Cultural Diversity, Worship, and Australian Baptist Church Life

New Winches Volume 2

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Transforming Expectations

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New Parishes for Anglicans and Baptists?

Missional Transitions in an Age of Economic and Ecological Crisis

Gordon Preece

Australia, like most Western nations, is slowly moving into a time of chronic economic crises. The post-World War II baby and resources boom we've taken for granted was a blip in our history and the world's history. French economist Thomas Pickett predicts a return to the business as usual of slow growth and massive, increasing inequality between the rapid compound growth of inherited and invested wealth versus relatively waning wages. Rapidly rising numbers of regional and younger people especially are unemployed or under-employed, even before looming retrenchment. In addition to these threats to our economic and social ecology the threat of climate change looms large, already causing climate refugees as the world's poor bear the cost of the West's profligacy. In the midst of rapid economic and ecological transition, a transitional churches or parishes movement, along with a vow of stability, may provide ways forward.

Introduction

The world is in transition. The post-World War II rapid growth economy is powered between slowing population-driven economic growth and the debt collector at the door demanding long deferred externalised ecological costs. French political economist Thomas Pickett's book Capital and neat U-shaped graphs depict a likely return to the historical pattern of the past two centuries and
most likely two millennia. It is a pattern of slow growth accompanied by a growing
gap between capital and invested, compound-interest-generating inheritance
and the waning comparative value of wages. We are already returning to historic
highs of inequality. By 2016 the Occupy movement’s infamous one percent, now
numbering only 80 billionaires, will own 50 percent of the world’s wealth.

The luck of “the Lucky Country” is starting to run out. Australia has ridden the
sheep’s back for a century and then relied upon the Chinese panda’s insatiable
appetite for our minerals. However, China’s growth has now slowed to 6.9
percent, its weakest in 25 years. Our economic surpluses were frittered away
on middle- to upper-class welfare benefits such as effectively tax-free unlimited
superannuation for millionaires and billionaires. John Howard’s Government
forfeited $40 billion of tax revenue through populist long-term tax cuts for the
wealthy based on a temporary boom. The opportunity to invest in the educational
and environmental infrastructure of the future was thrown away largely due to
minerals industry lobbying and media campaigns.

Former Treasurer Joe Hockey’s Australianised “lifters and leaners” adapts Ayn
Rand’s (former Federal Reserve head Alan Greenspan’s guru) division of the world
into economic light and darkness. A Manichean productive and non-productive
dualism that is not intrinsic to the population is ideologically imposed upon it. For
instance, in the Australian context the Brotherhood of St. Laurence has tracked
and projected a rapid increase in rates of youth unemployment in particular
pockets of poverty. In the map below, 14 of 18 hotspots of youth unemployment
are in the south-east quadrant of the country but the worst are in the far north and
west.

Figure 1: Mapping youth unemployment: the worst hotspots in each state

HOTSPOT - Region with highest youth unemployment in each
Australian state and territory

- 14.5% Brisbane – North West
- 19.4% Brisbane – Yermae – Mid North
- 17.3% Melbourne – West
- 19.6% Tasmania – South East
- 13.7% Northern Territory
- 19.4% Brisbane – Yermae – Mid North
- 21.8% Hunter Valley (excluding Newcastle)
- 28.4% Queensland – Outback
- 11.7% Australian Capital Territory

Around the world excessive educational expectations fostered by expensive
universities have led to deep disillusionment among the young from the Middle
East to India to the USA and Australia. There are just not enough of the jobs
people are being trained for to go around and to enable transitions from education
to first job, to stable jobs, to adulthood, and on to family formation. Yet the
rhetoric blames the victims and many find themselves saddled with mortgage-
sized debts for their trouble.

In Australia, young males are more likely than young women to be unemployed
due to the decline in traditional working-class manufacturing jobs, trades, and
apprenticeships). Young women are more likely to be under-employed. There
are particular problems for young men transitioning to work, adulthood, and
family formation. Further, the effects of poor educational outcomes and high
unemployment (including racial and religious prejudice) for young Muslims,
especially men, in inner western Sydney and northwestern Melbourne need
investigation in relation to transitions to radicalisation and some ways in which
transition to employment might perhaps reduce this.

Among churches, the recent UK Evangelical Alliance report Working Faithfully
found that “Evangelicals care about unemployment, with 82 per cent saying
that the government should... ensure... enough decent jobs for those wanting
work. Seventy-five per cent define decent as including a “living wage”. But more
importantly, 40 percent of Evangelicals say their church offers practical support to
local unemployed and many church agencies like Cardiff’s Vocate and CAP Job
Climate change will also require preparedness and strategies to reverse it. Technology might be a critical factor in this but there will be no easy technological fixes. In such circumstances the role of the churches is critical, frequently found in the tension between the concerns of local and global communities. This forces decisions regarding under-employment, communities under-water or over-heating, communities facing permanent drought, and Pacific and Asian climate refugees. It is in this broad context that I now want to address the role of transitional churches.

**Australian churches, schools, and agencies tackling unemployment**

Can the local church or parish play any role in this transition process? Let me share some examples past and present. There are opportunities for government and church-based unemployment projects in Australia, sometimes under our noses. In the early 1980s, as an assistant Anglican minister in Sydney’s Seaforth, I was looking for missional opportunities and walked across the road to the local TAFE. There I met a Uniting Church laywoman ironically called Laurel Dole who ran the Education Program for Unemployed Youth (EPUY). She invited me to do personal development work with EPUY. She and her students taught me more than I taught them, but it started a long journey. In one introductory game about favourites—foods, movies, music—I sat opposite a downcast young man marked by poverty and aggressive acne. I asked “what’s your favourite food?” He mumbled “coco-pops”. I said “for breakfast?” He replied, “No — breakfast, lunch, and tea.” He was disempowered and despairing. Others were quick-witted enough to jokingly say “I work for the government” in answer to the inevitable question, “what do you do?” Now I ask people “how do you occupy yourself?” allowing for non-job answers.

Many churches have under-used property that could be turned into social enterprise and job training and creation projects. Malabar Anglican Parish started doing this, in the 1980s, before I arrived in 1985. Based on a peninsula, this parish bordered Sydney airport and some of Australia’s dirty dozen industries. The area was undergoing major economic and ecological transition with traditional manufacturing like W.D. & H.O. Wills cigarette factory and General Motors Holden moving out along with the oil refinery closing. La Perouse and its Mission was the local dumping ground for Aboriginals, lepers, and the first AIDS victims, who were treated at Prince Henry Hospital.
of Sydney’s sewage, half processed, poured onto our closed beach. When the offshore winds came in we’d say: ‘sewer’s up’. We lived “between the Devil and the deep brown sea”. My wife, an asthmatic and mother of three asthmatics, ran asthma support groups from the minister’s house. She was interviewed by local press regarding the sewer works and high asthma rates next door at our school. I joined CESS, Campaign to End Sewage Smells. I became the Anglican church expert on sewage! The parish facilitated ecological worship at the first Australian Ecumenical Ecology Conference in 1990.

On the employment front, the late social entrepreneur Steve Lawrence, Canon Edie Ashley, and others living in subsidised church housing and in Acts 2 and 4 style with shared purse, pooled their government salaries for computer training to create a social enterprise fund for WorkVentures. They took over half a disused church (apart from its Resale Shop) in Matraville and started job training and job creation projects using Christian community principles to develop the gifts, talents, and different intelligences (e.g. the great manual skills) of some ESL participants or illiterates. Three ex-Navy high-school drop-outs took early retirement and taught electronic repair and maintenance skills on ATM machines. This ITEC Centre, a model developed in the UK to be self-funding in the dire days of Maggie Thatcher, soon became a rich revenue stream giving relative independence from government funding. Baby business incubators were set up with mentoring, peer support, and pooling labour costs by having shared administration services as on-the-job training for those in computer courses. The normal 80 percent failure rate for first-time businesses was turned into an 80 percent success rate. All this arose just from living alongside people, in the manner of Jeremiah 29, seeking and praying for shalom in a time of transition or “exile”.

Introducing the concept of “Transition Parishes”

WorkVentures still operates from Surrey Hills, near Central Station, within reach of Malabar, but its start in Malabar Parish exemplifies what I call a Transition Parish, adapting Rob Hopkins’ Transition Towns concept. I’ve recently suggested this as a way for local parishes to transition towards tackling today’s chronic ecological and economic challenges in sustained and sustainable ways. Westerners tend to be better at dealing with crises than chronic issues because of our technological quick-fix mindset, the limited attention spans of the media, and compassion fatigue. But quick fixes for crises often produce crises elsewhere in the social and ecological system, not going to the roots of our relationship with God, humanity, and creation.

I’ve advocated the transition parish concept since the mid-1980s in Malabar; admittedly, its being on a peninsula made it better suited geographically to being a parish than many; my current parish is, for example, dissected by a freeway. Back then many church growth experts envisioned churches, particularly mega-churches, as interest-based, not locality- or place-based. With the “homogeneous interest group principle”, it was as if cars changed the character of church into some kind of vehicle for upward career and social mobility — thereby avoiding the need to cross cultural or class boundaries.

While not upholding any exclusivity of the concept of parish or any biblical textual background for the exact concept, its grounding of the people of God in a particular locality holds together creation and redemption, time and eternity, place/locality and the global/universal of the faith. I’ll first draw upon Bishop Lessie Newbiggin’s eschatological affirmation of the parish; secondly I’ll reflect on Alison and John Milbank’s Radical Orthodox praise of parishes as an alternative form of civil society movement to both state and market monopolies; and, finally, I’ll examine the promising New Parish movement from the USA.

Firstly, Newbiggin has an exciting eschatological and missional perspective on the parish in transition between old and new creation.

The Church can be the first-fruit, sign and instrument of God’s new creation planted firmly in the context of some segment of the old creation. “The world” is too vague a phrase to have any real meaning. Human life is lived not just in “the world” but in concrete and particular communities — this village, this factory, this school, this government office, this suburb, this trade union, this professional association. To speak of God’s new creation means to speak also of God’s will for these particular and specific communities... If the Church is to be in and for the world, it must be in and for these particular segments of the world. It must be the Church in and for this village, this factory, this suburb. In other words, the structures of the Church must be organically related to the structures of the secular world. That is the enduring theological justification for the idea of the parish [my italics]. There is no meaning in speaking of the Church as first fruit, sign and instrument of God’s reign in the world
to be a priesthood on behalf of all its neighbours. As Jesus came to be the great High Priest for all mankind, so each congregation is to carry out his priesthood for its neighbours. Priesthood has a double character. It means bringing the truth and love and peace of God to worship, and... it is to offer up to God not only its own obedience and love; it is to act as the priestly people offering up to God the life of its whole neighbourhood that God's reign may truly become effective in the whole of its life... Many of the programmes in which we are engaged should be looked at in this perspective... It is easy to say that the Church is God's servant for the world. It only becomes realistic if we act concretely in relation to some segment of the world. That is the enduring validity of the parish.  

Newbigin here provides some answer to the stimulating articles by Glenn Hohnberg of City Bible Forum Brisbane, challenging a focus on local neighbourhood or parish mission given the evidence that most people's time is spent at work. For Hohnberg we are not witnessing if we are not primarily focused on reaching workers evangelistically.  

My own mission focus often emphasises the scattered roles of God's people at work. But this is only one pole of God's people gathered on Sunday, scattered on Monday. It also seems to focus only on the second of Newbigin's biblical metaphors — witness — losing sight of the service and priesthood of God's people. This risks narrowly instrumentalising or turning the nature of God's people into a means towards an evangelistic end. However, it is priestly service and holistic, integral mission (1 Peter 3:15 or Colossians 4) which raise questions to which we can offer a hopeful answer. Hohnberg also risks instrumentalising our work as part of the creation commission (Gen 1:26–28, 2:15; Ps 8), which should be a sacrificial offering or an act of worship (Rom 12:1, 2). Further, he runs the risk of reducing our relationships, which are an integral part of the great commandment of love (Matt 22), to an evangelistic inducement. For me, the transitional parish model holds the theological tension together, despite the time-juggling, child-rearing, and commuting tensions of postmodern working life.  

Secondly, Alison Milbank writes (with Andrew Davidson):  

> In... For the Parish, we... make a strong case that the parish is particularly adapted for mission today, offering a generous conception of responsibility to care for every person in its area. The parish is inclusive, public and a necessary mediating institution.
between local and larger society. In a time in which society at large is learning the importance of locality in the drive for ecological sustainability, the Anglican Church is putting at risk the very structures that allow it to be a force for good.

Unlike the Homogenous Unit Principle [that like attracts like], the parish church is an inclusive and mixed community, and is present everywhere, not just in the suburbs but in public housing estate and village alike. The poor, we argue, are not mobile in the manner of the middle-classes, and stability for them is a positive quality.

We also point out that a great many so-called “Fresh Expressions” initiatives are the outreach of parish churches, and do not have an independent life of their own. In that way, they remain extra-liturgical outreaches and fit quite well with the hospitality of the parish idea. But bouncing castle and desert church — one Australian example — cannot be the whole worshipping experience of a mature faith.

Milbank’s husband John sets parishes in the wider setting of debates about renewing civil or “Big Society”.

Given that neither state nor market is able to supply various crucial local needs, we are seeing a natural return to mutual collaboration in order to make up for this lack — anything from voluntary-aided independent schools taking supposedly “impossible” students to cooperatives committed to keeping old bicycles in constant repair and renewed circulation.17

There are inherent limits to any system’s attempts to dispense with the role of trust and reciprocal assistance. Central planning cannot assess people’s various local and changing needs, while the pursuit of profit leaves many genuine needs and demands totally unmet.

In addition, we should welcome the rise of the third sector because it vastly increases the instance of genuine, spontaneous and participatory democracy in operation... Merely representative democracy has reduced the ordinary person’s real decision-making power which can only come about through neighbourly collaboration.

Fixation on the ballot-box means that governments are increasingly able to manipulate the choices of individuals in a vulgar Benthamite [utilitarian] manner that is supposed to increase their passive, consumerist “happiness”. The population is in turn bought off with “welfare” which blinds them to the injustices of the workplace and releases them from any active thought as to what the pursuit of true education, true health and true care … might really involve.

[An]… equally crucial reason [is that] participatory democracy, in the realms both of welfare and of co-operative and stakeholder enterprise, was in the British past (as elsewhere…) almost entirely tied up with the practice of religion… [This parochial philanthropy] allowed intimate and collaborative relationships between donors and beneficiaries; it guarded against loneliness; it ensured an holistic union of body and spirit when it came to schooling and nursing; it rendered domestic labour communal and collaborative and it encouraged far more communication across class boundaries than pertains today. Moreover, it gave an enormous role to women.18

Thirdly, an outline of the US-based New Parish Coalition is in order. Lest you might think that parishes are just for Anglicans not Baptists let me introduce you to an ecumenical coalition of Seattle-based pastors and professors who co-lead www.parishcollective.org. In the face of US fragmentation, individualism, consumerism, and place-lessness, they urge the church to immerse itself with (missional church) and in (first-century church) a particular locale while collaborating there with others long-term.

You and all your neighbours desire clean air to breathe, good schools for your children, livable vocations that serve the common good, justice for all, a voice in how things are governed, and so on. The locational limitation is liberating, forcing us “not to be church just for others like us, but for all our neighbours”, “rooting deeply in the place God has planted you and expecting that your sense of community, your formation and your participation in God’s renewing mission will integrate right where you live your everyday life”.19

Further, they distinguish their new vision from the old Christendom or corporate corruptions. They expect ecclesial life to be centred in a neighbourhood or “new commons”, not expensive drive-through worship entertainment extravaganzas.
or larger-than-life remote videoed pastors like Mark Driscoll, whose church has dissolved around him. As an Anglican I admit that the Cranmerian practice of Common Prayer lost some of its socially and even ecologically integrative power when the powers that be enclosed and privatised the Commons, land previously accessible to the poor.

New Parish churches seek to recapture something of this sense of neighbourhood commons in a non-denominationally specific or established church way. As Baptist Union of Victoria Mission Facilitator, Darren Cronshaw notes, "at their best, [they] take a local interest in education, civic leadership, economics and environmental care. Churches that really... take an interest in [neighbourhood] reconciliation and renewal, are... churches people want to join". Hence, incarnation and attraction are not opposed.

This local emphasis breaks down the false dichotomy of many missional models that distinguish between incarnation and attraction, something that Scripture holds together (cf. Isa 2:1-2; Jer 29:4-9; Matt 5:13-16 with Matt 28:16-20). Rather than focusing on strategy and results, the parish model encourages people to focus on faces and places and to shift from the statistics of strategy to the stories of particularised humanity.

Thirdly, the practice of the new parish "begins with 'presencing'" — through listening (in Lectio Divina style to Scripture, your own story and the story, needs and hopes of your own place"), discerning what "seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). "It also requires 'rooting' — growing stability in your place with personal and group practices, e.g., frequenting local cafes, exercising locally, and prioritising local community advocacy." This resistance to perpetually "moving on" in response to each successive postmodern whim taking us to the next consumer experience, involves learning to move at the patient pace of grace, that of "The Three Mile an Hour God". It involves hi-touch human pace, not hi-tech inhumane pace, walking with people through "the hopes and fears of all the years". These are met in Christ as "O Little Town of Bethlehem" puts it poetically. Here the authenticity of genuine pastoral practice replaces the outmoded authority stance of Christendom. Christianity's authenticity as a religion for all seasons stands the test of time as opposed to fair weather religions and philosophies only for young hipsters and trendies.

"Transition Parishes", the need for roots, and the vow of stability

This need for roots is regarded as essential by the Jewish-Christian philosopher and French activist, Simone Weil, if we are to resist the fragmenting effects of modernity and the reactive threats of modern uttivist totalitarianisms of state and religion. Further, the poor are not middle-class cosmopolitans ever on the move, able to uproot whe the going gets tough or the next creative project comes along. The secularisation and individualising of the Protestant vocational ethic into first a modern career with its sense of constant upward motion and then morphing into a postmodern portfolio of creative projects have produced deep social erosion of families, local communities, and parishes.

Mark Sayers, a veteran of emerging churches, provides a penetrating cultural genealogy of the Romantic and literary movement and the influence of its organic values upon the creatives and postmodern de-constructors of the institutional church. He effectively critiques the critics and himself. People who were part of a cafe church without worship he once led were "fully wrapped around the organic values... We had created a space for Christians who had stopped going to church... happy to turn up twenty minutes late every few weeks. A liquid church in a liquid culture simply washes away".

Such churches rarely last. An attitude of postmodern "whatever-ish" irony and critical detachment is ultimately better at destroying than creating, unmasking the misnomer of so-called "creatives". This is itself a cultural form of capitalism's so-called "creative destruction". Sayers seeks and sees a movement in his Red Church "from destruction to devotion". He also cites pastor-sociologist Thomas Willer's perception of a rising new "generation of reconstructors" whose "ground story"... was the self-sacrificial Harry Potter defeating the evil Voldemort and whose end point centers on restored family and the continuation of tradition... a grown Harry and his friends, now married and happy, sending their own children on the train to Hogwarts?

Such remnants of stability still survive in many parishes. A recent ABC Radio show described how in New Orleans the impact of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent effect of the flooding were not effectively relieved by the "fly in and out" State agencies, nor their corporate replacements, but mainly the local, on the ground, congregations and parish-based groups and agencies. New Orleans' local government is also still based on the notion of parish.
A parallel aspect of the commitment to Christian community expressed in the parish commitment to place is the Benedictine vow of stability, to stay put, hold on, and persevere through the roller-coaster of Christian community. Some recent experiments in new monasticism without slow monasticism’s vow of stability become more like monasticism-lite or fast. When some give more attention to trendy slow food (itself a helpful movement) than traditional slow sex you wonder how long such movements will last or merely replicate their parents’ most divorced generation ever.

At the end of his seminal After Virtue, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre predicted a new Dark Ages needing “another — doubtless very different — St. Benedict” to appear. For MacIntyre, “the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers, they have already been governing us for quite some time”. He hopes for new, local forms of community, treasuring traditions for the stable formation of virtuous character against the atomising acids of modernity.

Anabaptist Gerald Schlabach took a vow of stability as a lay Benedictine oblate, following a modern monastic rule of life, influenced by MacIntyre, the early married Anabaptists, and Benedictine and Franciscan tertians. Schlabach notes, following Hauerwas, that the ‘voluntary community’ for which Anabaptists once died has degenerated — in this liberal society where most organisations are voluntary — into the marketing of churches and ‘church shopping’ among all sectors within all traditions.

Schlabach, like Pentecostal Calvinist James K.A. Smith, finds that a vow or rule of life involving daily worship is necessary because our bodily desires are constantly fuelled until completely captivated by a 24/7 conformist, consumerist culture, rather than continuously conformed to Christ. This operates, as Benedict and the later Finkielwalde monastic, Bonhoeffer, realised, even in our idealistic desire for community in our own image.

I too have found this stability hard to live out in idealistic Christian communities. In 2008 I was in Melbourne Town Hall commending my friend and former student Sally Apokis and husband Con, for sticking it out for over a decade in a difficult ministry situation. She told me that my espousal of the Benedictine “vow of stability” had struck a chord. I was warmed by the comment but too heartbroken to say I was having to leave a place I loved after just 18 months, my shortest ministry spell ever.

Now, seven years later, I am experiencing the stability of leading St. Mark’s Spotswood in Yarraville “Transition” Parish two days a week. Consequently, I’m able to share some of its story and struggle to stay put. Besides being committed to an Anglican parish that had a fraught history of conflict and clergy short stays, I’m also Anabaptist, with a commitment to non-violent reconciliation. Rather than commuting to a ministry location that panders to a customised church-style or lifestyle enclave, ministering to everybody within the parish boundaries helps Christians commit to deal with differences and conflicts (Matt 18:15–20). We should beware of the postmodern temptation to “move on” when our single-issue (ethical, doctrinal, or personal) or idolatrous identity marker clashes with another’s. We’re “in Christ”, in the parish, let’s persevere. I believe with Hauerwas that “The church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic” by its very stickiness, shape, and reconciliatory practices. To be prophetic is to persevere.

Resisting postmodern “moving on” has physical and sacramental expressions too. When we determined to sell an expensive-to-maintain and poorly located branch church to an ethnic congregation with whom we’d built a good relationship, we put the money into a long-needed “makeover for mission” of our main church, hall, and tennis courts at St. Mark’s Spotswood. My friend and former church chairman Peter Deutschmann exemplifies and cites Hauerwas’ story in After Christendom? Hauerwas describes his United Methodist church in a downtown area in Indiana putting on a new roof as a prophetic sign of their vow of stability, staying in the inner-city, and not joining the suburban flight of the church. We see our development that way.

In Melbourne’s western suburbs, hard yakka for Anglican churches, we will have a 130-place child-care centre serving the community, enabling young families struggling to find good child care, to get a mortgage and put roots down in the area. We also have a church building big enough for hundreds of Burmese (Chin) Baptist refugees; a sign of ecumenical welcome, global hope, and a prompt to Australia to welcome more like them.

Building-wise, we’re in transition, and also theologically transitioning towards being a Transition Parish. We’re becoming economically sustainable — we would have been broke by now without the child care centre — and have become a parish and regional centre for hospitality. We’re shifting money and intellectual resources via Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity & Society from the eastern suburbs Bible belt to the west. Almost annually we have an international speaker at St.
Mark's. At the gateway to the west our motto says: "Welcoming the West and the World". God willing we're here to stay, and in Jim Collins' terms, *Built to Last.*

Our parish is also transitional through our intersection of the best global thinking and concern we can muster with local action, particularly around work/economics and ecological issues. Global thinking for the church, through time and space, means loyalty to the Creeds. Our trinitarian mission statement based on three credally connected commissions, or mandates, includes the creation commission of the Father in Gen 1:26–28 to rule or have dominion over the earth and guard the Garden (Gen 2:15) through service and stewardship; and the great missionary/discipling commission of the Son in Matt 28:18–20. Christ is the model God-man with all authority in heaven and earth. He fulfills the creation commission, through his life of service, nature miracles, sacrificial death, and resurrection, restoring creation. Making disciples involves all cultural spheres of creation as well as all peoples. The Great Commandment is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit enabling us to love God (Rom 5:1–5) and neighbour (Matt 22) and accomplishing creation's renewal and completion (Rom 8). We are committed to supporting people in their work (paid or unpaid), ecological care, witness, and discipling, and their contribution to a reconciling Christian community that foreshadows the great multinational crowd gathered round the Lamb (Rev 5:9–14).

We have numerous ecologically informed and concerned people in the congregation. A number ride bikes to church. Some haven't found the greening (in a non-party-political sense) of the church easy. One stalwart member gave me an Andrew Bolt article against the idea of human caused climate change. That's fine, we're still friends. Our older ones are very gracious towards the younger activists. They know it was our advertised social issues series which started our growth spurt — social issues can be missional if the church is a social ethic! A creative kid's talk on water led to the building of a church community garden with water tanks, often a venue for Sunday club. The kids work side-by-side with adults learning about God's creation. We hope the appropriately named Bloom child-care will use the garden as a liminal, go-between space between the church and them, while we serve parents free coffee. Our Laotian Baptists also have a plot of Burmese spices. They use them for the magnificent spicy food they love to cook.

As a parish we seek to be a community for the community. We initiated the first Spotswood Festival in 2012, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of the movie *Spotswood* which we showed to a standing ovation. The movie, filmed on location, features Anthony Hopkins as an efficiency expert, coming from England to downsize a local moccasin factory, but being won over by the working-class community of the slot-car club at the factory. In a rapidly gentrifying area we wanted to celebrate and preserve where possible the parish's strongly communal working-class values. Spotswood Primary School, who hosted the festival, are now hosting us till the new church is built.

The transition parish concept also joins with the recent Ethos Oikos Project linking ecologists and economists. It uses the root term of both, *oikes* or house/home, to encourage ecologically sustainable communities. Jonathan Cornford's "The Shaking of the House" explains the household concept well. It is a more biblical, cosmic, communal, economic notion than privatised families and churches today.

Cornford argues that the biblical "household" fits well with a transitional, transparent parish model. Cornford explains our transitional eschatological position well as:

>... fundamental to the vocation of God's people to embody and proclaim the reconciling of economics and ecology which is at the heart of God's great work of restoring all things, and at its heart is the intimate and practical reconciling of economics and ecology within our own homes... The Christian community should... speak with wisdom and insight into the challenges now posed by climate change — it has always been our core business to bring the future into the present... to instruct... how we ought to live now. We should be, but we are not. Before the Church can begin to more fully reclaim its vocation, it must go through a profound shaking of its own. "For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17)."
Our present day relations with one another and with the Earth community as a whole anticipates that better future. We exist in two dimensions simultaneously — the present reality of brokenness, and the future reality of a redeemed Earth. We live "in between", in transition. And in that place, when we are truly thankful of God’s blessings, we cannot help but share them.  

Conclusion

Whether in transition ecologically or economically, involving being in or out of paid work, the eschatologically oriented transition parish concept helps keep us earthed and connected with God’s creative, redemptive, and restorative work. This occurs in the painful and potentially positive places of transition, as creation groans through the toughest transition of all, cosmic new birth (Rom. 8:18–30). Transition parishes refuse to allow us to move on, lift anchor, and be tossed like flotsam and jetsam on the turbulent seas of liquid modernity. Parishes provide us with roots which can withstand the toughest storms. I hope I’ve provided sufficient stories of steadfastness and stability as parish parables of hope in the tumultuous transitions our world and parishes face. My prayer is that others, over time, develop their own experiences and stories, drawing on both old and new parish models.

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