Listening to God and the *missio Dei*

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ABSTRACT

The early church was a church of mission; incarnational mission. This changed when the church entered into the Christendom era and church membership grew by birth, rather than by conversion, so there was no need for mission. The decline of numbers attending church services in recent years forced the church to look at mission and a number of church-centred models have developed. But in recent years there has been an awareness that mission is not the mission of the church. It is the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. In this thesis I have outlined the evolution of the concept of the *missio Dei* and its importance to the church. I have also given some examples of the way that the *missio Dei* has been put into action and the importance of listening to God when you are involved in it. This listening to God involves listening, individually and as a church, to God using prayer and Scripture. It also involves listening to God in the lives of the people in our neighbourhoods. This is because God is active in our neighbourhoods and we can join in this activity of God.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirm to the best of my knowledge, that this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.
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CONTENT

Introduction .................................................... 6

1. What is the *missio Dei*? .................................. 7

2. Models of mission .......................................... 20

3. Why it is important to listen to God when you are
   involved in the *missio Dei* ............................ 32

4. How do you listen to God when you are
   involved in the *missio Dei*? ............................ 42

5. How to get the people in our congregations involved
   in listening to God and the *missio Dei*. .......... 57

6. Conclusion .................................................... 74

7. Bibliography ................................................. 76
INTRODUCTION

I am the Vicar of St. John’s Anglican Church in Te Awamutu, which is a New Zealand country town of nearly ten thousand people. Like most Anglican Churches in New Zealand it has experienced a numerical decline in numbers attending services, along with a decline in the number of baptisms, weddings and those presenting themselves for confirmation.¹ The church also has an under-representation of those under 50 years old and an over-representation of those in the older age groups.²

The parish has tried a number of initiatives like Alpha and Back-to-Church Sunday, but these have not stemmed the decline in numbers attending services.

In 2007 the Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki was introduced to the concept of the missional-church and the concept of the missio Dei.³ The missio Dei is the mission of God⁴ or the sending of God.⁵ This was a shift in thinking for many of us because we had been brought up with the concept of the missio ecclesiae, the church’s mission rather than the concept of missio Dei, the mission of God.

In this thesis I will explore the concept of the mission Dei and look at ways that it can be implemented in a parish like mine. Along with this I am going to explore ways that we can listen to God, the God of mission, as part of the missio Dei.

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² Again this follows the New Zealand Anglican trend, see ibid.
³ Steve Taylor, Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change (Notes given out at Diocese of Waikato’s Ministry School, 2007).
CHAPTER ONE
WHAT IS THE MISSIO DEI?

The *missio Dei* is the mission of God\(^1\) or the sending of God.\(^2\) It is a concept that has revolutionised the church’s view of mission over the past few years. To understand this concept we have to start with the alienation of humanity from the love and power of God, as recorded in Genesis 3:1-23, especially verses 22-24.

Then the Lord God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever’—therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.\(^3\)

From here the *missio Dei* starts. Right through the Scriptures we find that God has called people to bring justice, healing and reconciliation to humanity. Some examples are;

The call and sending of Abraham:

Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing’ (Genesis 12:1-2).

Then there was the call of Moses and the sending of the people of Israel:

The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt (Exodus 3:9-10).

Later there was the call of Isaiah:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’ (Isaiah 6:8).

God’s response to Isaiah saying “send me” was:

Go and say to this people: “Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand” (Isaiah 6:11).

Isaiah was not only sent by God, he was also guided by God in the *missio Dei*.

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\(^3\) All the Bible references are in *The New Revised Standard Version*, Copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
Abraham also was guided by God as he took part in the *missio Dei*. One example is in Genesis 13:14-18;

> The Lord said to Abram .... Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.' So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Like Abraham and Isaiah, Moses also was guided by God as he took part in the *missio Dei*. One example is Genesis 14:1-2;

> Then the LORD said to Moses: ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea.

In the New Testament, we have Jesus’ own experience of being sent by God to fulfil God’s mission in the world;

> Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ (John 20:21).

> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Like all mission, this sending of Jesus into the world involved transformation, incarnation, change and courage.

It was in the synagogue of his home town that Jesus gave, by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, a concise explanation of his future ministry and the *missio Dei*;

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour (Luke 4:18-19).

But, just as Jesus was sent by God to fulfil God’s mission on earth, he also sent his disciples out in mission:

> Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:1-2).

Later on he sent out seventy others:

> After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go (Luke 10:1).
But these were essentially local missions “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and not to the Gentiles. All this was about to change on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 1:6-8.

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

The day of Pentecost started the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic period of Christian history. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the early church started its mission. Initially it was a local mission, centred on Jerusalem, but it then spread out from Jerusalem under the threat of persecution.

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him (Acts 8:1).

The first recorded act of mission after this was Philip’s preaching in Samaria. He was also guided by God. An example is his encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch:

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went (Acts 8:26-27).

It is in the life, ministry and mission of Paul that the missio Dei expands beyond Jerusalem. Again we see that Paul is continually led by God as he carries out God’s mission. One example of this is Paul’s vision of the man of Macedonia:

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them (Acts 16:9-10).

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5 Matthew 10:5.
Therefore it can be seen that the early church expanded because it was a missionary and incarnational church. It did not have sacred buildings. For the most part it was decentralised and the church was often driven underground because of persecution. Martyrdom was a way of life. "The dramatic faith of the Christian martyrs who died painful deaths called into question the norms and values of pagan Roman society, attracted notice, interest, and commitment from non-believers, and deepened the faith of other Christians".

However all this changed when the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This move united the Empire and benefited the church in that it was no longer under persecution and Christians were able to worship freely. So Christianity moved from being a marginalised, subversive, and persecuted movement to being the favoured religion in the empire. The emperor changed from being the principal persecutor of Christianity, to being the chief sponsor of the church. Because of this the role of the missionary witness to the outside community started to diminish as the church started to occupy a central place in society. The church gave way to cultural Christianity. Thus Christianity moved from being a dynamic, de-centralised, revolutionary, social and spiritual movement, to an organisation with an institutionalised and hierarchical notion of leadership and structure. This gave rise to the sacral culture called Christendom.

As Western civilisation became more and more Christianised, the church became more and more politicised. "In the corpus Christianum (viz. Christendom), church and state became the pillars of the sacral culture, each supporting the other". Mission was seen to be no longer necessary in Europe.

Even Martin Luther and the other 16th century reformers worked within the concept of Christendom. They tended to focus on church questions rather than mission.

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9 Ibid., 10.
10 Ibid., 11.
12 Ibid.
questions. Protestant life at the time was largely centred on getting things right in the church.

The Anglican Church emerged as a distinct entity in the early Middle Ages “as the church among the English people (ecclesia Anglica – the church in England)”\(^\text{13}\). The result of this is that Anglicanism has always had a national character. Church membership grew by birth, rather than by conversion, so there was no need for mission. There was some change in the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century with the formation of the voluntary missionary societies like the London Missionary Society. “From the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century mission was generally understood as an unidirectional activity from older sending churches in the West to dependent “missions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific”\(^\text{14}\).

During this period the mission of the church overseas was to largely cultivate and preserve Western culture and to expand the territory of Christendom. The philosophy of the period was to “Christianize” and “civilise” the indigenous people\(^\text{15}\). This reflected the integration of church and state. Because of this policy missionaries accompanied the military, political and economic forces of colonialism\(^\text{16}\). This kind of mission made sense in the Enlightenment in that it sought to extend the church models and the cultural world views of the Enlightenment\(^\text{17}\). All of this thinking can be seen in Samuel Marsden’s account of his 1814 Christmas Day service held at Oihi Bay in New Zealand’s Bay of Islands;

“On Sunday morning, when I was upon deck, I saw the English flag flying, which was a pleasing site in New Zealand. I considered it as a signal and the dawn of civilisation, liberty, and religion, in that dark and benighted land. I never viewed the British Colours with more gratification; and flattered myself that they would never be removed, till the Natives of that island enjoyed all the happiness of British Subjects.”\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{14}\) Ian T. Douglas, ‘The Missiological Significance of Listening in a Globalized World of Identities and Differences’, 18


\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Samuel Marsden, Missionary Register, November 1816, 470-71 and quoted in Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating Aspects of New Zealand Church History*
This same Christendom model has continued to dominate the church’s thinking about mission. Even though society has changed, and no longer has its values shaped by a Christian understanding, the church has continued to maintain forms, values, language and rituals that have come out of the Christendom framework. “However they are meaningless (when they can actually be understood) and irrelevant to the vast majority of those brought up in post-sixties Western culture”. Hence there is diminishing involvement in churches “among baby boomers and, even more so, amongst the generations that have followed them”.

One other reason for the lack of emphasis on mission in the Anglican Church was that it relied on people coming to it for baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. The Church depended on a ‘single strategy for growth; that of generational increase, rather than the employment of a variety of strategies to convert, catechize and nurture believers. Its primary mode of mission was based on the word ‘come’. Real mission was something that was done in far off regions like Africa or Melanesia. The Christian in the local situation is called upon to be a good citizen and to support the missionary cause overseas. There was no concept of the lay members of a church being involved in mission in their community.

This lack of emphasis on mission in the Anglican Church extended to the training of the clergy. As Bishop Richard Randerson states:

At St. John’s College in the 1960’s there was no discussion about the theology of mission, or to put it more succinctly: ‘What basically is the Church about? What are our goals in mission (by which I do not mean overseas missions but mission in our own backyard)? There was a basic assumption that our mission was to do our best in running parish churches with all the energy and passion we could muster......

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19 Kevin Ward, ‘Christendom, Clericalism, Church and Context’, *Stimulus*, 10: 1, (Feb 2002), 57.
21 Ibid.
There was still very little emphasis on the theology of mission when I was at theological college in the 1990s. Little has changed today as “a theology of mission is still often missing from the training of ordinands”.  

This decline in the number of Anglicans attending church services can be shown in the census figures.

In the 1926 census 575,000 people indicated affiliation with the Anglican Church, and by the 1966 census this had risen to 901,000. By 2006, at 555,000 this had fallen below the 1926 figure, despite a population increase of 2.7 million. An average weekly attendance of 47,500 in 1986 had declined to 39,000 by 1999 and further to about 32,000 by 2006.

We see many more people in our shopping malls on a Sunday morning, than in our churches. “The new temples are the supermarkets and shopping malls. People want innovation, variety and entertainment”.

Apart from the lack of mission there are a number of other reasons for this decline. The first is society’s changing attitude to voluntary societies. There is a decline in the number of people committing themselves to organisations that require some commitment. This has shown itself in the decline in the numbers of people wanting to be involved in voluntary organisations and organised social structures in New Zealand like service clubs, sporting clubs, political parties and other organisations, including churches.

The second reason for this decline is that the declining numbers of people involved in churches has caused many churches, especially those in country areas, to move into maintenance mode, rather than mission. This means they are trying to keep the churches going in the face of declining numbers. So mission work can become the

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28 Kevin Ward, ‘Social Change and Church Involvement as Seen Through the Lens of Sport’, 25.
victim of the maintenance mindset.\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, in order to support mission and ministry, the church must equip the laity to discover their vocation in the world and to nurture a spirituality that works in the world.\textsuperscript{31} “These would be major correctives to a church that tends to shore up its institutional boundaries, to be preoccupied with the organisational self-preservation, and to direct its resources – financial and spiritual – to its own hierarchy”.\textsuperscript{32} This change in mission can only come about when we break down the clericalism of the church and develop a heightened view of the baptismal authority of all God’s people. This means that the rigid line that is drawn between the ordained and the laity must be broken down and that we speak instead of the ministry of all baptised. This will be expanded on in Chapter five.

Modern research in the western world has shown that people have continued to remain overwhelmingly religious despite the serious decline in people attending churches.\textsuperscript{33} A 1991 survey in New Zealand indicated, if anything, a slight increase in religious believing.\textsuperscript{34} The problem is that people are not finding a spiritual experience “that meets their values and aspirations in what the church has to offer”.\textsuperscript{35} This means that there is an increasing gap between religious believing and belonging.\textsuperscript{36}

Many people who regularly attend church feel the same way; they long for a living spirituality.\textsuperscript{37} Dave Tomlinson, in his book \textit{Re-enchanting Christianity: Faith in an emerging culture}\textsuperscript{38} states that he has no “doubt that the future of the church in Western societies hinges on its ability to engage with, and cater for, this spiritual hunger”.\textsuperscript{39} If the church can’t satisfy these spiritual longings, then it is missing out in a vital part of mission.

In the middle of the twentieth century there was shift in the church’s thinking about mission. This started a move away from the church’s entrapment with Christendom.

\textsuperscript{30} Geoffrey Haworth, \textit{The Triumph of Maintenance over Mission?}, 67..
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Kevin Ward, ‘Christendom, Clericalism, Church and Context’, \textit{Stimulus} 10:1 (Feb 2002), 52.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
This was partly due to the growth of the church in the global south and to the fierce reactions to colonialism and missionaries. In the late 1940’s and early 1950’s there were ecumenical councils, especially the 1952 International Ministry Conference at Willingen in Germany, that wrestled with the nature of the mission of the church, the *missio ecclesiae*, rather than the church’s mission. This led to the idea that the mission of the church is the central calling of the church, rather than mission organised by voluntary associations of Christians. This inspired Emil Brunner to state “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning”. It also inspired Stephen Neil to proclaim “That the age of missions is at an end; the age of mission is to begin". There was now a shift to looking beyond the church to focus on God’s action in the world. “Increasingly the church was seen as an adjunct to God’s saving action in the wider struggles of the world. The *missio ecclesiae* (the church’s mission) was to give way to the *missio Dei*, the mission of God or the sending of God. John Flett also calls this “God’s mission”;

...because it recognises that the question of the church’s connection with the world can only be answered by who God is. ... Mission is justified because God is a missionary God.

The theological basis for mission shifted from the Great Commission of Jesus to one that is based on the Trinity. It was one that recognised the Trinity as outward reaching and not some holy huddle that is inward looking. Thus the church is part of the sending movement of God.

The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit was expanded to

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40 Ian T. Douglas ‘The Missiological Significance of Listening in a Globalized World of identities and Differences’, 18
43 Ian T Douglas, ‘The Missiological Significance of Listening in a Globalized World of Identities and Differences’, 18
44 Quoted in ibid., 18
48 Ibid., 4.
include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.49

This doctrine of the mission Dei was also a great shift in thinking for the church, in that since the time of Constantine mission was ecclesiocentric, it was the church that sent people on mission.

Mission was all about the church. “We might characterise (or caricature) the worst of ecclesiocentrism this way: The church sends the church’s missionaries to accomplish the church’s mission, which is the expansion of the church and, implicitly, the achievement of the church’s agenda.50

As well as the concept of a sending God, the church also needs to hold onto the social doctrine of the Trinity.51 This is the doctrine that God is a relational God and the Trinity is a relational community of three persons who share a common interdependent life.52 God does not want humanity only to know that God is relational. God wants to have a relationship with humanity.53 “Consequently the theological insight that God is on a mission is not just a datum to be pondered; it is a call first to enter into a relationship with God, and then join God’s mission to bring others into relationship with him.”54

The problem is that the grass-roots level of the church, until recently, has been very slow at taking hold of this idea of mission, the missio Dei.55 An example is the Waikato Taranaki Diocese. This idea of incarnational mission, the missio Dei, has only been part of our thinking since Steve Taylor introduced it at our Ministry School in 2007 as part of his lectures entitled Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change56. As part of his Bible study on Luke 10:1-12 he said: “The 70/2 are appointed and sent ahead of Jesus to ‘every town and place where he himself intended to go.’ So this is the missio Dei. The phrase comes from the Latin and

52 Ibid., 14.
54 Ibid.
56 Steve Taylor, Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change (Notes given out at Diocese of Waikato’s Ministry School, 2007).
means ‘God’s mission’. God is prowling our world and we are invited to follow and participate”.57 This concept of the missio Dei was reinforced by the visit of Alan Roxburgh to our Ministry School in 2011.

If everything God does is mission, then mission becomes the proper description of everything the church does in participation with God. This means that ‘mission’ effectively becomes synonymous with ‘ministry’.58

In any event, the missional church movement is one of the most prominent after-effects of missio Dei’s rise. In the essence, it is the outworking of what it means for a congregation to be sent, as the Son was sent, in its context, apart from the issue of sending missionaries to other contexts. Ecclesiology has taken a turn for the participatory, thereby challenging even greater numbers of church members to consider what being a part of this missional body means for our own lives. Becoming part of a church as an end in itself is, thankfully, a dying model in some quarters.59

This concept of the missio Dei has led to the concept of the missional church, rather than the church’s mission, where the missional church participates in the triune God’s mission in all creation.60 There is also a call for all Christians to participate in God’s mission as a result of their Baptismal call.61 For; “Just as God sent Jesus into the world, and Jesus sent his disciples to the ends of the earth, we too are sent in mission. The imperative is clear.”62 This is reflected in these words from the ordination service in the New Zealand Prayer Book;

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptised receive a ministry to proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and to love and serve the people with whom they live and work. In Christ they are to bring redemption, to reconcile and to make whole. They are to be salt for the earth; they are to be light to the world.63

57 Steve Taylor, Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change, 4.
59 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Church of the Province of New Zealand, A New Zealand Prayer Book- He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, (Auckland: Collins, 1989), 890, 900, 912 because it is quoted in the ordination services of Deacons, Priests and Bishops.
For this to happen the church must realise that its dispersed mission and ministry does not happen in the church itself. What happens in the church is that all the church members gain the strength and teaching, through word and sacrament to go out into the world for mission and ministry. As Maybee points out that when “the Sunday liturgy is over, the weekday liturgy – the liturgy of our lives – begins”.\(^6\) Thus mission belongs to the whole of the gathered community.

The Church is not the place of origin and goal of the missionary enterprise: the missionary enterprise is the historical happening which embraces the Church and takes it up into its service.\(^5\)

That is why our Eucharist finishes with the powerful words of dismissal proclaimed by the deacon, or (in the absence of a deacon) by the presider from the front of the church. These words are given from the front of the church so all God’s people are seen to be included.\(^6\) These powerful words are:

Go now to love and serve the Lord. Go in peace.

**Amen. We go in the name of Christ.**\(^57\)

Are these words taken seriously, or understood, in the light of the *missio Dei*?

There is a risk in stepping out in mission, the same risk that Jesus warned his disciples about; “Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves” (Luke 10: 3).

At the heart of mission is the incarnational event of real people being with real people. As missionaries allow their own living to mesh with the living of others, they open themselves to be profoundly affected by others. Just as God’s incarnation project was risky, so also encounters in world mission are risky. For all, there is the risk of being personally challenged, especially as we give up privileges that we are asked to do. For some, there is the risk of violence and disease. God’s risky self-emptying in Christ is our model for this mission.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book-He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, 429.

The problem is that much of what the church calls mission, even ‘missional’, still operates in the traditional Christendom “paradigm of a church with-a-mission”.\textsuperscript{69} In this view mission is ancillary to the church’s life. This can lead to an attractional approach to mission. This is where a church develops programmes and other methods in order to attract non-Christians into their churches.\textsuperscript{70} Examples of these are programmes like ‘Back to Church Sunday’ or the Alpha programmes. These are explained a little more in the next chapter.

In contrast a missional church sees what a church is for, because the “church is a product and participant in God’s mission”.\textsuperscript{71} All of its members, by virtue of their baptism are involved in this mission. Local churches are central to God’s mission, the \textit{missio Dei}. “They discern God’s movement in their particular times and places and join up with this movement”.\textsuperscript{72} This idea is expanded in the next chapter where some models of mission are explored.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
A number of mission initiatives have been put forward in the past thirty years in response to declining numbers of people attending church services. In describing some of these initiatives I am going to use the two categories of church mission as used by Frost and Hirsh.\(^1\) The first is an attractional approach to mission where the church develops programmes and methods in order to attract non-Christians into their churches.\(^2\) The second is an incarnational approach to mission. This is when, following the example of Jesus, churches carry out the missionary act of going into their neighbourhoods, rather than inviting people to a church programme or service. “If the church is incarnational, its stance is always inclined to go forth and enter into the lives of the host community”.\(^3\) This second approach reflects most closely the *missio Dei.*

Some of earliest initiatives for mission that have arisen in the past thirty years were the *Alpha*\(^4\), *Christianity Explored*\(^5\) and the *Emmaus Discipleship Course.*\(^6\) They are still very popular and have been used by many churches. Of these, *Alpha* is the most well-known.

*Alpha* began in 1977 as an introduction to the Christian faith for new Christians attending Holy Trinity Brompton Church in Central London. In 1990, Nicky Gumbel took over the running of this course and he noticed its appeal to those who would not describe themselves as Christian. The course became increasingly popular and in 1993 it began running in other churches in the United Kingdom and around the world. By 2011 approximately 18 million people in 169 countries had attended an *Alpha* course.\(^7\)

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2. Ibid., 225.
3. Ibid., 228.
Each Alpha course is organised as a series of sessions that are run over ten weeks. There is also a day or weekend away where there is an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Each session starts with a meal, followed by a talk about the Christian faith (often a video with Nicky Gumbel speaking) and then a discussion in small groups.

Even though Alpha has been successful, it has also come under some criticism. Ian Stackhouse, says that Alpha courses water down the Gospel and that “the summons of repentance is relativised by the need to include the opinions and beliefs of all”. From my experience, Alpha operates as an attractional and non-incarnational form of mission. It relies on Christians inviting people along to the courses. Despite Alpha running major advertising campaigns, most people attend because they are personally invited. Also “it appears that the people who learn most from basic courses such as Alpha are not (as is widely assumed) interested non-Christians, but those who are already members of the Church”.

The next major initiative in church mission was the concept of a Mission-Shaped Church. The major influence for this was the book entitled Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context. This book was actually a report published in 2004 from a working group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council. It had a major influence on the Church of England and initiated a whole raft of books such as Mission-Shaped and Rural: Growing Churches in the Countryside, Mission-Shaped Children: Moving Towards a Child-Centred Church, Mission-Shaped Youth: Rethinking Young People and

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8 See http://www.alpha.org for a detailed description of the course.
10 Ibid., 23.
Church\textsuperscript{15} and Mission-Shaped Spirituality: The Transforming Power of Mission\textsuperscript{16}, to name a few.

The book starts by highlighting the social trends in the past thirty years that have had an impact on the Church. Two important trends are “the power of networks”\textsuperscript{17} and a “consumer culture”.\textsuperscript{18}

Since the start of the third millennium the western world is best described as a network society where the importance of place is secondary to the importance of flows\textsuperscript{19}. It is the flow of information, images, and capital that is increasingly shaping society.\textsuperscript{20} This has been greatly influenced by the internet and the cell phone and this has resulted in a comparative loss of local and national power. As a result of this networks have not replaced neighbourhoods, but have changed them.

Community and a sense of community are often disconnected from locality and geography. A typical town will have an array of networks.\textsuperscript{21} ....... Geography no longer seems to be the primary basis of community. People define their communities through leisure, work and friendships.\textsuperscript{22}

This has caused a fragmented society and people are less inclined to make lasting commitments to a specific geographic community. As a result communities are increasingly being re-formed around networks.\textsuperscript{23} So many of the fresh expressions of church outlined in the report “are connecting with people through the networks where they live, rather than through the place where they live”.\textsuperscript{24}

The report also points out that we are also living in a consumer culture where society now finds its identity in what it consumes.\textsuperscript{25} This has meant that the core value of society has changed from ‘progress’ to ‘choice’ – the absolute right of the freedom to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Tim Sudworth, \textit{Mission-Shaped Youth: Rethinking Young People and Church} (London: Church House Publishing, 2007).
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England), \textit{Mission-Shaped Church}, 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 9.
\end{itemize}
choose. This means religion is now a matter of choice and people tend to explore for a church that suits them.

The rise of the network culture and consumerism has coincided with the demise of Christendom and the decline of organised religion. This has resulted in the loss of the Christian story in mainstream society and that British culture no longer brings people to the church door. This is also happening in New Zealand. One example is that more and more weddings and funerals are being conducted outside of church settings, often with secular celebrants. Because of this the Church has to realise its missionary responsibilities as “many people have no residue of Christian faith at all; it’s not just dormant, its non-existent; in so many instances we have to go back to basics; we are in a critical missionary situation”.

This awareness that the church has had to realise its missionary responsibilities has caused a growing understanding of the need for fresh approaches in mission and church planting. The problem is that many churches are not attractive to post-Christian people, so there is a move to ‘fresh expressions’ of church. Some examples of fresh expressions of church are alternative worship communities, cafe church, cell church and school-based and school-linked congregations and churches. So the phrase ‘fresh expressions of church’:

...embraces two realities: existing churches that are seeking to renew or redirect what they already have, and others who are intentionally sending out planting groups to discover what will emerge when the gospel is immersed in the mission context.

This is important because, according to the report, all churches are created by God to grow.
Tom Wright\textsuperscript{35} states that if we want a mission-shaped church, it must be a hope-shaped church.\textsuperscript{36} This is a hope that is rooted in the here and now, as well as a future hope. This is shown by his comment about salvation. “We can enjoy it here and now (always partly of course since we all have to die) genuinely anticipating in the present what is to come in the future”.\textsuperscript{37} This is because salvation is not only ‘going to heaven when you die’ but is rooted in the here and now. It is ‘being raised to life in God’s new heaven and a new earth’. He said “the work of salvation, in its full sense, is (1) about whole human beings, not merely souls; (2) about the present, not simply the future; and (3) about what God does through us, not merely what God does in and for us”.\textsuperscript{38} So the split between ‘saving souls’ and ‘doing good in the world’ has created the cultural captivity of both in the western world. So mission involves both justice and evangelism.\textsuperscript{39}

There are a number of critics of the concept of a mission-shaped church, or at least the English report. One is Alan Smith\textsuperscript{40} who believes that the danger with the preoccupation to make the church mission-shaped, is that we might take our eyes off God and shift our focus either onto ourselves, or to the church. This view is also shared by John M Hull in his book, \textit{Mission-shaped Church: A theological response}.\textsuperscript{41} He believes that it fails to “…distinguish clearly between the church and the mission of God, and consequently its limited ecclesiology and its restricted view of the scope of the Christian mission”.\textsuperscript{42} He also points out that the church is a mission project and not the mission itself. The real object of mission according to Hull and Smith \textsuperscript{43} is the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{quotation}
The church is thus called to participate in the mission of Jesus who proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom in his life, in his words, and his
\end{quotation}

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\textsuperscript{35} Tom Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope} (Great Britain: SPCK, 2007).
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 210.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 277.
\textsuperscript{40} Alan Smith, \textit{God-Shaped Mission: Theological and Practical Perspectives for the Rural Church} (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008)
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{43} Alan Smith, \textit{God-shaped mission}, 56.
\textsuperscript{44} John M. Hull, \textit{Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response}, 5.
\end{flushright}
... deeds, and who died and rose again to establish the church as an agent of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{45}

Because of this Hull asks; “Why doesn’t the report call upon the church to manifest the Kingdom of God in exhibiting the signs of the Kingdom as well as through embodying the growth of the Kingdom?”\textsuperscript{46} He also believes that everything, including worship, is subordinate to mission.\textsuperscript{47} Smith refutes this as he believes all Christian living and doing, including mission, comes out of a sense of being caught up and transformed by the vision of God.\textsuperscript{48} “From ‘this perspective, long before we are called to go out and participate in God’s mission in the world (\textit{missio Dei}), we are called to be immersed in the life of God himself”.\textsuperscript{49} So mission should come out of our encounter with God.\textsuperscript{50}

Another critic of mission-shaped churches is John Drane.\textsuperscript{51} He believes emerging churches are in effect “a marketing slogan, offering new packaging for what is likely to be an old product”.\textsuperscript{52} The problem with churches is that there is a real lack of fellowship.\textsuperscript{53} There is also a lack of tolerance of newcomers and much church life represents a way of being that struggles to address the underlying issues of belonging and community.\textsuperscript{54}

Drane believes that Jesus is central for the emerging church as an example to follow, especially his teaching about the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{55} The Church must learn from the way in which Jesus related to others and follow that pattern as much as we are able. Moreover;

\begin{quote}
..... this is not just a return to the past but a living reality for the present. The question is not the highly publicized bumper sticker, ‘What would Jesus do?’ but the more sophisticated theological question, ‘What is Jesus doing?’ To tell the story of Jesus in this way, rather than focusing
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} John M. Hull, \textit{Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response}, 5.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{48} Alan Smith, \textit{God-shaped Mission}, 53.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{51} John Drane, \textit{After McDonaldization}.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 50.
on the theological meanings that have been attached to his life, death and resurrection is a huge paradigm shift in Christian thinking.\textsuperscript{56}

“The notion that this is indeed God’s world, that God can work in it, and that being the Church involves a call to discern where God is at work and to be intentionally aligned with that, is fundamental to much emerging-church thinking”.\textsuperscript{57}

But it is also important to remember, that because this is God’s world, there can be no ‘no-go areas’ for God, “so even in the most inhospitable reaches of the culture God may be found at work”.\textsuperscript{58} This will be a radical shift in the churches’ thinking and will involve finding different ways of relating to the wider society.\textsuperscript{59} It will also involve prioritising “Christology over ecclesiology”.\textsuperscript{60}

It is also important that the Church sees mission as a divine activity that requires human collaboration, rather than as an essentially human activity. For if mission is something that we do, then we can stay firmly in control of it and to some extent predetermine its outcomes. This means we are never challenged beyond our own comfort zones.

But if God is the initiator of mission, who knows where it might lead us, and what the outcome might be? A greater recognition of the many diverse ways in which God works in people’s lives, and a willingness to embrace what God is doing, offers a way of doing mission that will certainly be scary but probably transformational, for Christians as well as for others. It is of course a return to a very old paradigm because it is grounded in the example of Jesus himself.\textsuperscript{61}

So a new approach is needed, one that is less attractional, more incarnational and gets involved in the \textit{missio Dei}. It has to be one that is “grounded in the example of Jesus himself”\textsuperscript{62} and “discern where God is at work and to be intentionally aligned with that”.\textsuperscript{63} This new approach to mission comes is seen in the writings of Michael

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{56} John Drane, \textit{After McDonaldization}, 50. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 51. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 92. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 50.
\end{flushright}
Frost and Alan Hirsch⁶⁴, Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren⁶⁵, Dwight Zscheile⁶⁶ and others. This is the missional Church.

Frost and Hirsch believe that churches need a revolutionary approach to mission.⁶⁷ The important question for churches looking at mission, and making it a priority, is “What has God called us to be and do in our current context?”⁶⁸ What is needed, along with this question is; “the abandonment of the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profound spaces in our world and the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption”.⁶⁹ This is because;

Mission is not merely an activity of the church. It is the very heartbeat and work of God. It is the very being of God that the basis of the missionary enterprise is found. God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and creation reconciled, redeemed, and healed. The missional church then, is a sent church. It is a going church, a movement of God through his people, sent to bring healing to a broken world. .... The existing church, which is invariably static, rooted in one place, institutionalised, needs to recover its sent-ness in order to become the missional church.⁷⁰

The way forward will involve establishing a new movement, rather than tinkering with the existing church structure.⁷¹ So instead of mission-shaped churches, there is a move towards missional churches which are a “community of God’s people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God’s missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ”.⁷² As stated earlier this missional church will be incarnational, rather than

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⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 18.
⁷¹ Ibid.
⁷² Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World,* XV.
attractional. It will look vastly varied in many different contexts and one size will not fit all of them. This will involve a tremendous amount of imagination on behalf of the church leaders and the people within the churches. “The church must rediscover the ability and inclination to find God in the place of action so that others might find him there as well”. As Roxburgh and Boren point out: “The emergent and missional streams, however are not necessarily the same thing. Many emergent churches seem to be new forms of attractional churches that have little sense of their neighbourhoods or the missional nature of the church”.

Frost and Hirsch believe that if the church aims at ministry, it will seldom get to do much mission. But if it aims at mission, it has to do ministry because ministry is the means by which mission is achieved. The problem with most of the ministry that is carried out is that it is ‘in house’, that is ministry for the church members and not with those outside the church family. This is reflected in the areas of ministry that need licences in the Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki. They are Worship Leader, Pastor and Educator. Those who are licensed, hold a licence from the Bishop to carry out that ministry. “By the licence the Diocese supports the ministry of the person and the person is accountable to the Diocese”. Those who have a licence sign a Ministry Covenant that is reviewed annually. But mission, incarnational mission, is not directly covered in any of these licences.

The important thing is that incarnation must be central to the churches’ thinking about mission, especially when thinking about missional churches. For, as Frost and Hirsch say:

... the Incarnation is an absolutely fundamental doctrine, not just as an irreducible part of the Christian confession, but also as a theological prism through which we view our entire missional task in the world. So when we talk of incarnational mission, we hope to, in some way, directly draw

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74 Ibid., 22.
75 Ibid., 135.
76 Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 70.
77 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 149.
79 Ibid., 4.
80 Ibid., 11.
inspiration and motivation from that unique act whereby God entered into our world and into the human condition in the person of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{81} Jesus becoming flesh was an act of profound identification with humanity, it was God’s actual ‘dwelling’ among us (John 1:4). Because of this missional churches must move amongst, and identify with, the people they are trying to reach. This means they must, like Jesus did, enter into their cultural life “without damaging the innate cultural frameworks that provide the people group they are reaching a sense of meaning and history”.\textsuperscript{82} This must be done without compromising the truth of the gospel itself.\textsuperscript{83} Finally, “this incarnational ministry implies a sending impulse for “God is a missionary – he sent his Son into the world, into our lives and into human history”.\textsuperscript{84}

Roxburgh and Boren go a little further than Frost and Hirsch in that they point out practical implications of the incarnation for a missional church. Those churches on the missional journey will want to \textit{pitch their tent} amongst the people in their neighbourhoods and communities just as Jesus did (see John 1:1-14). They will want to enter into these places in order to discern and discover how the Spirit will have them shape their lives as God’s people. They will not see this as some sort of program but as a radical way of being.\textsuperscript{85}

But, the missional church cannot be codified in a simple definition. It is an alternative imagination for being church.\textsuperscript{86} It is a “moving back into the neighbourhood, entering into people’s stories and discovering what the Spirit wants us to do”.\textsuperscript{87}

“The missio Dei is the understanding of Jesus life, death and resurrection that is centred on God rather than on meeting personal needs”.\textsuperscript{88} So churches need to answer two questions. The first is; “What is God doing in our world?” This calls for discernment to recognize what God is doing in their neighbourhoods, schools, businesses and so forth. The second question is; “What does God want us to do in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{81} Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, \textit{The Shaping of Things to Come}, 35.
\bibitem{82} Ibid., 37.
\bibitem{83} Ibid.
\bibitem{84} Ibid., 39.
\bibitem{85} Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 32.
\bibitem{86} Ibid., 45.
\bibitem{87} Ibid., 53. Roxburgh and Boren give many examples of groups doing this.
\bibitem{88} Ibid., 70.
\end{thebibliography}
our world?” Each of these questions will direct their attention and energy in very different directions to where the churches are going at the moment. So;

The task of the local church in our present situation is to re-enter our neighbourhoods, to dwell with and to listen to the narratives and stories of the people. We are to do this not as a strategy for getting people to church but because that is how God comes to us in Jesus, loving us without putting strings on the relationship. It will be in these kinds of relationships that we hear all the clues about what the Spirit is calling us to do as the church in that place.89

Alan Roxburgh, along with M Scott Boren and Fred Romanuk, gives a Missional Change Model that will enable a church as a whole, or a group of people in a church, to start on such a missional journey. The model follows a number of steps that navigates a congregation towards becoming a missional congregation.90

Leadership is very important when taking people on this missional journey and the important starting point is the cultivation of the imagination of the missional leader. One of the steps in this is cultivating a biblical imagination.

The narrative imagination of Scripture challenges our assumptions about what God is up to in the world and reminds us that leaders can do great things when they align their expectations with God’s. An important role of a missional leader is cultivating an environment within which God’s people discern God’s directions and activities in them and for the communities in which they find themselves.91

This is because the biblical narrative is an encouragement to people as it is full of stories where people without hope became centres of the Spirit’s creative, world-changing activity.92 In order to do this we need “leaders with the capacity to cultivate an environment that releases the missional imagination of the people of God”.93 I will also be touching on this in the next chapter.

Finally, the idea of mission has shifted from an attractional approach to mission, where the church develops programmes and methods in order to attract non-Christians into their churches to the second is an incarnational approach to mission.

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89 Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 32, 85.
90 Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, The Missional Leader, 79-108. This is explained further in chapter five of this thesis.
91 Ibid., 16-17.
92 Ibid., 17.
93 Ibid., 20.
most closely the concept of the *missio Dei*. This is where churches go out into their
neighbourhoods and join in with God’s mission because God is already working in
those neighbourhoods.

Dave Tomlinson summarises much of what has been said so far in what he calls his
own ‘mission statement’. This is what he thinks really matters about Christian mission
in the emerging world of the twenty-first century.94

Mission is not a set of activities that can be learned from a manual or
copied from previous generations; mission is the act of interpreting and
expressing God’s loving presence in the world in ways that resonate with
or are relevant to a particular cultural and historical context with its peculiar
needs and opportunities.95

This idea that “mission is the act of interpreting and expressing God’s loving
presence in the world in ways that resonate with or are relevant to a particular
cultural and historical context with its peculiar needs and opportunities” is expanded
in the next chapter. This is done by looking at ways we can listen to God, and the
people in the community, so we can join in the *missio Dei*.

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94 Dave Tomlinson, *Re-enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture* (Norwich, England:
Canterbury Press, 2008), 129-147.

95 Ibid., 130.
CHAPTER THREE
WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO LISTEN TO GOD WHEN YOU ARE INVOLVED IN THE *MISSIO DEI*

It was stated in the last chapter that “the *missio Dei* is the understanding of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection that is centred in God, rather than on meeting personal needs”.¹ So churches need to answer two questions. The first is; “What is God doing in our world?” This calls for discernment to recognize what God is doing in our neighbourhoods, schools, businesses and so forth. The second question is; “What does God want us to do in our world?” The way to answer these two questions is to listen to God, for the *missio Dei* is God’s mission.

This poses a challenge to the church, especially a missional church involved in the *missio Dei*. For there will be times the way forward is rarely clear-cut. However, the challenge is to talk, debate, listen and then act. Integral to this process is the need to listen to God through prayer and the Scriptures: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and the quarry from which you were dug”.² The motivation and energy for the church to move forward comes from a renewed sense of God’s grace and his call”.³

It is important that we go back to our roots, and to listen afresh to God, if we want to become a missional-church. Because of this there are four important areas of listening that we must pay attention to when we are involved in the *missio Dei*. They are listening to God for guidance in the *missio Dei*, listening for what God is doing in our neighbourhoods, listening to God in order to sustain us in the *missio Dei*, and listening to God as a part of joining with those in our neighbourhoods who are interested in spirituality. These are all expanded in this chapter.

LISTENING TO GOD FOR GUIDANCE IN THE *MISSIO DEI*

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² Isaiah 51:1
Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk emphasize in their book, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, the importance of listening to the biblical text as part of the development of a mission strategy. They say:

> The narrative imagination of Scripture challenges our assumptions about what God is up to in the world and reminds us that leaders can do great things when they align their expectations with God’s. An important role of a missional leader is cultivating an environment within which God’s people discern God’s directions and activities in them and for the communities in which they find themselves. The biblical narratives are full of stories about places and people without hope who become centres of the Spirit’s creative, world-changing activity. This can still be the case.

They go on to say that “missional congregations are formed out of the interaction between the Christian narrative in which they live and that has been passed down to them, and their listening interaction with the narratives of the people in their community”.

This interaction with the Christian narrative involves not only an interaction with the New Testament text, but the whole of the biblical text. An important part of this interaction is listening to what God of the *missio Dei*, is saying in the text. For if God is inviting us to participate in God’s mission in the world, then it is important to listen to what God is telling us about mission and to seek God’s guidance. The problem is that most of the members of our congregations do not know how to listen to God.

The other way that the churches show a lack of a knowledge of listening to God is shown in the way its people make decisions. Their main way of decision-making is through voting. In fact “churches are mired in organisational structures that deaden vision as people gather endlessly in committee meetings”.

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5 Ibid., 16.
6 Ibid., 73.
8 John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2001), 1.
9 Ibid., 2.
They rarely listen to God or to each other. Individuals may be doing all kinds of work for God, but they rarely stop long enough to hear what God might have in mind.\(^\text{10}\)

The problem is that congregations who are seeking to be missional may use attractional programmes like Alpha. They may also use some other programme that other seemingly ‘successful’ churches like Saddleback Willow Creek promote or a programme like Back to Church Sunday.\(^\text{11}\) Churches who use these attractional programmes “assume that the missional church is following the pattern about an ideal church and providing a model to emulate”.\(^\text{12}\) Instead it is important that churches are aware of God’s call for our faith community “at this time and in this place”.\(^\text{13}\) This is because ‘even apparently worthy’ activities can distract us from what God wants us to do, if we are not taking the time to stop and give space for the Spirit to reveal God’s way forward, individually and corporately.\(^\text{14}\)

The way to discover what God is doing is by using tools of discernment like stopping, listening to God and listening to each other. It also involves watching and listening for signs of need in our neighbourhood and noticing any energy for outreach and opportunities for mission. It involves looking for signs of God’s activity in the community. The contemplative stance underpins all of this.\(^\text{15}\)

Much has been written about ‘fresh expressions’ of the church and the need for outreach into our communities. But before we make choices about how we reach out to offer alternatives, I believe we must offer to God a listening space in our hearts – individually and corporately – so that we and those we companion will be better able to receive the direction and enthusiasm of the Spirit, and be guided in the practical outworking of God’s fresh expression of church, God’s invitation to growth and service.\(^\text{16}\)

There is more about these ‘tools of discernment’ in the next chapter. But, this will involve a cultural change for many in our congregations and especially the congregations that I am at present leading. It will involve cultivating fresh ways of

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\(^\text{10}\) John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations*, 1.

\(^\text{11}\) See www.auckanglican.org.nz/?sid=689


\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 204.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.
engaging Scripture. For a “missional culture is cultivated within a congregation as it
learns to indwell and engage Scripture in new ways”. 17 Traditionally congregations
have viewed Scripture as a tool to be used for a variety of reasons and often this is to
meet their own needs. “Scripture has become like a bank safety deposit holding a
depository of information and knowledge that can be collected when needed”.18

Culture change happens in a congregation when God’s people shift
attention to elements such as listening to Scripture; dialoguing with one
another; learning to listen; and becoming aware of and understanding
what is happening in their neighbourhood, community, and places to their
everyday lives.19

It is important to realise that this involves “cultivating an environment that invites
people to address their experience and to reconnect with the memory of the biblical
narrative in a way that grounds their lives in a story bigger than their private needs”.20
This will be a new experience for many in our congregations and this listening to God
takes time to develop and involves small steps.21

One of the ways to encourage congregations to listen to God is for churches to have
a flatter organisational structure. Churches, and especially clergy, must give ministry
back to all of the people.22 The focus must be on people and not on structures. The
people must be given access to the sacred in life changing ways. This will involve
clergy going from being the expert, to being a facilitator and teacher.23

And when people take more responsibility for their individual life, the
congregation carries out much more mutual ministry. The shape of our
life together in communities helps form our individual lives. And our
individual awareness of God’s presence helps shape our common life.24

It is important to realise that what works for one congregation may not work for
another. This listening will involve the vicar, or the parish leader, being willing to

17 Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, The Missional Leader, 33.
18 Ibid., 34.
19 Ibid., 64.
20 Ibid., 69.
21 Ibid., 64.
22 John Ackerman, Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations, 2. A good guide to help with the
process of giving ministry back to all the people is Robin Greenwood’s The Ministry Team Handbook (Great
Britain: SPCK, 2000)
23 John Ackerman, Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations, 3.
24 Ibid., 2.
serve the whole congregation as it is and not see it as some imagined group. John Ackerman found that when he listened and received regular feedback about where people discerned God was calling them, they all grew.\(^{25}\) It is also important to learn from parishioners how they find God in the worship services and this requires continual listening. To this he says:

‘Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now’ (Matthew 6:33\(^{\text{TM}}\)). When I am asked what makes a difference between a congregation doing business as usual and one doing spiritual formation, I hope I am remembered to say “listening.” Listening to God by the pastors, listening to God by the leaders, teaching leaders to listen to parishioners after worship, to outsiders hungering for good news, and to themselves. One way to listen to God is to pay attention to God in our experience.\(^{26}\)

This is something one cannot learn from a book but it is a skill that can be developed through practice. I will enlarge with this in the next chapter.

**LISTENING FOR WHAT GOD IS DOING IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS**

The other important aspect of listening to God, when you are involved in the *missio Dei* is “watching and listening for signs of need in our neighbourhood, noticing energy for outreach and opportunities for mission”.\(^{27}\) It also involves looking for signs of God’s activity in our neighbourhoods for God is active in them. We need to do this so we can effectively minister to people outside the church, otherwise our missional ideas can be ineffective. We need to empower people in our congregations to listen to what God is doing and saying in our neighbourhoods and blessing them to follow God’s leading without having to call it a ministry of that church.\(^{28}\)

It involves going into the neighbourhoods, entering into the people’s stories and discovering what the Spirit wants us to do amongst the people there.\(^{29}\) “We must enter the neighbourhood, sit with the people “and be shaped by their narratives in order to ask the questions of what God might be up to in that context”.\(^{30}\) Also it involves “asking questions about how our Biblical understandings are being

\(^{25}\) John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations*, 5.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{27}\) Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 204.

\(^{28}\) Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 52.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 85.
challenged by this involvement in the community”. Thus we have to read scripture with the eyes of those in our neighbourhoods. This concept is expanded in the next chapter.

LISTENING TO GOD IN ORDER TO SUSTAIN US IN THE MISSIO DEI

Listening to God is also important for sustaining those involved in incarnational mission, the missio Dei, because it can be challenging at times. Roxburgh and Boren found that those leaders, and I would add anyone involved in the missio Dei, whose lives are embedded in the practice of Christian life and a community of prayer and conversation, are best able to sustain themselves through the missional change.

It is important for the leader to mentor and coach people into some of the critical practices and habits that form the character and identity of a Christian community. These can include dwelling regularly in the Scriptures; cultivating the habit of listening with the desire to hear the other; regular practice of keeping a daily office of prayer, scripture and silence; regularly giving hospitality to the stranger. The missional life of the people develops through these habits and practices and sustains this mission. This is important so that the congregation learns and discerns the ways that God may be calling them into new and imaginative forms of missional life.

Elizabeth O’Connor’s influential book, Journey Inward Journey Outward, is about forming people around the spiritual practices of missional life. She emphasises the importance of what she calls the spiritual practices while being involved in mission. This would include listening to God. O’Connor was a long-time member of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D. C. This is a church that has been involved in mission and ministry in the community around it for many years.

For O’Connor, ‘the inward journey’ and the ‘outward journey’ are both important for the people of the church. While it is a critical mistake to assume that churches can be on an outward journey without being on an inward one; it is also equally disastrous to

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31 Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 90.
32 Ibid.
33 Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, The Missional Leader, 104.
34 Ibid., 115.
assume one can make the journey inward without taking the journey outward. They must go together.

She writes of the importance of knowing God and the primary way is through prayer grounded in Scripture. “As people on an inward-outward journey, we are committed to taking whatever time is needed to develop an interior life – a life of prayer. We will take time to be with God in the quiet places of our spirit, so that we can come to know a different quality of life”. This comes through all forms of prayer, from a simple petition and intercession to meditation and contemplation and the prayer of silence.

This commitment to an inward journey should also lead to commitment to an outward journey. This is important so that the inner and the outer become related to one another and “one has meaning for the other and helps us to make the other possible”. She states that if prayer, or the inner life, does not drive us out into some concrete involvement at a point of the world’s need, then we must question prayer.

Jesus, the Son of God, saw the importance of time with God, and listening to God, as he carried out the missio Dei. An example is Luke 5:16: “But he (Jesus) would withdraw to deserted places and pray”.

All these examples reinforce the idea that anyone involved in the missio Dei must spend time in prayer, and listening to God, if they want to stay in it for the long haul.

LISTENING TO GOD AS PART OF GOING OUT AND JOINING WITH THOSE IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SPIRITUALITY.

It was stated in the previous chapter that, even though people are leaving the church, there is still an interest in spirituality amongst those outside the church. The success and growth of an interest in spirituality, rather than religion or church attendance, has come about because the church has not taken spirituality seriously and has no effective engagement with it. Christians in the past reacted to a ‘new

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36 Elizabeth O’Connor, Journey Inward Journey Outward, 9.
37 Ibid, 17.
38 Ibid., 19.
39 Ibid., 28.
40 Ibid.
41 John Ackerman, Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations, 17.
spirituality’, or a spirituality that does not seem Christian, by tackling it with analytical, propositional arguments “based on an essentially Cartesian view of the world and human nature”. This traditional Chinese proverb shows us a better way to reach out to these people in the community who have an interest in spirituality:

Go to the people, Live among them, Learn from them, Love them. Start with what they know, Build on what they have.

To this John Drane comments:

To reach a people group requires an understanding of the culture of that group, a willingness to address cultural barriers that prevent or inhibit people ‘hearing the gospel’, and a creative approach to building relevant communication of the Christian message in such a way that it can be received as what it claims to be, namely ‘good news’.

This is also a starting point for working with any group in society, not only those with an interest in spirituality. It involves spiritual dialogue and listening and finding out where God is working in their lives and helping them articulate that.

The art of spiritual dialogue is the art of drawing out the religious life that is already there, but that has often been repressed or ignored. My work begins with the premise: ‘Called or not called, God is always present’.

This is important because there is an interest in spirituality among many people in the community and a “hunger for spiritual guidance, for spiritual resources, both within and beyond church communities”. God is already present in the lives of many people, even though they do not attend church.

There is one other important issue here when we are talking about listening to God.

The new spirituality longs for mysticism, not devotional worship; that is why traditional worship fails to recognise it as religious. We have narrowed the term ‘religious’ down to a series of conventional practices, but the new spirituality is not churchy. .. People don’t want talk about God, but a life changing encounter with the sacred.

43 John, Drane, Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?: The Rise of New Spirituality and the Mission of the Church, 99.
44 Ibid., 105.
45 Ibid.
46 David Tacey. Spirituality as a Bridge to Religion and Faith (Lecture given to the Tertiary Chaplain’s Conference at Auckland Institute of Technology, Auckland, 2005), 2.
47 Ward, Kevin. ‘Christendom, Clericalism, Church and Context’, 53.
48 David Tacey. Spirituality as a Bridge to Religion and Faith, 4.
Research has shown that many New Zealanders may not attend a church, but are interested in spirituality.⁴⁹ So if the church wants to reach these people, it must rediscover its own mystical heritage and resources.⁵⁰ It will have to dig deep into the kind of practices that are covered in the next chapter, such things as prayer, contemplation and listening to God. It will also have to offer alternative services like Taize or contemplative services “which are designed to draw out the latent spiritual feeling in people’s lives”.⁵¹ But the wonderful thing is that this will also help those in the church with their Christian life because many people who regularly attend church long for a living spirituality.⁵²

But there is one other challenge for the church when we are talking about sharing with these ‘spiritual’ people in our community. This is the fact that many Christians, or at least Anglicans, seem to be lacking in the confidence needed to speak about their own spiritual journey. This applies not only to the speaking to those in the wider culture, but also with others in their congregations.⁵³ This is because they are insecure and uncertain about their own spiritual journey.⁵⁴ Also they might feel that the context is not right to share their faith without seemingly preaching. Maybe they have been put off by evangelists in the past.⁵⁵ This is a challenge for churches and church leaders and this must be addressed if we are able to connect and share with those in the community. Again I will touch on this in the next chapter.

So in the words of John Drane, words that are important in the light of everything I have written so far:

The central question for church leaders to ask is not, ‘Will we change?’ but ‘Are we willing to take the initiative to become the agents of the sort of intentional change that will reflect and grow out of the values of the gospel?’⁵⁶

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⁵⁰ David Tacey. Spirituality as a Bridge to Religion and Faith, 4.
⁵¹ Ibid.
⁵³ Christian Schwarz, Natural Church Development (Germany: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 72.
⁵⁴ John, Drane, Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?, 121.
⁵⁶ John, Drane, Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?, 121.
So are we prepared to go, settle, and listen to those in the community outside the church without any expectation that they be integrated into the church as we know it? This is a major challenge for church leaders, along with listening to God which is covered in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
HOW DO YOU LISTEN TO GOD WHEN YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH THE MISSIO DEI?

The focus of the previous chapter was the importance of listening to God when you are involved with the missio Dei. In this chapter we will explore some of the ways to listen to God through prayer and contemplation, Scripture and listening for God in our neighbourhoods, when you are involved in the missio Dei.

PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION
Many Christians see prayer as speaking to God. There is a misunderstanding that prayer is something we do, that is, we pray to God using words. More correctly, and this is important as we consider listening to God and the missio Dei, “prayer is what God does in us. Our part is more with consent rather than initiative”.¹ That consent is most simply saying yes to God’s invitation to a loving encounter. But the important thing about prayer is that it is a conversation, it involves both talking and listening. Sometimes it can involve just silently enjoying the presence of God²

One of the truths emphasised by Thomas Merton is that humanity has a fundamental duty to orientate their entire being, and their life, to God.³ In a sense this is what we have been created for. We are not fully human until we are one spirit with God.⁴ Merton emphasises contemplative prayer, which “refers more to the orientation that one’s life of prayer must take”.⁵ This is because all of us have a need to listen to God in silence, we must develop a personal outlook or attitude of prayer and try and live consciously in an atmosphere of prayer.⁶ This for Merton involves the whole being of the one who prays.⁷ So contemplative prayer is essentially a listening and it is meant to open our hearts to God by enabling our inmost depths to experience God’s presence.⁸

² Ibid., 21.
⁴ Ibid., 26.
⁵ Ibid., 73.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid., 74.
⁸ Ibid., 75.
Merton also stresses the importance of meditation, or the prayer of the heart. For Merton this is ‘the active effort we make to keep our hearts open so that we may be enlightened by God and filled with this realisation of our true relation to God.\footnote{John J. Higgins, \textit{Thomas Merton on Prayer}, 79.}

True prayer must lead us to action, or outwards to others. “If we experience God in contemplation, we experience Him not for ourselves but also for others”.\footnote{Ibid., 93.} This is important as we consider listening to God and the \textit{missio Dei};

\begin{quote}
Action and contemplation now grow together into one life and one unity. They become two aspects of the same thing. Action is charity looking outward to other men, and contemplation is charity looking inward to the divine source.\footnote{Thomas Merton, \textit{No Man is an Island} (New York: Image Books, 1961), 65 and quoted in Ibid., 95.}
\end{quote}

Sue Pickering defines contemplation in this way;

\begin{quote}
Water Burghardt defines ‘contemplation’ as taking a long loving look at the real’.\footnote{Walter J. Burghardt, ‘Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real’, in \textit{Church}, Winter 1989. Quotation accessed at website http://www.shalem.org/resources/quotations, 3 December 2006 and quoted in Sue Pickering, \textit{Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction} (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 2008), 27.} Contemplation from this perspective means that we take time to stop and pay attention to \textit{anything in our experience which attracts our attention}. We engage in a form of concentrated looking which allows us time to see below the surface to a deeper level of meaning, or beyond the literal to the symbolic.\footnote{Sue Pickering, \textit{Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction}, 27.}
\end{quote}

There are several ways that this \textit{concentrated looking} can take place. The first is to take a ‘loving look’\footnote{Ibid.} at everything around us. Alongside this we must also pay attention to our inner reaction to something that is happening to us as we take this ‘loving look’. I believe this is important for \textit{missio Dei} because this ‘concentrated looking’ should lead us to mission and guide us in it.

There is another way of using the word ‘contemplation. “In the sixth century, Gregory of Nyssa described contemplation as ‘the knowledge of God impregnated with love .... the \textit{fruit} of reflection on the word of God in scripture and the same time a \textit{gift} of God .... \textit{resting} in God ....”.\footnote{Thomas Keating, \textit{Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life} (London: Continuum), 20, and quoted in Sue Pickering, \textit{Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction}, 27 (italics are hers).} This is traditionally called the \textit{lectio divina} or sacred
reading. Its title comes from the Latin words “meaning reading and divine/holy”. In the lectio divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Lectio divina can be practised both by individuals and in groups. We will look at the practice of lectio divina with groups in the next chapter.

Most descriptions of lectio divina say that it is made up of four elements “that weave together like a braided river and connect us with God”. These four elements are:

- **Lectio** Slow, reflective reading aloud of a few verses of scripture or other spiritual literature.
- **Meditatio** A thoughtful consideration of how these words relate to our current circumstances.
- **Oratio** Discoveries, emotional responses, movements of the heart and will, questions and doubts are shared with God.
- **Contemplatio** The person at prayer stills his or her activity and ‘contemplates’.

Guido Oliana, in his book Lectio Dei: Spirituality for the Mission adds one more element which is important as we consider listening to God and the missio Dei. It is:

- **Missio** “Reaching out in love, witness, apostolate, ministry. It means to affect others with God’s love as we have been affected ourselves by it”.

This is because prayer needs to agenda action.

In terms of listening to God and the missio Dei, the meditatio step is one of great importance. That is, in contemplative prayer we need to keep our focus on our neighbourhoods as well as Scripture. For contemplation does not take us away from the struggles of ‘the real world’. Catherine of Siena reminded the church of the true relationship between action and contemplation when she wrote: “The secret of

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16 Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction*, 27
17 Mars Hill Bible Church, *Lectio Divina* (marshill.org/teaching/sp)
19 Ibid., 28.
21 Ibid., 21.
22 Ibid., 29.
Christian contemplation is that it faces us with Jesus Christ toward our suffering world in loving service and just action.”

If we engage in the missio Dei without contemplation, or listening to God, we run the risk of;

- expending our resources of time, money and people-power on things that may not really further the kingdom;
- failing to consider the real motives that lie behind our actions;
- not noticing Spirit-inspired ways of handling a project or solving a problem;
- falling into the trap of thinking that everything depends on us, and not on God.

LISTENING TO GOD IN SCRIPTURE

Most Christians read Scripture, but this may not be the same as listening to God. “To do one is not necessarily to do the other. But they are often assumed to be the same thing”. We must be alert to this if we are going to allow God to speak to us through the Scriptures. So the important thing is the contemplation on Scripture or, as Peterson calls it, contemplative exegesis. This is not the same as technical exegesis that most pastors and priests are trained in. This technical exegesis can cause pastors and priests to treat the Bible as a textbook written to provide us with information about God or doctrine, or religious history, or material for sermons. Instead we must “read Scripture in order to listen again to the word of God spoken, and when we do, we hear him speak. Somehow or other these words live”.

Peterson uses the idea of “eat this book” which comes from Revelation 10:9:

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, ‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth’.

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26 Ibid., 113.
Peterson says that this kind of reading is named by our ancestors as *lectio divina* and it is the kind of reading that enters our souls, as food enters our stomachs and spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and reason.\(^\text{27}\) It is a “permeation of our lives by the revelation of God”.\(^\text{28}\)

*Lectio* is meeting with a friend, a very special Friend who is God; listening to him, really listening and responding, in intimate prayer and in the way we take that Word with us and let it shape our lives.\(^\text{29}\)

*Lectio divina* supplements the usual way of studying the Bible. There is a danger in this in that we can make the Bible a source of information and nothing more. It occurs when we consciously or unconsciously distance ourselves from the text, making it a source of information and nothing more. It occurs when, in our reading, “we attempt to control the text’s access to us, rather than allowing the lively, active, inspired text of Scripture to address us directly, an address to which we must respond”.\(^\text{30}\) This can also occur in Bible studies which often are in a question and answer format. Also this can also occur when we use Bible study notes and there is a tendency to go straight from the text to the study notes, rather than let the text speak to us. There is sometimes a problem with Bible readings in our church services. The lessons are read without a time of silence at the end for the people to “hear what the Spirit is saying to the church”.

Christopher A. Hall, gives a cluster or participles that capture well the heart of *lectio divina*: ‘pondering, ruminating, chewing, embracing, addressing, imitating, responding, following, repenting, eating, digesting, revering, meditating, praying, hearing, reflecting, considering, listening remembering’.\(^\text{31}\)

*Lectio divina* concerns much more than the act of reading itself. Yes, in *lectio divina* we are reading the text, but we are reading in a manner and with purpose that far surpasses the vocalisation of written or printed words and their comprehension by the mind. We are reading it to be changed, to be transformed, to recreated, to be reshaped ever more into the image of

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28 Ibid., 81.
31 Ibid., 144.
the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ our Lord, sent by the Father to redeem and recreate.\(^{32}\)

The *lectio divina* allows the text to speak to us in our own situation, our *missio Dei*. For, “*lectio divina* leads to the ‘fusion’ of my story and Christ’s story”.\(^{33}\)

Before we enter into *lectio divina* we must choose a section of scripture we would like to read and pray with. We could also use some other spiritual literature. It is important that we do not try to set a goal for how much content we will cover, “the goal is to listen for God and to experience his presence”.\(^{34}\) We could also choose our neighbourhood and the people in it, or a challenge in our community that we feel that, as a church, we should get involved in for our *lectio*.

We must also prepare ourselves by being quiet so that we can allow God to speak to us. As the Psalmist said “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10). So we need to find a quiet room, sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair. It is important that we take up whatever posture that will help us prepare to receive and experience God’s presence.\(^{35}\) We also need to be ready to meet God on God’s terms and not ours.\(^{36}\)

When you sense that your heart is prepared, you can then take the first step of *Lectio divina*. It is *lectio* and “it is the moment we collect the data for our reflection”.\(^{37}\) It involves slowly reading the text, often out loud. “Move slowly through sentences and phrases. As you read, pay attention to what word, phrase, or idea catches your attention”.\(^{38}\) It is important that we do not hurry through *lectio* even though we are experiencing a certain attitude of detachment. It is important to remember that we need time to warm up. “The seed needs time to be fertilised and germinate”.\(^{39}\) Also we need to wait for the rain of the Holy Spirit.

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\(^{32}\) Christopher A. Hall, ‘*Reading Christ Into the Heart: The Theological Foundations of Lectio Divina*’, 144.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 147.

\(^{34}\) http://missionalfaith.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/lectio-divina-mars-hill.pdf. This is the clearest explanation of the *lectio divina* I have read.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.


\(^{38}\) http://missionalfaith.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/lectio-divina-mars-hill.pdf

Undergirding our reading of the text is a fundamental theological proposition that is deeply Trinitarian: *the Eternal Word, sent by the Father, has become incarnate in Jesus Christ and continues to speak to us through the Holy Spirit.*

The next step is *meditato.* This is where we begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that has captured your attention in the *lectio.* “Repeat it again and again. Consider: What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase, or idea? What are you reminded of in your life? What does it make you hope for?”

As we try to concentrate we must not be disappointed if random thoughts enter our head. If they do we must offer them to God. It is important to remember there is something vital as we carry out *meditato.* For;

*Meditato* moves from looking at the text to entering into the world of the text. As we take the text into ourselves, we find that the text is taking us into itself. For the world of the text is far larger and more real than our minds and experience.

Oliana adds an important sub-step in *meditato* that is important as we consider listening to God and the *missio Dei.* It is *collatio* where we share and communicate the Word read with other members in our praying community which enriches our *meditato.*

*Collatio* is when we share what we are meditating on in dialogue with others and allows us to compare views. It also helps us exchange our thoughts and experiences of faith with others.

It is a great help to build our communities on and in the Word. An apostolic community needs to promote *collatio* in order to reach a transforming experience of *oratio, contemplatio* and *missio.*

Oliana adds an addition which is important for those involved in missio Dei;

How can we share the Word of God *ad extra* in mission, if we do not share it first *ad intra* in *collatio*? In order to evangelise with the Word we need to be continually evangelised by the Word.

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40 Christopher A. Hall, ‘Reading Christ Into the Heart, 146.
41 http://missionalfaith.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/lectio-divina-mars-hill.pdf
42 Christopher A. Hall, ‘Reading Christ Into the Heart, 158 quoting Eugene H. Peterson, Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006) 99.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
This idea of sharing what we have learnt with others in *lectio* is expanded in the next chapter.

The next step in the lectio divina is *oratio* where we “express our affective relationship with God intimated by *lectio* and *meditatio*”.\(^{46}\) In this step we tell God what word, phrase, or idea has captured our attention and what came to mind as we meditated upon it. Ask yourself; “How is God using this word, phrase, or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you’ve listened and meditated.”\(^{47}\) This may involve our responding in adoration, or thanksgiving, or intercession, or repentance according to what we have received in *meditatio*.\(^ {48}\)

Then we move to *contemplatio* which is the consummation of *oratio* where one enjoys the presence of God.\(^ {49}\) Here we focus our attention on the fact that God’s presence is with us. “If as you try to focus on God’s presence you sense a need to read the text again, to continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God”.\(^{50}\)

Finally there is *missio*. This is an addition of Oliana and it is important if we are involved in the *missio Dei*. *Missio* means reaching out in love witness and ministry. It is the conclusion of the *lectio divina* and it is the missional action that comes out of it. *Missio* is the urge to witness and announce the liberating power experienced in the *lectio divina*.\(^ {51}\)

Finally Peterson summarises lectio divina in this way:

> All those who regularly meet the Lord in *lectio* will go beyond all the thoughts and ideas and concepts, no matter how fascinating they are, and enter into a contemplative union with God in Christ, which is a heart of

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\(^{47}\) http://missionalfaith.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/lectio-divina-mars-hill.pdf


\(^{49}\) ibid, 20.

\(^{50}\) http://missionalfaith.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/lectio-divina-mars-hill.pdf

self-giving love, ever ready to give itself totally for the salvation and well-being of the human family.  

LISTENING TO GOD IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Many churches today are asking; “How do we get more members?”

This is not the primary question we should be answering. Instead we should be wondering, what is God up to in our neighbourhood? How do we join up with it? What is our unique calling, both personally and communally?  

The problem is that the church has promoted and communicated the idea that God primarily shows up on Sunday mornings and at church meetings. God never shows up on the jobsite, or at the office, or in people’s homes. “Establishment’s legacy of a church-centric imagination hinders us from seeing God at work in the neighbourhood, which is unfortunate, because that’s where our future lies”.  

Jesus had an itinerant ministry and he went to where the people were. He didn’t stay in one place, or spend all his time in the synagogue or the temple. He didn’t expect people to come to him. Jesus travelled around and listened and talked to many different people, especially those not of the Jewish faith. He also had to rely on the hospitality of others. We read in Luke 9:1-8 that he sent the disciples out to do the same and likewise we read in Luke 10:1-12 he sent others out to do the same as well. For Jesus tells them not to move from house to house. They are to eat what is set before them. As followers of Jesus, we must also learn to be guests and rely upon the hospitality of the neighbourhood.  

On the missional church journey we want to pitch our tent beside the people in our neighbourhoods and communities as Jesus did (see John 1:1-14), not as a program but as a way of being church. We want to enter these places in order to discern how the Spirit will have us shape our lives as God’s people”. To do this we must develop a missional strategy by dialoguing, engaging and contemplating with the contexts and neighbourhoods in which we live. This involves the table fellowship as

52 Guido Oliana, Lectio Divina: Spirituality for the Mission, 90.
54 Ibid., 76.
55 Ibid., 77.
56 Ibid., 78.
described in Luke 10:1-12. “The task of the local church in our present situation is to re-enter our neighbourhoods, to dwell with and to listen to the narratives and stories of the people. We are to do this not as a strategy for getting people to church but because that is how God comes to us in Jesus, loving us without putting strings on our relationship.”

Roxburgh and Boren point out two steps that can help a local church learn to listen, and see, where God is at work in their neighbourhoods.

1. Entering and Listening to One’s Context.59 “Missional life emerges from the kind of listening that connects us with what God might be up to in a particular context”.60 This then allows the church to develop a local strategy. This listening has two parts:
   a. The church community must first get involved with the people in their neighbourhoods and become attentive to what is happening in them. I enlarge on this in the next chapter. “It is essential to be in a setting long enough to be known and to absorb its ethos in order to become part of the life of the context, not just an observer”.61
   b. “A second element of listening has to do with attending to the values and meanings that underlie the surface activities”.62 This takes time and a passion for the people with whom you are ‘dwelling’ with. From all this listening you can get some clues of what the Spirit is doing in that community.

2. Re-engaging the Biblical Narratives63

This involves contemplating on both Scripture and the neighbourhood together. “We must learn to read Scripture with the eyes of the neighbourhood. We need to listen to how they interpret for their situation as it is probably/possibly different to how we might interpret it. All this involves perseverance and commitment and being in this

58 Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One, 84.
59 Ibid., 87.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 88.
62 Ibid., 89.
63 Ibid., 90.
neighbourhood for a number of years.\textsuperscript{64} This shapes our imagination about the mission of God and allows us to begin to see Scripture in a new way.\textsuperscript{65}

There are two other ways of listening to what God is up in our neighbourhoods, especially when many neighbourhoods are beyond the influence of the institutional Christian Church.\textsuperscript{66} These are based on the idea that was raised in the previous chapter that there is an interest in spirituality among many people in the community. There is also a “hunger for spiritual guidance, for spiritual resources, both within and beyond church communities”.\textsuperscript{67} This is because God is already present in the lives of many people, even though they do not attend church, and may not even be fully aware of this.

The first way comes out of the work of Bruce Maden.\textsuperscript{68} Bruce is the chief executive officer of Te Aroha Noa. “This God-inspired community has, for the past 18 years, been building bridges of hope in the multi-cultural state housing area it serves in Palmerston North”.\textsuperscript{69} Maden describes the essence of Te Aroha Noa’s work by quoting its website:\textsuperscript{70}

> Throughout every aspect of Te Aroha Noa we too are training our antennae to discover beneath the surface of all those we encounter the suppressed signals of spirituality in the depths, the fire, the passion and God.\textsuperscript{71}

This is driven by Maden’s belief that the Spirit of Christ is already in the neighbourhood. Even though he is writing the paper as part of his spiritual director training, the principles he has set forward in his work can be applied to anyone with a contemplative stance.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{64} J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 90.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Kevin Ward, ‘Christendom, Clericalism, Church and Context’, 53.
\textsuperscript{69} Sue Pickering, \textit{Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction}, 205. Sue also notes that the locality of the state-housing area is often described as an area of high social and economic deprivation.
\textsuperscript{70} www.tearohanoa.org.nz
\textsuperscript{71} Bruce Maden, \textit{God is in the Neighbourhood}, 8.
\textsuperscript{72} Email received from Maden 30 May, 2013.
“The ‘culture of care’ or ‘heart’ of Te Aroha Noa is primarily through the ‘telling of stories’”.73 When listening to these stories, the people of Te Aroha Noa are listening for God working in the lives of those telling their stories, they are “alert for the Christ within, for signs of grace”.74 It is important that those telling their stories are encouraged to tell them in their own language, using their own way of naming the sacred. They also must be encouraged to explore their experiences in a deeper way by the use of open-ended questions.75 The result of doing this is shown by Maden:

When a permission giving environment is created and constraints to expression removed, people share experiences of prayer being answered, the strange falling into place of events, the sacred in nature, an awareness of the presence of God and in one story a sense of the presence of evil.76

Maden gives some excellent principles for listening to the people living in our neighbourhoods so we can find out, or should I say let them find out, where God is working in their lives. But I believe there is one other important key in our being able to do this. “Maden is highly intentional about his own spiritual growth, and works out of a deep personal awareness of the love and grace of God”.77

The second way to listen to what God is up to in the community, especially among those who have an interest or awareness in spirituality, comes from the work of John Drane.78 It differs from Maden in that Maden talks mainly about drawing an awareness out of those who are unaware that they have a spirituality. Drane is talking about those interested in what he calls a ‘new spirituality’. I am extrapolating his ideas to anyone who is interested in a non-Christian spirituality.

Drane uses the concept of journeying with another person and this must be done with a personal engagement and empathy with the person, rather than talking about belief systems in abstractions.79 This could be a challenge for many Christians from a Western culture as the last five hundred years has caused the church to value the

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74 Ibid., 207.
75 Bruce Maden, *God is in the Neighbourhood*, 8.
76 Ibid., 9.
79 Ibid., 106.
rational over the experiential.\textsuperscript{80} Like Maden, Drane stresses the importance of story because “a story does not evoke confrontation in the same way as propositions”.\textsuperscript{81}

To connect effectively with spiritual searchers, Christians need to rediscover the power of story – their own stories, other people’s stories, and God’s story – and understand that it is a three-way relational matrix that the gospel is most likely to be most truly heard, and acted upon.\textsuperscript{82}

We must remember that all Christians follow in the footsteps of someone who knew the power of story.

Acts 17:16-34 records Apostle Paul’s encounter with the academics and philosophers at the Areopagus, which meet on Mars Hill in Athens. The Areopagus was the academic meeting in Athens.\textsuperscript{83} Paul speaks to those who had gathered there in a language they would understand and using examples about which they were familiar.\textsuperscript{84} Paul was able to do this because he spent time beforehand wandering around the nearby market place (Agora), listening, observing and meeting with the people there. Like today, Athens was a “quintessential supermarket of faiths”.\textsuperscript{85}

Drane uses Paul’s encounter with the Areopagus to discern a way to listen to what God is up to in our neighbourhoods, especially among those who have an interest or awareness in spirituality, “that will both be relevant to today’s culture, while also being rooted in the tradition”.\textsuperscript{86}

Drane points out three things in St. Paul’s evangelistic practices that are relevant if we want to journey with any spiritual searchers in our communities.

The first is; “There is a need to listen before we speak”.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{80} John, Drane, Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?: The Rise of New spirituality and the Mission of the Church, 106.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{84} An example is “People of Athens, I see that you are very religious. As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, ‘To an Unknown God.’ You worship this God, but you don’t really know him. So I want to tell you about him” (Acts 22-23).
\textsuperscript{85} John, Drane, Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?: The Rise of New spirituality and the Mission of the Church, 111.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 108
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 112.
Paul is an example of this. Before he spoke to the Athenians on Mars Hill he spent time wandering around the Agora, listening, observing and meeting with people. He also did some research on Athenian history and spirituality so he could relate his message to the Athenians in ways that were relevant to them.

If we are going to be involved in the *missio Dei* to spiritual seekers we must ‘listen before we speak’. These days it may involve searching the worldwide web and social networking sites to get information. We must also listen to the spiritual seekers to find out where God is in their lives before we can journey with them.

An effective communication with any people group must begin with authentic understanding. This involves taking seriously what we hear and treating all opinions and attitudes with the respect they deserve. This is because those holding them are women and men made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

The second is; “There is a call to journey with people”.\(^{88}\)

In Athens Paul started with the experienced spiritual journey of his hearers and affirmed what he found in Athens. He did not begin by dismissing anything he found out about the Athenians, or point out where they had gone wrong. He was respectful of their ideas and spiritualties. We must do the same with spiritual seekers. We must journey with them and keep listening for where God is active in their lives.

Luke, according to Drane, suggests that Paul never used his Bible at all. He did however share the story of Jesus and in such a way that the Athenians could understand. He quoted from traditional Greek literature as well.

The third is: “We need to be realistic about mission”.\(^{89}\)

Christian mission is tough and it takes time and patience. We must not expect instant results, for when we journey with spiritual seekers and listen to where God is in their lives.

All that Drane has said can be summed up in this traditional Chinese proverb:

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\(^{88}\) John, Drane, *Do Christians know how to be Spiritual?*, 115.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 119.
Go to the people, Live among them, Learn from them, Love them. Start with what they know, build on what they have.\textsuperscript{90}

Finally, even though I have pointed out three ways of listening to God, they must not be seen in isolation. We must always be involved in what John Scott calls ‘double listening’. This is where we develop the faculty of listening to two voices at the same time, that is the voice of God and the voices of those around us. “These voices will often contradict one another, but our purpose in listening to them both is to discover how they relate to each other.”\textsuperscript{91}

In the next chapter we will explore ways to enable those in our congregations to be involved in this double listening as part of the \textit{missio Dei}.

\textsuperscript{90} John, Drane, \textit{Do Christians know how to be Spiritual?}, 105.

CHAPTER FIVE
HOW TO GET THE PEOPLE IN OUR CONGREGATIONS INVOLVED
IN LISTENING TO GOD AND THE MISSIO DEI

The ministry of lay persons, as described in *The New Zealand Prayer Book: Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, is;

> From baptism, their vocation is to witness to Christ in the world using the gifts the Spirit gives them. Within the Church they share in the leadership of worship and in government.\(^2\)

The problem is that most churches have had a leadership model that came out of Christendom. Because of this they have not supported lay people in carrying out their “ministry to proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and to love and serve the people with whom they live and work”.\(^3\) “The focus has instead been church-centric – on what lay people can do to sustain the church’s institutional ministry.”\(^4\)

As Maylanne Maybee correctly points out, we have not learnt how to direct our resources and attention to the church’s mission and ministry outside the church. To support this ministry the church must equip the laity to discover their vocation in the world and to nurture a spirituality that works in the world.\(^5\) A change in mission can only come about when we break down the clericalism of the church and develop a heightened view of the baptismal authority of all God’s people. We must break down the rigid line that is drawn between the ordained and laity and speak instead of the ministry of all baptised, and the authority of the baptised.

This will involve a change of thinking by the laity because they have also been brought up in this hierarchical model with clergy who have been the ‘experts’. I touch on this again later in this chapter. This would also mean a shift for the many church leaders, especially clergy. They would have to promote a flatter leadership structure in their churches and move away from their role as the expert and interpreting on

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\(^1\) Provincial Commission on Prayer Book Revision for General Synod, *A New Zealand prayer book: Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (New Zealand: Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1987).

\(^2\) Ibid., 932.

\(^3\) Ibid., 890.


behalf of lay people. They will have to “use their expertise in the Christian tradition to create the spaces and practices where meaningful theological interpretation and spiritual growth can take place among the membership”.6 For the ‘missional church is a habit of mind and heart, a posture of openness and discernment, and a faithful attentiveness to the Spirit’s presence and to the world that God loves’.7 After all it is the missio Dei, so we need to open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is about seeing the church and the world in the light of the Triune God’s presence and activity.8

The practices mentioned in chapter four, and later in this chapter, are important in being attentive to the Spirit’s presence and to the world that God loves’.9 These practices are not simply to allow those in the missional church to grow spiritually, important as they are. They are vital for our participation in God’s mission, the missio Dei,10 as Van Gelder and Zscheile state:

For instance, the Christian practice of prayer - a central one, as most would agree - can take on a powerful missionary dimension when done with attentiveness to the world.11

This is a shift in the thinking of those in traditional Anglican Churches that would usually associate engagement with Scripture as something for individual growth alone. The problem is that late-modern culture has emphasised the individual’s discipleship and has de-emphasised the communal dimension of discipleship.12 This shift is also a challenge for any leader in a traditional church. “At times in the church’s life, spiritual formation has been construed distinct from relationships of service and witness with our neighbours. Yet, biblically speaking, there is no distinction”.13 Thus the important role of the leader of a missional church is to cultivate a missional imagination. God turns up in the most Godforsaken places, so we need leaders with the capacity and skills to cultivate an environment that

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6 Dwight J. Zscheile, People of the way: Renewing Episcopal identity, 123.
8 Ibid., 148.
9 Ibid., 149.
10 Ibid., 150.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 148.
releases the missional imagination of the people of God.⁴⁴ “Imagination must be embraced as a priceless resource for mission, if it is not, the Christian cause …. will be lost”.⁴⁵

It is important to remember that missional imagination is not the property of autonomous individuals, but it is ‘one of the ways the Holy Spirit ‘moves within and among us to lead us into God’s missional activity in the world’.⁴⁶ When we are considering the development of a missional imagination the term cultivation is of paramount importance. For the role of the missional leader is to cultivate and steward the faithful participation of the whole of the community of God’s people and its gifts in the *missio Dei*.⁴⁷ “It reminds us that we can plant, water and seek to provide good light and air, but it is God who gives the growth”.⁴⁸ This is not about new techniques or programs for the church.

At its core missional church is how we cultivate a congregational environment where God is the centre of conversation and God shapes the focus and work of the people. We believe this is a shift in imagination for most congregations, it is a change in the culture of congregational life. Missional leadership is about shaping cultural imagination within a congregation wherein people discern what God might be among them and in their community.⁴⁹

It is the cultivation of an imagination that allows those in our congregations to think outside the square.⁵⁰ There is risk involved in doing this because ‘the *missio Dei* cannot be tightly regulated and managed by leaders, they must be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.⁵¹ It is also important to allow the people in our congregations to take risks and even to expect failure.⁵²

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⁴⁶ Craig Van Gelder, and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 148
⁴⁷ Ibid., 155.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 152.
⁵² Richard R Osmer, “Formation in the Missional Church: Building Deep Connections Between Ministries of
Again it is important to realise that no one size fits all and the church organisation must emerge organically from the work of the Holy Spirit in the local context. The missio Dei will be unique for each church and the community that it is in. So “this transformation begins with attending to the missional Triune God’s movement in our midst and in the world”. This means that the church must organise itself to move outwards, while providing for the deepening of the Christian community.

There are three elements of leadership as cultivation. The first is cultivating an awareness and understanding of what God is doing among the people of the congregation. Also “an awareness of how a congregation can imagine itself as being the centre of God’s activities. This is ‘an amazing opportunity for listening to what is happening among God’s people and creating context for dialogue, rather than telling people what and where they should be spending their time and energy. This all leads to an awareness of what God is already up to in the congregation’s context.

The second element of leadership as cultivation is cultivating co-learning networks. These are so that congregations have space to test out actions with one another so they discover together new habits for missional life. “A network involves developing loosely connected teams that learn together how to experiment with new ways of engaging Scripture as well as having conversations with one another.”

The third element is cultivating fresh ways of engaging Scripture. For too long, congregations have been schooled in viewing Scripture as a tool for a variety of reasons, like finding an answer to a personal problem or meeting an immediate

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23 Craig Van Gelder, and Dwight J. Zscheile, The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation, 158.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 32.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 33.
need. The fourth element involves cultivating new practices, habits and norms. This involves introducing what Richard Foster calls the celebrations of the disciplines. Examples are the listening to God in scripture using *lectio divina*, as covered in chapter 4, along with other disciplines such as fasting, retreats and hospitality to strangers.

But in all this it is important to remember that missional transformation is costly and hard work and cultivation of a missional imagination takes time. So it is important that the leader, or cultivator, spends time listening to God themselves so they can stay motivated to keep going in the task of cultivating the missional imagination.

So now we will look at what methods could be used in our congregations to further this vision of missional engagement.

**POSSIBLE WAYS TO ENCOURAGE CONGREGATIONS TO LISTEN TO GOD IN PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE**

Dwight Zscheile, in his book *People of the way: Renewing Episcopal identity*, makes the comment that the Bible tends to be underutilised in Episcopal Churches. This is the same in many Anglican Churches in New Zealand, especially when it comes to using it to listen to God. Church leaders must find ways of helping their members learn about the Bible without the members being shamed. Additionally, they must also look for ways for Scripture to come alive in fresh ways in congregations and also look for ways to cultivate a God-shaped imaginations that is imagining ways that God is actively and at work in the world.

There are several ways that congregations have discovered the power of imaginative ways of reflecting upon Scripture in their neighbourhoods and I am going to highlight three of them. The first is *lectio divina*, the second is ‘dwelling on the Word’ and the third is Allen Hilton’s steps for missional formation. These ways of reflecting on

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32 Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 34.
34 Ibid., 19.
37 Ibid., 90.
38 Ibid., 91.
Scripture open up the Bible to an imaginative engagement with it and foster a different kind of conversation in the church’s life which can lead to new ways of reflecting on Scripture. They also need affirmation in the fact that God is speaking to them, and their situation in the Scriptural passage. Encouragement is the key.

The first method that could be used to teach and encourage the people in our congregations to reflect on Scripture is dwelling in the Word. It is a lectio divina type process of listening to God in the Scriptures that has been described as being “incredibly transformative”. There are seven steps in this method.

1. Open with prayer “inviting the Spirit to guide your attending to the Word of God”.

2. Choose a brief passage to be explored. This is usually less than a dozen verses. This could be passage of your choice, or a text from a lectionary. Ellison suggests starting with Luke 10:1-12. “It is a text on mission, of being sent out with the most basic of instructions, dependent upon our receivers’ hospitality.”

3. The passage of scripture is then read aloud. While they are listening the participants are invited to consider two questions: “Where was your imagination caught while the passage was read?” or “What questions would you ask a Biblical scholar about the text?”

4. There is a period of silence so the words can have their impact and the participants can reflect on the two questions given in step 3.

5. The participants are then asked to choose a person in the group that they know least well, or what Ellison calls a “reasonably friendly-looking stranger”. The pair

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41 Dwight J. Zscheile, People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity, 91.
42 Pat Taylor Ellison, “Here Are The Steps for Dwelling in the Word” (www.churchinnovations.org/category/dwelling-in-the-word/).
43 Dwight J. Zscheile, People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity, 91.
44 Pat Taylor Ellison, “Here Are The steps for Dwelling in The Word”.
45 Dwight J. Zscheile, People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity, 91.
46 Pat Taylor Ellison, “Here Are The steps for Dwelling in The Word”.
listen to each other to find out what each of them heard in the passage. Note-taking is acceptable.47

6. After about six to ten minutes the groups are dawn back together and asked to report on what they learnt from their partners.

7. Then the group as a whole is asked to wrestle with the passage together. They are asked; ‘What might God be up to in the passage?’ It is important to “remain in the same passage over an extended period of time (weeks or months)”. What is so amazing is that each time you reflect on the same passage, God speaks to you in a new way. Also “Bible stories take on a life of their own, where the scriptural narrative connects with our daily life and practice”.50

So ‘dwelling in the Word does three things:

1. It avoids the top down, expert-driven, approach to scripture that can exist in many congregations. Instead, it is assumed that in the process of the dwelling in the Word that God is speaking through the Word to each and everyone.51

2. It focuses on the imagination “recognising the power of the Word to inform, enliven, and renew our vision for God’s activity in the biblical narrative and in our world”.52

3. It also helps the congregation to listen to one another, while listening to the Word. This is foundational in learning to listen to those in our neighbourhoods.

The second method that could be used to encourage the people in our congregations to reflect on Scripture is lectio divina. The steps for lectio divina were covered in chapter four, but this was mostly for the individual. The following way can be used with groups. It involves three readings and it works best with groups of

47 Pat Taylor Ellison, “Here Are The steps for Dwelling in The Word”.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Dwight J. Zscheile, People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity, 92.
52 Ibid.
between four to eight people. There are various passages you could use as a starting point with this method. You could use Luke 10:1-12, or passages that “trace out the central theme of God’s mission through Scripture”.

In the first reading a group leader is chosen to coordinate the process and to facilitate the sharing. The person reads the same text out loud two or three times. After each reading there is a time of silence so that the members can hear a word or passage that is insightful to them. After the silence, each person shares with the others the word or phrase that has been insightful to them.

The second reading is given by a member of the opposite sex from the first reader. This time, listeners are to focus their attention on how the word, phrase or idea speaks to their life that day. What does it mean for me today? How is Christ, the Word, speaking to you about your life through this word, phrase or idea?

Then, after a brief silence, each member of the group shares what he or she has "heard" from the passage.

The third and final reading is for the listeners to focus on what God is calling them to do or become. Experiencing God’s presence changes us and calls us to do something. During this final reading, members are asked; “What is God calling them to do, or to be, as a result of this experience?” This step is very important in the context of listening to God and the *missio Dei*. After the silence, each person shares for the last time what they are being called to do and be. The exercise concludes with each person praying for the person on the right of him or her.

My final possible method that could be used by those in our congregations to reflect on Scripture is by using Allen Hilton’s steps for missional formation. What is unique


about this method is that it is a method of missional formation where listening to God in Scripture is combined with praxis.

Step One: “Trust God”.  

God is God and we are not. God is the former and transformer. If our people are to learn to love strangers and aliens, learn to be a light to all nations, learn that God’s activity in the world is exciting to join, it will be God who changes them. God did it then, and God can do it now.  

So the question that comes out of this is; “How will God form us?”

Step Two: “Open Wide the Classroom Door”.  

The first part of answering the question; “How will God form us?” is Biblical formation. The first step in the journey is to help people learn from the Bible. This is because biblical literacy is very low in the wider culture and the churches.

Step Three: “Make the Story Their Story”.  

“How will we help our people learn Scripture in a way that forms them missionally? The broad arc of our learning in this hour has been that God teaches the Hebrew people, the nation of Israel, and the early church through experience. Because of this Hilton developed an ‘experiential’; approach to Bible study. This includes finding a way into the ancient community the part of the Scripture being studied is speaking to, looking around at what they are experiencing and then listening to the words of Scripture through the ears of that ancient community. “Finally, after all that the participants feel their way back to the present, asking themselves “how many of the questions asked were our questions, too”.

The folks who walk this path together don’t retain everything they learn, by any means. But they are realizing more every day that what they thought was a religious anthology can actually be vital communication that meets their lives. They experience Scripture now in a way that makes them want

57 Allen Hilton, “Living into the Big Story: The Missional Trajectory of Scripture in Congregational Life”, 94.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 95.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 97.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 99.
to listen longer. It’s not all a success story, but God is doing marvellous things”.66

Step Four: “Move beyond the Classroom”67

Hilton believes that this method of experiential, intensive and guided reading of Scripture gives good hope for missional formation. “I see our people opening themselves not only to the book, but to their role in God’s love to the world”.68

The next step is a praxis-based discipleship group based on Acts 1-8. “This will be the first formational experience I’ve attempted that has missional goals at the very centre of the curriculum”.69

Finally, it is important to remember that the process of encouraging those in our congregations to listen to God directly “moves the clergy from the role of expert and controller to that of facilitator and teacher. Then the laypeople can exercise their own authority and are encouraged to listen to each other and their experiences”.70

The importance of double listening was highlighted in the previous chapter. This is where we cultivate the faculty of listening to two voices at the same time, that is the voice of God speaking through the Scriptures, along with the voices of those around us. All the methods for listening to God speaking in the Scriptures are only one part of this double listening. The other part is listening to what God is up to in our neighbourhoods.

LISTENING TO WHAT GOD IS UP TO IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

I will predominately use Roxburgh and Boren’s Missional Change Model71 as the basis of looking at how we can listen to what God is doing in our neighbourhoods. They go over the stages a church must go through to enter the missional journey.

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 John Ackerman, Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2001), 3.
71 Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church. There are other models that could also be used, like the Anglican Diocese of Perth’s Not Rocket Science: Building Links With the Community that could be used as well, but it is more of a research based method. It could be used alongside the Roxburgh and Boren material.
The way leadership is exercised is important when a church is going through the missional journey.

A key to missional innovation is empowering the people of a local church to discern and develop actions that come from among themselves rather than strategies and programmes proposed by leadership. To be blunt most change plans and programmes initiated by leadership will not change the social system or imagination of the people.\(^\text{72}\)

So the role of leadership is to create an environment where missional innovation can occur. “The leader creates space and experiences for others to imagine what the Spirit is calling forth”.\(^\text{73}\)

There are five steps in this process.

Step one is awareness\(^\text{74}\) - “Staring Reality in the Face”\(^\text{75}\)

People in congregations often feel that something is wrong in society, the church or their lives, but don’t have the words to meaningful identify their feelings about it. Often they have not been allowed to identify their feelings in a church situation. So in the awareness phase people are given space so that they can find a language to diffuse the feelings that things aren’t working the way they should be. Again the leader has a role in creating an environment so that the people can do this. This is to assist the people to find, but not provide, the means whereby they can name what is happening.

People need time and opportunity to work through their feelings to the place of new awareness, and they need the space to discover language for what is happening in their rapidly changing world. When others provide the language in neatly packaged sound bits, sermons, or programmes, they deny the opportunity to discover the place where they find themselves.\(^\text{76}\)

There are several ways that we can create spaces for this to happen. Some of these are pastoral care, appreciative inquiry in that “among the stories of the people of the church are all clues for discerning the dreams and ways of life the Spirit is calling


\(^\text{73}\) Ibid., 139.

\(^\text{74}\) Ibid., 140-142.

\(^\text{75}\) Ibid., 147.

\(^\text{76}\) Ibid., 141.
forth for that people in that place”, 77 workshops that give language to people’s feelings, and forming listening teams who will carry out a series of listening conversations across the church. 78 I also believe that empowering people to listen to God, and expressing what they think God is saying, through group *lectio divina* or dwelling on the Word, will help to give them the language to express what is going wrong in the world, the church and their lives.

It is important that we spend time on this ‘awareness stage’ step so we can move forward. Also it lets everyone know that their stories and imagination are the keys to discerning the Spirit’s work. 79

But, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, many Christians 80 are reluctant to tell their stories, especially their God stories. This is a problem because stories are an important part of mission and any contact with people in our neighbourhoods requires us to form relationships and develop community, “largely on our neighbour’s turf, where stories can be heard on all sides”. 81 We must begin these contacts with a posture of attentive listening. This means that people in our congregations will have to tell their own stories of faith by practicing with one another. But:

As these conversations unfold with neighbours, there is often a time where it is fitting to invite our neighbours to dwell imaginatively with us in the rich and provocative metaphors and parables Jesus uses or other stories from scripture. What they hear in those stories is as important as what we might tell them. Having learned to listen to God’s Word together in our communities, *we can learn to listen to our neighbours and what God might be saying to and through them*. 82

An example of how a congregation allowed their people to open up their relationship with God to the scrutiny of others was a ‘Barnabas Time’ during Sunday Worship. 83 This is a time when the members of the congregation can share “in their own words what God has been doing with them recently – during the week, during the last

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77 Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 150.
78 Ibid., 150-151.
79 Ibid., 154.
82 Ibid., 96. Italics are mine.
month – or what they feel he has been teaching them, or saying to them”.\textsuperscript{84} Often simple stories come out of this sharing time and it encourages others to share as well. This sharing builds up confidence in the people so that they can share their faith with outsiders. It can take time, patience and encouragement get those in our congregations to break down their natural reserve and talk about ‘God-things.\textsuperscript{85}

Once awareness develops and there is a focus on listening to one another and safe spaces are created the group can move to the next stage.

Step two is understanding\textsuperscript{86} - “Can we really talk about these things”.\textsuperscript{87}

This is when the leadership can talk about safe spaces and that there are no hidden agendas.

In one sense, then, awareness is a more personal, internal process of finding that ‘aha’ place where I am able to give words to my experiences, while understanding is when I begin to test this awareness in dialogue with others.\textsuperscript{88}

It is important that people do not reach any conclusions in this stage. It is important that leaders keep the awareness phase going by keeping the conversations open ended.

When the leader finds that the people are forming meaningful explanations about all the changes that are happening around them they can move the people onto the next stage.

Step three is evaluation\textsuperscript{89} - “A snapshot of the Church”.\textsuperscript{90}

At this phase people are:

.... invited into a dialogue process to evaluate how their church practices relate to its call to be mission-shaped people in the neighbourhoods where

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Susan Hope, \textit{Mission-shaped Spirituality: The Transforming Power of Mission}, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 142-143.
  \item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 157
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 163.
\end{itemize}
they live. In this phase we talk about our readiness as a church to be on mission and discern some potential ways we might do that.91

It is a phase where they can start to “hear what the Spirit is saying to the church”. It is extremely important that the regular life of the church keeps going through all these phases as it will provide a sense of security for those involved.

This evaluation phase is one where people are making decisions because they can now choose whether they want to move towards or away from the concrete actions of missional life. If they decide to move towards the concrete actions of missional life, then they can move onto the next stage.

Step four is experimentation92 – “Little Steps toward Something Big”.93

Those who have been through the first three stages can now “look at how to create some simple, limited experiments that venture into the neighbourhood”.94 It is important that those carrying out these experiments are given permission to fail. It is also important that these first experiments are simple in nature and instigated by the people themselves. This is about inviting people to dream in ways that can give them some wins after taking risks. The idea that the experiments are initiated by the people will be a big change for many churches. This is because in the past such ideas and plans came from the Vicar, or the leadership of the parish, and the people simply put them into action.

It is important to note that when the people take charge and step out into the community with missional experiments, missional transformation begins to take a life of its own.

It is this ongoing process of risking and experimenting, of failing and being encouraged, of blessing and risking again that creates the environment for real missional transformation when we are in the clearing.95

91 Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 164.
92 Ibid., 144-145.
93 Ibid., 181.
94 Ibid., 144.
95 Ibid., 145.
Initially only a small group in the church will experiment, usually 10-15% of the church. Once other people see that those doing the experiments are gaining some successful results from these initial experiments, they believe they can do the same.

One powerful experiment to see what God is up to in the neighbourhood, or to listen to God in the neighbourhood, is the practicing of hospitality with our neighbours. Hospitality is highlighted in scripture and it is “making room in our lives and in the personal space of our homes for those we classify as strangers”.

An important way to encourage those in our congregations to carry out the experiment of hospitality is to allow the Scriptures to shape their imaginations. Techniques described earlier like lectio divina, ‘dwelling on the Word’ and Allen Hilton’s steps for missional formation, would be helpful in shaping this imagination.

As Roxburgh and Boren state:

> It is not enough to simply go and do it. This might result in some good actions, but we are looking for more than actions. We are looking to have our inner being reshaped so that our actions become a part of who we are.

They have a thirteen week hospitality group process where the group learns the discipline of “dwelling in the word.” They read Luke 10 each time together “and listening to what God might be saying to them as they practice hospitality in their neighbourhoods”. This is in effect ‘double listening’ as described in the previous chapter.

Zscheile sees hospitality in a different way from Roxburgh and Boren. He says that up to now the church has seen hospitality as hospitality to its neighbours as Jesus asked us to do in Matthew 22:36-40;

> Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He (Jesus) said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

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97 An example is Hebrews 13:2 ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it’.
99 Ibid., 189.
100 Ibid.
To this Zscheile says:

That is a worthy thing to do, and we should do it sensitively and generously as possible. God came to us as a needy stranger whom we are called to feed, clothe, and embrace as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 24:42-45.  

But this is only half the story. As followers of Jesus, we must learn to be guests and rely upon the hospitality of the neighbourhood.  

This is the reverse of how most Christians, including Roxburgh and Boren, see hospitality. Here the disciples do not offer hospitality to the stranger, but seek the hospitality of the stranger. So we are to go and seek the hospitality of a stranger. This can place us in a vulnerable situation, but Jesus did say ´Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves´ (Luke 10:3). But by seeking the hospitality of strangers we are:

..... invited to join up with God’s ongoing movement in the neighbourhood, trusting that the Spirit of God is at work in the life of your neighbours, that we meet God there, and that by going with empty hands as learners we will experience God’s peace. We must go as Christ came to us – as guests, in a posture of humility and dependence.  

Another useful tool in helping congregations in this experimentation stage is “dwelling in the world” This was developed by the churches in South African. It is an exercise where members of the congregation are given a chance to think back over the past to an occasion when they had a chance to share the peace of Christ with someone. This too draws on the ideas that come out of Luke 10:1-12. The idea behind dwelling on the Word is that it gives people a chance “to revisit those relationships imaginatively and consider what God might want them to do”. They were also asked:

What are the conversations, gestures, and actions that might be taken up going forward? By taking seriously the ordinary relationships within which Christians live
and work as spaces for mission, the practice of dwelling in the world stresses both the relational character of mission and the betweenness of God’s movement in the world.\textsuperscript{106}

Stage five is commitment\textsuperscript{107} - “Signing on to New Ways of Being Church”\textsuperscript{108}

The people who have gone through all the phases now begin to innovate the mission-shaped life across the whole church.

It is at this point, in the midst of growing experiments, that the people realise that they have discovered for themselves a way of being church that isn’t dependent on outside programmes, gurus, or even ordained clergy. Tangible, measurable, and observable actions occurs.\textsuperscript{109}

This is the point that the church realises that it cannot go back to when it merely was a passive recipient of religious goods and service. The whole church commits itself to being a missional-church. This is again a new thing for my congregation and encouragement and awareness of God is the key.

\textsuperscript{106} Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J Zscheile, The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation, 122.

\textsuperscript{107} Alan Roxburgh and M Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it is, How to Become One, 145 - 146.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 145.
CONCLUSION

The *missio Dei* is the mission of God, or the sending of God, out of God’s concern for the nations and the whole of the created order. Because it is God’s mission, and not the church’s mission, it is important to listen to God, individually, and collectively as a church.

The concepts of the *missio Dei*, and the act of intentionally listening to God, can be new concepts for many congregations. However they can be difficult concepts for them to grasp, but they are extremely important because of the declining numbers of people attending our churches. Our future as a church depends on the *missio Dei* and intentionally listening to God. Because of this it is paramount that a missional imagination is cultivated amongst the members of our congregations.

The way to cultivate this missional imagination is by encouraging and empowering each and every member of the congregation, individually and in groups, to listen to God speaking through prayer and Scripture. There are a number of ways this can be done and these are covered in this thesis. It is important that this listening leads to the *missio Dei*, and along with this the congregational members must be encouraged to share their God stories with one another. This sharing builds up confidence in the people so that they can share their faith stores with outsiders, especially those in their neighbourhoods. This can take time, patience and encouragement to allow those in our congregations to break down their natural reserve and talk about ‘God-things’. However the sharing of such stories is vital to the *missio Dei*.

As well as cultivating the practices of listening to God in prayer and Scripture amongst those in our congregations, people must also be empowered with the skills to listen for signs of God’s activity in their neighbourhoods. The key to this is hospitality: getting amongst the people in our neighbourhoods and listening to their stories. This is done by showing or accepting hospitality. There are number of ways to listen for signs of God’s activity in our neighbourhoods and these are covered in this thesis. Such listening to God’s speaking through prayer and Scripture, and listening for signs of God’s activity in our neighbourhoods, must not be done in isolation. Taken together these activities can lead to a missional imagination.
Leaders must always remember that getting involved in the *missio Dei* is not a ‘quick fix’ solution to declining church attendances. Effective change always takes time because missional transformation occurs in a series of small movements, actions, and behaviours among God’s people. It involves patience, encouragement and tenacity on the part of church leaders and a flatter leadership structure in our churches. Leadership must be one that supports and encourages the lay people as they start to listen to God through prayer and Scripture, along with their listening for signs of God’s activity in their neighbourhoods.

Finally there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to cultivating a missional imagination, so the congregational leaders must choose a way that suits their congregations. However great comfort can be gained from the fact that when Christians step out into their neighbourhoods to carry out the *missio Dei* they find that God is already there. We are also reminded in Matthew 28:20 that Jesus has promised to be with us every step of way until the end of the age.
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