b).

Castells then moves to the nagging question of who holds power in a society. His answer is that two categories of people hold power: programmers, “those that program a network”; and switchers, “those that are at the critical switching point(s) between networks” (Castells 2011b). Network programmers are using their power, much like networking power, to recreate and re-create networks, while switchers act to connect different networks to each other (Castells 2011b).

Castells’ understanding of power is reflective of the commons. In a commons one must use network power to establish the community by determining who is in and who is out. When establishing the rules that will govern the commons the type of power used is networking power. And finally, network-making power is key in the establishment of a commons and the linking of the commons to other commons and/or networks.

### *Table Sitting, Setting and Serving: Stewarding Power in the Commons*

It is easy to observe that Castells’ perspective on power has much to say to the development of a commons. Locke and Van Dyke also examine power as something to be stewarded. They place the emphasis on the relational part of power and flesh that out in concrete ways. They instruct:

Incarnational leaders are skilled at the art of acquiring and stewarding power. Unfortunately power is often seen as a dirty word, especially among those who have been abused by it, or even among those who are recovering abusers of it [...] There is nothing harder than to steward power well. Jesus teaches that real power is perfected in weakness and most effective when given away. (Locke & Van Dyke 2017:78)

They go on to say that we are stewards of power, which is everywhere and not in limited supply, as we are prone to believe (Locke & Van Dyke 2017:78). They add, that “[t]here is only one kind of power associated with Jesus—the power (*dunamis*) of the Spirit” (Locke & Van Dyke 2017:78). Locke and Van Dyke (2017:78) explain that this type of power is

“generative, life-affirming, non-coercive, bottom-up power that is held loosely and given freely. The power of the Spirit is never associated with violence or force.”

In light of this, incarnational leaders recognize that it is not enough to simply transfer power from one group to another unless we also transform how power is seen and stewarded [...] Incarnational leaders resist the temptation to play power-games based on scarcity. Incarnational leaders are skilled at getting things done through the power of love, awakening desire and calling others to do the same. (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:78-79)

Rocke and Van Dyke’s take on power compliments Castells’ understanding of power. In response to the abuses of power Castells (2011a) sees in the network society, he explores the activity of counter-power. This should come as no surprise since throughout his career Castells has been interested in social movements. He describes counter-power this way:

By counter-power I understand the capacity by social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society. In all known societies, counter-power exists under different forms and with variable intensity, as one of the few natural laws of society, verified throughout history, asserts that wherever is domination, there is resistance to domination, be it political, cultural, economic, psychological, or otherwise [...] social movements may be progressive or reactionary or just alternative without adjectives [...] Social movements are a permanent feature of society. But they adopt values and take up organizational forms that are specific to the kind of society where they take place. (Castells 2007:248-249)

Both Castells and Rocke and Van Dyke see the transformational use of power. Castells in the counter-power movements and Rock and Van Dyke in how power is stewarded at the interpersonal and relational level.

Rocke and Van Dyke propose to steward power through hospitality. They discuss hospitality using the metaphor of a table (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:76). One can sit at a table, one can set a table, and one can serve at a table. They explain:

To nurture what we call “Tables of Transformation,” leaders will need to master three essential skills of hospitality: table sitting (guests), table setting (hosts) and table serving (waiters).

Incarnational leadership begins by learning what it means to be a guest—to sit at another’s table. To be a guest is to sit without power. We are on the turf and terms of those who invite us. When we have learned to sit as guests, then we can become good hosts who set tables where all are welcome, especially the most vulnerable. Good hosts create a warm and welcome context for their guests to feel “at home.”

In the end, incarnational leaders become the diakonos of the city—table waiters who serve. The purpose of the wait staff is to serve the meal in such a way as to enhance the dining

experience. The best waiters recognize that the star of the show is the meal and the fellowship. Great waiters are keenly aware of the entire dining experience, anticipating the desires of the guests. They move in and out of the meal in a way that is seamless. Their presence is part of the dining experience, but they are nearly invisible. (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:76-77)



Figure 25. (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:76)

**TABLES OF TRANSFORMATION**

FUNCTION	ROLE	IMPACT
Table Sitters	Guest	Trust is built
Table Setters	Host	All are welcome
Table Servers	Waiter	The city is served

*The Gospel gives preferred seating to the "least of these."*

Figure 26. (Rocke & Van Dyke 2016:64)

Rocke and Van Dyke's understanding of hospitality can be laid over Castells' understanding of network power to provide a guide for how to use power and understand power to create a network. First, let us consider the act of table sitting. In this practice, the incarnational leader sits at a table where they are neither host nor waiter. They are merely a participant. The invitation to the table has been made by someone else. The purpose and agenda of table has been set by someone else. Someone else holds the power and has established the protocols of the interaction. This act of table sitting is similar to Castells'

network power. In network power the participants are allowed to participate only if they can follow the established rules. In that setting, the rules hold the power and the participants have not created the rules, but are participating in the network – or table – using the rules that have been established.

Moving beyond being a guest and table sitting, one becomes a host and sets the table. As the table setter, the incarnational leader is functioning as the host and more than a participant. The invitation to the table has been made by them. The purpose and agenda of table has been set by them. The power to establish the protocols of the interaction is in their hands. In this role they are using two different types of power as understood by Castells. First, they are using networking power. They are deciding who is in and who is out by determining who to invite to the table and who not to invite. In Roche and Van Dyke's world this means an open table where everyone is welcome "especially the most vulnerable" (Roche & Van Dyke 2017:76) and they stress that "the preferred seating goes to the least of these" (Roche & Van Dyke 2016:64). So the networking power used in this illustration is an ability to invite everyone to the table and to set a very large table – a different table, one with space for the Other (Ruthruff 2015:47-57). The second power being used as a table setter is network-making power. In particular, the part of network-making power that Castells calls a programmer. The host has the power to create a network and establish how it functions or, in other words, to program it. This is an important step because how a network is programmed (or re-programmed if needed) sets up the network power (the power of the rules) that the network will use going forward.

The third action Roche and Van Dyke explore is stewarding power through the role of table server. In this role one is creating the environment for others to interact and develop a network of networks. In this role the server is functioning using network-making power in the role of the switcher. A switcher seeks to network different networks to each other by

creating a situation where one is simply giving or creating the environment and opportunity for networks to gather and begin linking together.

That leaves networked power, the type of power that seeks to answer the question of who ultimately holds the power (Castells 2011a:775-776). As in Castells' theory, one can likely answer this question in the case of specific tables, if one were to study each table and/or the network(s) represented at each table. So who has the power in any one of the networks at the table could feasibly be determined. However, deciding who has the ultimate power over all the interconnected networks is just as impossible when looking at power through the lens of table sitting, setting and serving as it is in Castells' theory. The interdependence of the networks on each other and the autonomy of the networks represented means that no one person holds power over all of the networks at any of the tables and, by extension, no one person or network holds all the power over the city.

For a community like the commons to become a reality, some method must be used to gather people into community (a network). Locke and Van Dyke's model of sitting, setting and serving creates a way to invite people into community and establish the rules need for that community.

## II. Curriculum for the Commons

The constructing of a curriculum for a learning commons should, like the defining of the community and the establishment of the rules, be undertaken by the community. In this sense, the commons proposed here is a commons that will function as a community seeking to do contextual theology. Robert Schreiter explains, "Liberation theologies in particular emphasize the role of the entire believing community in the development of a local theology" (1985:16). This "community as a whole" approach is in keeping with the commons



approach. What is taking place when a community seeks to develop a local theology is the practice of contextual theology.

Contextual theology is a way of doing theology that takes into account (or we could say puts in a mutually critical dialogue) two realities. The first of these is the *experience of the past*, recorded in Scripture and preserved and defended in the church's tradition. The second is the *experience of the present* or a particular *context*, which consists of one or more of *at least* four elements: personal or communal experience, "secular" or "religious" culture, social location, and social change. (Bevans 2018 [*italics original*])<sup>109</sup>

The commons being proposed is a community that will seek to do practical theology together and will create through that undertaking, a contextual theology for Anchorage. "A local theology begins with the needs of a people in a concrete place, and from there moves to the traditions of faith" (Schreiter 1985:13).

One way for a local theology (or curriculum) to develop is for the participants in the community to together function as a collective theologian (Schreiter 1985:16). In this model the "Holy Spirit works in and through the community" or, in this case commons, to give "shape and expression to Christian experience" (Schreiter 1985:16). This working together in community creates the local understanding of God at work. Schreiter (1985) explains:

The role of the whole community is often one of raising the questions, of providing the experience of having lived with those questions and struggled with different answers, and recognizing which solutions are indeed genuine, authentic, and commensurate with their experience. The poet, the prophet, the teacher, those experienced with other communities may be among those that give leadership to the actual shaping into words of the response of faith [...] Significant members within the community, often working as a group, give voice to the theology of the community. (p. 17)

This community-based approach stands in contrast to the professional theologian who, due to "the requirements of immersing oneself" (Schreiter 1985:18) has been separated from the local community. The reality is that "[a] theologian cannot create a theology in isolation from the community's experience; but the community has need of the theologian's knowledge to ground its own experience within the Christian traditions of faith" (Schreiter 1985:18).

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<sup>109</sup> This approach can be seen throughout this thesis as history and present have dialogued with each other to understand what is taking place in Anchorage and how it might change.

This community approach to developing a local or contextual theology can be aided by the use of a praxis cycle (also called the circle of praxis) that includes insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning (Holland & Henriot 1983:8). This thesis has been using Osmer's practical theology cycle – What is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond? – to guide this examination of Anchorage. It may seem odd here to add another cycle, even if complementary. The pastoral cycle is chosen here because of its stated goal of action and larger community scope. Osmer practices his cycle in the local church context while Holland and Henriot focus on the larger community. When the community (or commons) engages with the pastoral cycle it engages in an on-going process that asks questions and evaluates actions. As noted in the opening chapter, Holland and Henriot (1983:10) explain, “we must move from issues [...] to explanations of *why* things are the way they are”.

If the commons proposed in Anchorage would begin to use this cycle to address the issues present in the city, it is my assertion that the training needs for an educational commons would surface. Not only would the needs surface or become more apparent, but the expertise in the community would become visible so that that training and the trainer would be identified. Furthermore, the model of community as theologian provides an example of how a community can begin to learn and minister together in a way that has the method being the message.

In Holland and Henriot's cycle the goal is action. It is not enough to simply create a local theology. The Anchorage commons needs to be activated to restore the city and bring it closer to the vision of the perfect urban place in Revelation. It must take the depleted reality of the sin-affected, post-Eden world we live in and begin to transform it.

### III. Hidden Curriculum

While developing curriculum for the commons in Anchorage is important, paying attention to any hidden curriculum is also important. This is particularly essential if the desire is for the method to be the message. Palmer (1993:19-20) writes, “the rules and relationships of a school comprise a ‘hidden curriculum’ which can give greater formative power over the lives of the learners than the curriculum advertised in the catalogue”. Dinah Nyamai (2018) writes:

Yuksel (2006); Massialas & Hurst (2009); Yousefzadeh (2014); Azimpour & Khalilzad (2015) believe the hidden curriculum, which is an unstated agenda that conveys values like compassion, punctuality, discipline, obedience, respect for others, hard work, having competitive or collaborative spirit, accounts for as much as 90 percent of all students’ learning experiences and its effects are visible on students’ tendencies, beliefs and values (worldview) that they practice in their day-to-day lives – even to keeping a job in the future. (p. 140)

Writing specifically about theological education and hidden curriculum, Perry Shaw (2006:25) concludes “that theological education can only be effective when the hidden curriculum is intentionally designed rather than unintentionally accepted”.

This matter of hidden curriculum is important when considering training in a commons for leaders in Anchorage. First, it is important because the commons would aspire to avoid the normal approach to ministry leader training that teaches, via the hidden curriculum:

[T]hat the best way to help people grow spiritually is for them to be schooled in the Bible and theology. Put more simply, we teach our students that “schooling” = “education” [...] In virtually every seminary grading and other forms of approval hinge on the cognitive mastery of biblical, theological, and historical data which can be expressed on papers or in examinations. A premium is placed on the accumulation of information, and this priority on head knowledge is subconsciously transferred to ministry. (Shaw 2006:27-28)

This head-over-hands approach is not the from below transformation the commons is seeking. Second, if 90% of what is learned is from the hidden curriculum, then it proves to be more influential than the stated curriculum. Thus, the hidden curriculum is extremely

important, even more important than the curriculum itself.<sup>110</sup> Third, the hidden curriculum is hardwired into the commons. Because the hidden curriculum is comprised of “the rules and relationships” (Palmer 1993:19) and these are the two things at the core of a commons, what is being created is not just a commons but the hidden curriculum.

Shaw offers a view of the hidden curriculum in seminary education. Shaw observes that not only does the hidden curriculum of seminary training instill the understanding that “schooling = education” in students (Shaw 2006:27-28), but also an overly academic approach to ministry (Shaw 2006:30-32). Due to the highly academic approach to theological training, students learn to focus on passing on knowledge to members and then wonder why transformation is slow or non-existent (Shaw 2006:30-32). Shaw (2006:31) states that students are better trained largely by the hidden curriculum for theological trivia games than to draw people closer to God. John-Marc Éla (1988:181) is quoted as saying, “While we teach orally, ‘the Word became flesh’ we teach psychologically and methodologically ‘the Word became text’” (quoted in Shaw 2006:32).

In high school I had a teacher that told us multiple times that we would never remember what he taught us but we would remember how he treated us. I had no idea at the time that what he was talking about was hidden curriculum. In the proposed commons, the hidden curriculum must be considered so that the method can be the message. The reality is that how things are done is more powerful than what is taught. With the hidden curriculum so closely tied to the relationships and rules (Palmer 1993:19-20) participants in the commons will need to pay close to the establishment of those rules, how they are embodied, and how relationships are built and maintained. If the values of the commons are Anderson’s (1999) habitus and Kang’s (2011 & 2013) passport-less theology, those making the rule must consider the expression of those values in the explicit curriculum and the hidden one.

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<sup>110</sup> “The hidden curriculum is subtle but is in fact more powerful than the explicit curriculum” (Shaw 2006:6).

#### IV. Community and Curriculum Conclusions

In seeking to answer the question “What ought to be going on?”, I showed how we must consider a few things in order to create an urban ministry education that is contextually relevant to Anchorage, focused on transforming both the participants and the city, and develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city. After observing that both content and relationships are needed to answer this question, and noting that the image of a central square did not provide a way forward, I determined that the method of instruction would need to be one where the method was the message. The practice of learning together must reflect the goal of transforming the city. In an effort to create a direction forward for Anchorage, I explored a commons as a possible route to both learning and transformation because it was in keeping with the desire for a relational approach to learning together. The commons also calls participant to learn in a way where the method is the message.

Every commons has three parts: the community, the resource being managed and the rules that help to manage that resource. The Garden of Eden was a perfect commons and the Fall ushered in of all the depletions we see in Anchorage (and beyond) of that perfect commons. The depletions of interest to this exploration are the ones expressed by the Anchorage interview subjects: issues of substance abuse, homelessness, violence and affordable housing and also the divisions expressed over race, issues, busyness and competition in the ministry community.

I proposed that the learning in Anchorage be conducted in a community of truth. That community would seek to enact rules in line with the habitus proposed by Anderson (1999) and Kang’s (2011 & 2013) cosmopolitan theology. Each of these approaches result in radical hospitality to the Other.

In this chapter, I examined the question of “How Might We Respond?” and proposed definite steps. The establishment of the commons in Anchorage should avoid the easy route of gathering a community by defining the group against others. Counter intuitively, it was also shown that placing the Gospel or even Jesus at the centre proves to be divisive due to the different understandings of both Jesus and the Gospel. Rather a gathering point can – and maybe should be – an interest in loving the city (in particular her most vulnerable) and seeking the peace (shalom, the way things should be) of the city. In order to gather a group to do that I proposed a thoughtful use of the networking, network, networked, and network-making power as understood by Castells (2011a) to establish a new network. Along with Castells’ understanding of power, I presented the hospitality of table sitting, setting, and serving (Rocke & Van Dyke 2016 & 2017) as a method of community formation.

To develop curriculum the pastoral cycle (Holland & Henriot 1983) was offered as a way for the community to address, understand and act on the needs in the community. In using a cycle, one could develop a curriculum that is contextual to the city of Anchorage and transformation oriented. I also noted that in designing the curriculum, one must consider and avoid the effects of the hidden curriculum so that the method of instruction is consistent with the message.

In the next chapter these principles will be used to flesh out a sample year of how the Anchorage Commons might proceed and how the city of Anchorage can begin to take steps toward becoming more like the great city of God in Revelation.

## Chapter 12: A Proposed Approach to the Anchorage Commons

### I. Methodology

I am proposing a commons as the answer to the central question of this thesis that seeks to create a transformational urban ministry education program in the context of Anchorage, Alaska. A commons consists of a community seeking to manage a common resource and the way that resource is managed. In this case, the community is the pastors and ministry leaders of the city. The resource that is being managed is the education of pastors and leaders. The rules to manage the resource of the proposed education commons in Anchorage are based in Anderson's (1999) habitus for globalisation and Kang's (2011 & 2013) cosmopolitan theology, both of which seek a removal of identity politics and a radical embracing of the Other. This stands in stark contrast to the history of colonialism (including Christendom's pervasive role) and the resulting racism and separation from the Other. All of this is being proposed with an eye toward transforming both the individuals participating in the commons and the larger commons – all those things that Anchorage residents hold in common, the resources that form and support the city of Anchorage as well as those resources found in her residents.

Traditional theological education resources such as schools, colleges, and seminaries are extremely limited in Anchorage and this depletion informs the desire and need to use what resources exist in the city outside of the formal educational system. Furthermore, the management and depletion of other resources in the larger commons context of the city have left many with unmet needs. The totality of the depletion is reflected in the issues facing the city – substance abuse, homelessness, violence and a lack of affordable housing and also the divisions expressed over race, issues, busyness and competition in the ministry community.

### *Gathering a Community*

In addition to the things all commons must have, there are three things that are important to the success of the proposed commons for Anchorage: relationships, the content, and the desired transformation of the individual and the city. I propose that the community in the educational commons of Anchorage be one of truth. That is, one in which participants enter into a “covenant with another, a pledge to engage in a mutually accountable and transformative relationship, a relationship forged of trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks” (Palmer 1993:31). In light of the proposed rules for the commons, this would mean a commitment to welcome the Other with hospitality and the seeking of radical solidarity despite differences of all kinds in keeping with Kang and Anderson. This diverse and committed community reflects the goal of the healed interactions between all nations in the glorious eternal city. In this way, the method is the message and the transformation begins in the practice of seeking that transformation.

In order to gather this community of those willing to commit, to risk, to welcome all voices to that table, and to seek action through theological reflection the easy route of defining the group against others will be avoided. This is done by inviting all that want to place the city and her vulnerable at the centre and seek to see Anchorage reflect the eternal city of God.

Lastly, a community is necessary to transform the city. This thesis understands that transformation happens at the level of relationships (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:49). From this relational basis change happens as the individual is changed and that individual begins to live out that change among others, causing interpersonal change. From that interpersonal change comes collaboration and problem solving that leads to community change. Change in the community results in institutional change and a common purpose that, in turn, can inspire societal change through active citizenship (Frost & Rice 2017:120-124). This is apparent in



the Social Ecological Model (SEM) that Frost and Rice (2017) base their theory of change upon.

### *Content and Transformation*

As for the content, on which much of this chapter will focus, the method first must be explored. Methodologically the goal for the Anchorage educational commons is for the community to reflect the goals of a transformed Anchorage. This will be accomplished through theological education via reflection. Graham, Walton and Ward (2005:Loc.154) explain that “theological discourse is now seen as process rather than product”. They further write that theology is three-fold: first, it “informs the processes that enable the formation of character”; second, “theology assists in building and maintaining the community of faith”; and third, it “enables the relating of the faith-community’s own communal identity to the surrounding culture, and the communication of the faith to the wider world” (Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:Loc. 261 & 267). In a similar way D.P. Davies (2008) writes:

I am persuaded that getting the method right is more important for our understanding of theology than establishing what the subject matter of theology is. Theology is not, in my view, a body of knowledge so much as a way of experiencing and interpreting life. (p. 74)

He then offers three stages of doing theology: first, is human experience either private or corporate (Davies 2008:74); second, reading that experience through the lens of a “common inheritance of faith” (Davies 2008:74); and third, critical reflection on the experience as read by the common inheritance of faith (Davies 2008:75). Like Graham, Walton and Ward, Davies’ practice of theology has personal, communal, and interpretive aspects. Furthermore, Davies’ understanding of theology as a way to interpret and experience life gives life to the practice of the commons as it seeks to understand and engage with the city of Anchorage.

Graham, Walton and Ward (2005) apply their three parts of theology to the practice of theological reflection:

The tasks of theological reflection.

- 1) The induction and nurture of members.  
What does it mean to be a Christian?  
Who am I as a Christian believer?
- 2) Building and sustaining the community of faith.  
What does it mean to be the ‘body of Christ’ in this place and time?  
How are we to live faithfully and authentically?
- 3) Communicating the faith to a wider culture.  
How is God to be apprehended and proclaimed?  
What does it mean to preach ‘Good News’?  
In what ways are Christians called to be signs of God’s activity in the world?  
(Loc. 272 & 280)

It is this practice of theological reflection that is proposed as the method of the Anchorage education commons. The movement from the individual to the community to the wider culture mirrors the movement desired by the commons as it seeks to transform individuals in community for the sake of transforming the city. The questions asked in this approach, particularly those in the second and third tasks, comprise a great starting point for how to take what is learned together and from the city and move into actionable living for the sake of transformation in Anchorage.

Specificly, the model of theological reflection, that is the “Theology-in-Action: Praxis” model (Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:Loc. 3782ff), is proposed for Anchorage. Rooted in liberationist theology the “starting-point of this method of theological reflection has thus never been abstract speculation on timeless truths, but consideration of the obligations of communities of faith in the context of social, economic and political extremities” (Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:Loc. 3795). Graham, Walton & Ward further explain:

This method of reflection characterizes theology as ‘performative knowledge’, that is, a way of knowing that is inseparable from doing. The fundamental assumption here is that theory and practice are inextricably joined. (Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:Loc:3782)

The emphasis on theological reflection that necessitates action is consistent with the desired outcome of the proposed commons (and with practical theology as a whole). Furthermore, these approaches to theology and theological reflection have the same flow – from individual to the larger world – as the theory of change being used in the Anchorage commons.

As one might expect from the title, this model of theological reflection is closely connected to contextual theology:

[T]he processes involved in praxis-based theological reflection were schematized into the ‘pastoral cycle’ of action and reflection. This term evolved from the Roman Catholic usage of ‘pastoral’ to mean that which pertains to the life of the Church, its ministry, sacraments and social witness. In this frame ‘[p]astoral action necessarily includes action on behalf of justice’ (Holland and Henriot, 1990), reinforcing an understanding that social change is as much an integral part of the Church’s mission as personal conversion. The pastoral cycle embodies a synthesis of practice and theory, and offers what has become a much-used methodology for engagement with context that has been applied far beyond its original roots in twentieth-century Roman Catholic social activism. (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005:Loc. 3806-3819)

In an effort to have the education of the commons be a reflection of the end goal of the perfect urban environment of Revelation, the method proposed is to have the community reflect theologically together in light of the context in Anchorage with the goal of action in the city. This reflection would engage the individual, the community of the commons and the entire city (and beyond) in transformation. Inherent in this approach is the desire to comprehend the context and consistently engage the pastoral cycle as a way to address, understand, and act on the needs in the community as well as evaluate the actions taken.

### *A Work of the People*

David Babin shares that the English word *liturgy* has a Greek origin. The original meaning of the word “might be approximately translated by our phrase ‘public works’” (1968:13). He further elaborates that in ancient Greek cities “it was customary to assign to the citizens certain projects for the benefit of the entire community” (Babin 1968:13). Pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage would be familiar with the word *liturgy* referring to the order of a worship service. However, this thesis is calling for a group to take up the

“public works” meaning of the word. The Anchorage commons seeks to perform a liturgy in Anchorage as it seeks to transform the city from its current depleted state to one that reflects the city of God in Revelation. Rather than liturgy remaining stuck inside the walls of the church, this transformation seeks to change the city for all residents.

## II. Proposed Commons Learning Opportunities

The practice of an education commons will not take place in a single type of interaction. When those gathered around the ideals of seeking theological reflection and education in a community with the desire to transform Anchorage learn together, the commons will form. As noted previously one could understand what follows to be a prescriptive program, however, what follows are simply proposed ways that this gathering and learning might take place. The proposed methods are fleshed out in detail to give a more complete picture of what education in the commons could be. In each of these different ways of learning together the same rules of the commons – radical inclusion of the Other and hospitality – and the desire to contextually engage the city for the sake of transformation will be practiced.

These opportunities are presented in three levels. The first level are opportunities for learning that are meant to introduce interested leaders to theological reflection on the city and the issues present. These opportunities provide an on-ramp into the Anchorage commons. The second level will invite those who have been introduced to the issues present in the city and theological reflection to dive into how transformation might take place. The final level calls those who want to go deeper into the healing of the divides in the city.

### *Level One: Introductions*

One way to introduce leaders to the Anchorage commons and the theological reflection on the city, her most vulnerable and the issues present in the city is a podcast. It may seem counterintuitive to start with a somewhat disembodied media such as a podcast in laying out a strategy for implementing a relational educational commons. Podcasts are largely listened to in isolation. Also, podcasts are most often created in a small group format, often one on one, or even as monologues. However, they are a version of storytelling that could help draw people into the Anchorage commons and expose them to the city and those serving in it.

Jeff Johnson of Mile High Ministries in Denver, CO produced a podcast called *Delve Denver* during 2015 and 2016. Johnson has been ministering in and loving the city of Denver for a long time; his podcast is an extension of that love. His podcast is about seeking to uncover the soul of Denver through the city's history, places, and people. It is a great podcast for anyone wanting to listen to a person passionately read their city and tell its story. In listening to Johnson uncover Denver through the episodes of *Delve Denver*, one direction for the Anchorage commons has emerged.

Busy Anchorage leaders who are separated by race and issues may find it hard to hear the stories of or share space with other leaders in the city that might provide the opportunity for them to be captivated by the Face of the Other. As discussed previously, the demands placed on pastors provide little time for interaction with peers and colleagues, not to mention meeting other leaders that might be outside their natural network of relationships. Those same leaders may also find it hard for a number of reasons to interact with those on the opposite side of an issue from them or from a differing theology. Likewise, interaction with those from a different cultural, racial, or ethnic background can prove to be challenging to initiate due to real and imagined barriers. A podcast could serve as a way to introduce

listeners to the stories of others in city with whom they might not normally interact or even be aware of in a way that would allow for access at the listener's discretion.

While a podcast does not offer the face-to-face interaction and relationship that is ultimately needed to transform a city (a real barrier), a podcast could serve to provide an introduction to those ministering in the city across the divisions of race and issues in a way that is very non-threatening. A podcast can be experienced when convenient for the listener, thus eliminating the concern of busyness. Also, a podcast is passive and does not throw the listener into the type of rivalry and competition as face-to-face interactions often do.

A locally focused podcast could serve as a low-barrier introduction to the stories of people ministering in Anchorage. Using the *Delve Denver* model – uncovering the soul of Denver through the city's history, places, and people – there is also a teaching function the podcast could perform as well in sharing the history and places of Anchorage. As a teaching tool, the podcast could be a powerful aid for those seeking to engage the city. This might be of particular importance for those new to the city. With the majority of those leading congregations and ministries moving to Anchorage from outside of Alaska, there is a need to learn the context. There could also be a benefit for anyone seeking to engage with the city in a deeper way, but who are not yet ready for a more personal hands-on encounter. Finally, a podcast gives the listener an opportunity to learn about the city from perspectives different than their experience because the history, places and stories would be purposely diverse so that listeners would come into contact with perspectives different from those they might naturally encounter in the course of their daily lives.

A podcast could also prove to be part of a trend happening nationally. A recent CBS News poll have shown that the popularity of podcasts is on the rise (CBS News 2019).<sup>111</sup> It

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<sup>111</sup> An informal poll among those in the Anchorage interview participants focus group showed that few listen to podcasts on a regular basis, but this data suggests that it may be changing in the culture at large.

has also been reported that podcasts among the faith community are popular (Brumley 2019). “Podcasting offers an opportunity for religious education and spiritual development that is unfettered by the parameters of religious institutions” (Brumley 2019). Brumley reports that faith-based podcasts of all types are popular with some episodes being downloaded tens of thousands of times (2019).

In producing a podcast, the members of the commons would be curating the experience in light of the rules of the commons and thus would seek to hear from the largest possible variety of voices. In creating the content, by inviting others to tell their stories and deciding what history and places to explore, those producing the podcast would be setting the table and inviting others to that table. In this way they would also be using networking, network, and network-making powers. A podcast could prove to be an effective on-ramp to relationships in and with the city of Anchorage.

Another possible on-ramp to the Anchorage commons could be book discussion groups. Book groups have proven to be helpful in changing the practice of teachers (Hoerr 2009) and organise for social change (Riley 2015). In a similar way book groups could provide an opportunity to gather leaders and introduce the issues present in Anchorage as well as theological reflection on those issues. Here are three examples of books that could be used to accomplish this level one introduction to the Anchorage commons.

E.J.R. David’s *We Have Not Stopped Trembling Yet: Letters to My Phillipino-Athabascan Family* (2018) and Mary Kudenov’s *Threadbare: Class and Crime In Urban Alaska* (2017) are two books recently written from the Anchorage context that offer a route into the commons and the issues present in the city. These two texts offer a look into the realities of the divisions present in Anchorage over race, diversity and the legacy of colonialism as well as the issues related to poverty and crime such as homelessness and affordable housing, a high murder rate, and substance abuse.

David writes to his “Filibascan”<sup>112</sup> (2018:4) children:

To impact the current, younger, and future generations, I need to go into some history because, as a brown-skinned immigrant man in this country, my reality is different, and it’s different because of the historical and contemporary oppression that people like me have experienced. I will probably get redundant, my loves, because oppression is redundant. (David 2018:6)

David’s book gives the reader a glimpse into the realities of race and colonization in Alaska.

David begins the book talking about the death of his friend, an Alaska Native, at the hands of police officers. He explains to his children and the reader, “Instead of focusing on how my death might effect you, I began to think about how I should prepare you for the reality that I am going to pass away – perhaps suddenly and unexpectedly and, conceivably, tragically too” (David 2018:5). This beginning sets the tone for the truth being told.

Kudenov offers a string of stories of urban Alaskan poverty. The tales of inmates, the residents of unmaintained and decaying apartment buildings, transients, murderers all told while she shows you the Anchorage most tourists never see.

Taku Drive rests just outside of Mountain View, once considered Anchorage’s worst neighborhood before city council committees “cleaned up” around the business districts. But gun crimes and prostitution never went away; they crept into surrounding areas, making our street the dark underbelly of the former underbelly. The first month in my apartment I had called the police often, any time I heard gunshots or arguing, but they seldom came. (Kudenov 2017:29)

Passages like that dot the book as Kudenov spins narratives that draw you deep into the city and its struggling citizens.

Both David and Kudenov offer the opportunity to understand Anchorage from a perspective many never get. While a great number of books on a wide range of topics pertinent to Anchorage might be worthy of being read and discussed in a book club format as part of the commons, these two books are both recent and written from a current and former resident of the city that gives them special value. The opportunity to read and discuss these

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<sup>112</sup> David is a Filipino immigrant and married to a Koyukon Athabascan (Alaska Native from the western interior of the state), thus he refers to his kids as “Filibascan”.



stark realities provides an opportunity to consider how followers of Jesus might be able to respond to the realities present in the pages of these books.

Another book around which a group could be gathered is Ray Bakke's *A Theology as Big as the City* (1997). For pastors and ministry leaders who are interested in beginning to think about the city from a less Anchorage specific lens, Bakke's book provides one learners journey to understand their city and what the Bible and theology say about the urban world. Bakke's walk through the scriptural text from start to finish with an eye for connecting the Biblical story to the narrative of the city is a tool to open the eyes of those looking to do the same. This book, with its scriptural focus, might appeal more to pastors, is a great place to start exploring the intersection of the city and theology.

A book group offers another entry-level interaction in the community of the commons. The group invited would seek to be a representation of the city so that the discussion did not slip into voyeurism or detached intellectual engagement, but rather would allow for the understanding to go beyond the pages of the book. For a diverse group to engage the issues of colonialism and race together could prove to be an extremely generative experience. For those of different economic classes to engage together about their separate experiences in the same city could prove to be transformative. For those seeking to understand the city in light of scripture the perspectives of those reading the city and the text differently could be enlightening. Book groups offer the opportunity for personal growth and education, even transformation. However, if read and experienced together through the lens of transforming the city towards the Holy City then action towards that goal is a real possibility.

In gathering these book groups, the organisers would be setting a table for participants to hear the experience of the authors as well as each other. The organisers would be using their networking power to invite voices to the table. And those voices have the potential to

transform the participants and inspire action in the city, all while operating in a group that is a reflection of the goal being sought.

### *Level Two: Diving In*

Once leaders are introduced to the Anchorage education commons and the issues seeking to be addressed by that community for the sake of transforming the city, they will be invited to go further into the community that is learning together as a liturgy for the city. One way for this to take place is learning opportunities in the model of *City of Joy*, the pilot for this thesis. Another route to engaging at a deeper level would be an on-going weekly group focused on the city.

The pilot learning experience for this thesis, *City of Joy*, was a Friday evening and Saturday intensive that focused on using different lenses to see the city. The Friday night session was in a classroom setting and the Saturday session was a walking field trip through the downtown area of Anchorage. This format provides a template for future learning opportunities. While the exploration of lenses through which to view the city was helpful in the pilot and could continue to be a curricular topic, in light of the reality and impact of globalization, a learning opportunity intensive on that topic would be helpful to those seeking to go further into the commons. A learning experienced focused on understanding the planetary nature of globalisation would include the topics addressed in chapter seven of this thesis: the city pulling resources it does not produce from a distance and expelling a residue of people; the importance of place and developing a theology of place; the nature of contested space; diversity; the right to the city; and the reality that the urban is a state of mind.

In a Friday night session, the reality of planetary urbanisation and its related issues could be explored in a classroom setting. This introduction would give the participants an overview of the realities of the contemporary urban environment. On the second day a field

trip into the city would bring participants face to face with the realities of resources drawn from a great distance away through a visit to an overlook of the Port of Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad. In this location the group could discuss how Anchorage was established to provide resources to be used a long distance away and now brings nearly everything it needs in through the port. Stopping in the informal camps that house many homeless people in the city offers the opportunity to observe the residue that is expelled by the city, contested space, and the right to the city. A final field trip stop at a park in the Chugach State Park, Flattop Mountain, would afford a perfect opportunity to discuss the assertion made by planetary urbanisation that all places are now urban, even this remote “wilderness” place. This park also offers a sweeping overlook of the city of Anchorage and would be the perfect place to talk about how, in light of the issues of global urbanisation, a theology of place can be developed.

In crafting a learning experience on planetary globalisation focused on those realities in Anchorage the commons would be setting a table for those interested to learn more about the realities present in the city. In setting this table the organisers would be using networking power by how participants are chosen and network power in how the experience would be carried out. This type of intensive learning would provide to busy leaders a way to learn about the issues and realities present, discuss those issues and realities, and imagine together how Anchorage can become more like the perfect urban prophesied in the closing pages of the New Testament.

Episodic intensive learning experiences offer one route to entering further into the commons but a weekly gathering would provide for a more consistent interaction between the participants and the needs of the city. One example of how a group like this might be formed is the Preaching Peace group in Tacoma, Washington. Rather than gather around a shared affinity, this group was brought together around a common need – the need to preach each

Sunday. Preaching Peace has been gathering for five years. Started out of the felt need that all pastors have – weekly sermon preparation – this group was formed to come together weekly to discuss the weekly lectionary texts. This group was initially convened and guided by Kris Rocke of Street Psalms, by asking the question “How do we preach peace in Tacoma?”. This question, if used with the understanding that peace means shalom, could be a weekly discussion about how the participants preach in such a way that Anchorage becomes the way it should be, like the city of God in Revelation.

While the Preaching Peace participants all have in common that they are from churches preaching from the common lectionary, it was really enlightened self-interest that drew them together. From this simple beginning as a textual discussion group, much has grown. A number of the churches, too small to form much of a youth ministry on their own, have joined together to offer a combined youth ministry to their teens. Members of the group have travelled together to conferences and other events. Some members of the group have continued to attend the group even though they are not preaching from the lectionary text. Clearly this pattern of meeting together weekly leads to action and relationships, two goals of the Anchorage commons.

Born out of a common felt need the Preaching Peace group exemplifies Volf’s (1996:98) notion of “sharing a common social space and taking responsibility for each other.” a group like this could be formed in Anchorage around a similar felt need. While I’d like to think that meeting for the sake of fellowship would be enough of a reason to gather, it is clear that this is not true. An example is the Evangelical Pastors Lunch. The history of this group is rich and dates back to when Anchorage was a much smaller place. The group has been part of city-wide initiatives and other actions while meeting weekly for decades as a brown bag lunch for fellowship, a discussion, and prayer. However, in recent years the lunch has been poorly attended, and the regulars of the group are mostly aging retired pastors. Few,

if any, of the younger Evangelical pastors, church planters, or ministry leaders regularly attend the group. While this group has been more than just fellowship, the current configuration is heavy on this single aspect and the group has dwindled.

If a felt need, such as preaching, could be used to gather Anchorage pastors and leaders to a weekly group where they discuss the question, “How do we preach/bring shalom to Anchorage?”, that weekly gathering would create a community among participants, a common preaching of the text, and action toward bringing shalom to the city. For the group to be effective it would need to be comprised of committed leaders that want to see change. If the group could be configured by how people were invited to the table (networking power and table setting) across the divisions of race and issues, I believe a weekly pastors gathering in Anchorage could be a powerful example of how to build the commons in the city and see it transformed.

### *Level Three: Going Deeper*

Once one has been introduced to the commons via a book group, the podcast, or some other means, and has engaged the issues of the city in a weekly group or an intensive, then that individual would be invited to go even deeper into the commons. Here the hard work of healing wounds and welcoming the Other are the fertile soil of transforming Anchorage.

In light of Anchorage’s history of colonialism and racism as well as the trauma present in both the victims and perpetrators of discrimination and persecution, the need for healing exists. Michael Lapsley has developed a method for helping people heal from past trauma. The survivor of personal trauma, he saw an opportunity to help those seeking to heal from the wounds of South African apartheid. Lapsley’s approach would serve Anchorage pastors and ministry leaders as a way to begin to heal the wounds of colonialism and racism.

Lapsley has established the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM).<sup>113</sup> Ian Nell (2011) explains Lapsley's approach as a work of practical theology using Victor Turner's (1980) theoretical construct of the social drama. Nell (2011:2) explains that in a retreat setting, IHOM brings participants through the four stages of the social drama – breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration – by using “a wide range of activities, from personal advice and informal meditation to the performance of a public ritual”. In the case of IHOM, these activities make large use of artistic expression. In the workshop, the breach, defined as a rupture in social relations, is surfaced by having the participants write their expectations for the experience on a piece of paper which are then posted on a wall (Nell 2011:3). The breach is further exposed by a drama that portrays a scene from the apartheid past. The drama, which includes song, also engages the crowd in the experience (Nell 2011:3).

Following the surfacing of the breach through the expectations exercise and the drama, the crisis, defined as escalation of the crisis (Nell 2011:2) in which the breach tends to widen and intensify, is addressed as the group is led through a discussion facilitated by an IHOM staff member. Participants are asked to share what they were feeling during the drama. Of the discussion Nell (2011:3) writes, “One realizes that this is indeed the stage of turning points, rife with moments of danger and suspense, where people start to speak the truth about the real state of affairs and where it is no longer possible to wear masks”.

In the third movement participants are asked to make a drawing of their “river of life”. This exercise is the beginning of the redressive action which is defined as, “[t]he re-establishment of social relations” (Nell 2011:2) and meant to stop the further spread of the crisis. The creative expression of each participant's stories:

Can be called ‘adjustive and redressive mechanisms’ insofar as they function not only to limit the spread of the crisis, but also try to understand the underlying reasons for the ‘disturbed social system’. (Nell 2011:4)

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<sup>113</sup> <http://www.healing-memories.org> (Viewed 5 April 2019)

Nell (2011:4) notes that “the act of storytelling is a kind of remedy to the initial problem and functions as a *redress* and the reestablishment of social relations”.

The final step in IHOM’s process for healing is reintegration. This last step takes place in three movements. First, after a long day of storytelling and deep listening, participants spend some time socializing over food and drink in a light-hearted atmosphere to end the day (Nell 2011:4). Second, the following morning, participants take part in a liturgy together. The participants choose the central theme of this liturgy that gives everyone an opportunity to contribute (Nell 2011:4). Supporting the liturgy are two creative activities. In one activity a lump of clay is given to everyone to create a symbol that will be presented to the group in the liturgy (Nell 2011:4). The other activity is to create a small group drama to be performed to the larger group that “present something of their experience of reconciliation and peace” (Nell 2011:4).

After the liturgy, a facilitator guides the group through a debriefing of the entire worship experience (Nell 2011:4). In this final step, the expectations, still hanging on the wall, are referenced and each is asked to consider if their expectations had been met.

Nell (2011) concludes:

If practical theologians are serious about ‘*social cohesion*’ in order to ‘resolve the race and class polarizations within the population and to form and build a united nation with a unitary state in which justice and equity are the leading values’ (Cloete & Kotze 2009:7), the healing of memory workshops are *important tools* in realizing this goal. (p. 7 [*italics original*])

Nell’s thoughts here, while based on the South African experience, are something that is true in Anchorage as well. Lapsley and IHOM’s approach to healing the divide around the experience of race, colonization, and racism is a possible curriculum direction for the proposed commons.

In using IHOM’s *Healing of Memories*, the Anchorage commons would be functioning as table servers and using networking and network-making power. Inviting IHOM to guide those gathered through their restorative social drama places IHOM front and

centre and moves the commons organisers into the role of facilitating the experience of others. By inviting an outside voice to lead the experience, the commons is using networking power. By inviting participants and setting the topic to be covered it is practicing of network-making power.

By using the IHOM *Healing of Memories* approach to address the personal legacy of colonialism and racism, the commons would be using an approach that models the goal of a transformed city. If the goal is the healing of all nations and harmony among all people in the eternal city (Rev 21:21-27 & 22:2), then seeking to heal those in the city of Anchorage is a good step. For this healing to take place in a group that reflects the diversity present in Anchorage reinforces the desire and movement toward the ideal Holy City and begins the desired transformation.

In light of the issues that divide the pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage a method for listening to each other and discussing those issues could prove profitable. A possible way for addressing this need is The Colossian Way. The Colossian Way is an approach to having dialogue about issues.

Not all problems are created equal. Some problems are tame — they can be defined and solved to everyone's satisfaction. Other problems are hard to define, and so hard to solve. These problems aren't tame, they're wicked, as in wicked hard (The Colossian Forum 2019a).

As has been displayed there are wicked problems that are dividing those ministering in Anchorage. It is out of similar divisions that The Colossian Way has been developed:

In a time of deep division between Christians, The Colossian Way is a small group series built on hope. The name comes from the hope-filled proclamation of Colossians 1:17: *In Christ all things hold together* (The Colossian Forum 2019b).

The wicked problem that has been used as an example throughout this thesis is LGBTQ+ rights and same-sex marriage. The Colossian Way is a part of an organization called The Colossian Forum that has as its mission “to equip leaders to transform cultural conflicts into opportunities for spiritual growth and witness” (The Colossian Forum 2019c). Using a small group experience, groups take up “the practice of gathering together and loving



God and one another while engaging challenging issues [...] in the hope that, when done in faithful ways, we will witness the body of Christ built up” (The Colossian Forum 2019b).

These groups have a core belief that “[o]ur ability to handle tough issues well is limited by our lack of deep formation into the character of Christ” (The Colossian Forum 2019b).

The Colossian Way has been piloted in Anchorage by drawing together a diverse group of members from a local church to talk about LGBTQ+ rights. True to the goal of the group, which is “less to resolve a specific issue once and for all, and more to build a capacity for working on important questions in a way that reflects faithful obedience to Christ” (The Colossian Forum 2019b), the pilot group met for ten weeks of group interaction and discussion in early 2018. Informally participants reported that the experience was fruitful in building relationships and Christlikeness.

The organisers of The Colossian Way in Anchorage are seeking to take this approach into discussions with pastors and ministry leaders about LGBTQ+ rights in the near future. In a climate where leaders are divided over “wicked problems”, the approach to dialogue over difficult issues used by The Colossian Way offers a direction that should be explored in the commons being proposed. The practices of The Colossian Way offer hope that the proposed principles from which to develop rules can be practiced in a dialogue between pastors and ministry leaders who hold differing views on issues and/or theology.

By inviting participants in the Anchorage commons to participate in The Colossian Way and *Healing of Memories* the organisers of the commons would be table serving. By using networking, network-making power and inviting participants to join into both of these learning opportunities, the commons invites in other voices that are also seeking the transformation of the city.

One final way of going deeper is the Urban Peacemaker Fellowship format being used by Street Psalms. Urban Peacemaker Fellowships gather leaders in a city around a question

for a year with the goal of collective action on that topic. This approach has been piloted by the Anchorage Urban Training Collaborative.

The Anchorage Urban Training Collaborative was funded by an Urban Peacemaker Grant from Street Psalms<sup>114</sup> in early 2018. Anchorage was one of eight cities worldwide that hosted a Peacemaker Fellowship and sought to answer a question of importance and common interest in their city. The question addressed by the Anchorage Peacemaker Fellowship (APF) was “How can/should the people of faith in Anchorage respond to the violence in our city?”. The group comprised eight members who were ministry leaders, pastors and church members from Anchorage. While far from representative of the diversity present in the city, this group sought diversity when forming. The make-up of the group was five men and three women, seven were Caucasian and one Sudanese American. The members were nearly exclusively Protestant Christians with a single member coming from the Russian Orthodox Church. Three of the members were pastors, two others were ministry leaders, two were students, and the final member was a conflict mediator. This group met once a month for three hours and formed relationships and community as they sought to transform the city around the issue of violence.

The APF is an example of table setting. In the APF, I functioned as much more than one of the participants of the group. A co-facilitator and I created the invitation and sent it out soliciting via networking, social media, and advertising in Anchorage. We looked at the applications and decided who would be in or out of the group (networking power). We, as co-facilitators, designed and established the agenda and purpose of the group, its goals, and facilitated each meeting, thus establishing the protocols of the interaction (network-making power via programming and network power). We set the table.

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<sup>114</sup> <https://streetpsalms.org/ourwork/> accessed 3 July 2019

The Anchorage Urban Peacemaking process saw the participants discuss and research the question and learn about community organizing from a consultant who had years of experience creating change in Anchorage. In the end the group joined with two other Anchorage groups, *Activate* (a group focused on gathering pastors for change in the city, which has since folded) and *Worship + Justice Movement* (a group committed to raising awareness of issues in Anchorage and empowering people to join in through quarterly worship events)<sup>115</sup> to host a city-wide prayer gathering and facilitate calling the city to 40 days of prayer to end violence. Due to time constraints, the group decided on this direction, though the group explored a host of other options.

The Peacemaking Fellowship format of gathering a group together around a question to learn together and move toward action fits the goals of this thesis and the commons well. The approach is relational and seeks transformation. This format could be used around a wide range of topics facing the city and provides a template for commons activities moving forward.

### III. Summary of Proposed Approach

For the city of Anchorage to move from the depleted reality of a post-Eden world to a reflection of the final city we see in John's vision in Revelation, pastors and ministry leaders of Anchorage must join together in a liturgy – a public work. In this chapter a proposed approach to this public work was outlined. This approach takes place in three levels. The first level offers an introduction to the commons, the second level invites participants to dive into the commons further, and a third level offers those invested to go deeper.

For the first level I proposed that a podcast could offer an introduction to the commons and the issues and divisions facing the city by exploring history, places, and people

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<sup>115</sup> <https://www.worshipandjusticemovement.com/> accessed 3 July 2019

of Anchorage. While the format is not the gathering in community and learning in truth that is sought by this thesis, it does offer a way for those wanting to engage a way to begin the journey that is non-threatening, flexible, and low barrier. It was also proposed that an introduction to the commons could be made through the discussion of books on topics related to Anchorage or cities in general. In this case, a group would be formed and discussions of the issues present in the book would take place face-to-face. A book club with diverse participants would serve to give the members of the group an introduction into the issues in the books, but also the opportunity to hear how others read those some issues. This engagement offers a launching pad for community to be built and a new vision for Anchorage to be fostered.

In the second level those introduced to the commons through the book groups or podcasts would be invited to take a deeper “dive into” Anchorage. Two possible ways of doing this were expressed. The first would be intensive learning opportunities that would give the participants classroom background and instruction before exploring the topic in a field trip experience. The example given as an intensive of planetary urbanisation. In addition to these occasional learning opportunities on topics, I proposed a weekly group focused on seeking the shalom of the city. Modelled after a group that gathers for a weekly discussion of the text of the lectionary for preaching with an eye toward peace, I proposed that a similar approach could be used in Anchorage to gather and read the text and discuss with the goal of Anchorage reaching shalom – the way things are supposed to be. These two options bring participants into further and deeper community while also deepening the discussion and re-imagining of the city of Anchorage.

The final level beckons to those who want to go deeper. In this level transformation is the goal and participants interact with issues in a deeply personal and concentrated way. Through the *Healing of Memories* participants are able to both share and hear the personal

experiences of racism and colonialism in a way that creates healing. The Colossian Way offers a format that seeks to instill in group members a deeper love for God and each other as they discuss “wicked issues”. This format offers hope that extremely divisive issues can be discussed by people on both sides of an issue in a way that reflects the harmony of the city to come. Finally, the Urban Peacemaking format of gathering leaders around a question with the purpose of action provides a way forward for the commons to address issues of all kinds.

In all of these levels the goal is transformation of the city in keeping with the theory of change that starts with the individual and moves to the larger society. Each of the levels would operate using the inclusive rules of commons and seek to have participation in line with the makeup of the city. Each of these groups will employ a praxis model of theological reflection. The format might change but the goal of transformation, the inclusive nature of community and the practice of education through theological reflection would be present at all levels.

## Chapter 13: Conclusion: Toward a Contextual Urban Ministry Education Model for Anchorage, Alaska

This thesis has sought to answer the question of how to create an urban ministry education that is focused on transforming both the participants and the city and contextually relevant to Anchorage, that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city. In order to guide the exploration of this question I used Osmer's (2008) practical theology questions: "What is going on?", "Why is it going on?", "What ought to be going on?", and "How might we respond?".

### *"What is Going On?"*

We began by noting that the city of Anchorage is not the city of God that was seen by John in the Book of Revelation (Rev 21 & 22). An apocalyptic (meaning to reveal) reading of Anchorage was needed to understand why. To answer the question "What is going on?", I interviewed 38 pastors and ministry leaders in the city of Anchorage. That research was conducted using the narrative practical theology approach of Julian Müller that sees those interviewed as co-researchers. The interviews with mostly church-based, ministry leaders from Anchorage revealed a city that is divided and broken. The data showed agreement around the issues facing the city – substance abuse, homelessness, violence (when all types are combined), and affordable housing – that shed light on the fact that not all the citizens of Anchorage are protected or provided for.

Another answer to the question "What is going on?" was that the ministry climate in Anchorage is divided. This division was seen in racial and ethnic divides, as well as differences in opinion over issues, including "hot button" issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and, to a lesser degree, busyness and competition. Further division exists over how participants

see the city. Participants expressed a desire for more educational opportunities in the city and preference for relational types of education in light of the lack of opportunities currently available in the city.

In addition to interviewing pastors and ministry leaders in Anchorage I also interviewed ten urban ministry practitioners from around the U.S. and the globe. Those interviews yielded insights that the urban ministry education being done in those locations originated from a need present in those cities. The data also stressed the relational aspects of urban ministry education.

An increased understanding into “What is Going on?” was gained from analysing the data from both the Anchorage co-researchers and the urban ministry practitioners as well as the insights gleaned from the focus group of co-researchers and the pilot learning experience. This analysis confirmed that a need for urban ministry education exists in Anchorage for two reasons. First, those interviewed expressed it as a need. Second, the majority of those serving in Anchorage as pastors and ministry leaders have moved to the city from outside of the state. It was suggested that if Anchorage ministry leaders could learn together then perhaps the divisions that exist could be bridged and the city reimaged.

The analysis also exposed that the diverse views of the city held by pastors and ministry leaders are moot in light of globalisation. While the diversity of opinions on Anchorage highlighted the indefinable nature of the cities it also presents an opportunity to begin to see the city in new ways. One such way is the perfect vision of globalisation offered in the Revelation city.

*“Why is it going on?”*

To answer the question of “Why is it going on?”, the issues of division over race, issues, competition and busyness were each gazed on. Behind the issue of racial division sits

a long history of colonization and discrimination that continues until today. In Anchorage an example of division over issues is the long-running conflict over LGBTQ+ rights in the city. Historically Christians have battled each other over this issue. Competition was attributed to the mimetic nature of desire, while busyness is reflective of national trends of increased expectations for pastors.

Analysis of these insights further exposed what is going on in Anchorage. Behind the division of race and the inability to discuss the issue is trauma being carried by both the perpetrators and victims of colonialism. Added to that is the normative whiteness that allows for the discussion to be dismissed due to colour-blindness, and the isolation that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds continue to experience and maintain.

Behind the division over issues and decades of battling over LGBTQ+ rights in Anchorage is the historical division between Evangelicals and mainline Protestants. This division boils down to the supremacy of preaching or social action as the starting point for the Gospel.

In the area busyness and competition, I observed that channelling the same desires present in the busyness and competition into a positive community of desire might serve to overcome the present situation. If instead of gathering desires from those with whom there is competition or from the desires imposed by the expectations of others, positive desires could be gathered from those seeking community and transformation so that a new norm could be created.

The last thing that was gazed upon was the globalised nature of the world today that sees even a wilderness adjacent city like Anchorage as urban, as well as the wilderness it sits next to. While cities are hard to define and the movement now is to see the urban as a state of mind more than a physical expression, there are some factors that were observed that cities hold in common. Cities draw to themselves resources from far beyond their borders in a



physically exploitive way. The result is that there are always people that are left discarded by the city. In light of this, the city has become a place of contested space and makes one question who has a right to the city. Making the issue worse is that Christians have been slow to develop a theology of place that would help to navigate these realities. This gaze exposed the complex nature of the city.

*“What ought to be going on?”*

In light of the insights gained into what is going on in Anchorage and why it might be going on, I proposed a commons approach to education. The commons was engaged in light of the first commons in Genesis. The Eden commons was examined as a way to consider doing urban ministry education in Anchorage with the desire of transforming the city. The commons of the opening pages of the Bible saw the resource of the garden and all of creation, managed by the community made up of God, Adam and Eve. That commons, like all commons, was governed by rules and expectations. The humans were expected to: 1) reproduce, make more humans and, in this way, take part in God’s creativity; 2) Adam and Eve were bestowed the task of stewarding all of creation; and 3) humans were encouraged to enjoy creation with everything given to them to provide for their physical needs. Finally a single rule was established – “not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:16-17) – a rule they could, in the end, not obey. Thus, the commons was destroyed and everything was affected. Relationships changed. Conflict was introduced. Pain and toil in work and reproduction became a new reality. The Garden of Eden was enclosed and all of the earth suffered depletion.

The desired outcome of the Anchorage commons is a community living in the reality of the city of God in Revelation. In that city, God is dwelling among his people in such a way that a church is unnecessary (Rev 21:3 & 21:22); there are no more tears and suffering

because the depleted order that resulted from the Fall has passed away (Rev 21:4); everything is being made new (Rev 21:5); a perfect urban has descended from heaven (Rev 21:10); all are perfectly safe (Rev 21:25); all needs are supplied (Rev 22:1-2); all the nations of the earth are living in harmony (Rev 22:2); and there is no longer any curse (Rev 22:3). In short, the original commons is restored.

However, Anchorage is not a safe city. The needs of all residents are not being met. Divisions over race in the city exist in this diverse place. Anchorage experiences the issues of substance abuse, homelessness, violence and affordable housing. Ministry leaders are divided by race, and over controversial issues like LGBTQ+ rights, as well as experiencing business and competition. These issues and divisions are a depletion of the resources of the original commons in Genesis.

Like the first commons in Genesis, all commons consist of three things: a community, the resource that community intends to hold in common, and the rules that facilitate this community and govern the resource. A commons is created by a community. What I have done in this thesis is to propose a commons for Anchorage. But my proposal is just one person's understanding and recommendations. Building a commons is the work of a community that is seeking to manage the resource of training together.

I have proposed that a community be created for the purpose of forming a commons focused on urban ministry theological education in Anchorage. I propose this approach because of the desire expressed by Anchorage ministry leaders for more training opportunities and the preference for that training to take place in a relational way. I propose that this community be reflective of the community found in the Trinity (Rohr and Morrell 2016, Franke 2009, Staniloae 1994) and the Bible, and exemplify a sharing of common social space and taking responsibility for each other (Volf 1996:98). This community will be formed by those who share this vision and seek to use their networking, network, and

network-making power (Castells 2011a) to invite people into a new network (the commons), establish the rules, and link the commons to other networks in the city and beyond. I recommend these powers be used by practicing hospitality as participants sit, set and serve at different tables throughout the city (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:76-79). In light of this being a community seeking to learn together, the commons should be marked by a commitment to forge relationships that are mutually accountable, transformative, and “forged of trust and faith” what Parker Palmer (1993:31) calls a community of troth. In understanding that relationships are the core of the commons, this community of training reflects a relational theory of change (Rocke & Van Dyke 2017:49; Frost and Rice 2017:120-124).

I propose that the rules that guide this new commons be reflective of the habitus proposed by Anderson (1999) and the cosmopolitan theology of Kang (2011 & 2013). The principles of the habitus include: wonder at the mystery of human uniqueness; the practice of hospitality toward the stranger; recognizing the Other; and reconciliation (Anderson 1997). Kang’s (2011 & 2013) cosmopolitan theology promotes a theology of trans-identity, radical affirmation of the Other, radical neighbourly love, trans-religious solidarity, and counter-empire should inform the rules of the commons. If lived out as the operating procedure of the commons (and working as hidden curriculum), these principles will serve to bridge the divisions present in the city as well as create a positive community of desire (Rocke & Van Dyke 2012:285-303), which will reinforce the norms of the group and undermine the competition displayed in Anchorage.

*“How might we respond?”*

In seeking to answer the question “What ought to be going on?”, both content and relationships are needed in the Anchorage commons. Also, the method of instruction would

need to be one where the method is the message – where practice of learning together must reflect the goal of transforming the city in the likeness of the eternal city.

In the final section of this thesis the question needing to be answered was “How Might We Respond?” It is in this section that concrete actions were set out.

To gather a community of learners in the city together, the easy route of defining the group against others was not seen as the way forward because of its use of further division to define the group. Counter intuitively, placing the Gospel or even Jesus at the centre proves to be divisive due to the different understandings of the Gospel and Jesus and was also avoided. Rather, the group must be gathered around their shared interest of loving the city (in particular her most vulnerable) and seeking the peace (shalom, the way things should be) of Anchorage. The mechanism proposed to gather a group is a thoughtful use of Castells’ (2011a) networking, network, networked, and network-making power. Castells’ understanding of power is made operational through the practice of hospitality, namely table sitting, setting, and serving (Rocke & Van Dyke 2016 & 2017).

I proposed developing curriculum that makes use of the pastoral cycle (Holland & Henriot 1983) so that the community can address, understand and act on the needs of the city. In using this cycle, a curriculum is developed that is contextual to Anchorage and transformational in nature. Furthermore, any curriculum designed must avoid the effect of the hidden curriculum so that the method of instruction can be consistent with the message.

For the depleted post-Eden city of Anchorage to become a reflection of the perfect urban of the final pages of the Bible, the pastors and ministry leaders of Anchorage who are gathered into the commons must engage in a liturgy – a public work. It is proposed that the educational activities of the commons that comprise the framework for that work be offered in three levels.

In the first level, the introduction phase, I proposed using a podcast as on-ramp to the commons. The podcast would be an introduction to the commons and the issues and divisions facing the city by exploring history, places, and people of Anchorage. This non-threatening and flexible format that can be engaged with at the listener's discretion does not meet the community desire of the commons, but is a tool for those interested to begin on a journey into the commons. Also in the first level, I proposed forming book groups as an introduction to the commons and the issues facing the city. These groups would gather together around the reading of a book and the discussions would take place face-to-face. A book club comprised of diverse participants would give the members an introduction not only to the issues of the books, but also the perspective of the others on those issues. This engagement provides a starting place for community to be built and is fertile soil for the development of a new vision for Anchorage.

In the second level, once an introduction to the commons has taken place, participants are invited to a deeper dive into Anchorage. I offered two options in this level. The first is intensive learning opportunities. These intensives would invite the participants into a classroom experience to teach the background of a topic before exploring the topic further on a field trip.

In addition to those occasional intensive learning opportunities on topics, I proposed creating a weekly group. Modelled on a weekly lectionary discussion group, this group would meet with the goal of seeking the shalom of the city. This weekly gathering of pastors and ministry leaders would practice reading the lectionary text and discuss it with the desire to apply it to the goal of shalom in Anchorage. These two options bring participants further into community while also inviting them to further enter the discussion and reimagining of the city.

The final level beckons to those who would like to go into the commons deeper. The final level's goal is transformation through interacting with issues in a deeply personal and concentrated way. *Healing of Memories* gives participants the opportunity to share their story and hear the stories of others around racism and colonialism so that healing can take place. The Colossian Way is a group format that seeks to foster a deeper love for God and each other in the participants as they discuss "wicked issues". This approach to extremely divisive issues offers hope that they can be discussed by people on both sides of an issue in a way that reflects the interactions of the eternal city. Finally, the Urban Peacemaking format of a group of leaders forming a group for the purpose of addressing and taking action is a flexible format for the commons to address issues of all kinds.

The goal of all three levels is the transformation of Anchorage into a city that increasingly reflects the perfect urban of Revelation. The theory of change that makes such transformation possible begins with the individual and moves to the larger society. Each of the levels operate using the rules of the commons that require diversity and inclusivity in the participants. The actions of the commons at all levels will employ a praxis model of theological reflection. The format of each group may change, but the goal of transformation, the inclusive nature of the community, and the practice of education through theological reflection will permeate the commons.

This thesis has been a journey. A journey that started with a question. That question was explored and the answers analysed. In the beginning the desire was to create content. Then the shift to focusing on relationships usurped that focus before a more balanced approach emerged. The journey ended in a proposed urban ministry educational commons. The commons was seen as a way to do education, but also as a model for understanding the depletion of the world brought on by the Fall and the transformation that is possible when we look to the future eternal city of God. But this is just a proposal. It sits here on paper, a

plan, a dream, a desire. But that is all it is. It is a proposal that calls for a community. That community is not yet formed but for this proposal to be embodied, this community must be called forth. That community must covenant together to learn and dream together for the sake of the city of Anchorage and the most vulnerable of her citizens. That community must be able to see the reality of the depleted commons that is the post-Eden Anchorage and at the same time see the vision of what Anchorage can become exemplified by the city John sees in the vision in Revelation 22 and 23.

The city of Anchorage has an opportunity to move forward together. We have the opportunity to learn together. We have the opportunity to create a commons and in doing so a new way to learn to live together. We have the opportunity to transform our city. What needs to be done now is to make it happen. A community is needed to create this commons. But who will join the commons? I will be the first. I will step into this new commons. Who will join me in the commons?

Appendix I:

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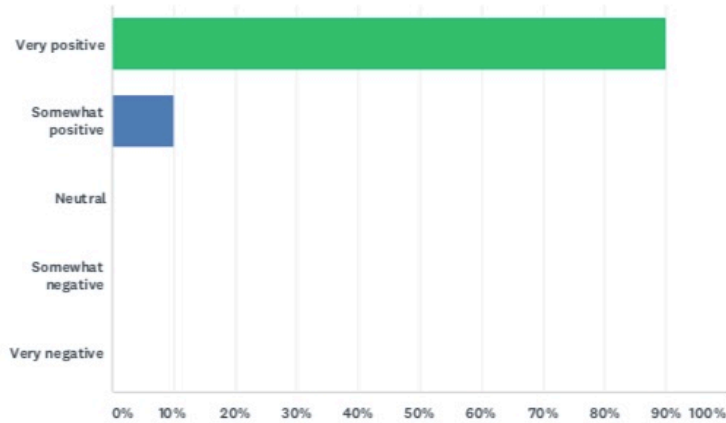
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## Appendix II: Pilot Learning Project Data

## Q1 Overall, how would you rate you experience at CITY OF JOY?

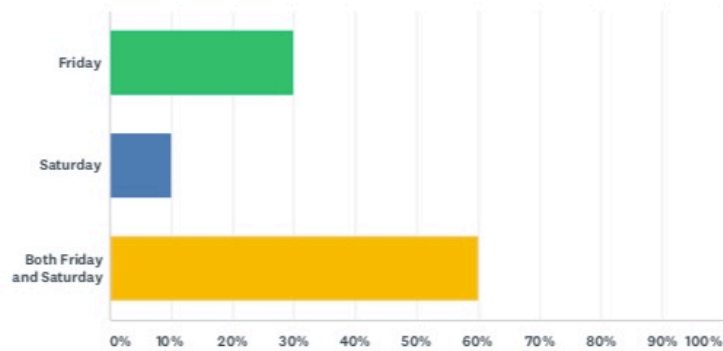
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very positive	90.00%	9
Somewhat positive	10.00%	1
Neutral	0.00%	0
Somewhat negative	0.00%	0
Very negative	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>10</b>

## Q2 I was able to participate...

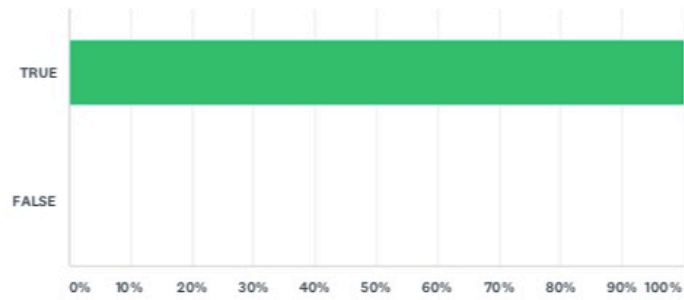
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Friday	30.00%	3
Saturday	10.00%	1
Both Friday and Saturday	60.00%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>10</b>

### Q3 I would recommend CITY OF JOY to a friend.

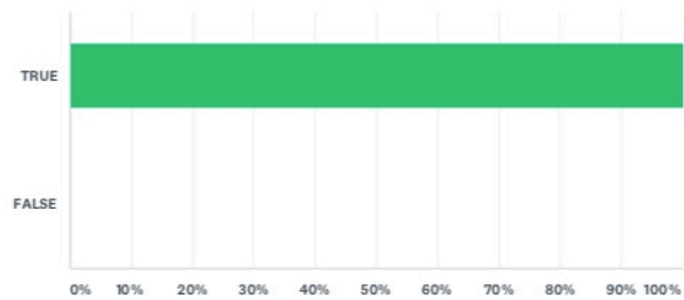
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
TRUE	100.00%	10
FALSE	0.00%	0
TOTAL		10

### Q4 CITY OF JOY helped be see the City of Anchorage better?

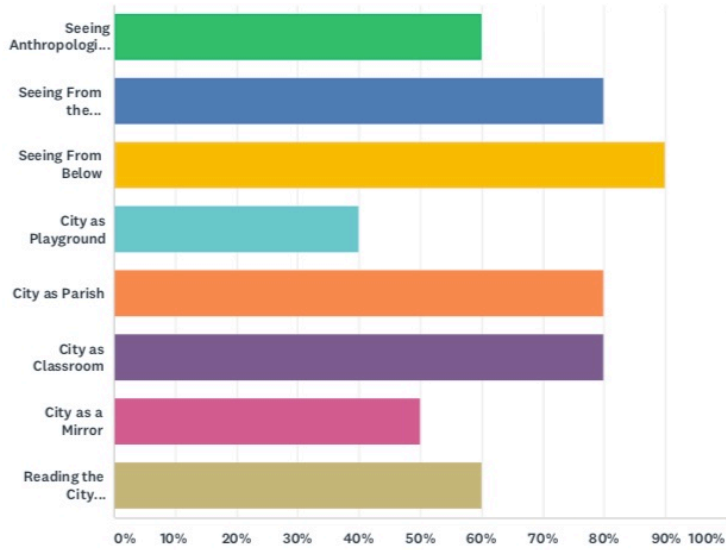
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
TRUE	100.00%	10
FALSE	0.00%	0
TOTAL		10

Q5 I found the the following lenses for reading the city helpful (check all that apply):

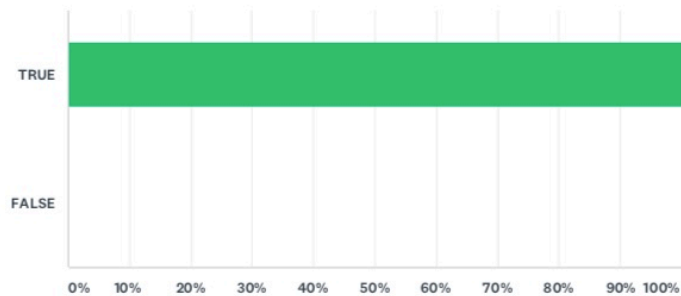
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Seeing Anthropologically	60.00% 6
Seeing From the Resurrection	80.00% 8
Seeing From Below	90.00% 9
City as Playground	40.00% 4
City as Parish	80.00% 8
City as Classroom	80.00% 8
City as a Mirror	50.00% 5
Reading the City Geographically / Spatially	60.00% 6
Total Respondents: 10	

Q6 CITY OF JOY provided tools I can use in ministering in Anchorage.

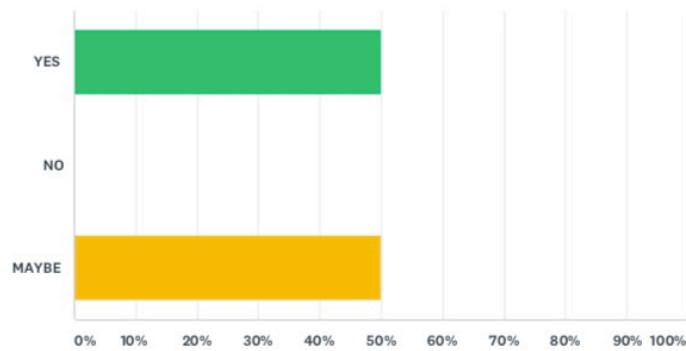
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
TRUE	100.00% 10
FALSE	0.00% 0
TOTAL	10

### Q7 I would be interested in more learning experiences like CITY OF JOY?

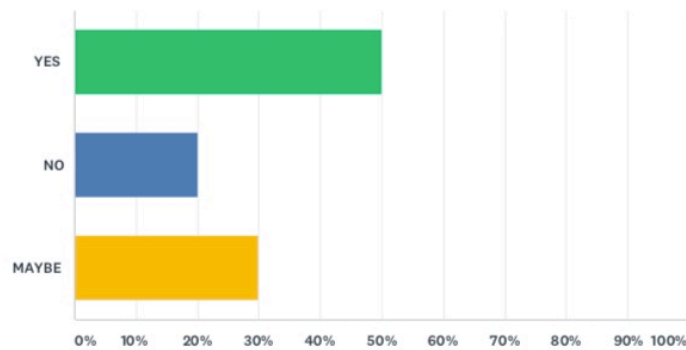
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
YES	50.00%	5
NO	0.00%	0
MAYBE	50.00%	5
TOTAL		10

### Q8 I would be interested in helping to bring more learning experiences like CITY OF JOY to life in Anchorage.

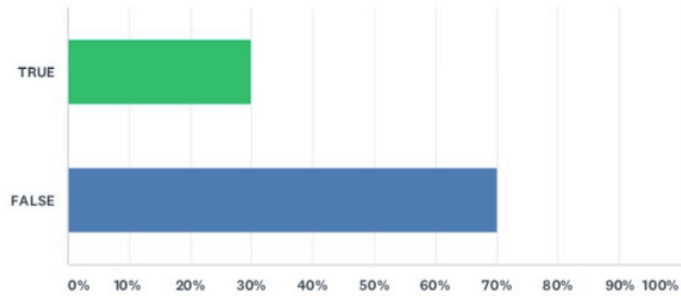
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
YES	50.00%	5
NO	20.00%	2
MAYBE	30.00%	3
TOTAL		10

### Q9 I am a regular podcast listener.

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
TRUE	30.00%	3
FALSE	70.00%	7
TOTAL		10

Please share any other thoughts you have about your experience at CITY OF JOY.

Answered: 4 Skipped: 6

RESPONSES (4) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

Apply to selected  Filter by tag

Search responses

Showing 4 responses

- I would love more intentional conversations about hard topics in any forum. Pub theology comes to mind, but even just some dinners that involve a particular topic to discuss... I am definitely still carrying words and phrases with me that I heard Friday evening. Thank you for that.  
 5/21/2017 10:55 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- Enjoyed the diversified group in class.  
 5/19/2017 8:02 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- Joel, you did a fantastic job of opening up our eyes to se Anchorage well. I know I had to leave early on Saturday and I don't know how the trip around downtown finished, but it certainly began very strong. Thanks again! -Phil  
 5/18/2017 10:39 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)
- Thank you  
 5/18/2017 8:34 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)

### Appendix III: Interview Questions

#### *Anchorage Pastor and Ministry Leader Interview Questions*

1. Can you tell me about how you became a Christian and how you were called into ministry?
2. Could you walk me through your experience of being trained for ministry?
3. Tell me about how you ended up in Anchorage and in your current ministry position?
4. Would you be willing to describe for me how you view your ministry and walk me through a typical week in your ministry?
5. Can you tell me about any citywide ministry (ministry outside your local congregation) you are involved with and how you see the ministry climate in Anchorage?
6. From your perspective, what are the major issues facing the city of Anchorage?
7. Would you be willing to share with me the single most transformative experience that has prepared you for ministry?
8. Can you walk me through the ministry training options - both formal (such as schools, institutes, seminaries, colleges) and informal (such as seminars, consultations, trainings, classes, etc.) available in Anchorage and in Alaska *and* share with me how effective you feel these ministry trainings are for preparing leaders for ministry in Anchorage?
9. Please describe how well prepared you feel you are for ministry in the city of Anchorage as it relates to issues such as:
  - Diversity
  - Pluralism
  - Population density
  - Violence
  - Etc.
10. Can you share with me the ways you do, or do not, view your ministry as “urban”?

*Urban Ministry Practitioner Interview Questions*

1. Can you tell me about how you became a Christian and how you were called into ministry?
2. Tell me about your city. (ministry context / climate / cooperation)
3. Could you walk me through your experience of being trained for ministry?
4. Would you be willing to share with me the single most transformative experience that has prepared you for ministry?
5. Can you walk me through the ministry training options - both formal (such as schools, institutes, seminaries, colleges) and informal (such as seminars, consultations, trainings, classes, etc.) available in your city and share with me how effective you feel these ministry trainings are for preparing leaders for ministry in you city?
6. Can you walk me through the ministry training (urban) you are involved in (how did it get started, what to you do, format, topics, accreditation, etc.)
7. What is your vision for your city? How does your training fit that vision?

Appendix IV: Informed Consent Forms

*Anchorage Pastor and Ministry Leader & Urban Ministry Practitioner Interview*

*Informed Consent Form*

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT  
FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

**Title Of The Study:**

Join Me in the Central Square:  
Towards a Contextual Urban Ministry Training Model for Anchorage, Alaska

**Researcher:**

Joel Kiekintveld  
PhD candidate, Practical Theology, University of Pretoria  
1200 West Dimond Blvd. #1472, Anchorage, Alaska 99515 USA  
[joel@parachutesalaska.com](mailto:joel@parachutesalaska.com)  
+1 (907) 240.4812

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Thank you for participating in the pilot interviews for this study (April 2016-February 2017). Those interviews were part of an initial pilot study to help conceptualize and verify research questions for this project. You were invited to participate in this academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely ministry in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. Those interviews proved so helpful that I am seeking to include them in the body of my work and am requesting this written consent to do so. Each participant must receive, read, understand and sign this document before the data gathered can be included in the study.

- Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions. First, the question is, how can a transformational training, contextually relevant to Anchorage, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city? Secondly, in light of Anchorage's size and limited training resources, in what way can a transformational training that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city, be created, housed, and sustained in a way that is the local, concrete and specific?. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of our findings on request. No participant's names will be used in the final publication.



- Duration of the study: The study will be conducted over a period of three years and its projected date of completion is Spring of 2018.
- Research procedures: The study will use a qualitative interpretivist research paradigm and a narrative research methodology based on exploring of Anchorage using literary and cultural resources, as well as the interviewing of Anchorage ministry leaders. In addition interview subject will be invited to further input as part of focus groups and reviewing the findings of any work prior to publication or submission. The data gathered through interviews will be used to: 1) Identify from the stories of ministry leaders the current understanding(s) of ministry in Anchorage, the perception of the city held by those ministering, and the shape of the practice of ministry enacted in the city. 2) To document the local theologies informing the ministry climate, perceptions of the city, and current ministry praxis. 3) To determine what a training program, contextually relevant to Anchorage, that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city might look like and how it can foster in them second order change. All of this in an effort to answer the questions What is going on? (descriptive-empirical task), Why is it going on? (interpretive task), What ought to be going on? (normative task), and How might we respond? (pragmatic task).
- What is expected of you: Participants are asked to consent to a single one to one-and-a-half hour interview. Any participation in focus groups or reviewing of findings will be voluntary. The final outcomes of this study will be made available to all interview participants for their review prior to submitting it to the Faculty of Theology for its formal review and defense.
- Your rights: Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.
- Confidentiality: All information will be treated as confidential. The relevant data will be destroyed, should you choose to withdraw.

## **WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT**

---

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.  
I understand that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number of the Researcher:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT** *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

---

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her relatives, the letter of introduction. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Pilot Learning Opportunity Informed Consent Form*

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT  
FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

**Title Of The Study:**

Join Me in the Central Square:  
Towards a Contextual Urban Ministry Training Model for Anchorage, Alaska

**Researcher:**

Joel Kiekintveld  
PhD candidate, Practical Theology, University of Pretoria  
1200 West Dimond Blvd. #1472, Anchorage, Alaska 99515 USA  
[joel@parachutesalaska.com](mailto:joel@parachutesalaska.com)  
+1 (907) 240.4812

---

Thank you for participating in the pilot learning opportunity for this study (May 12 & 13, 2017). That experience was part of an initial pilot study to help conceptualize and verify research questions for this project. That experience proved so helpful that I am seeking to include reflections from it in the body of my work and am requesting this written consent to do so. Each participant must receive, read, understand and sign this document before the data gathered can be included in the study.

- **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions. First, the question is, how can a transformational training, contextually relevant to Anchorage, be created that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city? Secondly, in light of Anchorage's size and limited training resources, in what way can a transformational training that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city, be created, housed, and sustained in a way that is the local, concrete and specific?. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of our findings on request. No participant's names will be used in the final publication.
- **Duration of the study:** The study will be conducted over a period of three years and its projected date of completion is Spring of 2018.
- **Research procedures:** The study will use a qualitative interpretivist research paradigm and a narrative research methodology based on exploring of Anchorage using literary and cultural resources, as well as the interviewing of Anchorage ministry leaders. In addition interview subject will be invited to further input as part of focus groups and reviewing the findings of any work prior to publication or submission. The data gathered through interviews will be used to: 1) Identify from the stories of ministry leaders the current

understanding(s) of ministry in Anchorage, the perception of the city held by those ministering, and the shape of the practice of ministry enacted in the city. 2) To document the local theologies informing the ministry climate, perceptions of the city, and current ministry praxis. 3) To determine what a training program, contextually relevant to Anchorage, that develops in the participants a new way of seeing and ministering (acting) in the city might look like and how it can foster in them second order change. All of this in an effort to answer the questions What is going on? (descriptive-empirical task), Why is it going on? (interpretive task), What ought to be going on? (normative task), and How might we respond? (pragmatic task).

- **What is expected of you:** Participants are asked to participate in a two day learning experience called “CITY OF JOY” focused on lenses for seeing the city. Any participation in focus groups or reviewing of findings will be voluntary. The final outcomes of this study will be made available to all participants for their review prior to submitting it to the Faculty of Theology for its formal review and defense.
- **Your rights:** Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.
- **Confidentiality:** All information will be treated as confidential. The relevant data will be destroyed, should you choose to withdraw.

## **WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT**

---

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.  
I understand that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number of the Researcher:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT** *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

---

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her relatives, the letter of introduction. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix V: Ethics Clearance



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology

### **FAKULTEIT TEOLOGIE: NAVORSINGSKOMITEE** **FACULTY OF THEOLOGY: RESEARCH COMMITTEE**

#### **KRITERIA VIR EVALUASIE VAN MEESTERS- EN DOKTORALE NAVORSINGSVOORSTEL** **CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF MASTERS AND DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

- 1) Is daar 'n duidelike studieveld/probleemstelling?

*Is the field of study/problem statement clear?*

Yes

- 2) Watter kennis van en insig in bestaande navorsing openbaar die navorsingsvoorstel?

*Does the research proposal reveal sufficient knowledge of and insight into existing research?*

Yes

- 3) Het die probleemstelling die vul van 'n navorsingsleemte in die oog?

*Does the research proposal address an identifiable research gap?*

Yes

- 4) Is die probleemstelling kenteoreties begrond, soos byvoorbeeld 'n teoreties beredeneerde keuse vir 'n kwalitatiewe en/of kwantitatiewe benadering en 'n bepaalde model van data-insameling, beskrywing en verduideliking?

*Does the research proposal have a sound epistemological basis? For example, does it contain an adequate theoretical argument for either the choice between or for a combination of a qualitative and quantitative approach, as well as a model for the collection, description and explanation of data?*

Yes

- 5) Is daar refleksie op metodologie en hou die gekose metode(s) verband met die kenteoretiese begronding van die probleemstelling?

*Does the research proposal include a reflection on methodology and the relationship between the chosen method(s) and the epistemological basis?*

Yes

- 6) Bevat die navorsingsvoorstel 'n uiteensetting van die raamwerk van die hoofstukke waaruit die studie gaan bestaan?

*Does the research proposal include a chapter outline for the dissertation/thesis?*

Yes

- 7) Wat is die kwaliteit van die literatuurstudie wat in die navorsingsvoorstel aangedui is?

*What is the quality of the survey of the existing literary mentioned in the research proposal?*

Very good

- 8) Word mense op 'n empiriese wyse in die navorsing betrek deur middel van byvoorbeeld veldwerk of kwantitatiewe vraelyste?  
Ja / Nee

*Does the research involve people in an empirical way by means of fieldwork or quantitative questionnaires?*

Yes

- 9) Is die titel aanvaarbaar vir registrasie? Lewer asb kommentaar.

*Is the titel acceptable for registration? Please comment.*

Yes

#### Aanbeveling / Recommendation

I want to congratulate the candidate with a relevant and well thought through research proposal. The intended research is not only creative and fresh, but also crucial in practical theology and ministry. It will surely benefit, not only Anchorage's- and Alaska's urban ministry and -hermeneutics, but also the hermeneutics and contextual (urban) ministries in North-America and the rest of the world! I wish the researcher all the best with this research and look forward in anticipation to the outcome of this study.

Please take note: The format in which the results are going to be made available (14.2) – is not a M-dissertation, but a PhD-thesis.

Boek / Book	
Wetenskaplike artikel / Scientific article	YES
Leke-artikel / Lay article	YES
Televisie / Television	
Radio	
Proefskrif / Thesis	YES
Referaat / Conference paper	
Verhandeling / Dissertation	YES
Miniverhandeling / Mini-dissertation	

It is not necessary to submit the proposal again, and the candidate can proceed under the supervision of his supervisor.

Onderneem u om die navorsingsvoorstel konfidentieel te hanteer?  
Do you undertake to handle this research proposal confidentialia?

Ja / Yes

Evalueerder / *Evaluator*:

Kwalifikasie van evalueerder / *Qualification of evaluator*: PhD in Practical Theology UP 2008

Datum / Date: 9 October 2017

---

**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
EVALUATION OF THE ETHICAL COMPONENT OF THE RESEARCH  
PROPOSAL

**1 The relevant application has been completed**

Yes	X
No	

**2. Appropriate permission from the relevant authorities has been obtained**

Yes	
-----	--



No	
n/a	X

### 3. Appropriately customised letter of informed consent has been attached

Yes	x
No	
n/a	

### 4. Appropriate questionnaire has been attached

Yes	
No	
n/a	x

### 5. Comments on risks and/or disadvantages to the subjects /co-researchers

No comment

### 6. Comments on deception and/or benefits to the subjects / co-researchers

The applicant said no, but I am sure that involvement in this study, that is about opening eyes will have an effect on the participants, which might be positive or negative.

### 7. Is confidentiality handled correctly?

Yes	X
No	
n/a	

### 8. Did the student note the relevant information regarding storage of research data (see point 15 on the application form)?

Yes	X
-----	---

No	
n/a	

### 9. General comments

### 7. Decision

<b>Recommended</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Recommended, provided amendments are made</b>	
<b>Recommended with request to discuss at FTREC meeting</b>	
<b>Not Recommended and to be discussed at FTREC meeting</b>	
<b>Revise and resubmit</b>	

### 8. Do you undertake to handle this research proposal confidential?

Yes	<b>x</b>
No	

<b>NAME AND SURNAME OF EVALUATOR</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	10.10.2017

