

**Theological Reflections on Leadership in
Christian Community**

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the dynamics involved in Christian community, paying particular attention to the pivotal role leadership plays in nurturing and sustaining the life of the community. It begins by analysing the human need for community if people are to fulfil their potential both individually and communally. Time is devoted to understanding Christian community from a Scriptural perspective and a caution is sounded not to envisage Christian community in purely mechanistic terms. The doctrine of the Trinity of God is used as a lens to view vital characteristics in the life of Christian community. The theology of leadership is explored and implications drawn for the exercise of Christian leadership today. The role of Christian communities in the ongoing work of building the Kingdom of God is considered in light of the Gospel imperative to continue the work started by Jesus of Nazareth. A framework is offered to leaders in Catholic schools to assist them in the complex work of building school cultures and practices that incarnate their visions for the future. Finally, recommendations are made to support and develop leaders of Catholic schools in Western Australia.

Declaration of Authorship

This dissertation is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Gerry O'Neill

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Introduction

Catholic education in Western Australia has made evangelisation a strategic priority. Each of its one hundred and fifty schools is required to produce its own evangelisation plan. The initiative is in line with the W.A. Bishops' Mandate Letter that states:

The mission of the Church is the basic mission too of the Catholic school within it. In working to fulfil this mission, all within its community need in addition to remember that, through his Church and its various communities, Christ is seeking to reunite the human race, divided by sin, into the peace originally intended for it by God. (Bishops' Mandate Letter, 2001 – 2007, 9)

It is in this context that this paper is written. Its specific purpose is to examine what it means to be a Christian learning community in the current context and to extrapolate implications for leadership in Catholic schools. The evangelising dimension of schools' praxis is considered from the perspective of both internal critique and the ways in which they reach out to encounter others.

The starting point is a consideration of the characteristics of and human dynamic involved in community. We are human first and therefore it is sensible to reflect upon what needs to be attended to in the formation and nurturing of communities that help members flourish. The particularities of what it might mean to place the adjective "Christian" before community is investigated from both a scriptural and doctrinal basis.

Attention turns to the theology of community and leadership and insights are drawn for what this might mean in a Christian, learning community today. Leadership questions are woven into the entire fabric of the paper, providing a distinctive refrain and reminder of the central role leadership plays in the formation and development of vibrant communities.

The paper then discusses the need for fidelity in any evangelisation activity in acknowledgement of the understanding that Christians continue the mission begun by

Jesus of Nazareth and handed in trust to the community of believers under the power of the Holy Spirit. The question of change, how it relates to Christian community and the leadership challenges therein are discussed briefly.

The place and function of core values in the life and practice of a community are examined with specific reference to Catholic schools in Western Australia. A matrix of values is proposed as an intelligent way of dealing with the complex and often ambiguous situations that confront school communities on a daily basis. The paper continues with the presentation of a conceptual framework designed to help leaders negotiate a safe and life-giving path through the difficult terrain inherited by disciples of Christ.

In conclusion, recommendations are put forward to promote the ongoing successful leadership of Catholic schools in Western Australia.

1.0 Understanding Human Community

Community is a contested concept. It means different things to different people and has acquired multiple layers of meanings (Beck, 1999, 1; Pillsbury and Shields, 1999, 2; Whitehead and Whitehead, 1982, 22). The term “*community*” is better at generating positive emotions than accurately carrying meaning (Wagner, 98, 2, cited in Schiller, 2000) and may in fact hide more than it reveals (Pillsbury and Shields, 1999, 2, cited in Schiller). It is important therefore that those charged with the responsibility of leading communities clarify the image of community they are operating from and the assumptions inherent in it.

Connections between the drive towards community and human flourishing need to be established, before attention is turned towards the motivation for and specificity of Christian community. The paper will make explicit important aspects of human community and, in so doing, illumine some of the essential dynamics and processes involved in the generation and sustaining of communities that help people to grow into their fullest potential as human beings.

1.1 Characteristics of community

Finding an adequate definition for community may prove a fruitless exercise insofar that little consensus has emerged from the literature. Instead, Peck (1987, 25) chooses to list a series of distinguishing characteristics for community. These include:

- Community is inclusive – it always reaches out to others;
- Community is realistic – it appreciates the gifts of others, including their limitations;
- Community is contemplative – it examines itself and recognizes its ill health and takes quick action to seek its own healing;
- Community is a safe place – it allows defences and masks to be discarded;
- Community fights gracefully – it is committed to struggling together;
- In community leadership is shared – it is the spirit of community that leads and not any single individual;
- In community a spirit of peace and love is present.

A list of distinguishing features is useful in that it enables leaders to recognise essential elements of community rather than wasting time attempting to construct an adequate linguistic formulation that is likely to defy one's best efforts. The process that a community engages in to clarify how it wishes to be community is just as important as the list of distinguishing features that emerge from it. If, for example, the process is highly authoritarian with little scope for dialogue it makes no sense for openness to be claimed as a distinguishing feature. In other words, a high degree of congruence needs to exist between what people experience in the practice of community and what is claimed on behalf of that community. Consistent mismatch between experience and rhetoric is likely to lead to apathy and cynicism with a consequent haemorrhaging of the community's energy.

1.2 Conflict in community

Peck's list highlights the potential for conflict within community in its acknowledgement of difference – the gifts of others – and in the community's

commitment to fight gracefully. Whilst the potential strength of a community is its difference, it needs to be managed wisely if it is not to degenerate into division. Sofield et al suggest that conflict is normative in community but caution that it needs to be managed wisely.

The issue is not the existence of conflict, but the way in which it is addressed. Often there is a powerful, at times unconscious, collusion among community members to ignore conflict. While this occurs, it precipitates either apathy or intense tension and the inevitable erosion or demise of the community. (1998, 77)

Zizioulas is also conscious of the negative impact on community when difference degenerates into division and warns that:

“When difference becomes division, communion is nothing but an arrangement for peaceful co-existence. It lasts as long as mutual interest lasts and may easily be turned into confrontation and conflict as soon as these interests cease to coincide.”

(2001, 1) In light of the destructive potential of conflict in any community, Sofield et al suggest ways in which it can be turned into a positive experience for community members and the community as a whole. They posit that conflict can become a growth opportunity in the life of the community when:

- It motivates you to draw on untapped abilities and develop new skills.
- It encourages you to find new ways to deal with problems.
- It stimulates your interest in community and one another.
- It forces you to clarify your views or re-examine your positions.
- It promotes personal growth.
- It clears the air and brings you closer to others. (1998, 82)

1.3 Mission as essential to community

Peck’s first distinguishing feature of community is community is inclusive – yet the fact that it always reaches out, alludes to a tension in community that needs to be named and creatively held in balance. If a community becomes self-absorbed, it loses

its missionary thrust and is likely to become apathetic. If, on the other hand, its sole preoccupation is on the needs of others, it may well result in burnout and the collapse of the community through exhaustion. The community needs to monitor and balance the energy it expends upon nourishing itself and that which it uses up in the service to others. Stephen Covey expresses this need for balance in language that will be familiar to leaders in Catholic schools in Western Australia.

If you adopt a pattern of life that focuses on golden eggs and neglects the goose, you soon will be without the asset that produces golden eggs. On the other hand, if you only take care of the goose with no aim towards the golden eggs, you soon won't have the wherewithal to feed yourself or the goose. Effectiveness lies in the balance. (1990, 54)

1.4 The primacy of relationships in community

Relationships are constitutive of community. People in community connect the many points of themselves (head, heart and hand) with other people and their environment to live and work with a sense of wholeness (Kelly and Sewell, 1991, 7, cited in Schiller). The quality of relationships gives to the community its distinctiveness and influences those in the community in a positive way.

A journey in community building becomes, over time, a commitment to generosity. We learn to be generous of ourselves, our ideas, our friendship, our time and our energies. (Ibid, 5)

In coming together to strive for a worthy purpose, people learn to be more open, more collaborative and, ultimately, more human.

Closely aligned with the quality of relationships is the level of trust that exists within the community. Stephen Covey (1990) uses the metaphor of the “*Emotional Bank Account*” to talk about the level of trust in relationships and suggests that high levels of trust encourage integrity, creativity, self-discipline and appreciation. He proceeds to offer advice about ways to boost the Emotional Bank Account:

- kindness and courtesy
- keeping promises
- honouring expectations
- loyalty to the absent
- making apologies

Sofield et al also point to the pivotal role trust plays in the sustaining of right relationships.

The quality of trust is an enigma in any community or in any relationship. Yet it is an enigma that must be grappled with if relationships are to develop. (Sofield et al, 1998, 5)

They also offer practical ways in which trust can be enhanced and sustained within a community.

- Willingness to progressively disclose oneself to members of the community
- Willingness to receive the disclosure of others with respect and confidentiality
- Consistent behaviour with others
- Following through on commitments
- Affirmation and acceptance of others
- Avoiding judgment of others
- Being trustworthy and honest
- Focusing on areas that the members share in common
- Scrupulously avoiding stereotypes (Ibid, 53)

1.5 Giftedness and community

Peck (1987) suggests that community is realistic insofar as it appreciates the gifts of others and, just as importantly, their limitations. If one person possessed all the gifts necessary for mission there would be no need for community. St Paul emphasises the need to respect the diversity of the body of Christ present now in the believing

community and not to subordinate any part, for all are essential. (1Cor: 12-30) Within this understanding of community, limitations as much as giftedness are a motivation for community and so gift of the Holy Spirit.

The subversive wisdom of community is highlighted in the *Parable of the Pounds*. (Luke 19: 11- 27) The more the community reaches out and touches the lives of others, the more it develops the talents in the community and it flourishes. There is a *kenotic* movement in the community that finds echo in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Zizioulas (2001, 3) affirms this as the normative pattern for Christian living, saying that: “the “*kenotic*” way is the only one that befits the Christian in his or her communion with the other, be it God or neighbor.” For any community to be successful in the realisation of its mission, it must identify the diverse gifts resident in the community, utilise those gifts and unify them in pursuit of its mission.

1.6 Values in community

True community involves mission and reciprocal responsibility (Jason, 1997, 72-73 cited in Schiller). This is undertaken in the context of a matrix of values that are collaboratively articulated and committed to. It is this core set of values that provides direction, energy and the ultimate source of accountability for the life of the community. A tension will always exist between the ideal of community expressed in the core values and codified in the statement of vision and the praxis of the community. Community values need to be embodied in the life of community members if they are to be effectively transmitted both within and outside the walls of the community.

Jason suggests that the small exchanges in everyday life contribute just as much to the development of the sense of community as the established rituals and customs. Chenu (1981, 14) reinforces the power of witness to *speak* to people authentically:

Evangelisation must not be thought of as a transmission of truth but as the incarnation of the gospel in contemporary historical reality.

Anyone involved in education will understand from experience that witness is a pedagogical priority. Words will appear empty and, even worse, hypocritical if they are not matched with appropriate action.

1.7 Implications for leadership

The following dot points are a synopsis of key factors that leaders need to be conscious of in relation to their important and complex task of nurturing and managing communities that help people participate and grow to maturity within. They are offered as a checklist for school leadership teams to reflect upon their practice in this vital area of leadership.

- A clear understanding of community and how it works is essential for wise leadership.
- Competence in managing conflict is a key leadership skill. If difference within a community is not honoured and managed well, it is likely to result in division and prove detrimental to the cohesiveness of the community.
- High levels of trust are necessary to sustain productive relationships. High levels of trust in the community need to be consciously worked upon and monitored.
- A gift discernment process is required to utilise effectively the diverse gifts in a community. Given that people's gifts change with time, it is necessary to repeat this process periodically.
- A balance needs to be struck between mission and maintenance. In the busyness of school life, it is easy to lose the focus on mission and become preoccupied with urgent business. This represents an ongoing and difficult dilemma in the life of every school.
- The buck stops with the vision and not any particular individual or group within the community. Part of the leadership function is to nurture responsibility for the achievement of the school's vision throughout the entire school community.

2.0 Understanding Christian Community

Having established the motivation for and characteristics of human community, it is now the task of this paper to give attention to the motivation for, characteristics of and theological underpinning that informs Christian community. In order to do this task adequately a three-pronged methodological approach is used. Literature dealing with Christian community, scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity are used to throw light on and to propose a model for authentic Christian community. Following Peck's (1987) direction, no attempt is made to distil the essence of Christian community into a working definition, rather a list of distinguishing features is provided to point to the reality inherent in such a community. Following the pattern set in the first chapter, implications for leaders will be discussed at the end of the section.

2.1 Fidelity to scripture

All four gospels affirm the call to community that was central to the mission of Jesus:

The invitation to someone to become a disciple, "Follow me," was an invitation to join a community and to have a relationship with Jesus, *and* with a group of disciples. (Lee, 2000, 123)

St Paul's letters are replete with references to the community and how members must treat each other as the body of Christ. Indeed, the word Paul uses for community – *koinonia* – a Greek word whose root meaning is *participation* not only stresses the need for community, it hints at the type of community it ought to be. It may be that the practice of participation within Christian community needs to change to reflect different historical times and cultural contexts but participation should remain constant as a distinguishing feature of the community. The People of God image of church, emphasised by the second Vatican council, provides a powerful visual metaphor for and invitation to greater participation within the community of the church.

The mission of Jesus of Nazareth is centred upon proclaiming and bringing into reality the Kingdom of God. It is the work that leads him to Jerusalem and,

ultimately, to the cross. It is central to our understanding and work as followers of Christ. Whitehead and Whitehead conceptualise Christian communities as the carriers of that dream.

The dream of the Kingdom of God does not exist in the abstract or only in the written pages of the New Testament. It survives and thrives in individual communities of faith. This inherited hope is dreamed again in the lives of believing Christians. The Kingdom of God is rescued from being only a utopian vision as it attains recognisable shape in the lives of Christians in particular communities of faith. (1982, 98)

The notion that the Kingdom has arrived when it is powerfully alive in us, in our dreams and imaginations (Ibid, 107) underlines the importance of Christian community as a realised eschatology, giving a foretaste of what is but not yet fully realised. Christian communities have a pivotal role to play in the coming of God's Kingdom into the world. They constitute, as it were, the leaven that works within the greater body enabling it to rise up and claim its full potential.

2.2 Plurality in Christian community

In times of rapid and profound change, there is often a need for certainty and difference is viewed with suspicion. In terms of Christian community, diversity may be viewed as theologically suspect and injurious to the unity of the faith. However, history stands as a corrective to this need for uniformity in times of turbulence and reminds the believing community that diversity is, in fact, a sign of God's presence not his absence.

The one faith that Christians confess has from the beginning of our history been believed and expressed plurally. This was necessarily the case for a faith that was intended for all nations (Mt 28: 19): is a universal religion, not limited to a single culture or race, ... (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1982, 5)

The unity of Christian faith is not destroyed by diverse expression. It is a unity that demands diverse expression since its richness defies any attempt to exhaust it in a single model. It is a unity that generates difference and honours it. However, if difference degenerates into division, the unity of the faith is compromised and the body of Christ suffers.

2.3 An organic metaphor for community

Veiling (1995) makes the interesting observation that Christian communities cannot be built and instead must grow. This understanding of Christian community stands in opposition to the more mechanistic approaches often taken in strategic planning initiatives whereby a particular vision for the community is articulated and becomes the only end point, stifling creativity with its certainty. The more organic approach to community suggested by Veiling leads to a different practice. He cites Bank's experience:

... this may mean starting with the network of relationships that already exist in our local regions. Recognise what is there and help it grow. (Ibid, 6)

The pattern of affirmation and critique may be a helpful one in the task of nurturing authentically Christian communities. There will exist in the community features that help people to grow into their humanity and there will also exist features that diminish people's dignity, denying access to their full humanity. Any process of community development or appraisal must deal with both realities.

2.4 Distinguishing features of Christian community

(a) The prophetic dimension of Christian community

A Christian community needs people who provide stability and others who provide the impetus for growth. Whitehead and Whitehead articulate this dual community need well. They argue:

A community needs to welcome and support in its midst both those who help it act responsibly in regard to the compelling needs of the present and those who turn it towards the future. (1982, 106)

It is the dissenters or the prophetic voices within the community that help it to develop to meet the new challenges and opportunities. Without such input, the community is likely to become largely irrelevant to people's lives. Using the analogy of how a beehive operates, Bill Mulford illustrates how the deviant behaviour of the fifteen percent in the hive is the source of renewal and development. He cautions:

Being part of that fifteen percent in human organizations may mean that eight-five percent try to hammer you into shape. However, for an organization to be successful and survive, it must recognise the value of the behaviour of the fifteen percent and, in fact, reward that type of behaviour. (1994, 2)

The prophets of a better future may be irritants first. The ministry of irritation is vital to the ongoing health of Christian communities!

(b) Unity in community

The fourth gospel captures the sense of unity that is characteristic of Christian community. Its vine metaphor (John 15: 1-17) depicts a unity that is life-giving and which highlights the interconnectedness of all things.

In Spring, as the sap of the vine runs through the stalk it begins to sprout branches, tendrils, twigs and eventually flowers and gives fruit in abundance. (Falardeou, 2000, 16)

It is in eucharistic celebration that this unity is most clearly focused and seen in its pluriformity.

At the Eucharistic table, we gather and greet, welcome and listen and speak. There is admonishing, asking, bringing gifts, blessing,

singing, thanking, pouring wine, eating and drinking from a common plate and cup. (Downey, 2000, 96)

(c) Love as essential

In a sense love is not only a characteristic of Christian community, it is Christian community. Scripture is unambiguous regarding the question of love and the claim to be Christian.

Whoever does not love, does not know God, ... (1 John 4: 8 and 20) for God is love. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. (Falardeou, 2000, 15)

The author concludes that the love that binds together the Persons of the Trinity is the same love that binds Christians together. (Ibid, 15)

The acknowledgement that love is constitutive of Christian community does not deny the existence of conflict, but locates it within a particular context.

Realistically, one can only struggle for a type of sociability in which love will be less difficult, and where power and participation will have better distribution. (Boff, 1986, 5)

The commitment to love that is part of Christian community must find expression not only in human attitudes and engagement but should also shape the structures that give formal expression to a loving community. Referring to Catholic schools, Treston argues.

Another related issue is the need to develop meaningful pastoral structures that reflect a belief in faith communities that are energised by Christ's vision of love and compassion. (2000, 89)

(d) Sharing as part of communal life

The Acts of the Apostles recalls the unity of the early Christian community. “They were one in faith and love. None of their number was in want since everything was shared in common. The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common.” (Falardeou, 2000, 21) This emphasis on the common good is based in Scripture, embodied in Christian community and offers a corrective to the current over emphasis upon rugged individualism prevalent in Western cultures.

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his associates argue that the language of biblical traditions can help us recapture a public philosophy rooted in the “We” of mutuality rather than the ‘I’ of individualism. (Veiling, 1995, 120)

The practice of co responsibility in Catholic schools in Western Australia is a good example of sharing that manifests its commitment to the Christian virtue of caring for the common good.

(e) Prayer as essential to Christian community

Prayer will be an important aspect in the life of a vibrant community of faith. From the earliest stages of Christian community, members recognised the need to turn consciously to God.

The early Christians understood that everything in the life of grace is gift. They had personally experienced their own conversion from doubt to faith, from infidelity to fidelity. Since everything depends on God, they turned to God in their need. (Falardeou, 2000, 31)

The celebration of the Eucharist will, of course, be the high point in the community's prayer life, but it is also important to make explicit the presence of God in the successes and tribulations that form the substance of life in any community. It is perhaps most important, and often most difficult, to name God in the low points of community life. However, scripture teaches us that God is present on the road to Emmaus and lack of recognition must not be confused with absence. Jesus was with the apostles on the road to Emmaus even though they did not recognise him. Similarly, God is with us even in those times when our own fear blinds us to his presence.

(f) Forgiveness and community renewal

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32) attests to the centrality of forgiveness in Christian life. The father's quality of forgiveness symbolically brings the younger son back to life. Within Christian community there will be failure and hurt. As Whitehead and Whitehead put it, "If the Kingdom is always being realised, it is also and simultaneously being frustrated." (1982, 105) Without the giving and receiving of forgiveness the life of the community will suffer. When forgiveness is exercised relationships are mended, life is restored. Respect for life lies at the core of forgiveness and in Christian community it finds particular expression in concern for the poor.

Reverence for life always begins with respect for weaker life, vulnerable life. In the world of human beings this means the poor, the sick and the defenceless. (Moltmann, 1997, 42)

(g) Participation in the community

The reality of God's incarnation in Jesus has major implications for the believing community. Christian community is now the body of Christ that must continue his work of building God's Kingdom. It is both our privilege and responsibility as Christians.

The People of God and body of Christ images of church remind us that we *are* church and have both rights and responsibilities for the mission of the church. (Treston, 2000, 89)

Lee echoes this understanding and the commitment it contains. We learn that as adults we not only receive faith – it is also *something we must perform* in both the church and the larger community. (2000, 123) *The Parable of the Pounds* (Luke 19: 11-27) is a powerful reminder of the responsibility Christians bear to use their gifts wisely as they continue in the Spirit the mission begun by Jesus.

(h) Humility – a vital safeguard

True Christian community is characterised by a sense of humility. John’s gospel reinforces powerfully the servant nature of discipleship and leadership within the early Christian community. Unfortunately, the history of the church has not always lived up to this understanding. Faldardeou comments that religious heritage was often trampled rather than respected. “Some religious beliefs were imposed rather than proposed.” (2000, 24)

(i) Hope for the world

The community is most effective when it gives expression to its own interior reality. Whitehead and Whitehead put it into very concrete terms.

A Christian vocation is a calling, an invitation to do something special with my life. A vocation is a dream personalised: we are invited by God to pursue the powerful religious hopes we find within ourselves. (1982, 98)

When Christians bring alive their own deepest desires, they are the hope for the world. Or as Lash puts it, “Christianity is not a “world-view,” or system of beliefs. It is a people with a memory and, for all the world, a hope.” (1993, 60) Moltmann sees the decline of community as a sure road to disaster and urges Christians, “Not just for our

own sake, no: for God's sake we must not surrender the universality of hope." (1997, 42)

3.0 Trinity as a Model for Christian Community

The doctrine of Trinity serves as a marvellous insight into the mystery of the Christian God and may provide a useful model and insight into Christian community. In a sense the believing community is the ongoing embodiment of God in the world and, as such, should be a faithful reflection of the triune God. The paper will now identify elements of trinitarian thinking and make connections with the practice of Christian community.

3.1 The relational dimension

The triune God is at core relational and the human is drawn into that divine relationship.

Through the Son and in the Spirit we are drawn into relationship with the Father. To be Christian is to be caught up in the relationship between Father and Son in the gift of Love bonding Love and its expression, even now. (Downey, 2000, 79)

La Cugna supports the emphasis upon relationships within God and between God and humanity saying, "Trinitarian theology is par excellence a theology of relationships: God to us, we to God, we to each other." (1973, 243)

However, the Greek Fathers of the Church were careful to maintain the differentiation within the Godhead and not allow the emphasis upon unity in the triune God to degenerate into sameness. O'Collins insists that the relational aspect of Trinity entails acknowledging that the three persons are persons in different ways. (1999, 179) Just as Paul's analogy of the body of Christ protects both the unity and diversity of the believing community, the doctrine of Trinity honours unity in diversity as an authentic Christian way of imaging God.

The *perichoresis*, or mutually indwelling, means a supremely intense and blissful mutual presence, a reciprocal coinherence and participation in each other that, however, stops short of the three persons being swallowed up by each other or disappearing into each other. (Ibid, 179)

3.2 Generativity in Christian community

The *perichoresis* of God alludes not to a closed system of intradivine love but a love that overflows from the Godhead into human history. The logic of the Trinity regarding the generativity of God is put more concretely in the doctrine of incarnation.

Through the incarnation, God became part of our eating and drinking, our sickness, our joy, our delight, our passion, our dying, our death! But all of this is for the purpose of drawing us out of ourselves, away from our own self-preoccupation, self-absorption, self-fixation, so as to participate in the divine life. (Downey, 2000, 79)

As Downey so beautifully puts it, “God comes to us in the embrace of human flesh.” (Ibid, 81) A community that becomes overly focused on self is not reflecting the triune God who sends his only son into the world to bear the good news to all of creation.

3.3 A self-correcting community

Reflecting on the three persons in the one God,(Lash 1993, 7) and the need for Father, Son and Spirit to continually influence and shape the correct way to talk about God, Lash suggests that Christian community ought to exhibit a similar self-correcting pattern. The way things hang together, in the Christian scheme of things, is through this ceaseless labour of mutual correction. Leaders in Catholic schools in Western Australia, committed to the practice of collaborative leadership, will appreciate the way in which Lash portrays such work.

This may seem a restless or exhausting kind of unity and yet, as we proceed, I shall suggest that it is better seen as the unending and usually discordant labour of people learning to make music, to move closer to the harmony of God, in whom alone all things hold together. (Ibid, 7)

3.4 Further implications for leadership

The distinctive characteristics of Christian community place particular demands on the exercise of leadership in those communities. The list that follows outlines some of the main issues that leaders in Christian communities need to be aware of in the development of their leadership praxis:

- Community members have a right and responsibility to participate fully in the life of the community. A leadership style that helps people to accept responsibility and grow in maturity is needed for this to happen.
- Diversity in the community needs to be valued and harnessed to the task of realising the mission.
- An organic approach to culture building is more suitable in community than a mechanistic one. Culture building is an ongoing task that requires patience and commitment.
- Dissenting voices may hold the promise for renewal. Leaders need to be sensitive to alternative perspectives and guard against the dangers posed by group think.
- The common good needs to be balanced against individual rights. Unpopularity and leadership go together when societal values clash with core values of the community.
- Communal prayer and shared faith experiences are vital for the spiritual health of the community. Leaders need to nurture a confidence in talking about their faith and a school climate that encourages others to share their experiences of God.
- Hope and joy are characteristics of Christian community. In the absence of these qualities in the community, leaders need to ask searching questions and consider the possibility of burn-out.

- Relationships are at the core of vibrant communities. The relationships within the leadership team can act as a powerful witness to the kind of relationships that are conducive to a life-giving community.
- Designated leaders in community need to invite criticism and correction. A degree of humility and openness to the wisdom of others is essential to collaborative leadership and a prerequisite to the active participation of others in the life of the community.

4.0 Leadership in Christian Community

Having discussed the human need for community and the particular characteristics of Christian community, it is necessary to locate leadership within that context. Leadership takes many forms but it is important that whatever leadership style and practice which emerges in Christian communities, it is congruent with the *People of God* image of Church articulated at the Second Vatican Council and the incarnation reality of Jesus of Nazareth that manifested a particular way of encountering and engaging with the other. McLaughlin puts it succinctly.

... it is appropriate that the type of leadership exercised in the Catholic school reflects Vatican II's evolving participatory and communal emphasis. The community dimension is, perhaps, one result of the new awareness of the Church's nature as developed by the Council (1997, 13).

The growing awareness of the nature of community and the need for participation that is captured by the Greek word for community *koinonia* points to a leadership practice that is collaborative in style and substance. Treston (2000, 89) underlines this understanding when he writes: "The people of God and body of Christ models of church remind us that we *are* church and have both rights and responsibilities for the mission of the church."

4.1 Servant leadership

Various writers on leadership suggest that the story of Jesus indicates a preference for a servant model of leadership. (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1991; Connolly, 1996; Greenleaf, 1977) Whitehead and Whithead suggest that Jesus proposes an alternative to the elitist model of leadership that existed in his culture. They quote from Matthew's gospel to support this assertion. "The greatest among you must be your servant. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (23:11-12, JB) Connolly (1996, 80) agrees with this assertion and makes explicit the implication for leadership.

You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant." (Mark:42-43) Nothing could be plainer. Jesus led us by living this example.

Greenleaf (1977) supports the model of servant leadership and adds to it an important dimension. He proposes a test that can be applied to see whether or not this notion of leadership is successful.

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?
(13-14)

Perhaps Greenleaf's test of leadership is a good way to appraise the effectiveness of what is happening in Catholic schools both in terms of those within our school communities and others in the wider community?

The emphasis upon servant leadership and its practice of collaboration does not in any way detract from the need for leaders who exercise legitimate authority. Lennan

(1999, 155) insists that, “In order to fulfil their proper task, those in authority are entitled to make demands on the rest of the group: to act in certain ways or to refrain from acting in a certain way.” Whitehead and Whitehead agree with this assertion saying, “Understanding leadership as a group process does not take away the need for designated leaders. Seeing leadership in this wider view simply clarifies the task of the person in charge.” (1991, 105) Too often those opposed to the notion of collaborative leadership criticise it on the flawed assumption that it jettisons leadership. No. It simply changes its character.

4.2 The importance of vision

The ministry of Jesus underscores the centrality of vision to the function of leadership. In as sense, he is God’s only son insofar that he is utterly faithful to the work of the Father articulated in Luke’s gospel. (Lk 4: 16-19) His life and work is shaped and energised by the vision of the Kingdom expressed by the author of Luke. McLaughlin stresses the key role vision plays in the life of a community and the need to align the community’s culture with that vision.

Transformational leadership is about the articulation of a community’s vision and the development of a particular organisational culture that nourishes this vision. This is an important responsibility, because “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18 KJV).

Greenleaf also stresses the importance of vision to leadership and reminds of the need to articulate the vision in a manner that inspires people to strive for something that may yet lack precise definition. He advises, “It is so stated that it excites the imagination and challenges people to work for something they do not yet know how to do, something they can be proud of as they move towards it.” (1997, 16)

A vision can blind a community if it does not dialogue with current realities and open itself for renewal. A major part of Christian leadership is to ensure that the vision remain relevant to people’s lives and continues to express what lies at the heart of the Christian vision of life. McLaughlin points to the ongoing need for vigilance.

Ideally, the Catholic school, like all expressions of Church, does not merely invite change but readily accepts its necessity. "... loyalty to the aims of the Catholic school demands constant self-criticism and return to basic principles, to the motives which inspire the Church's involvement in education." (1997, 21)

4.3 The need for mission

Thornhill (1999, 146) reminds the Christian community that it is the continuation of God's mission that marks true discipleship and which gives the community its strength and commitment.

In practical terms, the Saviour's call to discipleship invites an identification with him in the mission he has received from his Father. This is a commitment that must prevail over all other allegiances, even those of flesh and blood (cf. Mt 10:37; Lk 14:25). Indeed, Jesus declares that, through this sharing in his mission, his disciples constitute his true family: "my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21)!

Leaders in Christian communities need to keep members focussed upon their specific mission and be alert to the many distractions that may blind the community to its core business. The temptation scene in Luke's gospel before Jesus proclaims his mission in public for the first time, demonstrates how the mission is a source of strength in times of trial.

... but when he was asked to prove his power as the Son of God by the relevant behaviour of changing stones into bread, he clung to his mission to proclaim the word and said, "Human being live not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Nouwen, 1989, 18)

Leadership will get its direction and energy from a clear sense of a mission that continues the work of building the Kingdom of God. More than this, it will also derive its courage in times of uncertainty from commitment to that mission. For this reason Burrows (2001, 403) is able to say. “True leadership in the Church, then, is the exercise of dominion in leadership with the clear goal of *mission* always before us.”

When thinking about mission, it is necessary to recognise that all four gospels have Jesus focus primarily on the poor. Indeed, Luke’s gospel talks specifically about the Good News to the poor. Connolly draws a clear implication between this reality and the exercise of leadership.

Jesus’ wholehearted attention to the most forgettable of people, while he was about the business of saving the world, is among the most powerful lessons he gives us about leadership. (1996, 79)

It seems clear that Christian communities must have a clear focus upon and stand in solidarity with the poor if they are to retain the authentic message of Jesus. This is a daunting leadership challenge in Australia today when those who speak up for the poor are castigated, in some circles, as “bleeding hearts” or “do gooders” and the poor are often scapegoated for the evils in society. It will take men and women of great courage and a preparedness to be unpopular to stand against the populist clamber to disown the poor.

4.4 The primacy of relationships

Relationships are essential to our Christian understanding of the triune God and to our understanding of community. A leader in a Christian community will spend time developing a high level of trust so that good relationships may flourish. Whitehead and Whitehead see this as the central task of leadership.

Their task is to foster the network of effective relationships through which members care for one another and pursue shared

goals. When they do this, our leaders foster the fruitful flow of God's power among us. (1991, 104)

To be truly Christian ministry leadership must flow out of one's relationship with God. Again the story of Jesus reinforces the necessity of nurturing an intimate relationship with the divine. "Jesus proclaimed the reign of God to invite all people into the same relationship with God that he himself enjoyed. (Connolly, 1996, 77)

In the busyness of school life, it is not easy but is essential that school leaders make room to spend some time each day with God. When they do this, it is more likely that their leadership is motivated by love and they witness to those they serve the importance of keeping connected to the deepest reality – God.

4.5 The primacy of prayer

Closely related to the question of having a relationship with God is the question of prayer. Nouwen sees prayer as an essential discipline underpinning authentic Christian leadership.

If there is any focus that the Christian leader of the future will need, it is the discipline of dwelling in the presence of the One who keeps asking us, "Do you love me?" (1989, 28)

It is very easy for leaders in Christian communities to get caught up in the busyness of everyday life and fall into a checklist kind of leadership to ensure that everything gets done. However, the danger of seduction from leadership to management in response to the reality of busyness prompts Nouwen to ask the question, "Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, to listen to God's voice, to look at God's beauty, to touch God's incarnate Word and to taste fully God's infinite goodness?" (Ibid, 29-30)

If leaders do not find the time to build an intimate relationship with God so that their exercise of leadership is a function of and overflows from that relationship, it is likely that fragmentation will result in the community.

Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. (Nouwen, 1989, 31)

4.6 Humility and the exercise of leadership

It is easy to understand how leaders can lose a sense of humility given their election to a leadership position and the normal social trapping of success that go with that position – office, car, parking lot. Nevertheless, it is vital that leaders within Christian communities retain a sense of humility in the knowledge that they have been chosen to be agents of God in the continuing mission of building the kingdom.

When Moses is chosen to lead the Jews out of Egypt, he protests about his lack of capacity for such a daunting commission but the Lord responds.

“Exactly, Moses; it is my *I am* that is going with you. You are only the bearer of *my* name; your name is of no consequence!”
What a splendid affirmation of the need for leaders to be humble.
(Burrows, 2001, 404)

It is good to recall that leaders are chosen because of the special gifts they bring to a position but it is recognition of their own limitations that allows them to work collaboratively with others and to trust ultimately in the power of God to act in and through their agency.

4.7 Retaining vulnerability in the exercise of leadership

Henri Nouwen (1989, 17) reflecting upon his move from academic life to a life of service to the most needy in society, cites the retention and acknowledgment of one’s vulnerability as central to leadership in the future.

I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in the world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self.

The call to vulnerability presents a great challenge to today's leaders in that vulnerability is often interpreted as weakness and control is viewed as the manifestation of power. However, the image of the cross that presents God in the act of self-emptying (*kenosis*) and the suffering servant offers an alternative paradigm for living and a radical icon to guide Christian leadership.

4.8 The call to sacrifice

Those who answer the call to discipleship and pursue the ministry of Christian leadership can expect their lives to be changed and for sacrifice to be part of that change.

Those who respond to Jesus' call to discipleship will find that their lives are radically challenged: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mk 8:34 –35; cf. 10-21; Jn 12:26). (Thornhill, 1999, 146)

Connolly (1996, 81) captures beautifully the rapidity with which popularity can degenerate into condemnation and leaders need to be alert to the fickleness of public approval and the need to wear unpopularity in the pursuit of authentic Christian leadership.

If crowds could sing "Hosanna" to welcome him to Jerusalem, they could soon enough shout "Crucify him" (Mark 11: 9-10; 15: 13-14) to send him out again.

4.9 The "letting-go" dimension of leadership

This is a difficult aspect of leadership in that it is counter-intuitive. It is understandable that leaders feel a sense of ownership for their communities and, in a sense, this is good. However, if ownership becomes possessiveness, it may stifle the development of new leadership within the community and compromise the continuity that is required in any healthy community. Whiteside and Whiteside (1991, 111) warn about this danger.

The temptation that we experience here is one that accompanies any investment: when we care deeply for something, we often try to control it, to possess it. Parents learn this painful lesson of stewardship as they acknowledge that their children are not, in any final sense, “theirs”. They are neither reproductions nor possessions. Pastors and principles are invited to this same discipline.

4.10 Leadership and change

A pivotal role in leadership is the ability to work creatively with change. Leaders need to understand culture and how it operates if they are to be successful change agents.

Culture, in this sense, is a human creation that protects us from the fear-evoking dark abyss of disorder and chaos into which we might otherwise fall. It is a personal and group defense (sic) against the anxiety that change generates. (Arbuckle, 2000, 7)

Jesus is a good example of a leader who constantly challenges the culture of the day, even the law of the Sabbath, when it conflicts with his mission.

Arbuckle stresses the need for designated leaders to protect the innovators in a community since the normative response to them is to denigrate them. He states that, “Pejorative words like *dissenters*, *deviants*, *rebels*, *revolutionaries*, *traitors to the tradition*, *cultural heretics*, and *big-heads* are commonly used to describe creative

people.” (Ibid, 9) Leaders need to protect innovators who hold the key to community renewal and development. As Greenleaf (1977, 8) puts it, “Prophets grow in stature as people respond to their message. If their early attempts are ignored or spurned, their talent may wither away.” Thornhill (1999, 150) supports the view that prophets need to be listened to and contends further that they are ever present in Christian community.

Within the trusting community of discipleship, the *prophetic* dimension of the church’s life will find renewed expression. Every Christian community has prophets in its midst, those whose openness to the Spirit of God can point out the way, bringing significant blessings to the whole community.

4.11 Further implications for leadership

Those who bear responsibility for leadership in Christian communities need to balance the knowledge contained in current thinking on leadership and the wisdom inherent in Christian tradition regarding the function of leadership. The following points are offered as a guide to help leaders maintain that balance.

- ❑ Leaders need to make time each day to be consciously in the presence of God. It is only out of a consciousness of this presence that Christian leadership is nourished.
- ❑ Leaders who develop the capacity to share their vulnerability are more likely to create cultures that help people to honour their full humanity.
- ❑ Leaders must expect to face criticism and hostility if they are committed to building God’s kingdom.
- ❑ Leaders should be attentive to and prepared to protect the prophets in the community who may be pointing to a better future.

5.0 Christian Community and Fidelity to Scripture

It is important to ask the question: What are Christians called to be faithful to? This involves looking back at Christianity’s founding narrative to resurrect what the

German theologian Metz refers to as the “dangerous memory of Jesus.” If Christian communities are to be the ongoing embodiment of Christ, they need to be clear about and committed to what they are expected to give life to. Looking back is, in a sense, the first step to authentic living in the present and is connected to what we are likely to create in the future. The gospels reconnect the believing community with their identity as a people, what they stand for and their ultimate vision of reality. Memories of the past have the capacity to renew commitment to core values and provide inspiration and hope to live courageously in the present.

5.1 Need to honour the richness of scripture

The four gospels show that Jesus’ public ministry was characterised by healing, teaching and casting out demons. They tell the story differently but it is the same story they tell. It is a story too rich to be told in a single telling. The Christian community needs to honour the richness of the various gospel accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

If we overlook these differences, or try to blend them together into a single story, the effect is to simply obscure from view the actual message proclaimed by each of them in its own way, and by all of them together. (Lash, 1993, 56)

5.2 The Kingdom of God

The first thing to say about Jesus of Nazareth is that he did not preach about himself. “Jesus Christ preached not religion nor an institution, not even himself. He preached the kingdom of God.” (O’Meara, 1983, 26, cited in Tinsey, 1995)

Like the first evangelist, the first bearer of the good news to the poor, disciples have a responsibility to follow the path set by Jesus. Whilst it would be naive to attempt to crudely ape the life of Jesus, Christians have a duty to clarify the values that guided, directed and gave shape to his life on earth. Our lives will take on their own shape, and need to, but do they remain faithful and give expression to the core values that inspired the anointed one of God? The purpose of living a life faithful to the life of

Jesus is not about some kind of hero worship, seductive as this is, but a practical way of continuing the work not finished by Jesus – building the Kingdom of God. It is a task that is frightening in that it calls one out of one's comfort and asks for solidarity with those who stand at the margins of society. It is messy work and yet, paradoxically, if the risk is taken, it leads to true fulfilment.

We need to transcend the narrow focus on the individual hero whom we have made so heavenly that we frequently betray the incarnational engagement which seems to have been central to Jesus' own life and for which people are hungry today. (O'Murchu, 1997, 30)

5.3 Christians are called to confront evil

Just as Jesus taught about the *basilea* of God in his parables, he brought the foretaste of its being into existence through his actions of healing and casting out demons. Perhaps there is a lesson here? The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into human history depends upon affirming what is most noble in society and denouncing that in society which diminishes people's humanness.

In relation to Jesus' work of bringing into being the Kingdom of God, the paper will consider first his passion for confronting evil. It is a gospel imperative that most find daunting. It is much easier to be part of the force of evil than to stand against it. The centrality of opposing evil as a means of initiating the Reign of God is beautifully put by Bosch (1991, 31-35).

God's reign arrives whenever Jesus overcomes the power of evil. Then, as it does now, evil took many forms: pain, sickness, death, demon possession, personal sin and immorality, the loveless self-righteousness of those who claim to know God, the maintaining of special class privileges, the brokenness of human relationships.

Christians, like Jesus, have a duty to oppose evil in whatever form it takes and are just as likely to be vilified for it as he was!

When Jesus encounters the women bent over for eighteen years, he is moved by compassion and rids her of her infirmity. (Lk 13: 10-17) Today many people are bent over with the weight of every kind of evil and they cry out for healing. They need to be touched by God's grace to enable them to stand up straight and claim their full humanity. The Christian life or true discipleship is not about avoiding the bent over in case they contaminate our well-ordered world. No, we are asked to contaminate the world with our compassion and love and be prepared to break the current conventions of purity to make the world truly holy.

In response to this act of compassion, the president of the synagogue rebukes Jesus for violating the Sabbath. Jesus' response – *Hypocrites* – attests to the foolishness of placing social conventions before the needs of people which they were set up to protect. Leaders need to be aware of and prepared for the public disapproval that will inevitably come when Christian communities act in ways that are congruent with their mission yet out of step with societal norms and conventions.

The Good Samaritan in chapter ten of Luke's gospel is also instructive in terms of what needs to be challenged in society. The story demonstrates what it means to be a good neighbour. It is the Samaritan, the outcast in that world, who proves the good neighbour, showing compassion to the person in need. It is very easy to become preoccupied with the conventions of one's religion and to lose touch with what lies at the core of the religion. If, in the observance of religious mores, we are prevented from reaching out to those in need, we may compromise the substance of the faith in deference to a particular form that is meant to express our core values and beliefs.

In the parable of the Gerasene demoniac again Jesus is confronted with evil. (Lk 8: 26-39) Legion is possessed by many demons and is marginalised from his society. Jesus frees Legion from his demons and so reintegrates him into the community where he can rediscover his meaning and dignity as person. We may use different language now, but there are many in society who are possessed by multiple demons and who experience alienation. For example, the high youth suicide rate in Australia confirms the pressures that many people are unable to bear. To be faithful to the memory of Jesus, Christians need to confront those demons and help people to

reclaim their humanity. It involves mixing with those who are easier to ignore and getting one's hands dirty in the task of building a more just and compassionate world. When this work is undertaken, it is likely that the popular response will be hostile.

5.4 Christian must affirm what is good in society

Jesus not only confronts evil in the society of his day, he affirms what is noble in that society. The great beauty and dignity of the human is underlined when Jesus heals those who are sick. He restores people to health and dignity within the community. He is prepared even to challenge the religious conventions of his world when these are opposed to people's legitimate needs. It is crucial that Christian communities recognise and affirm the nobility they encounter in others of a different religious persuasion. A community shows great maturity when it is able to engage with difference and is prepared to learn from the wisdom of the other. In the process of encounter the ability to be influenced by the other is closely correlated with the ability to influence the other. The Christian community has a wonderful story that it must share with other but it must also recognise that there are other stories in different places and cultures that mediate the reality of the divine-human encounter.

5.5 Respect for human freedom

It is illuminating to observe that Jesus does not impose healing but invites people to it. Jesus, the God-Man, respects people's freedom. The human is not overwhelmed in the encounter with Jesus and is not reduced to a puppet with the divine pulling all the right strings. The latter position might be appealing, especially in tough times, but it is not how God chooses to act in his\her encounter with the human family.

In John's gospel the man sick for thirty-eight years is asked, "Do you want to be well again?" (5: 7) The person remains an active agent in his own healing. This pattern of engagement between the human and the divine is further underlined when Jesus teaches about prayer. "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." (Mt 7: 7) The way in which Jesus

respects the agency of the person points to the good practice of encouraging people to grow in freedom, maturity and responsibility. It is a way of working with people that finds expression in the current practice of shared leadership found in Catholic schools in Western Australia.

It is heartening to realise that a pattern and practice of leadership leading to collaborative engagement may give effect to the Reign of God and, more than this, help those in the community experience a God who is at core relational. It is therefore a matter of urgency and importance that leaders in Christian communities model a shared leadership praxis that places priority upon relationships whereby people are encouraged to exercise their talents for the sake of the kingdom of God.

6.0 The Community Web

The community web (see **Appendix A**) is a model designed to help leaders in the complex and important work of retaining the Christian community's sense of mission, preserving its identity and maintaining a relevancy to people's lives. (O'Neill, 1999, 8-9) It has emerged from reflection upon work done with Catholic school leaders in the area of effective school visioning in the years 1992 – 2001. The model is a tool that may prove helpful to school leaders as they embark upon the task of evangelisation within their own school community and the wider community that they serve. The web has explanatory value providing a conceptual framework that helps leaders to reflect upon the various facets that make up a coherent visioning process.

The strength of the community web is the emphasis it places upon connectedness. It helps leader to see more clearly the relationships between different aspects in the visioning process and provides a corrective against trying to change one dimension in the community without first considering the ripple effect that may occur in other parts of the system or in the wider community. Leaders who have changed school uniforms without first consulting the community will know how damaging these ripples can be! For the purpose of this paper, three aspects of the community web are isolated and discussed in greater detail: *core values*, *internal organization* and *the wider community*.

At the centre of the community web lies the matrix of values that provides the community with its source of inspiration, its conscience and reference point to which it can appraise its practice. In a sense, it is the community's heart and mind; the place where it finds its energy and sense of purpose. The anchors of the web – critical thinking, life-long learning, seeking justice – represent the outcomes that the community commits to for all of its members providing focus for community action and reflection. The strands of the web connecting the anchors together represent the internal organisation and culture of the community, giving it strength and encouraging alignment between core values, outcomes and organisational form. The community web is a leadership tool enabling leaders to build organisations that help the vision to become a reality in people's daily lives.

6.1 The place of core values in Christian community

In a Catholic school a Christian vision of reality ought to lie at the heart of the community. It is the lens through which we see and engage with each other and the world. It is the rallying call that captures our most fundamental beliefs and defines who we are and what we stand for. In effect, it encodes our identity and says in essence what needs to be further enfolded in the life of the community.

Underpinning the statement of vision that distils so much of our hopes and dreams into a few sentences are the core values that emerge from our founding story as Christians, the specific work we are engaged in and from the community's sense of the values embodied in the human person. These values help community members to live in ways that are faithful to the vision. Time needs to be spent in negotiating how core values manifest themselves in human, social and educational terms so that what we say is important does not remain an abstraction but is embodied in practice.

6.2 What values should lie at the core?

The question of what values guide, direct and give energy to the life of the community is a crucial one. Like most key questions it is not straightforward. Experience suggests that even at the level of values there are areas of greyness that need to be negotiated. My work with Catholic schools in the area of vision, inclines me in the

direction of articulating a matrix of core values that need to be held in tension when considering matters of great moment. Indeed, it takes great insight for a community to recognise when values are in conflict and when perhaps an over emphasis on a particular value may be distorting the vision of the community. For example, in a school context it may be a value for children to dress smartly. This, in itself, is good. However, if the emphasis upon dress becomes so great that it leads to restricted access to the poor – those to be privileged first by reception of the good news – then it becomes destructive of the very vision of a Catholic school.

Core values are powerful determinants in the life of the community and it is unwise to have too many of them. In a Catholic school it makes sense to have perhaps three core values – an educational value, a human value and a prophetic value. The interplay of these values will shape the school in particular ways and help it become an authentic Christian learning community. When values do clash, as they must at times, the Christian community will place priority on the core prophetic value that helps it to go beyond where it really wants to go. Commitment to a matrix of guiding values will not take away the messiness of living in human community but it provides a template against which that messiness is engaged with.

6.3 Internal organization as a reflection of Christian community

The most powerful witness to the good news of Christ is the way in which a community operates. If there is a lack of alignment between what a community expresses and how it lives, cynicism is the likely result. The community web suggests that the culture and internal organization of a community are the strands that hold the organism together and give it strength. It is also helpful to be reminded that any process of effective evangelisation begins with self-critique. It is one thing to **proclaim** the good news of Christ, it is another to **be** that good news for others. In the process of internal critique, it is important to have critical friends to help deal with the shadow side of community that distorts our vision. As Anthony de Mello (1982, 14-15) suggests in the story of the *Little Fish*, we often cannot find the ocean because we are immersed in the water!

Lying beyond the core of the web are the different elements that give substance to the vision. The mission of the school, for instance, is to bring its vision to life in the business of teaching and learning. The ongoing work of the community is to weave a culture and practice of schooling that embodies and enables the great reality at the core of the community to be lived out daily. To put it another way, the essence at the core of the organization must be released by human endeavour and talent so that it flows into the community and out to the world. The inspiration at the heart of the enterprise connects human perspiration with God's work of building a more just, compassionate and caring world where all things are invited to flourish.

Each dimension of school life – culture, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting – needs to be appraised to see whether or not it is aiding the school vision to prosper. This paper focuses on culture for two main reasons. Firstly, it is a somewhat nebulous term and difficult to pin down. Secondly, its pervasive nature makes it the single most important dimension in any community. The culture of the community needs to be made explicit to test what is truly valued as opposed to what is said to be valued. On any journey the starting point is as important as the hoped for destination. A community must know first where it stands before it can proceed in any particular direction. Two methods are suggested to appraise the culture: monitoring language used in the community and listening to the humour.

6.4 Monitoring language used in the community

The language used in a community gives an insight into the assumptions, beliefs and values inherent in the community. Leadership that wishes to know where the community is in relation to what it values and deems important will be attentive to the recurring patterns of speech that occur in community dialogue. In addition, Johnson (1993, 4) suggests that the language in a community reinforces the identity and behaviour of that community.

... the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. Such speaking, in

turn, powerfully moulds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis.

Community leaders need to be aware of the double bind in this understanding of culture. In the first instance people construct the culture of a community and then the culture shapes the people in that community. In places like schools and hospitals where there is a relatively high turn-over of staff, it is critical that the culture is influencing people in ways that are consistent with the vision expressed by the community.

If, for instance, exclusively male language and metaphor are used when speaking of God in schools staffed predominantly by women, that practice marginalises and subordinates the dignity of women as persons and denies female insight into the mystery called God. If such practice happens in schools and it is condoned, they have no right to claim equality, justice or human dignity as core operational values. As well as doing a great injustice to women, such practice does a disservice to the Christian God who transcends gender categories.

6.5 What do people laugh at in the community?

Another strategy worth spending time on to gain insight into what is really valued within the community is to analyse the humour. What people laugh at is a window into what is really valued and into the community's corporate shadow. Laughter can be a wonderful source of energy and stress relief within the community. On the other hand, humour can be a most effective way of putting people down. An important leadership question is, does laughter in the community destroy people's self-esteem, silence them or take away their energy? The great gospel value is life. If any facet of the community is draining away life, it needs to be addressed so that the community may have life and have it to the full.

6.6 Connectedness to the wider community

Schools have a responsibility to prepare young people to act in the world with confidence and competence. They are called to be both authentic and relevant.

Encircling the web is the world. A school committed to relevance will scan its local and global environments to discern the opportunities and challenges that its young people will face. There are many trends that need to be considered before deciding about what and how to do things in schools. Issues like, multiculturalism, changing patterns of employment, youth suicide, technological advancement, increased life-span, growing uncertainty and greater ambiguity must influence and shape the kind of learning communities provided in the future. If Catholic schools are to remain vital communities of faith, they must engage with the world, help transform it in light of the mission of Jesus and refuse the temptation to become Catholic enclaves committed to self-preservation and apathetic to the needs of the world. To do less would be a scandal to God, a betrayal of the world and a diminishment of the story that we are privileged to continue.

7.0 In Conclusion

Having reflected upon the human need for community and the particularities of living in and leading Christian communities, a list of recommendations are offered to stimulate dialogue about the important question of succession planning within Catholic schools in Western Australia. It is imperative for the health of the system that a pool of leadership talent is identified, developed and supported so that the Catholic school system in Western Australia can continue to provide excellent schools that are active agents in the nurturing of and witnessing to God's kingdom.

7.1 Recommendations

It is imperative that leaders have opportunities to nurture their faith lives and their theological understanding so they are credible faith leaders in their school communities. This is becoming increasingly important as the number of religious in schools diminishes and the school becomes the centre of Church life for so many young people and their parents. It would be unfair to expect school leaders to shoulder the burden of faith leadership without providing the requisite theological training needed for such a role.

Leaders in Catholic schools need to be committed to collaborative leadership and skilled in the practice of working effectively with groups. Much of the leadership literature and Scripture attests to the need for a leadership approach that helps people to develop their talents, grow in responsibility and mature as people. In some ways this is the hardest kind of leadership to enact because it demands that the community must work with its diverse talents in the pursuit of its vision. It means that the leadership team must be competent in and skilled in managing conflict so that the community's energy is oriented towards mission and not turned inwards in a destructive cycle of negativity. The Kingdom of God is more likely to be brought closer if communities learn to work collaboratively.

Appraisal of leadership in the Catholic system should focus on the performance of the leadership team instead of the principal alone. A commitment to shared leadership ought to find expression in shared responsibility. The notion that the "buck stops with the principal" harks back to a time when leadership was conceptualised in terms of one person, and that was generally a man! This thinking is not compatible with the commitment to a shared leadership model.

The vitality of the school community should form a major criterion in assessing the success of school leadership. Leadership is essentially about people and not things. The best manifestation of leadership success is the commitment, enthusiasm and vitality of the staff.

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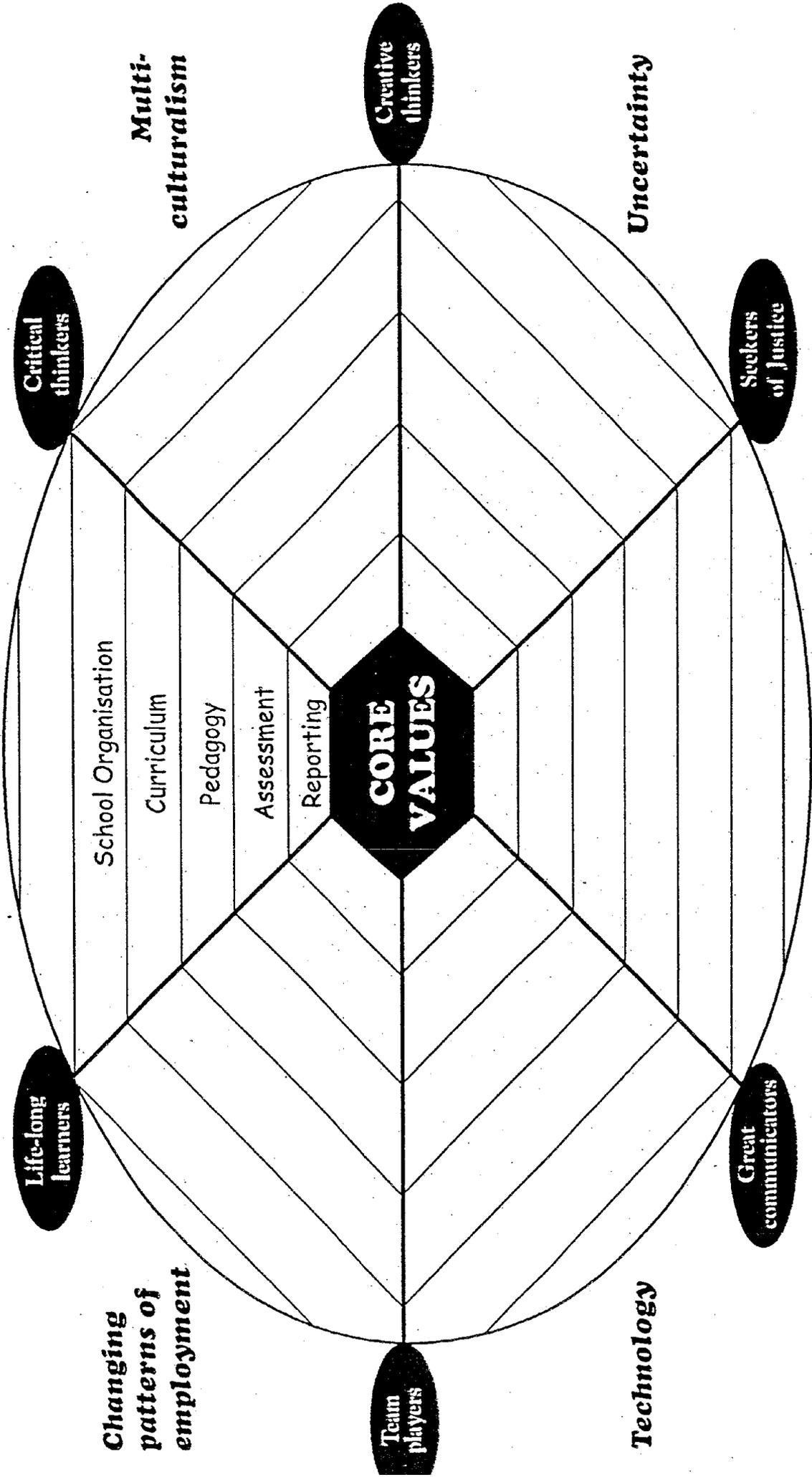
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THE COMMUNITY WEB

Appendix A

Youth suicide



Changing patterns of employment

Technology

Ambiguity

Multi-culturalism

Uncertainty

Critical thinkers

Seekers of Justice

Creative thinkers

Life-long learners

Great communicators

Team players

School Organisation

Curriculum

Pedagogy

Assessment

Reporting

CORE VALUES