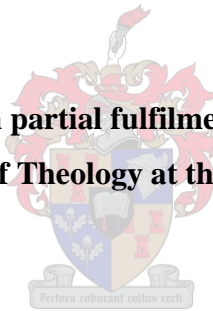


**Youth Ministry in the
Independent House Church Movement:
A Liturgical Evaluation**

By

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**A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch**



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Professor Johan H. Cilliers**

March 2008

Declaration:

I, the undersigned, Jonathan Charles Wileman, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work. I have never previously submitted it in part or in its entirety to another university or tertiary institute for a degree.

Signed:

Date:

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ABSTRACT

Young people, teenagers and children are members of various communities. These communities include their families, society, their schools and their churches or, more appropriately, their parents' church. These various communities impact their lives in significant ways: they provide the frameworks which determine who they are and what they are going to become. Through their interaction within these communities, life is given meaning.

All of these communities operate according to a "liturgy" i.e. an order or style that allows each individual to discover his or her purpose in life. Parents, as the primary community, should provide a healthy and positive environment in which the young life is shaped.

However, this is not the only community in which the young person interacts. The church is another and has an enormous influence and vital responsibility in helping to facilitate this shaping process. If, however, the church does not identify fully with young people and their needs, it will become irrelevant and their young lives will be shaped by other communities of influence that are not necessarily positive.

A new liturgy i.e. "New Wine" is required to be effective with today's postmodern generation. The institutionalized church faces a very real danger of being complacent and apathetic in terms of "doing church" in a way that is relevant and attractive. The purpose of this dissertation is to propose a different form of faith community i.e. a "New Wineskin", a wineskin that is elastic and flexible.

Along with the positive nurturing and influence of the family, the church as a new faith community must become creative and authentic if it is to reach postmodern youth. Central to this new liturgy is relationships: relationship with God, with parents, with family, with friends and others. As the Godhead is made up of three "Beings" in relationship with each other, so we have been created to be in relationship firstly with God and then with each other. Thus in a postmodern society, relationships within the family and the church are essential in order to lead young people into a real, authentic and healthy relationship with God.

OPSOMMING

Jong mense, tieners en kinders vorm deel van verskillende gemeenskappe. Hierdie gemeenskappe bestaan uit hul families, die samelewing, skole en kerke, of eerder, hul ouers se kerke. Hierdie verskillende gemeenskappe maak 'n deurslaggewende impak op hul lewens, hulle vorm die raamwerk vir wie hulle is en wie hulle gaan word. Die lewe word betekenisvol deur interaksie binne hierdie gemeenskappe.

Elkeen van hierdie gemeenskappe werk volgens 'n "liturgie" d.w.s. 'n vorm of struktuur wat elke individu toelaat om betekenis te vind in hul lewens. Ouers, as primêre gemeenskap, behoort 'n gesonde en positiewe omgewing te skep waar die jong lewe gevorm kan word.

Dit is egter nie die enigste gemeenskap waarin die jong persoon lewe nie. Die kerk vorm ook 'n gemeenskap wat 'n groot invloed het en 'n uiters belangrike verantwoordelikheid dra in die vorming van die jong lewe. As die kerk nie met jonge mense en hul behoeftes kan identifiseer nie, sal die kerk irrelevant word en die jong lewens sal deur ander gemeenskappe beïnvloed word, wat nie noodwendig positief is nie.

'n Nuwe liturgie d.w.s. "Nuwe Wyn" is nodig om effektief te wees in die lewens van vandag se postmoderne geslag. Daar bestaan 'n wesenlike gevaar dat die geïnstitueerde kerk selfvoldaan en onbelangstellend is ten opsigte van 'n manier om "kerk te doen" wat relevant en aantreklik is. Die doel van die tesis is om 'n ander vorm van die geloofsgemeenskap voor te stel, d.w.s. 'n "Nuwe Wynsak" wat elasties en soepel is.

Saam met die positiewe versorging en invloed van die familie, behoort die kerk, as 'n vernuwende geloofsgemeenskap spontaan en kreatief uit te reik na jong mense. Sentraal tot hierdie nuwe liturgie is verhoudings; verhoudings met God, met ouers, met familie, met vriende en ander. Die Godheid, in 'n drievoudige verwantskap, bied ons 'n voorbeeld van verhoudings. Ons is geskape om eerstens in 'n verhouding met God te wees en dan met ander. In die hedendagse samelewing is verhoudings binne die familie en die kerk noodsaaklik om jong mense te lei na 'n eg, opregte en gesonde verhouding met God.

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“In the House” House Church, I am honoured to call you my family. For the past three years you have walked this journey with me, encouraged me and prayed for me. Thank you for letting me “speak my mind” - and for listening to me even when I didn't quite make sense!

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Last, but most importantly, to God for giving me this opportunity in mid-life to pursue a dream. He has been faithful and will continue to be faithful. His is the Glory!

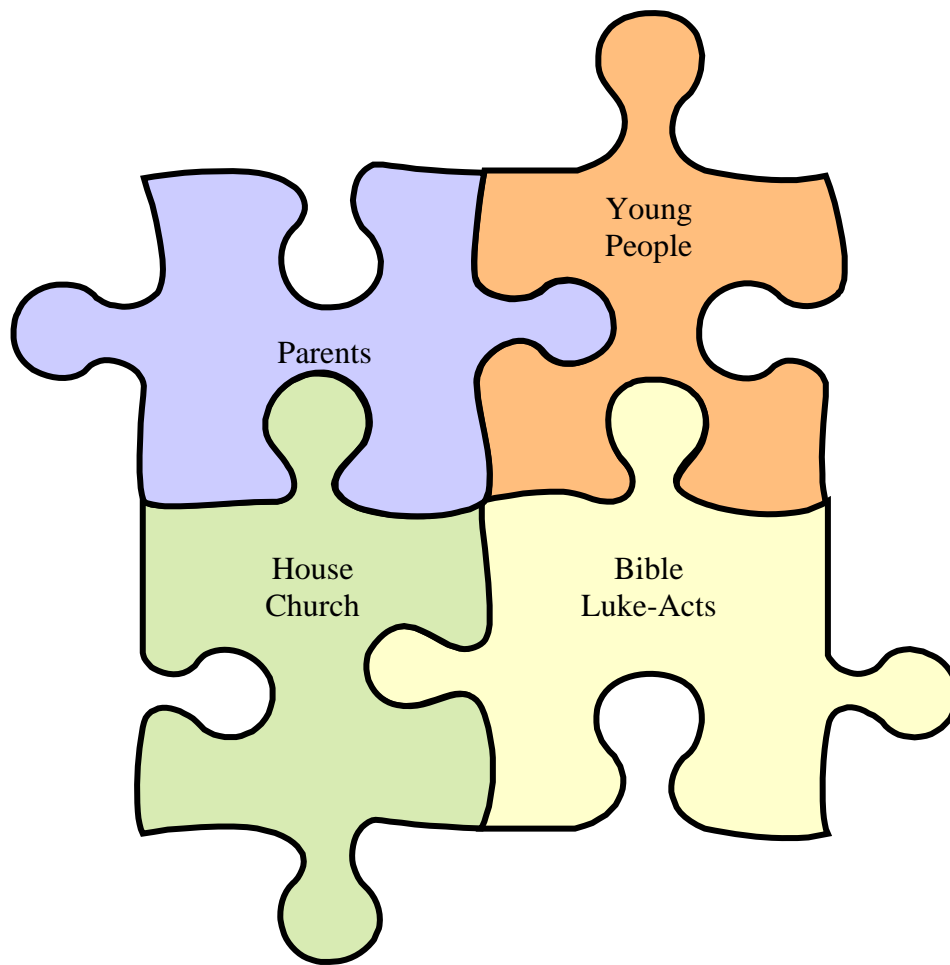
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Sunday School	2
1.2 Para-church Youth Organizations	3
1.3 Church Youth Ministry	3
1.3.1 The Jewish Culture influences Youth Ministry	4
1.3.2 The Industrial Revolution influences Youth Ministry	5
1.3.3 The Modern Society influences Youth Ministry	6
1.4 House Church Youth Ministry	6
1.5 Methodology	8
1.6 Hypothesis	8
1.6.1 Objectives for Ministry to the Young People in the House Church	8
1.6.2 Objectives for Ministry to Unchurched Youth	9
1.7 Visit the Past to Address the Future	10
 2. THE HISTORY OF THE INDEPENDENT HOUSE CHURCHES	 12
2.1 Types of House Churches	14
2.1.1 The House Church Movement (HCM)	15
2.1.1.1 Common Characteristics of this Movement	18
2.1.1.2 Common Weaknesses of this Movement	19
2.1.2 The House Church in America	20
2.1.3 The Cell Church within the Congregation	23
2.1.3.1 The Cell Church in Korea	23
2.1.3.1.1 <i>Seven Phases of Problems</i>	25
2.1.3.2 The Cell Church in America	26
2.1.3.2.1 <i>The Structure of the Cell Church</i>	28
2.1.3.2.1.1 The Cell	29
2.1.3.1.1.2 The Congregation	29
2.1.3.1.1.3 The Celebration	29
2.1.3.1.2 <i>The Cell Church and Young People</i>	30
2.1.3.3 General Observation of House Churches and Cell Churches	31
2.1.4 The Independent House Churches (IHC)	31
2.1.4.1 The American and Canadian Context	33

2.1.4.2 The European Context	34
2.1.4.3 The Latin American Context	35
2.1.4.4 The Chinese Context	36
2.1.4.5 The Eastern Context	37
2.1.4.6 The African Context	38
2.2 The Strategy of Independent House Churches	39
2.3 The Liturgy of Independent House Churches	41
 3. THE COMMUNITY EMPHASIS IN LUKE-ACTS	 43
3.1 Jesus, the Invited Guest	44
3.1.1 The Calling of Levi	44
3.1.2 Invitation to the Home of a Pharisee	48
3.1.3 Observations drawn from these two Narratives	52
3.1.3.1 Inclusiveness	52
3.1.3.2 Hospitality	52
3.1.3.3 The Marketplace	53
3.1.3.4 Relationships	53
3.1.3.5 Modelling	54
3.2 Summary	54
3.3 Establishment of House Churches	55
3.3.1 The House Church in Jerusalem	56
3.3.2 The House Church in Antioch	58
3.3.2.1 The House Church in Philippi	58
3.3.2.2 The House Church in Corinth	59
3.3.2.3 The House Church in Ephesus	60
3.3.2.4 Other House Churches	60
3.3.3 Observations drawn from the House Churches in Acts	61
3.3.3.1 Young People in the House Church	62
3.3.3.2 Hospitality in the House Church	63
3.3.3.3 Liturgy in the House Church	63
3.3.4 Similarities between Biblical House Churches and Postmodern Independent House Churches	64
3.3.5 Liturgy in the Independent House Churches	65
3.3.5.1 Worship	65

3.3.5.2 Eucharist or Lord's Supper	65
3.3.5.3 Reading of the Scriptures	66
3.3.5.4 Praying	66
3.3.5.5 Preaching	67
3.3.5.6 Confession	67
3.3.5.7 Other Practices	67
4. YOUTH, CHURCH AND PARENTS	69
4.1 The Present Status	69
4.2 Where it all Started	70
4.2.1 Para-church Youth Organizations in the United Kingdom	70
4.2.1.1 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)	71
4.2.1.2 Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)	71
4.2.1.3 Scripture Union (SU)	72
4.2.1.4 Boys' Brigade	72
4.2.1.5 Girls' Brigade	73
4.2.1.6 Crusaders Christian Youth Movement	73
4.2.2 Para-church Youth Organization in the United States of America	74
4.2.2.1 Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour	74
4.2.2.2 Young Life	74
4.2.2.3 Youth for Christ (YFC)	75
4.2.2.4 Campus Crusade for Christ	75
4.2.2.5 Youth With A Mission (YWAM)	76
4.3 Church Youth Groups	77
4.3.1 Postmodernism versus Modernism	80
4.3.1.1 Definition of Modernity	80
4.3.1.1.1 <i>Modernism in Youth Ministry</i>	80
4.3.1.2 Definition of Post-Modernity	80
4.3.1.2.1 <i>Postmodernism in Youth Ministry</i>	81
4.3.2 Models of Modern Youth Ministry	83
4.4.2.1 Church-Based Youth Meetings	83
4.3.2.2 Church Confirmation Programmes	83
4.3.2.3 Youth Services and Events	84

4.4 Parents	86
4.4.1 Parents as Models of Life	86
4.4.2 Parents as Agents of Change	90
5. A HOUSE CHURCH LITURGY FOR POSTMODERN YOUTH	94
5.1 Objectives of House Church Ministry to Young People	95
5.1.1 Christian Young People	95
5.1.1.1 Parents as the Primary Teachers of Christian Faith	96
5.1.1.2 Young People as Members of the Independent House Church	96
5.1.1.3 Young People Participating in the Independent House Church	97
5.1.2 Non-Christian Young People	98
5.1.2.1 Building Relationships between the Churched and Unchurched Young People	99
5.1.2.2 Equipping Young People to Share their Faith with Unchurched Friends	99
5.1.2.3 House Church as a Forum for Faith-Related Questions	100
5.2 A Liturgy for Postmodern Youth Ministry	101
5.3 A New Liturgy for the Independent House Church Youth Ministry	102
5.4 An Alternative Liturgy for Postmodern Youth Ministry	105
5.4.1 Artistic Expression	106
5.4.2 Creative Writing	106
5.4.3 Songwriting	106
5.4.4 Dance	107
5.4.5 Drama	107
5.4.6 Other Liturgical Aids	107
5.5 “A Liturgy within a Liturgy”	107
5.5.1 Relationships	108
5.5.2 Realness	109
5.5.3 Relevance	109
5.5.4 Mercy	110
5.5.5 Accessibility	110
5.6 Conclusion	111
Bibliography	112



This diagram represents the importance of relationships between parents, young people, the house church and the Bible. As in any given puzzle, the true picture is only seen as all the pieces connect together. In discovering a new liturgy for young people there needs to be an inter-connectedness between all the role players. In Christendom nothing can happen in isolation: relationships are at the core of our being.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth Ministry, as ministry that includes both children and teenagers, is relatively new in the Christian Church. Previously, adults and children would gather together as a family during times of worship. Every worship service was a family service, with no age differentiation.¹ Later in this dissertation, when referring to the role of parents as nurturers of the Christian faith and as role models for their children, I will address this issue further. Suffice it to say we have discarded the ‘oneness’ of the Body of Christ in worshipping God in favour of a ‘compartmentalised’ form or structure where families are separated from each other during a worship service.

Malan Nel makes the following observation regarding adolescence: “Today the term adolescence refers to the time between puberty and adulthood. Up until the eighteen hundreds, children became adults at ages twelve to fourteen. There was no ‘in between’ time. This changed” (Nel, 2000:31).

Larry Richards, the foremost specialist Christian Educator in America in the 1970s and 1980s, says the following: “In the early centuries of the church, no provision was made for the education of children, either in basic literacy or in the Christian faith. Classes were formed in the first and second centuries for new converts and, presumably, older children found themselves in these converts classes, called ‘catechumenal schools’. The catechumenal schools continued for several centuries, but they deteriorated after about the fifth century” (Richards, 1975:15).

¹ In his book, “Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Congregational Approach”, Malan Nel says that ‘of all the people involved in youth ministry parents have the most natural ability to differentiate’ (Nel, 2000:112). By this he means that parents can cope with children, whether they are babies or young adults.

1.1 Sunday School

Age-related ministry was not practised until recently i.e. approximately 200 years ago. The Sunday School as we know it today, only started at the end of the 18th Century with the aim of ministering to young children outside of the church community. A critical need was observed in society at large and through the efforts of one man, Robert Raikes, a ministry was founded to make a life-transforming impact on the lives of children.

“Robert Raikes’ early Sunday schools were as much aimed at bringing basic literacy to the deprived chimney sweeps on Sooty Alley as they were to bring them salvation. The Gloucester editor assembled his first Sunday school in Mrs. Meredith’s kitchen. He paid her for teaching them, and later employed others. But he was ‘outside’ the church, and few clergymen gave him encouragement. Among those who did were John Wesley and William Fox. Both gave Raikes early endorsement, even before Raikes revealed to the public what had been going on in Gloucester kitchens for nearly three years. The movement flourished. By the time of Raikes’ death in 1811, there were nearly half a million children enrolled in his Sunday schools. William Fox founded the Sunday School Society in London in 1785, and, backed by several wealthy friends, he proceeded to spread the idea. When the Sunday school movement leaped to America, it became less and less a literacy program and increasingly a gospel agency. By 1810, the American version of the Sunday school was permitted to come into the churches” (Richards, 1975:15,16).

As can be seen from the above quote, Sunday school became integrated into the institutional church, thereby losing its initial impact of reaching out to young people on the fringes of the community. The following question can therefore be posed: was Sunday school a positive or a negative concept in the life of the Christian Church? Did it add to the compartmentalising of the various age groups in the church or did it heighten the congregants’ reaction to the plight of children, especially those with no church connection? Put differently, should the Sunday school not have been allowed and encouraged to continue to operate independently outside of the institution where, according to research, it was highly effective? In this research paper I am hoping to answer this question in terms of how we relate to young people and how effective we are in ministering to them.

1.2 Para-church Youth Organizations

Youth ministry, aimed at those between the ages of 12 to 13 and 18 to 20, began in the middle of the 19th Century. One can, in fact, put a date to it i.e. 6 June 1844. George Williams founded the Young Men's Christian Association in London at the height of the Industrial Revolution as a result of his desire 'to win souls to Christ.' (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YMCA>) It was only during the 20th Century that many of the other para-church youth organizations such as Scripture Union, Youth for Christ, Young Life, Campus Crusade for Christ and Youth with a Mission were founded.² The reason for the establishment of age-specific youth ministry was due to the growing generation gap between adults and their children. Adults felt they could no longer relate to the younger generation who, in turn, were questioning the values for which these same adults stood.

The need arose for ministries to be established that could relate to young people. Para-church organizations seemed to have the 'know-how' and were established in order to bridge the gap which, increasingly, the churches found they could not address. The co-operation between the churches and these para-church organizations worked well. An organization like Youth for Christ operated their weekly 'Saturday Night Clubs' in local church halls and, during the holidays, they often presented 'coffee bars' in these same venues. It would appear that most churches were glad to have a 'specialist' youth organization operating on their premises since they knew that their own young people were being catered for. In many cases this meant that they did not need to establish their own youth ministries or recruit volunteers to work with their teenagers. This latter task of involvement with the teenagers was not a popular one.

1.3 Church Youth Ministry

During the 1970s churches were becoming concerned about the 'teaching' that young people were receiving at these clubs. These teenagers were mixing with young people from other denominations, denominations which might have had a completely different ministry style.

² In Chapter 4 I will be looking at the history of the para-church organizations and the reason why they were established.

In the past 20 to 30 years, churches have felt the need to establish their own youth ministries in order to cater for the needs of the young people within their own church community.³ These church-based youth ministries were often based on the models of the para-church organizations. Their modus operandi was considered to be successful and was incorporated into the institutional church structure with minor adjustments.

1.3.1 The Jewish Culture influences Youth Ministry

Prior to this time, young people were regarded as part of the wider church where there was no specific age differentiation. This is clearly understood when one studies how young boys at the age of 13 are regarded as adults in Jewish culture. Jewish boys celebrate the Bar-mitzvah at the age of 13 to signify that they have now reached the age of maturity and can undertake the responsibilities associated with adulthood.⁴

“A Jewish boy reaches his second religious milestone at the age of thirteen. He then becomes confirmed, or, as it is called in Hebrew – Bar-mitvah, which means literally, ‘Son of the Commandment.’ This is the Hebrew way of saying that the lad is now old enough to understand and observe, with due responsibility, the commandments and traditions of Judaism. The word is used both of the ceremony of Confirmation and of the boy who is confirmed. The privilege of reading from the Law in Synagogue, or even of saying the benedictions when the Cantor reads the lesson, is reserved for adult men. The granting of this right to the Bar-mitvah indicates that he has now become spiritually of age; that he is recognised as a responsible Jew, entitled to share in the joys of Judaism and charged with its duties” (Abrahams, Date Unknown:3).

Likewise, young Jewish girls celebrate the Bat-mitzvah at the age of 12.

“A Jewish girl reaches the age of confirmation when she is twelve years old. She is called Bat-mitzvah ‘a daughter of the commandment.’ The earlier confirmation of the girls is not an

³ This practice caused further division not only amongst denominations but also between young people who were friends, attended schools together and played sport together.

⁴ It has been difficult to ascertain exactly what these responsibilities were. In the light of this, is it possible that the disciples were mere teenagers when Jesus called them to follow Him?

idle compliment to them; it is based on the fact that normally a girl attains maturity sooner than a boy” (Abrahams, Date unknown:6).

“Up until the end of the nineteenth century a person between twelve and fourteen was already regarded as an adult in many cultures and in the Jewish culture in specific” (Nel, 2000:30).

1.3.2 The Industrial Revolution influences Youth Ministry

We are aware that, in the not too distant past, many of our fathers and grandfathers were working whilst still in their teenage years and, in some instances, also getting married. As mentioned earlier, the Industrial Revolution took place in the 19th Century and this meant that young people had to find employment in order to help their families put bread on the table. In the United Kingdom many young people moved from the rural areas into the cities to find employment. This had a dramatic and lasting affect on the lives of these same young people.

“Women and children worked as unskilled labourers and made only a small fraction of men’s low wages. Children – many of them under ten years of age – worked from ten to fourteen hours a day. Some were deformed by their work or crippled by unsafe machines” (The World Book Encyclopaedia, 1982:Vol.10:191).

Gordon A. Craig in his book “Europe since 1815” made the following comment about the Industrial Revolution: “In the 1840s a series of reports of royal commissions bared, to all who could read, some of the results of the unregulated extension of industrialism: the deplorable conditions in factory towns, many of which had no sewage systems, no adequate water supply, and no housing for the working classes except the most flimsy and unsanitary hovels; the shameful situation in the mines, where women and children were found working like animals; the wretched state of many of the factories, in which *laissez-faire* often meant irresponsibility and callousness on the part of employers” (Craig, 1971:113).

1.3.3 The Modern Society influences Youth Ministry

Youth ministry has only changed during the course of the 20th Century. The church was faced with a “new” age group that they struggled to understand and most certainly did not know how to relate to. It was only in 1955 that the term or label ‘teenager’ was used for the first time.⁵ A new cultural group had been birthed and social scientists were now faced with the task of dissecting this new “species” and analysing their personality and behavioural patterns.

1.4 House Church Youth Ministry

Even more recently i.e. in the 21st Century, we have witnessed the birth of the emerging church movement, of which the House Church Movement is an integral part.⁶ In this context, the pressing question often raised concerns the young people. Dale writes, “When we tell others that our churches meet in homes, invariably one of the first questions they ask is, ‘What do you do with the kids?’ There are almost as many answers to this question as there are churches, since every situation will vary according to the people involved” (Dale, 2003:146).

Banks writes, “The place of children in a home church has always been a matter for considerable discussion. No one we know claims to have all the answers. In the middle of such a discussion some years ago, one of the women declared, ‘What we do for our children in a home church will be as different from Sunday school as is worship in a home church from a typical Sunday morning service.’ We all recognized the truth of her words, but what did they mean in practice?” (Banks, 1986:193).

We are now in a postmodern paradigm where structures and institutions are being questioned. In the context of the institutional church, attendance is declining, especially amongst young people who find that the church is irrelevant. Present facts indicate that there

⁵ H. Stephen Glenn – “Positive Discipline for Teenagers”.

⁶ In Chapter 2 I explain the difference between the House Church Movement, Cell Churches, and the Independent House Churches.

are more Christians outside of the institution than inside.⁷ Together with this move away from the institutionalized church, there is a growing danger that our children will get “lost.”

“Churches mistakenly flee back into religion that controls – the typical pre-modern security in which the group, tradition and others have authority. Yet the true response to postmodernism would be a growing openness” (Nel, 2000:47).

Generally, the traditional, institutional church has responded very slowly to postmodernism. On the other hand, however, the Independent House Churches and certain “newer” churches have embraced postmodernism. If the House Church is one of the “new wineskins” i.e. a new form of ministry, it is essential that we present an alternative form of youth ministry to our children.⁸ The question, though, is how do the House Churches address this issue?

The above quotations illustrate a universal problem area for House Churches, namely, ministry to the youth. Families are an integral part of the House Church Movement, therefore their needs must be acknowledged and met. Dale declares very emphatically, “This is family, and children are an integral part!” (Dale, 2003:148).

One of the aims of my research will be to initiate a process whereby House Churches can effectively minister to the young people who are part of their “church family”. Referring to the New Testament church, Atkerson says the following: “The churches were in the home; families lived in homes; children met with the church in the home” (Atkerson, 2003:85).

⁷ In his book, “A Churchless Faith”, Alan Jamieson comments on his interviews with 162 people in the United Kingdom who had left the institutionalised church. These people were predominantly in their 30s and 40s and had been involved in churches for an average of 15 years and more. Most of the people interviewed had retained their faith, but were no longer attending traditional churches. They preferred instead to meet in smaller faith communities. This trend is not confined to the UK but is evident throughout the world.

⁸ “He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better’” (Luke 5:36-39).

1.5 Methodology

Firstly, I will analyse the House Church Movement. Secondly, I will do an exegesis of Scripture in support of my proposals. Thirdly, I will reflect on the above information and the current context of Youth Ministry. Finally, I will make suggestions for a new liturgy for “doing” Youth Ministry within the House Church Movement.

1.6 Hypothesis

The current phenomenon in the growth of the Independent House Church Movement indicates that there is a shortcoming in the traditional institutional church in terms of ministering to young people, especially from a liturgical viewpoint. My hypothesis is as follows: a study of the Independent House Church Movement, evaluating it in the light of Scriptural content, might enrich the church in its endeavour to find meaningful ways of incorporating postmodern youth in a liturgical manner.

I propose that this process be initiated on two levels: firstly, to the young people who are part of the House Church, as a discipleship process; secondly, to the unchurched friends of these young people, as an evangelistic process.

1.6.1 Objectives for Ministry to the Young People in the House Church

- to encourage parents as the primary means of teaching the Christian Faith to their children;
- to encourage the House Church to view young people as an integral part of the “church family”;
- to plan the House Church gathering in such a way so as to actively incorporate the youth.

1.6.2. Objectives for Ministry to Unchurched Youth⁹

- to provide opportunities where relationships can be developed between the “churched” and the “unchurched” young people;
- to equip House Church youth with the necessary skills to share their faith with “unchurched” friends;
- to provide a forum where unchurched youth can come together to ask faith-related questions.

At this point in time, not much literature is available on the subject of youth ministry in a House Church context since the movement is still relatively young, especially in South Africa. This thesis, therefore, is proposing a new liturgical form of youth ministry within the House Church in South Africa. I am proposing that, in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, a new strategy is required. The implementation of youth ministry in this context will differ from country to country, culture to culture and region to region. I propose to elaborate on this statement in my thesis.

Personally, I am convinced of the fact that the parent is the primary source of faith formation in the life of the young person. The House Church is the secondary source. Simson states, “One of the qualifications of a biblical elder is that ‘he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?’ (1 Timothy 3:4)” (Simson, 1999:254).

With this study I will highlight what I refer to as the “liturgy within a liturgy” i.e. liturgy normally refers to a system of operation, but I believe there needs to be an underlying value system of principles in place before the practise of the system can be implemented. Atkerson writes, “In discussing practical ways to integrate children into the life of the home church, we must understand at the onset that if the parents bring the traditional mindset of the institutional church into the house church, nothing will work for the kids” (Atkerson, 2003:86). We need to revisit the past in order to move forward into the future.

⁹ The term unchurched could be used to refer to those who have become disillusioned with the church. However, it mainly refers to those who have had no contact with church or a Christian community.

1.7 Visit the Past to Address the Future

The process of “revisiting the past” would mean going back to the biblical and historical basis of “doing” youth ministry - if there ever was, in fact, a clear demarcation of age-related ministry.¹⁰ In Chapter 2, I will investigate the history of the Independent House Church Movement which has been birthed during approximately the past fifty years. I will explain the difference between the various movements that exist. Thereafter, in Chapter 3, I will do a biblical exegesis of the New Testament House Church by comparing the writings of Luke, both in his own Gospel and in the book of Acts. I will also observe how and in what context young people were acknowledged and how the Christian community incorporated them in ministry. In Chapter 4, I will investigate postmodern Youth Ministry practices by comparing them to the modern practices we are accustomed to. Included in this section I will investigate the known methods i.e. youth groups, confirmation programmes, special youth services and the role of the parents, in faith formation. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will conclude with an evaluation of the past and propose a new “liturgy within a liturgy” for doing youth ministry in a House Church context.

In the past number of years there have been numerous books written, seminars delivered and conferences attended, which have emphasized the practical “how to” of youth ministry. However, this has been done within the context of the old wineskins. The old wineskin is perished. It can no longer contain the New Wine that God is pouring out in this day and age. I do believe that we need to reconsider all of our practices: evaluate them, track their successes or failures, consult with ministers and leaders, read widely, interview both young people and adults, and then start afresh.

Before we look at youth ministry in the 21st Century, we need first to look at the Independent House Church Movement and why it is gaining popularity worldwide as a new form and expression of “being the church”. Could this be the New Wineskin for Youth Ministry in the 21st Century?

¹⁰ In the Bible we find a number of references to children, but not to teenagers. The Bible does, however, mention “young men” and “young women”.

Perhaps we should heed the following words of Kreider and McClung before we dogmatically claim, “We have discovered the best model of church.”

“What would you say is the best container to hold water – a glass or a bottle? The truth is that each container is unique, and each has its limitation, depending on the situation. It is not wise to become too dogmatic about a particular model of church – the container. Often, in our zeal, when we believe that God has shown us something new, we have a tendency to go overboard. We tout our container as the one and only way to do church. We start the Container denomination and write books about containers. Then we start a Container school. And of course we eventually franchise the product, because we are Americans! Actually, it’s not the kind of container, its size or its label that counts – it’s what is on the inside. And by the time we brand and sell our container, God uses a different container to accomplish His purposes!” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:18).

CHAPTER 2

2. THE HISTORY OF THE INDEPENDENT HOUSE CHURCHES

The Independent House Church Movement could be referred to as part of the “Emerging Church”¹¹ but in fact it has existed in reality since before the term “emerging” became popular. “Emerging” or “emergent” refers to those faith expressions that have come into being in order to minister to the postmodern culture or society. These “emerging” churches consist of many forms and styles. Some meet in homes, some in shops, some in schools and others in derelict or empty church buildings. The term also refers to more traditional churches that have had a change in paradigm - or a shift of emphasis - in their liturgical style. They have recognised that the liturgy which they have used for many years no longer connects with the postmodern generation. Each church appears to have its own distinct character or ethos which causes it to practise church as it does. This character could be determined by culture, geographical location, relevant age group or perhaps because it is simply the preferred style of the minister or leadership team. One of the main driving forces common to all these churches is the desire to make church culturally relevant.

We live in a post-church culture and people do not attend church “just because it’s the right thing to do”.¹² Until approximately fifty years ago society still epitomized structure and order. During the 1960s, a sense of rebellion began to appear which became increasingly evident and more pronounced, especially amongst the younger people within society. This produced a category of young people who were classified as “dropouts” i.e. anti-establishment.¹³ They wanted to experience all the things that had been previously been taboo, to taste the “forbidden”. There have been numerous factors put forward as to why society changed so drastically.

¹¹ The term “emergent” or “emerging” church is difficult to define because there is no one model. Two descriptions used are “new forms of church” and “new ways of being church” (Moynagh, 2004:14).

¹² Post-church means that the church is no longer a priority or a basic need in a person’s life. Years ago church would have been synonymous with work, home, education, etc.

¹³ Common terms for so-called “dropouts” were “hippies” or “children of love”. This generation is referred to as the Baby Boomers or Busters.

The purpose of this thesis is not to explore these factors. Suffice it to say that music, alcohol abuse, drug addiction and promiscuity, all played a major part in changing society. One cannot pinpoint any single influence or factor which caused the rebellion in the 1960s to set in. I personally believe that one of the main reasons for this rebellion was that parents became “disconnected” from and lost close contact with their children. The world was in chaos. (I will refer to this further in Chapter 4). One thing is certain: the church did not know how to cope with these changes in society and generally did not know how to respond.

Society was making the shift from modernism to postmodernism, yet the church remained rooted in its traditions. Young people felt out of place in the church and, instead of providing that safe place where young people could seek refuge, it condemned their actions, further entrenching their resolve to be anti-establishment. It was about thirty years ago that churches tried to rectify this situation by establishing youth ministries (as we shall see in Chapter 4). However, the damage had been done. A whole generation had moved on, and with it went any desire to be part of the church culture. The children of that generation grew up being unchurched. Churches should have had a paradigm shift in the way they connected and communicated with society and their specific communities. However, there is very little evidence that this happened. Increasingly today the church is recognizing that it needs to move out into the marketplace, engaging and interacting with people where they are.

In their book, Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung comment as follows: “Could it be that God wants to change everything about how we view the Church? He has created the church to be a dynamic, growing, changing movement, not a static doctrine. The Spirit of God calls each generation to re-imagine church for its own context and culture. The Holy Spirit invited every generation into the struggle to discover answers and approaches for themselves about church – answers that bring them into fresh partnership with God and fresh contact with their culture” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:16).

Kreider and McClung say what many others through the last couple of years have been saying. The term “reformation” - “semper reformanda” meaning “always reforming” - has a continuous tense to it. Reformation is an ongoing, changing process and not a once-off event that has taken place in the past.

For the postmodern generation, along with a definite move to a new expression of church, there has been a re-discovery of the term or label “church”. For decades, when the word “church” was used, people immediately thought of a building or a denomination. However, more recently theologians have been referring more to the real meaning of the word, namely the “church” as the Body of Christ. Therefore, all Christians are the Church, regardless of where and when they meet to worship God. It is not the place but the people who constitute the Church of Christ. Similarly, wherever a group of Christians meet to worship God or even to share a meal together, there the Church is gathered.

Increasingly Christians are recognizing that the meeting place is no longer the thing of importance but that it is the gathering together itself which is significant. It is precisely because of this “new understanding” of the meaning of church that the church of the twenty first century is undergoing such a metamorphosis.

2.1 Types of House Churches

One of these new expressions of “being the church” is the house church “movement”. Here the word “movement” has been used hesitantly. This is because of the negative connotation that is connected with the word.

For many Christians from the more traditional expression of church, “movement” implies the following:

- a movement can never be a real expression of church;
- a movement always foreshadows what is to come;
- a movement must be constituted;
- a movement will ultimately become a denomination;
- a movement will fade away at some future stage;
- a movement has no visible structure;
- a movement is leaderless.

Through the years there have been various expressions of “smaller groupings” within the more traditional denominations. Some examples of these groupings are Bible study groups, fellowship groups, evangelism groups, outreach groups and study groups.¹⁴ What I would like to consider are the more autonomous groups that have mushroomed in the past fifty years.

For the purpose of this research, I will differentiate between the House Church Movement (HCM) i.e. the groups established in the 1960s, and the Independent House Churches (IHC) i.e. the groups that have now risen to prominence in the latter part of the twentieth century and early twenty first century. It is in this latter group where my field of study lies.

The reason for the growth in the House Church Movement and the Cell Church is twofold. Firstly, bigger congregations feel the need to establish smaller groups for people to gather together weekly, outside of the Sunday worship service. Secondly, in order to care more effectively for their members, smaller groups are created where relationships are built and members’ needs are addressed in a more intimate setting.

2.1.1 The House Church Movement (HCM)

In essence, there are three broad groupings of the House Church Movement. I would like to investigate them by examining their history and by studying the purpose for their existence.

In the 1960s and the 1970s the House Church Movement started in the United Kingdom. It was established in response to the charismatic movement gaining momentum in the mainline traditional churches. This charismatic expression occurred beyond the sphere and scope of the more rigid liturgical style and practice of the orthodox traditional churches. Pentecostal churches practised a freer, spontaneous liturgical style which was attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. These manifestations of the Holy Spirit were normally associated with the release of various spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, physical healing, etc. These practices were not common or regarded as “normal” within the Protestant

¹⁴ This has happened because bigger churches realised that people were losing touch with one another and the congregation was not being cared for sufficiently in the larger body.

churches. There were many people who experienced the Holy Spirit at work in a new and different way and they felt they could no longer remain in their churches where such “phenomena” were regarded as extreme.

“Leaders like Michael Harper, David Watson, Graham Pulkingham, Leslie Davison, Charles J. Clark, Ian Petit and others urged people to stay within their churches and become the powerhouse which in time would renew the communities to which they belonged. At first it seemed that this was going to happen, but then breakaway groups of different kinds emerged, attracting people disenchanted for one reason or another with the status quo, and eventually they aligned themselves with other similar groups and formed what has now become known as the House Church” (Davies, 1986:12).

This led to individuals grouping themselves together as house churches so that they could experience the freedom of the Holy Spirit working in their lives without their denominational constraints. The reason for this move was that people did not want to join the Pentecostal branch. They wanted to remain within Protestantism, but at the same time they wanted to experience the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. This was the start of the original House Church Movement.

These various groups aligned themselves to one of three major streams, namely, Harvestime (Bryn Jones), Mr G. W. North and the Church at South Chard (Sidney Purse). The growth in these groups at the time was phenomenal.

“Perhaps it is better to speak not of the House Church but rather the House Church Movement which has several hundred ‘House Churches’ belonging to it. The 1983 edition of the UK Christian Handbook estimated that in 1980 the House Churches had a membership of some 60 000 people with 200 ministers and over 2 000 churches, which was an increase over 1975 when the comparative figures indicated a membership of 20 000 with 5 ministers and 1 000 churches (or communities). When the 1985/6 UK Christian Handbook was published, the House Church had grown still more, having in 1985 180 000 members, 750 ministers and 5 000 churches. Thus the membership of the House Churches trebled between 1975 and 1980, and trebled again between 1980 and 1985. Whether the membership will again be trebled, reaching 540 000 by 1990, remains to be seen. What cannot be questioned is the incredible rate of growth the last decade” (Davies, 1986:19).

But just as quickly as these House Churches gained a position of prominence, so they seemed to fade into oblivion. One of the major reasons for this was that they grew into denominations once again, despite the fact that they still labelled themselves as “non-denominational.”

“Much of this movement seems to have fallen back quickly into the very same congregational church structures and worship patterns they departed from, except that they place a high value on a breakthrough pastor, powerful worship, spiritual gifts or fervent evangelism. In other words, they renewed the qualitative aspects of the church without touching the structure and poured new wine into a new set of old wineskins. Even the planting of many new churches did not change much, because it was ultimately still old structures which were planted anew” (Simson, 1999:73).

Many of these house churches morphed into Ichthus Fellowship (Roger Forster), Pioneer People (Gerald Coates), New Frontiers International (Terry Virgo), etc. In fact, of the three examples mentioned above, Harvestime no longer exists, the ministry of Mr G.W. North is now known as the Lanark Christian Fellowship, and the Church at South Chard presently still exists under the same name.

“Many have now settled for a fairly traditional ‘family church structure’, have brought forth youth churches or become or joined another network or denomination. About one third of today’s evangelical churches in England are now part of the “New Churches”, as they are generally known” (Simson, 1999:73).

“Members liked their new way of being church and used evangelism to encourage non-churchgoers to join them. They ‘souped up’ the model of church but not the underlying approach: ‘We’ll get a group of Christians together, express church in a way that we enjoy and invite others to come along’. Often they had considerable success. They attracted Christians from mainstream churches who might otherwise have dropped out. They appealed to lapsed Christians and people with some Christian background. Occasionally they drew in people with absolutely no experience of church. New Church attendance in England ballooned from 75 000 in 1980 to 248 000 in 2000” (Moynagh, 2004:20).

2.1.1.1 Common Characteristics of this Movement

Following is an analysis of this Movement. I will observe the factors that characterise it and thereafter stress its weaknesses.

Firstly, the House Churches wanted a charismatic experience i.e. they wanted to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit which, in some circles, is referred to as “the second blessing”. Accompanying this was the desire for the “spiritual gifts”, especially speaking in tongues. This latter phenomenon was seen as a sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the adherents to the House Church Movement had become disillusioned with denominationalism and wanted to be part of a more spontaneous and freer form of liturgical worship. Worship involved being demonstrative where, for example, within this charismatic setting they could clap their hands or raise their hands or make comments.¹⁵

Thirdly, they desired a New Testament type of faith, the same as that read about in the book of Acts. This “oneness” of all things appealed to them. Acts states that “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (2:44). This is what they wanted to experience amongst themselves.

Fourthly, there was a strong emphasis on good solid Bible teaching. The exegesis of the Scriptures took prominence and teaching sessions often lasted from one to two hours.

Fifthly, the emphasis on praise and worship was very appealing. Here was a new, contemporary form and style of worship which took the place of the old, more traditional hymns. The liturgical freedom also meant a far more participative style of worship. Congregants were encouraged to participate actively by praying aloud, prophesying or speaking in tongues. This type of participation had not been allowed previously.

¹⁵ Even though they broke the ties with denominationalism, they were in total submission to leadership. This leadership sometimes represented apostolic leadership or representative leadership beyond their group.

Sixthly, tithing was emphasised as a form of evangelism. Giving was stressed as a sign of obedience to God who required that He be given ten per cent of all that the person received, whether financially or materially.

Unfortunately, what often seems to be “freedom” can ultimately become a form of legalism. So-called “obedience to God” can be so stringently enforced that guilt becomes the overriding emotion experienced by the adherent.

2.1.1.2 Common Weaknesses of this Movement

Firstly, the adherents to the House Church Movement struggled to relate to other denominations. They almost became elitist to the point of believing that only they knew the truth. This did not endear them to those who were still part of the denominational structures.

Secondly, there was a strong emphasis on church members being in submission to their leaders. Along with this was a strong hierarchy of apostles, elders, and church members. An apostolic team oversaw the ministry of the larger grouping and decided what was to be preached and what liturgy was to be followed. Although on paper each individual congregation within the grouping was to be autonomous, this did not happen in practice.

Thirdly, personal choice and freedom was nullified by the leaders who were in positions of power and exercised this power as the so-called “mediators” between God and the ordinary members. The danger of authoritarianism and control was very real. “Where the advice which is offered is not accepted by the individual or people concerned, there follows what is termed ‘confrontation’ when the matter is discussed from every point of view. It is here that the love of the fellowship is tested; when that love is real the matter is solved without any dissension – when it is weak a serious disagreement could ensue which could and does lead to the ‘rebellious’ leaving the fellowship” (Thurman, 1982:63).

Fourthly, women were not allowed to be in positions of leadership. “In all three types of house church women have no part whatsoever in the leadership – although the church at South Chard would be more sympathetic to the idea of women leading and has been known to encourage a church under the leadership of a woman. Nevertheless in the face of male

criticism of a woman leader the leaders at Chard would advise the cessation of female leadership” (Thurman, 1982:72).

These issues were common to all three groups. One notable area of difference was in their forms of worship. The Church at South Chard used loud, repetitive singing; the groups of the North fellowship were quieter, with the leader leading the singing as well as preaching; the Harvestime churches had various musicians playing various instruments as they led people in worship.

“Possibly the differences in the churches can be traced to the underlying vision of the types. Chard has the intent of establishing Body Ministry in the Christian Church, the North groups are concerned with the personal holiness of the individual, whereas the Harvestime churches see themselves as an eschatological grouping of God’s people” (Thurman, 1982:73).

2.1.2 The House Church in America

The House Church Movement as discussed above was unique to the United Kingdom. However, there were groups in America who could prove that their roots were also in the House Church Movement. I will use the Vineyard Christian Fellowship as an example since I was a pastor in that movement and therefore am very familiar with it.

“In October of 1976, some of the leaders from the Yorba Linda Friends Church (Quakers) started a home meeting to encourage one another in their teaching ministries. From the beginning the group had an intense hunger for God. As they met, they sang songs and then broke into small groups to pray for one another. The attendance grew from 12 to 50 in just a few weeks” (Jackson, 1999:58).

Carol Wimber, wife of John Wimber, was attending this group. She invited her husband to join them but he was sceptical of this small group meeting weekly.¹⁶ Finally, at the

¹⁶ It is assumed that John Wimber was the founder of the Vineyard. This was not the case. As documented here, Kenn Gulliksen was the initial leader and only after Wimber joined the movement was he asked to lead the ministry. The history of the Vineyard is very well documented in the book by Bill Jackson titled “The Quest for the Radical Middle”.

beginning of 1977, John consented and joined Carol at an evening gathering. As this “house church” grew, there was a strong desire to experience the Holy Spirit in all His power, as well as to experience the gifts. John Wimber became more disillusioned with the ministry style of the Quaker church which was closed to any manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Originally Wimber did not want to leave the Quakers, but ultimately had no option but to do so when the Quakers asked him to leave. At that time John, along with C. Peter Wagner, was teaching a course at Fuller Seminary School of Theology. This course was called “MC510 Signs, Wonders and Church Growth”.

“The group had grown to about 100 by April, and John had now become their leader. At this point the elders of the Friends church had asked John and Carol to leave” (Jackson, 1999:63).

This house church group felt that they needed to relate to some other ministry i.e. as a covering and for accountability. Carol Wimber had been attending the Calvary Chapel in Twin Peaks during this time and the pastor, Don McClure, suggested that they affiliate themselves with Calvary. This transpired on 8 May 1977 when this group became the Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda.

“Immediately after starting the church John called together all the adult members and shared his vision for growth. The price tag for this growth meant that the ‘inner circle’ had to die to itself and break into smaller groups to make way for new people. They called these groups *kinships*, borrowing a term coined by Lyle Schaller. In the smaller groups people began to find not only a new depth of relationship but a place for newcomers as well. Thus from the very beginning of the Vineyard, small groups were the heart of the infrastructure” (Jackson, 1999:64).

At the same time Kenn and Joanie Gulliksen who had been involved with Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa during the 1970s found their ministry expanding. They worked with Christian musicians such as Larry Norman and Chuck Girard.¹⁷ Kenn and Joanie felt uneasy remaining with the Calvary family as they were exposed to the ministry of the Holy Spirit

¹⁷ Larry Norman was recognised as one of the first artists in the Contemporary Christian Music context. Chuck Girard was a member of the band “Love Song” which was one of the first contemporary Christian bands. In the 1970s they were the prominent Christian musicians who were “in touch” with young people.

and even though Calvary was charismatic in their worship style, they were reformed in their practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In essence they did not subscribe to the manifestation of the various gifts, instead downplaying the manifestation and ministry of the Holy Spirit. This fledgling young group gathering together with Kenn and Joanie were struggling with what to call themselves.

“Early on the group wrestled with what to call themselves. Someone suggested ‘Church of the Creator’, another ‘Holy Ghost Fellowship’. Kenn wasn’t excited about either of these, to say the least. He asked God what he wanted it to be called. About a week later, Kenn was reading from Isaiah and the word *vineyard* jumped out at him. He realized the Holy Spirit was speaking and saying, ‘You’re the Vineyard. Everything the Father wants to do in the life of the church can be seen in the vineyard - ground preparation, sowing, husbandry, pruning, the production of the fruit, grafting, beauty, the joy of the wine...” (Jackson, 1999:81).

In April of 1992 John Wimber, along with other pastors affiliated to Calvary Chapel, gathered. During the meeting the other pastors disapproved of John’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit, especially on his teaching of ‘Signs and Wonders’. A solution was proposed: that John aligns himself with Ken Gullikson from the Vineyard. In May 1982 Yorba Linda Calvary Chapel became the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim. “The Vineyard, now seven churches in all, had a new leader” (Jackson, 1999:86).

What had started off as an intimate, small group of people desiring more of God and experiencing the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, had now grown into a “denomination”, this despite the fact that Vineyard has always referred to themselves as a movement.

My reason for referring to the House Church Movement in the United Kingdom and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in America is to illustrate how these groups that started off as house churches developed into bigger churches requiring staff and buildings. The simplicity they had pursued in their early years was replaced with structure. All of them had broken away from top-heavy organization models in order to be dependent on the Holy Spirit. However, again, a new hierarchy of organization eventually developed in its stead. This period was also the era of the “Church Growth Movement” which meant that success equated to growth numerically. John Wimber had been an associate with C. Peter Wagner at

Fuller Seminary School of Theology.¹⁸ Wagner was a lecturer in the area of church growth, and had also written books on the subject. It was logical that, due to this association, there would be an emphasis on growth in the Vineyard. Wagner had also had contact with the church leaders in the United Kingdom and this also led to the emphasis on church growth across the board.

2.1.3 The Cell Church within the Congregation

The next form of house church that we turn our attention to is the cell church structure.

2.1.3.1 The Cell Church in Korea

The foundation of this structured form of the cell church started in the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. Paul Yongi Cho, the pastor, started the church in 1958 with five people. In 1961 he made the decision that he was going to build the largest church in Korea.

“At that time we had a church of 600 members, a church that I had started three years earlier. We had just moved from the original site of the ‘tent church’ at Taejo Dong, a slum area of Seoul, to a better location in the Sodaemoon (or West Gate) area of downtown. It was a growing church, and I was proud of the work I had accomplished in only three years. In fact, I had become too confident. If I could get 600 members in only three years, I reasoned, why could I not build the largest church in the city?” (Cho, 1981:1).

Cho believed that God wanted to grow his church, but in 1964 he suffered a crisis. “I loved God and wanted to work for Him, but my hidden motive was always the drive to succeed. I was very egotistical, and I wanted to do everything my own way” (Cho, 1981:4). At one of the evening services he collapsed from sheer exhaustion and burn out.

“For the next ten years, from 1964 to 1974, I felt as though I were dying at every moment. It has become clear to me that an arrogant man pays a very high price – a hardened heart is

¹⁸ C. Peter Wagner was the Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary School of Mission. This is regarded as America’s premier missiological training institution.

very hard to break. I had wanted to be broken in an instant; instead it took ten years to destroy ‘the Great Cho’, as I had come to consider myself” (Cho, 1981:11).

Cho believes that this crisis was the best thing that could have happened to him since God got his attention. He realised that the ministry could not grow and expand without help. Until this point he had done everything, delegating little. He preached, led meetings, baptised new converts, and generally performed all the ministerial tasks.

“In my need, God spoke to me of the necessity for having communion with the Holy Spirit – to have intimate fellowship with Him, to share my deepest thoughts and emotions with Him. During the year from 1964 to 1965 I continued to be terribly ill, spending most of my time in bed, but during that time my fellowship with the Holy Spirit began to deepen and take on the characteristics of communion. That revelation was to have the most powerful effect on my ministry. Simply stated, the Lord wanted to show me that I needed to delegate responsibility in the church” (Cho, 1981:15).

Cho then started searching the scriptures in order to discover God’s direction for the next step in his ministry. He read Paul’s letter to the Ephesians about the Body; he read in Acts about the early church where everyone participated together in fellowship in their homes. It dawned on him that this was the answer to his predicament.

“Gradually the idea began to form in my mind: Suppose I released my deacons to open their homes as house churches. Suppose they taught the people, prayed for them to be healed and helped them, and suppose the people helped one another in the same way in those home cell groups. The church could flourish in the homes, and the members could even evangelise by inviting their friends and neighbours to the meetings. Then on Sunday they could bring them to the church building for the worship service. That would exempt me from labouring in visiting and counselling, and other such time-consuming work. I would be free to be the pastor – to teach and to preach and equip the lay leaders for ministry” (Cho, 1981:19).

There were many obstacles that Cho had to face: in Korea it was unheard of to allow women to minister to men in leadership positions; leadership was only given to people who were deacons. Finally, after many meetings and the solving of issues such as these, the cell group church was born. Seoul was divided into twenty districts with a corresponding cell group.

Originally things went slowly, with only 400 to 600 of the 2 400 members attending the first week. During the second week the attendance increased, and gradually the concept gained momentum. However, as with many new initiatives, problems followed.

2.1.3.1.1 Seven Phases of Problems ¹⁹

Firstly, most of the women leading the cells were untrained. The cells that were successful in leadership and evangelism were led by women who had undergone some form of training. In most of the groups led by untrained women, disorder reigned.

Secondly, there was a lack of discipline. As the groups grew and meetings rotated from home to home, competition increased. Each week the hosts provided a meal and soon they were trying to outdo one another. As a result, some people avoided the cells because they were simply not able to compete.

Thirdly, some cells invited visiting speakers and this caused dissention in the Body. They did not consult with the leadership and as a result friction arose. They took up money offerings to give to these visiting speakers, again against the wishes of the leadership.

Fourthly, cell group members borrowed money from each other, often charging interest. Some were encouraged to invest money in business ventures where they lost everything due to bad business practices.

Fifthly, the growth in some groups was phenomenal. In many homes space was limited and a single leader could not cope with the number of people. Assistant leaders were trained and the groups divided.

Sixthly, offerings were taken up at every meeting. However, sometimes the leaders borrowed from this money without repaying it. Organization was required and a registrar and a treasurer were appointed in each group. It was their task to record the amounts given

¹⁹ These problems did not occur concurrently i.e. they happened over time. This is why I refer to it as phases. In his book “Successful Home Cell Groups”, Paul Yongi Cho also refers to them as phases.

during the offerings and to ensure that that money was handed over to the church on the Sunday.

The seventh phase of problems was the most unexpected of all. Three of the licensed ministers who were each leading a cell church, became power hungry and decided to split from the church. Fortunately this split only lasted for six months.

Because of the above-mentioned problems, measures were put in place to prevent these issues from recurring. These same measures resulted in the cell churches becoming highly structured. In the Korean context this type of cell church has worked, because they are a highly disciplined society.

The Full Gospel Central Church in Korea has grown to hundreds of thousands of people and continues to operate as a cell church structure. Paul Yongi Cho still heads up the ministry. However, he would be the first to admit that it would not be nearly as effective if people were not cared for in smaller “congregations”, a central principle in the cell church structure.

This model has been replicated throughout the world and we will now turn our attention to one of the foremost proponents of this form of ministry.

2.1.3.2 The Cell Church in America

In 1990 Ralph Neighbour wrote a book with the title “Where do we go from here?” He had become frustrated with the traditional church structures. He had grown up as the son of a minister, and was himself in the ministry. He stated the following: “I could not understand why American churches universally suffered from stunted growth. Only a few dozen have been able to grow beyond 5 000 members, and only a couple of dozen have Sunday schools that are larger than 2 000. In the light of the population explosion, that seemed ridiculous. In the light of the book of Acts, it seemed intolerable” (Neighbour, 1990:78).

This journey began for him in 1965 at the age of thirty six. He had been instrumental in planting a few churches in North East America. “In each new town, we started churches in the homes of a few believers. We grew rapidly as long as we met in that way. Everyone

pitched in; everyone shared his excitement with friends over the newly forming church. Folks got converted regularly. We grew each church large enough to call a pastor and erect a 'starter building'. It puzzled me that, along with lovely new buildings and seminary graduates in the pulpits, nearly every one of those churches stagnated within a few years" (Neighbour, 1990:79).

This seemed to be the pattern wherever Neighbour went. When he spoke at conventions he discovered in his interaction with others in ministry that there was a dearth of converts. As he examined this phenomenon over and over again, he came to the conclusion that Christians lived in isolation from the community at large. They were so actively engaged in church activities that they had no contact with the non-Christian community. He started to frequent a sportsmen's lounge where he engaged with unbelievers. He discovered that they had absolutely no desire for attending church – in fact they showed no interest in any form of religious institution. This opened his eyes to the realities of the American situation and he was inspired to do something about it.

"Where did we come up with the idea that unconverted people are burning with desire to get all dressed up on Sunday morning instead of sleeping in, busting with enthusiasm to drive to a church facility, and filled with an insatiable thirst for Bible study?" (Neighbour, 1990:81).

In Neighbour's own church it was expected of unbelievers that they attend a Bible study as a point of entry into the church community. If they did not do this, they were ignored. It seemed preposterous to think that the very people that the church community wanted to reach were the very people that, in fact, could not attain the church's standard. Along with some friends he felt challenged to do something about the situation.

"We formed home cell groups, where our unchurched friends were made to feel welcome. They loved these get-togethers! We made the rounds of all the taverns in our area and met unreached men and women. We held barbecues in our back yards and met unmet neighbours. Our wives joined bridge clubs as a contact point with women in the area. My high school sons hung out where teenagers bought drugs, and we started small groups with them. We even opened 'The Giant Step', a ministry for prostitutes and pimps who were heroin addicts. Forty of us stayed with them by shifts, around the clock, in an old rented house, putting wet towels on their foreheads as they vomited their way through withdrawal.

Later, we took them into our homes to show them how Christian families live” (Neighbour, 1990:85).

This was the kick-start that Neighbour needed to realise that the life of the church lay in cell churches. It was not without its problems. The denomination with whom he was involved did not like this idea and insisted on holding on to their traditions. Finally, Neighbour had no option but to resign in 1980.²⁰ Fortunately, prior to this time Neighbour had had the opportunity to travel to the East to experience these cell groups in person. He was convinced that this was the way forward for the Christian church in America. He pursued what he felt that God was laying on his heart and developed the whole cell church structure.

In his book “Where do we go from here?” Neighbour wrote a manual for churches that were investigating the establishment of a cell church structure within their existing churches. The emphasis was on dividing the whole congregation into cell churches which met weekly.

“The cell churches may contain thousands of members, but the only thing a person can ‘join’ is a cell group that numbers no more than fifteen persons. The building block of all living organisms is a cell. Anyway, cells don’t grow; they multiply into more cells. Thus the growth is composed of tiny ‘mini-churches’, where there is a potential for more intimacy and transparency than one can ever find in a traditional church” (Neighbour, 1990:89).

2.1.3.2.1 The Structure of the Cell Church

One must bear in mind that this cell church structure operates within a traditional church context, and not autonomously. It, therefore, requires lots of planning and a high degree of structure in order to operate successfully within an institution.

What are the basic components of a cell church?

²⁰ Neighbour founded Touch Outreach Ministries as an equipping resource centre for cell churches. They distribute literature on how to implement cell church structures and conduct seminars. He operates as a consultant to cell churches.

2.1.3.2.1.1 The Cell

The most basic form or structure is the cell. This is a group of approximately fifteen people or fewer. When the cell reaches fifteen people it is expected that it will multiply to form two cells. All the churches programmes happen within the cell context, therefore there is no competition from any other church activity. Within this cell, two types of groups exist: the Shepherd group, where people are nurtured in their faith walk, and the Share group, where people are taught to share their faith with unbelieving friends. The Share group is an offshoot of the Shepherd group, connecting with unbelievers for the sole purpose of converting them, after which they are drawn into the Shepherd group.

A Zone Servant is appointed to oversee five Shepherd groups. This Zone Servant is unpaid and is only appointed after he/she has served his/her 'apprenticeship' as a Shepherd of one or two other cell groups.

2.1.3.1.1.2 The Congregation

The congregation is the next group within this structure. Twenty five Shepherd groups form a Congregation. They are formed regionally. Their purpose is for equipping, worship, and to cluster together for an evangelism event. A Zone Pastor is responsible for each of these Shepherd groups plus their five Zone Servants. It is important to stress that the congregation never replaces the cell. The cell remains the most important and basic structure. People can never join the congregation without first joining the cell.

2.1.3.1.1.3 The Celebration

The final link in this structure is the celebration. This is a mass meeting where all the cells gather together for worship, preaching and teaching. These occasions are referred to as 'events' and not 'services'. There is no specified end time to these events: they could last for hours. At these events the Senior Pastor oversees the activities.

One must conclude from the above analysis that the Cell Church system is highly hierarchical. It is also legalistic in that one cannot belong to the church unless one belongs to a cell. Membership is confined to those who are part of the cell church structure. If one is not

a member of a cell one is then regarded as a visitor. Because of the intricate structure, this necessitates regular meetings as the shepherds and pastors are required to meet on a regular basis. Certain leaders, therefore, are loaded with even more commitments than before.

2.1.3.1.2 The Cell Church and Young People

One of the positive outcomes of the cell church structure is that provision is made for youth cells. Children and teenagers are considered as vital in this form of ministry and are encouraged to form cell churches with their peers. When the cells get together for congregational or celebration events the youth cells join in with the other cells.

“Children’s small groups in the cell church should be designed to fulfil all the functions of adult small groups, but they will also have characteristics special to children. The people who lead them will be group leaders more than teachers, and they will shape their ministry on the model of kinship” (Neighbour, 1990:269).

“The home and family is still the prime context in which affective learning can take place – where attitudes, behaviour and values are created. Since Christian nurture has a large affective component, the family is likely the best model for transformative education. A cell group best reflects that model” (Neighbour, 1990:275).

Within the teen cells, teenagers themselves are involved as Shepherds amongst their peers. This is a good training ground for young people to exercise their leadership skills.

2.1.3.3 General Observation of House Churches and Cell Churches

As explained earlier, the House Church Movement in both the United Kingdom and America came to prominence during the “church growth period” that spurred them on to grow into fully-fledged congregations. One of the weak points of these House Churches was the lack of recognition of young people. The activities of the House Churches were geared towards adults, even though many of the adults were young and often childless couples.

The cell church structure, by contrast, has a high regard for young people and makes provision for them by means of cells. Through the congregational and celebrational events, people of all ages interact with each other.

2.1.4 The Independent House Churches (IHC)

During the last thirty to forty years a third form of House Church has been birthed. Unlike those referred to above, these have had a very different approach to “being the church”. Whereas the above groupings have wanted to grow their small groups, the goal of house churches is not to grow their present groups. Their goal is to multiply and form new groups. It is envisaged that the most successful form of evangelism is to be culturally relevant. Amongst other things this means that a neighbourhood be saturated with numerous independent, autonomous house churches.

“House church is an informal term for an independent assembly of Christians gathering in a home or on other grounds not normally used for worship services, as opposed to a church building, due to specific beliefs. They may meet in homes because they prefer to meet informally, because they believe it is an effective way of creating ‘community’ and engaging in outreach, or because they believe small family-sized churches were a deliberate apostolic pattern in the first century and intended by Christ”.²¹

²¹ Information drawn from the Internet at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_Church.

There are also other names or labels that are given to these independent house churches, namely, 'simple church', 'relational church', 'primitive church', 'bodylife', 'organic church', 'biblical church' or 'base communities'.

Unlike the House Church Movement and the Cell Church Structure referred to above, it is very difficult to place an exact time and place on the founding of the Independent House Churches. This is because House Churches, by and large, are devoid of the structures that we associate with churches. There is no building or signage that indicates its existence. There is no fulltime minister or pastor that attends minister fraternals in the neighbourhood. There is no church office with a listed telephone number in order to contact the secretary. For some this can be very disconcerting, especially if they are accustomed to the old familiar structures of the more formal church.

House Churches gather in relatives' or friends' homes; they gather at the local coffee shops; they enjoy picnics together alongside the river; they eat meals together in a restaurant. This concept requires a major paradigm shift for those who are accustomed to a church meeting in a certain building, on a certain day and at a certain time.

“Could it be that God wants to change everything about how we view the church? He has created the Church to be a dynamic, growing, changing movement, not a static doctrine. The Spirit of God calls each generation to re-imagine church for its own context and culture. The Holy Spirit invites every generation into the struggle to discover the answers and approaches for themselves about church – answers that bring them into fresh partnership with God and fresh contact with their culture” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:17).

It is an undeniable fact that House Churches do exist throughout the world and that they are growing at an unprecedented rate. The areas where they are having the most impact are in the East, in South America and Africa. One of the major reasons for their growth is the fact that they are not associated with a church building. In the more traditional approach to church, a building is needed in order to worship God. In the new paradigm, the lack of building means that more and more faith communities can be multiplied by meeting in homes. Instead of finances being poured into maintaining a building, finances are channelled into caring for those in need.

2.1.4.1 The American and Canadian Context

“The origins of the North American house church trend are varied. Some consider it a new variety of the Plymouth Brethren movement; others recognise a relationship to the Anabaptists, Quakers, Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Moravians, Methodists and the much earlier Waldenses and Pricillianists. Another perspective sees the house church movement as a re-emergence of the move of the Holy Spirit during the Jesus Movement of the 1970s in the USA or the worldwide Charismatic Renewal of the late 1960s and 1970s”.²²

As previously mentioned, it is extremely difficult to determine an exact date as to when the Independent House Churches began. This is as applicable to the North American culture as it is to the rest of the world. A common phenomenon in churches over the centuries is conflict. Conflict arises over major issues such as church politics, leadership issues and programme ideas, as well as over more mundane issues such as the colour of the new curtains, or whether mugs are preferable to cups and saucers. Trouble over such a superficial matter as the colour of the new curtains usually hides a far deeper problem within the particular church. Some House Churches which exist today do so as a result of these splits. However, most splits are as a result of a difference in opinion regarding teaching and doctrine.

Following is one example of an Independent House Church whose roots we can trace. DOVE Christian Fellowship in Pennsylvania is an Independent House Church started by Larry and LaVerne Kreider. In 1978, Larry felt that God was challenging him to start a new form of church i.e. one different to what he had previously experienced.

“In 1980, the Kreiders gathered a handful of believers and formed DOVE Christian Fellowship. DOVE is an acronym for *Declaring Our Victory Emmanuel*. The name is less important than the vision that propels it. Kreider sensed that the Lord wanted this new community to meet in homes, to rely on lay leadership and to focus its attention on reaching the lost unchurched society that would not participate in a traditional church structure” (Garrison, 2004:166).

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_Church

What started originally as three groups, by 1990 DOVE showed significant growth. In ten years this community grew to 2 300 members, with people participating in home fellowships across southern Pennsylvania. By the year 2001 the DOVE family of churches had multiplied, spreading to five continents throughout the world.

According to the latest statistics, 1 600 House Churches in America are registered on the Internet but, according to church statistician George Barna, there could be as many as 30 000 in that country.²³ In Canada the statistics indicate that there could be 2 000 House Churches. House Churches are autonomous, but many of them relate to “Networks” which provide resources such as literature and conference material. They also plan conferences for the House Churches. These Networks are not “headquarters” or “covering bodies”, but function as a loose network of like-minded churches. DOVE, House2House, The New Testament Restoration Foundation and Present Testimony Ministry are some of the more prominent Networks in America.

“The house church movement is no longer a fringe movement in North America or the world. In fact, many church families and denominations throughout the world are involved in the house church movement. House churches are alive and well and growing, in our nation and in many other nations. House churches, simple churches or micro-churches are meeting the needs of many North Americans as they seek new forms of spiritual community and worship” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:137).

2.1.4.2 The European Context

“In 1996 two young Swiss evangelicals began a cell church. In just five years the International Christian Fellowship grows to more than 3 000 members meeting in several hundred home cell groups” (Garrison, 2004:139).

²³ George Barna is the founder of The Barna Group, an organization specialising in church statistics. Along with fellow statisticians, he has been involved in collecting and collating church statistics in America since 1990. He is held in high esteem by the churches in America and has a reputation of being highly accurate in his projections.

In 1995, missionaries Larry and Laura Hughes began working in Eindhoven in Holland. They discovered that this area was a haven for refugees from all over the world – an estimated 90 000 refugees. Their original strategy was to visit and spend time with these refugees who were from Iran, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Afghanistan. In 1997 they felt the need to plant House Churches amongst them. They were uncertain as to what the response would be since this was a new concept not only for them, but also for the refugees themselves. By the end of that year ten groups were gathering. In 1998 they started fifteen new groups and halfway through that year left on furlough. They were not sure what they would find when they returned to Eindhoven. However, to their surprise, they discovered that the number of House Churches had grown to thirty, with possibly more that they did not know about.

Larry Hughes explains why this ministry has exploded so rapidly: “All of our house churches have lay pastor/leaders because we turn over the work so fast that the missionary seldom leads as many as two or three Bible studies before God raises at least one leader. The new leader seems to be both saved and called to lead at the same time, so we baptize him and give him a Bible. After the new believer/leaders are baptized, they are so on fire that we simply cannot hold them back. They fan out all over the country starting Bible studies and a few weeks later we begin to get word back how many have started. It’s the craziest thing we ever saw! We did not start it, and we couldn’t stop it if we tried.” (Garrison, 2004:143)

2.1.4.3 The Latin American Context

“Every Saturday night, 18 000 youth line up to enter a stadium for worship in Bogota, Columbia. Each week another 500 youth commit their lives to Christ and the core values of prayer, fasting and holiness. During the week they gather in 8 000 youth cell groups” (Garrison, 2004:123).

Columbia is one of the most violent countries in the world. It is estimated that 70 people die every day which, in turn, means about 25 000 deaths per year. Citizens of that country live in fear of kidnapping and murder. Yet in all this turmoil God is at work. House Church-based worshipping communities are flourishing. In 1983, at the International Charismatic Mission in the capital, Bogotá, there were 70 small groups. Eight years later the number had grown to more than 20 000.

“In Latin America, church planters began by becoming spiritual fathers and mothers who trained and released their spiritual sons and daughters to become new house church planters. In 1989, there were 129 churches in one area of Latin America. Nine years later, the number had grown exponentially to 1 918!” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:123).

Leonardo Boff in his book “Ecclesiogenesis” gives a record of what is happening to the Catholic Church in Brazil. There has been enormous growth in the church, especially in the rural areas, so much so that the church does not have enough seminary graduates to lead the churches. They have had to rethink the way they “do” church and their solution has been to start up what they call “Base Communities” to serve all the people. These are small groups of people who meet together in a facility to worship God together.

2.1.4.4 The Chinese Context

In the context of Independent House Churches, it is China that defines what it means to operate as a house church network.

“The revival in China today, for example, is considered the largest spiritual harvest since the book of Acts. This revival was fuelled by the severe persecution of Christians during the Cultural Revolution. Today, an estimated 35 000 Chinese become Christians every day through various house church movements that have sprung up throughout the nation. There are over 100 million believers in these unregistered house churches in China” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:119).

It is a very difficult task to get accurate statistics about the number of House Churches in China as this is a communist country where such statistics are not readily available. What we are certain of, however, is that it is the persecution that has caused House Churches to flourish. Christians cannot meet publicly for fear of being arrested, so House Churches spring up to fill the gap.

“Chinese house churches are unregistered Christian churches in the People’s Republic of China, which operate independently of the government-run Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC) for Protestant groups and the Chinese Patriotic

Catholic Association (CCPA) and the Chinese Catholic Bishops Council (CCBC) for Catholics. They are also known as the “Underground” Church or the “Unofficial” Church, although this is somewhat of a misnomer as they are collections of unrelated individual churches rather than a single unified church”.²⁴

A few years ago Larry Kreider met together with 80 leaders of the Chinese House Churches. Following that gathering, he felt that he had learnt far more from these men and women than he could ever have taught them. He discovered that ninety five percent of them had spent time in prison. There was only one reason for this imprisonment: their faith. Many of them had travelled for many days by train to meet with Kreider. He was particularly struck by the testimony of a man who oversaw approximately ten million house church members through the network he co-ordinated.

“In light of these hardships, God has poured out His grace on the Chinese Church. This underground church is probably experiencing the greatest move of God in history since Pentecost and it is all happening in and through house churches. The Chinese Church is the most strategically organized church in the world, and it is all networked through house churches.” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:120).

Another significant factor within the Chinese House Churches is their desire to train 100 000 missionaries and send them first to their neighbouring countries and from there throughout the world. This is particularly significant if one considers how the West, specifically through the missionary efforts of C.T. Studd, crossed cultural differences to take the Gospel to China. The process is now in reverse with the East sending missionaries back to the West.

2.1.4.5 The Eastern Context

China is not an isolated example of House Churches being birthed at a phenomenal rate: it is happening throughout the East. The Muslim World is a case in point. Islam and Christianity have been at loggerheads for more than thirteen centuries. It would appear that God is at

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_house_church

work in the Muslim world as never before. David Garrison says: “More Muslims have come to Christ in the past two decades than at any other time in history” (Garrison, 2004:99).

One may well ask how it is that Muslims are starting to embrace the Christian faith. This process has come about due to some key factors: the availability of a Muslim-friendly New Testament; the meeting in homes rather than in buildings; the adoption of Muslim-friendly names for the church; pastors and new believers using the Qur‘an as a bridge to invite Muslims to dialogue about Jesus and the New Testament. However, most significant of all is the bold witness of ex-Muslims who have become Christians.

“In an Asian Muslim country, more than 150 000 Muslims embrace Jesus and gather in more than 3 000 locally led Isa Jamaats (Jesus Groups)” (Garrison, 2004:99).

2.1.4.6 The African Context

Africa has not escaped the House Church phenomenon. At present the African Independent Churches are showing rapid growth throughout the continent. In the past most of these churches based their styles on Western church forms and practices. Recently this has been changing and faith communities are discovering the richness of their own culture in terms of the expression of their faith. Through the use of Western models in the past, the African church lost its unique identity, but with the growth of House Churches it has caused it to rediscover its own form and practice in terms of “doing church”.

In Ethiopia, a missionary strategist commented, “It took us 30 years to plant four churches in this country. We’ve started 65 cell churches in the last nine months” (Dale, 2003:10).

Previously African churches believed that if they were to copy the Western models they would grow and be successful. This crippled the church: there were millions of people living in poverty yet, in order to implement the Western models, leaders were demanding that their members fund their “dreams” for success. Increasingly, however, church leaders are recognizing that the building and its trimmings are not “the church” - the people are the church. Together with this different approach comes the realization that they can meet anywhere. The House Church is being birthed in Africa.

“Over the past century, the number of professing Christians in Africa grows from nine million to more than 360 million. Each month an estimated 1 200 churches are started in Africa” (Garrison, 2004:85).

One sees a similar phenomenon occurring in South Africa. More and more House Churches are being birthed in this country. Roger Dickson, an American living in the Tygerberg area of Cape Town, has a list of approximately 50 House Churches in the Western Cape alone.²⁵ He did a tract drop about two years ago and people responded to tell him about their house churches.

As with the other examples throughout the world, it is extremely difficult to estimate how many Independent House Churches there are in South Africa: this number changes continuously as more and more churches emerge. What I am convinced of, however, is that increasingly young people are becoming disillusioned with the institutional church and are forming small intimate fellowship groups.

2.2 The Strategy of Independent House Churches

Unlike the House Church Movement, the Independent House Churches are not trying to grow their existing small groups into bigger congregations. As previously mentioned, the House Church Movement came into existence at a time when the Church Growth Movement rose to prominence. Generally these House Churches grew into bigger congregations. The other option was for an existing bigger congregation to develop a Cell Church structure.

The Independent House Churches, however, do not attempt to grow their existing groups numerically. They are always looking for opportunities to start new groups. These new groups can meet in the homes of new converts who have no traditional church affiliations or in the homes of “pre-Christians” i.e. people who are interested in Christianity, but who have not yet committed their lives to Jesus. These new groups are immediately both autonomous

²⁵ I gleaned this information during a telephone conversation with him on Monday 10 December 2007. He has been involved in House Church ministry for the past 20 years and so has had contact with most of these groups.

and independent. The goal is that these new groups should never be dependent on existing groups.

The Independent House Churches exist in a “Network” i.e. they have a relational existence with other House Churches. I firmly believe that it is vital that House Churches network with one another in order to avoid the very real danger of becoming isolated. Isolation can easily give rise to a certain cultishness in belief and behaviour. “When each house church, although a little church in itself, is committed to networking with other micro-churches in their city or region, it keeps them from pride, exclusiveness and heresy” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:73).

There are two critical factors in the life of House Churches: firstly, the equipping of believers i.e. discipleship, and, secondly, outreach i.e. evangelism. Discipleship is encouraged amongst the members of the House Churches where each person is held accountable either to the group itself (or an individual in the group) or to a fellow Christian outside of the House Church.

“A true local church then, as we understand it, is a group of believers who are committed to the Lord and to one another, committed to obeying His Word, committed to a common vision and accountable to spiritual leadership. They are a group of believers meeting together regularly, caring for one another, watching out for one another and corporately seeking to worship, serve God and reach out to those who do not know Jesus. That is the local church, whatever its size, style or building in which it meets. Simple!” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:68).

The focus of the House Church is always outward i.e. towards those who are not part of “the community of faith”. Evangelism is at the core of the House Churches’ existence: we as Christians need to engage actively and meaningfully with the community and society in which we live, work and play.

“At the heart of home churches then, is God’s mission. The mission field is the world – the business world, the world of education, the world of arts and entertainment, the worlds of government, science, industry and the marketplace” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:30).

2.3 The Liturgy of Independent House Churches

Later in this thesis I will be looking at the subject of liturgy in more detail. Here I will discuss briefly whether there is a liturgy in the Independent House Churches and, if there is, what it is. Unfortunately, as with statistics regarding the House Churches throughout the world, facts regarding the practice of liturgy are not well documented. However, one can state with certainty that each House Church does, in fact, have its own “form” of liturgy. Because each group is independent and autonomous, this “form” differs from group to group.

The Anglican Community finds its liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer; the Methodists’ worship service is modelled along a similar style and format throughout the world; the Pentecostal churches have a format and order in which they do things which allows for a measure of spontaneity within that liturgy.

However, when it comes to the House Churches, things are done differently. The style and format of the gathering could be exactly the same every week, if that is what works for them. Therefore, this is their “liturgy”. On the other hand it could be totally different every week: different people with different gifts, expressed creatively, lead on different weeks. Put another way, the format and style is dependent on the person who has the responsibility of leading the gathering that particular week. In the context of House Churches there is a far greater freedom of expression.

“Each house church is a fully functioning church in itself. It has leaders who facilitate the involvement of everyone in the group. Meetings are participatory and interactive family-type gatherings where everyone has the opportunity to contribute something. Participants gather weekly to explore issues of faith or work on projects as they study the Bible, eat, pray, play, share the Lord’s Supper and baptize new believers” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:68).

One of the accusations which can sometimes be levelled at the House Church is that a gathering could be “messy” since there is no “liturgy”. Critics could say that there should be some form or structure and that meetings should take place in an orderly fashion. Here I must stress that, having freedom of expression amongst a group of believers gathering together, does not mean that there is no leadership. There is leadership, but in a facilitative

way. There is no evidence of “heavy-handedness” or the need for meek “submission”. In these House Churches there is a definite awareness that a “top-down” leadership approach is open to abuse of power. Many within these groups have been on the receiving end of such abuse in the more institutionalized church and want to avoid a recurrence of this at any cost.

As Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung state so succinctly, “The litmus test used to discern if a house church is healthy is simple: The believers in a healthy house church focus on loving Jesus, loving each other, reaching those who don’t know Jesus and respecting the rest of the Body of Christ” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:76).

CHAPTER 3

3. THE COMMUNITY EMPHASIS IN LUKE-ACTS

In the previous chapter we looked at the small group paradigm, including House Churches and Cell Churches. There is a natural question that flows out of this observation, namely, is there biblical basis for their existence? For the purpose of this chapter, I will look at the Christian communities as explained by Luke both in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts.

I will look at Luke's emphasis on families and the communal/family meals. In his Gospel his emphasis is mainly on Jesus' interaction with the outcasts of society, those whom the Pharisees regarded as sinners. A number of these interactions took place around the meal table. In our modern day context we could refer to this as "table evangelism". In the Book of Acts, the emphasis shifts to the Christian communities gathering to eat together, as well as to the role of families in the homes. This we could classify as the "building up of the Body". From these narratives I will draw some conclusions about the early church, as well as discuss certain practices which are common to both the early church and the Independent House Churches. This brings me to the main purpose of this dissertation i.e. an attempt to answer the following two questions:

- how do young people fit into the House Church structure?
- is there a specific liturgy applicable to them within the context of the House Church?

"Eating is one of the most intimate acts in social interaction. To eat with someone normally signals some level of social acceptance. Eating is universal. At the same time eating is one of the most particular acts in a culture. What a person eats, when they eat, with whom they eat, where they eat and how the food is prepared is unique to each culture" (Dollar, 1996:151).

Eating a meal together normally happens in an informal, relaxed way; this in turn creates an atmosphere conducive to conversation. Jesus spent time in the homes of numerous people whom he encountered. In most instances he was invited for a meal. Luke placed a lot of emphasis on these encounters, relating in some detail how Jesus interacted with the local inhabitants. Jesus never missed an opportunity to mix with the common people and share His

life with them. He shared in their meals, not out of a sense of duty, but because He was filled with compassion for them and was genuinely concerned for their well-being.

3.1 Jesus, the Invited Guest

“In the light of the importance of the temple in the Third Gospel, the balance between the temple and the house in Luke 1 & 2 is noteworthy. There, both function as space for divine revelation and the praise of God (1:25–56). As the narrative develops, a similar pairing of synagogue and house will occur. In the end, temple and synagogue will present themselves as antagonist to Jesus and his message, and the house will more and more become the centre of Jesus’ movement” (Green, 1995:12).

Jesus was invited into the homes of the so called “sinners”. I will focus my attention on two of these scenes, make certain observations and then look at the early Christian communities meeting in homes. These two events typify Jesus’ interaction with people with whom He lived as well as represent his attitude towards those who were not “religious” or, as the Pharisees phrased it, were not “righteous”.

3.1.1 The Calling of Levi

The first incident recorded is in Luke’s Gospel in Chapter 5.²⁶ Jesus had just called Levi, a tax collector, to follow Him. Amazingly, Levi left everything to follow Jesus. He was prepared to leave a well-paying, though not popular, occupation to follow someone who could offer him neither security nor salary. He was prepared to sacrifice his vocation for the sake of someone who promised him no material prosperity.

“This must have meant a considerable sacrifice, for tax collectors were normally wealthy. Levi (Matthew) must have been the richest of the apostles. We should not miss the quiet heroism involved in this. If following Jesus had not worked out for the fisherman, they could

²⁶ Luke 5:27&28 records, “After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi, sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me’, Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him”.

have returned to their trade without difficulty. But when Levi walked out of his job he was through. They would surely never take back a man who had simply abandoned his tax office. His following of Jesus was a final commitment” (Morris, 1974:119).

Levi then took it one step further. His life had been transformed: he had just met someone who gave him a new purpose for living; he could not keep this relationship secret so others had to meet this new friend. He prepared a meal in order to introduce his friends to Jesus. “Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them” (Luke 5:29). Levi became the perfect host, providing hospitality not only to Jesus but to others who were regarded as “outcasts” in the community by virtue of their occupation.

There is a perception in this narrative which indicates that, wherever good was being done, there were those who felt that it was their duty to “speak against” what was happening. Although the Pharisees were not invited, word soon reached them of the banquet at Levi’s house. It did not take them long to make their way to his home in order to see what was happening.²⁷

This was the first meal as recorded in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus was invited to, and it happened to be in the home of a tax collector. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day and spiritual matters were of great concern to them. It is possible that, knowing there was a banquet taking place where spiritual matters were being discussed, this could have provoked them to respond as they did.

However, it is more likely that their concern emanated from a sense of horror that this so-called “Son of God” had the audacity to eat and drink with sinners. To them it was almost blasphemy that one who claimed to be the “Messiah” would talk to sinners, never mind spend time in their homes as Jesus did.

“To welcome people at the table had become tantamount to extending to them intimacy, solidarity, acceptance; table companions were treated as though they were of one’s extended

²⁷ Luke 5:30 says, “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’”.

family. Sharing food encoded messages about hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and crossing boundaries. Who ate with whom, where one sat in relation to whom at the table – such questions as these were charged with social meaning in the time of Jesus and Luke. As a consequence to refuse table fellowship with people was to ostracize them, to treat them as outsiders” (Green, 1995:87).

Although it was Jesus with whom the Pharisees were indignant, it was the disciples whom they addressed, not Jesus. (Were they apprehensive to talk to Jesus directly?) However, it was Jesus Himself who in turn addressed them. He spoke directly to them about their own self-righteousness. He knew their hearts: He knew that they were more concerned about parading their “righteousness”, more concerned about those who were socially respectable, than they were about the poor. Jesus cut through their superficial and showy spirituality and said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31&32).

Jesus’ mission was to proclaim the Kingdom of God. When he sent out the seventy two disciples He gave them the following mandate: “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, the Kingdom of God is near you” (Luke 10:9). Isaiah had prophetically declared what Christ’s mission would be:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Isaiah 61:1&2; Luke 4:18&19).

This was the mandate given to the Son by the Father: all mankind was to hear the Good News of the Kingdom of God. This was what the Pharisees could not understand. Their religion meant ceremonial activities and rules that had to be adhered to; in their self-importance they regarded themselves as experts in spiritual matters and expected to be consulted in all matters regarding religion. However, this Jesus was bypassing them and going straight to the people, and not just to the so-called righteous people but to the “riff-raff” of society.

“That Jesus’ vocation of “proclaiming good news to the poor” embraces not only the economically oppressed in particular but also the excluded and disadvantaged of society more generally becomes clear from a survey of Jesus’ interactions with people in the Third Gospel. Indeed, it is surely of consequence that, though Jesus announces his mission “to the poor”, Luke never narrates his actually evangelizing “the poor” so named. Instead, Jesus is continuously in the company of those on the margins of society, able neither to participate as full partners in social interchange nor completely rejected” (Green, 1995:84).

For Jesus, His life’s purpose was to extend the grace of God to a people in need – it was for this He lived and for this He died. He met people at their point of need and, although He was God, He “made Himself nothing” (Philippians 2:7). This contrasted starkly with the Pharisees on the other hand, who expected to be treated with honour, reverence and respect because of who they were. Their form of spirituality was all talk and no action.

Jesus broke with religious convention by going to the house of a sinner and eating with him, and by associating with his friends who were regarded as the enemies of the Jews. The tax-collectors were despised; they were regarded as social outcasts along with the prostitutes; they were people with whom a respectable person simply would not associate.

It would seem that, because the Pharisees had no answer to Jesus’ assertion that He had come to call sinners – not the righteous – to repentance, they changed the direction of their argument. Instead they moved on to the issues of fasting and praying, topics with which they were extremely familiar. They contended that, if the disciples of John the Baptist fasted and prayed regularly, so too should the disciples of Jesus. In contrast to John’s disciples, Jesus’ disciples were clearly not performing “acts of righteousness”.

Jesus used a “mini-parable” of a wedding feast as an illustration in order to explain why His disciples were eating and drinking. A wedding feast is a joyous occasion; it calls for great celebration. The disciples were friends of the symbolic “bridegroom”, Jesus – it was only fitting that they celebrate with Him. The Pharisees’ interaction and conversation during Mathew’s banquet reveals an extremely narrow perspective in terms of their thinking. “Righteousness” had for them, a very specific meaning and understanding and, unless people lived according to their definition, they were not acceptable to God or to the religious community. In contrast, Jesus came to provide the disciples and mankind with the “abundant

life” that the Apostle John refers to in his Gospel account (John 10:10). Thus, experiencing this “life” meant great and continuous celebration.²⁸

To explain this concept further, Jesus used an illustration which the people of that day could relate to. In Jewish culture the skins of animals, specifically goats, were used as containers for liquids. As these skins became older and less flexible, they were prone to perish and tear. A new piece of skin could be attached to the old wineskin, but ultimately it too would tear and the old wineskin would have to be replaced by a new wineskin, elastic and flexible. In this context Jesus referred to Himself as the new wineskin; from this one infers that the Pharisees were considered part of the old wineskins in His illustration. The old wineskins were no longer able to contain the new wine which the Father had provided. Jesus was not like the new piece of skin applied to the old wineskin i.e. Judaism, but He is the new wineskin needed in the Father’s plan of salvation.

“The imagery of drinking aged wine now characterizes the old kind of fasting. That no one who drinks old wine from old wineskins he considers to be good, wishes to try young wine in new wineskins explains for the audience why the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees are content to fast in preparation for God’s coming salvation rather than to feast in recognition that God’s salvation has already arrived in the person of Jesus as the bridegroom of God’s wedding banquet” (Heil, 1999:31).

3.1.2 Invitation to the Home of a Pharisee

In this account as recorded in Luke (7:36–50) a Pharisee, reputed to be Simon, invited Jesus to his home for a banquet.²⁹ We are not told the reason for this invitation: perhaps it was a

²⁸ Luke 5:33-35 explains this parable. “They said to him, ‘John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking’. Jesus answered, ‘Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast’.”

²⁹ Luke 7:36-43 “Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured

genuine act of hospitality in order to get to know Jesus; perhaps it was to interrogate Him as to whom He actually was and for Him to explain His purpose. There is no indication that there were other Pharisees present, although it is clear that other guests had also been invited (verse 49). It is possible that this act of hospitality took place in secret and that only the invited knew about the banquet. Perhaps Simon was concerned about his reputation and did not want to be called to account for his actions by his fellow Pharisees.

“It is a mark of Jesus’ broad sympathies that He dined earlier with a publican and now with a Pharisee” (Morris, 1974:146).

Responding positively to Simon’s invitation to a meal reveals Jesus’ response to mankind in general: He shows no favouritism; wherever He is invited, He goes. Here once again, we see the contrast between the Pharisees and Jesus: His mission was to reach out to everyone in need, regardless of culture and social standing. All people are in need of God’s salvation. Jesus broke through the barriers of social norms by accepting this invitation despite there being a possibility that this was a trap to lure Him into making statements which would further sully His reputation.

“To the Pharisees and scribes who complained about his eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners at the banquet, Jesus announced that he has come to call sinners to repentance. Has Jesus accepted the invitation to eat with the Pharisee in order to call him to repentance?” (Heil, 1999:45).

Whatever the reason for Simon’s invitation, it was no longer a private affair when a prostitute made her appearance at the banquet. One wonders how she heard about the occasion: did she hear about it from one of her clients? Did Simon mistakenly mention it in her presence? Had he made use of her services? Was she intrigued by Jesus and had

perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner’. Jesus answered him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’ ‘Tell me, teacher,’ He said. ‘Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.’ ‘You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said”.

followed Him at a distance? Had she heard about the meal from one of Jesus' disciples? We are not told why, other than she arrived at the banquet uninvited.

“That the woman was ‘standing behind’ Jesus ‘at his feet’ rather than facing him not only corresponds to his position of reclining on a couch facing the table, but begins to describe her extremely humble, shameful, and loving gestures of unconventional and extraordinary hospitality focused on the feet of Jesus” (Heil, 1999:45).

This woman was overcome by emotion and began weeping. Her tears fell on Jesus' feet, so she used her hair to dry them. This went beyond her original intent which had been to perfume His feet. Simon and Jesus had a different response to the actions of this woman. For Simon, his conclusion was that it was impossible for Jesus to have been a prophet: if He had been He would have known that this woman was a “sinner” with an extremely sullied reputation; He would never have allowed her to touch Him. For Jesus, He saw beyond the action to the person behind it: He saw an act of immense love and devotion, the response of one whose life had been touched by His life. Here was a woman who was in the process of being transformed, who was discovering a new purpose for living.

“Simon, a Pharisee, clearly assuming Jesus to be a person concerned, as Simon was, with religious purity, invited Jesus to a meal. A woman, a sinner, recognizing that Jesus was ‘a friend of sinners’, interrupted the table scene so as to express her gratitude to Jesus. Simon, as host, should have performed normal acts of greeting when receiving Jesus into his house. He failed to do so, but the sinful woman, an outsider on whom was placed no such social expectations, performed these very tasks. In the end, she, not he, is the one who has received forgiveness, salvation, peace” (Green, 1995:90).

Here we see how the Jewish religious culture was turned on its head by this one symbolic gesture of a prostitute. The passage continues with the dialogue between Simon and Jesus. It is clear that Simon could not comprehend the action of Jesus: it was beyond the paradigm in which he operated. Jesus had broken through not only the religious barrier but also the social barrier. Women were regarded as second class citizens in the Jewish culture. In her book “Private Women, Public Meals”, Kathleen Corley states that, in some instances, wives and

mothers were held in lower esteem than women who were prostitutes and entertainers. In this book she provides an excellent exposé on women and their roles in Jewish culture.³⁰

“As the consciousness of people in the Western world has risen regarding the equality of women, so Luke’s portrait of Jesus’ relationship to women becomes even more striking. But the modern reader of Luke may not be aware of how radical Jesus’ conduct was and may assume that the prominence of women in this first volume represents the normal view of women in first century Palestine” (Dollar, 1996:28).

Again, as in the case of the Pharisees and Levi, Jesus told a parable to illustrate His point: he/she who is forgiven much loves much. The parable related to everyday living, something His hearers could understand. Clearly the Pharisees believed Jesus to be wrong in His attitudes and actions. They believed that society had to work within the parameters of “acceptable” religious behaviour and Jesus simply did not fit into these parameters. There was a structure and system which had to be adhered to and, to them, any deviation was regarded as sin.

After recounting the parable, Jesus turned to the woman and praised her for her actions. By doing so, He restored her dignity and symbolically gave her life back to her. Her gesture of washing His feet had been her gift to Him. However, He in turn offered her a far greater gift: His grace.

“Jesus is not saying that the woman’s actions had earned forgiveness, nor even that her love had merited it. In line with His little parable and His later words, He is saying that her love is proof that she had already been forgiven. It was her response to God’s grace” (Morris, 1974:148).

³⁰ Luke 7:44-50. “Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’.”

3.1.3 Observations drawn from these two Narratives

I will highlight a few thoughts which will help to shed light on the concept of Independent House Churches and the way they function.

3.1.3.1 Inclusiveness

What comes across very clearly in both of these narratives is Jesus' compassion for all people: no one was excluded. He spent time with, befriended and ate with all strata of society, even those – especially those - who were labelled as “sinners”. The Pharisees were the ones who formulated the “criteria for acceptance” in terms of righteousness. It was they who set the rules as to who was acceptable and who was not. In contrast, this distinction did not exist for Jesus. Whether a tax-collector, a prostitute or a Pharisee, all were in need of God's grace as made available through Jesus.

“Luke tells us that on one occasion ‘the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear’ Jesus. This is not an isolated incident in the Third Gospel, for Luke finds occasion to mention many who were scarcely respectable” (Morris, 1974:42).

3.1.3.2 Hospitality

In both of the above-mentioned narratives, even though Jesus was not the host, His presence offered the guests a sense of acceptance and grace. It was He who determined the atmosphere. The hosts provided the facilities but it was this “honoured guest” who dominated in His role as initiator of dialogue and teaching.

“An Eastern proverb runs thus: ‘The guest while in the house is its lord’. This is a true statement of the spirit of hospitality of the East. One of the first greetings a Palestinian host will give his guest is to say, ‘Hadtha beita,’ i.e. ‘This is your house.’ This saying is repeated many times. Thus actually the guest during his stay is the master of the house. And whenever the guest asks a favour, in granting it the host will say, ‘You do me honour’ (Wight, 1953:77).

3.1.3.3 The Marketplace

Through being the invited guest at these meals, Jesus made contact with those who were not usually welcome at the religious and social gatherings. As He moved through the community He got involved in the lives of the outcasts i.e. the publicans, the prostitutes and other “sinners”.

Very clearly we see that Jesus represented His Father “amongst” the people – not a distant and disinterested deity, but an involved Father. This was an aspect of God with which the people were not familiar. They always approached God via a mediator, namely, the Pharisee or the Priest. Although the people were not aware of it at the time, through Jesus, God was stepping into time and living and moving amongst them. He was encountering them “on their own turf”. The religious leaders sought recognition and power for themselves; in His humility and grace, Jesus sought to serve mankind.

“The Judaism into which Jesus was born was not just the particularism of the scriptures but a particularism that had developed out of Jewish history. What Jesus did was to go back to the particularism of the Scriptures. The origin of the Jewish people was God’s selection of a people who were marginal. They were powerless and unable to help themselves. They were a slave people. Jesus simply returns to the model of compassion and justice found in the exodus event” (Dollar, 1996:34).

3.1.3.4 Relationships

Wherever He went, Jesus built relationships. He treated everyone the same; to Him no one sector of the community was of more value than the other. The only group that Jesus referred to regularly was the poor of the community who were treated with disdain. He showed special compassion – not favouritism - for them, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah.

“Luke holds together what the contemporary church has often partitioned into discordant elements: empowering the disadvantaged, seeking the lost, reconciling persons across social lines, calling people to repentance, healing the sick, forgiving sins, initiating people into the community of God’s people” (Green, 1995:136).

3.1.3.5 Modelling

Through entering the homes of both the publican and the Pharisee, Jesus set an example for others. For Him, there was no “territory” that was out of bounds. If there was a need, He addressed it. His interaction with those who acknowledged their need of Him, whether tax collector or prostitute, was marked by gentleness, tenderness and compassion. Jesus modelled for His disciples the Kingdom of God; in the Book of Acts we see how His disciples started living their lives and ministering as they had seen Jesus do. They, in turn, modelled the life of Jesus to the early church.

“The core meaning of apostleship for Luke is found in the twelve Jesus selected to be with him throughout his incarnation. The apostolic twelve must be complete because this group authenticates the new movement begun by Jesus Christ. The apostles extend Jesus’ mission. Jesus’ mission of teaching and doing the works of God laid the foundation for a new paradigm for mission. The apostolic twelve extend this mission and clarify and confirm this new paradigm” (Dollar, 1996:118).

3.2 Summary

There are three factors in particular which are very important in the context of the Independent House Church ministry, namely, inclusiveness, hospitality and outreach. These characteristics were some of many which were illustrated in the life of Jesus and which set Him apart from the religious leaders of the day.

One of the goals of the Independent House Church is that outsiders feel welcome and cared for. Regardless of who they are or where they have come from, they need to feel at home and, right from the start, feel that they belong. From a position of feeling secure in a hospitable place, each person should be made to feel that he/she has a contribution to make and that his/her views and opinions are valued.

The mission of the Independent House Church is to establish more house churches. Growth happens as more independent groups start up and network with each other. Since the ideal is that no one group should grow to more than approximately fifteen people, the concept of

“multiplying” is also central. When the group gets too big, a second one is formed, thereby establishing two groups out of the one.

Central to the concept of the Independent House Church is the nurturing of healthy interpersonal relationships, both with fellow house church members and with non-Christians. This is an area where the traditional church often battles: Christians tend to spend so much time together that there is the danger of them losing contact with non-Christian society.

One of the values of the Independent House Church is authenticity. It does not attempt to display a sanitized image to the world: it is messy but real. Therefore, it is in this environment that those who are young in the faith can be disciplined: as Jesus modelled the Kingdom for His disciples, so House Church members are encouraged to model Jesus to both new believers and to the world.

These are a few of the fundamentals of Independent House Churches. In my conclusion, I will look at these practices in the context of Youth Ministry within the House Church.

3.3 Establishment of House Churches

“The early gathering place for Christian worship was in the home. The earliest excavation of the church by the archaeologists, where a date has been ascertained, is of a room within a house that was set apart for worship, and was thus furnished as a chapel. It dates back to the third century A.D. It seems difficult for the twentieth century Christians to realise that most, if not all, of the earliest churches met in homes” (Wight, 1953:123).

The first account we have of a House Church meeting is in the Acts of the Apostles when the disciples and new converts started meeting in homes. In chapter 2 (verses 42 to 47) we read that the believers gathered together daily in the temple courts, but that “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (verse 46).

“Foreign though it may seem to the contemporary church, the first century church enjoyed the Lord’s supper as a banquet that foreshadowed the marriage supper of the Lamb. It was

not until after the close of the New Testament era that the church fathers altered the Lord's Supper from its pristine form into a memorial service" (Atkerson, 2003:23).

3.3.1 The House Church in Jerusalem³¹

With the rapid growth of the Christian community in Jerusalem, it would have been impossible for all the believers to have gathered together under one roof. It is more than likely that there was not a facility big enough to accommodate them all together. For this reason it was far more practical to gather in homes. Here the foundation was laid for this new movement i.e. the church. Using Jerusalem as the base, the church then spread to other towns and villages where these small Christian communities met in private homes e.g. in Acts 12:12 we read of the House Church that met in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark.

Initially the believers continued meeting in the synagogues, but because of their new-found faith and the subsequent differences with the Jewish faith, they were forced to seek alternative places of worship. This led to House Churches being established, and this model continued until the 4th Century when Constantine started constructing "churches" as we know them today.

"When we read the book of Acts, we read about a church that shared their possessions with one another. We see, in our mind's eye, a community of people who were generous, vibrant, growing and courageous. It was a community of people who were wildly in love with Jesus, not an institution devoted to buildings and programmes. In Acts, we see friends in one another's homes, remembering the Lord's death by celebrating communion as they eat together. We see them worshipping with whatever musical instruments they can find, making joyful sounds as they praise God for sending Jesus. We try to imagine the small

³¹ Acts 2:42-47. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Ever day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

communities of Jesus followers spontaneously multiplying all over Jerusalem – the teachers, prophets and evangelists moving between the groups of believers, making sure they stay connected to one another” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:63).

Having written in his Gospel about Jesus meeting with people in their homes, Luke wrote in Acts about how the home had become the meeting place for the early church. The home had become the “heart” of the church. With the small Christian communities spreading throughout Jerusalem and beyond, the church began to develop a distinct character of its own, quite different to the worship in the synagogues that the Jews were accustomed to.

The synagogue model was the only model that the Jews knew and this was vastly different to model of the new Christian communities. In the synagogue the Priest performed the ceremonial duties while the people “participated” as onlookers. In the House Church the Christian community participated together, thereby providing a totally new experience in the practice of their faith. Although there were apostles who provided spiritual leadership to the movement as a whole, there were no professional priests: everybody participated, everybody contributed (Acts 2:42-47).

The apostle Peter clarifies this point: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The Jerusalem church was the catalyst for growth to the surrounding towns. People came to Jerusalem to experience this new move of God and, as their lives were changed, they returned to their own towns and villages. Here they gathered others in their homes and shared the Good News with their community. And so the early church grew, not with big evangelistic rallies, but with Christians “gossiping the Gospel” and sharing together in their homes.

“Every picture Luke paints of the church in the early chapters of Acts shows an unmistakable way the deep, intimate oneness that characterized those early believers. They were of one heart and soul, they ate their meals from house to house, and they held everything in common. If this kind of relationship characterized the Jerusalem church, how

could it be otherwise in subsequent situations where there would be a mixture of Jews and Gentiles?” (Dollar, 1996:162).

3.3.2 The House Church in Antioch

The Jerusalem church and the Antioch church operated under different styles of ministry. In the Jerusalem context people from surrounding towns came to Jerusalem and became believers. However, in the Antioch context the church sent out “church-planters” to establish churches in other regions and towns. Jerusalem was the “headquarters” of the early church while Antioch was the “sending agency.”

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).

A further difference between these two centres for the early church was that the Jerusalem church concentrated on the Jews whilst the Antioch church became the centre for ministering to the Gentiles. From this sending church of Antioch, Christian communities were established in many other towns.

3.3.2.1 The House Church in Philippi – Acts 16

One of the first House Churches planted by the Antioch “sending agency” was the church in Philippi. After Paul and Silas were released from prison they went to the house of Lydia where the Christians were gathered. Lydia was a prominent businesswoman from Thyatira and she and her household had been baptized after responding to Paul’s message. She was hospitable and invited Paul and Silas to stay in her house. Paul and Silas’s jailer and his family also joined the House Church in Philippi. As we read in the following account, they too had been obedient to the Gospel:

“He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God” (Acts 16:30-34).

3.3.2.2 The House Church in Corinth – Acts 18

The host of this House Church was Gaius Titius Justus, who was a Roman citizen. It was in this church that Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his family had become believers.³² This church served as the headquarters for Paul, although it would appear that he stayed with Priscilla and Aquila who were tentmakers. Paul worked for them while he enjoyed their hospitality. “He never had more loyal friends and helpers than this amazing couple” (Birkey, 1988:43).

More than one House Church met at Corinth. There are references to churches meeting in the homes of different people such as Stephanas who, along with his household, were the first to become Christians in the province of Achaia (1 Corinthians 16). Another church mentioned in Corinth was one that met in the home of Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11). “Presumably ‘Chloe’s household’ were members of a well-to-do house church – Chloe was the household head and owner of the house” (Birkey, 1988:44)

³² Acts 18:8. “Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.”

3.3.2.3 The House Church in Ephesus – Acts 18 & 19

“The church at Ephesus centered around the most celebrated couple in the New Testament, Priscilla and Aquila. Aquila had probably been born in poverty and slavery, somehow gaining freedom and arriving in Rome. There, he worked at an honest trade as a canvas maker. Fortunately for him, one day he met a most unusual woman who became his wife. Prisca (her formal Roman name) suggests that she was from one of the wealthy and noble Roman families. Together they developed their thriving business, Priscilla evidently providing wise expertise. Her leadership abilities are suggested in the fact that her name usually appears before her husband’s” (Birkey, 1988:44).

Soon after Priscilla and Aquila became Christians they had to leave Rome. They first went to Corinth where they met Paul and worked together with him in ministry. They also established a business selling sailcloth. By the time Paul left for Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila joined him. It seemed that they intended to start a branch of their business in Ephesus and, more importantly for the early church, they established a church in their home.

The church in Ephesus was unique in that Paul established a training centre there. For two years, Paul rented the Hall of Tyrannus and trained men like Titus, Timothy, Gaius, Aristarchus and others, to prepare them for ministry.³³

3.3.2.4 Other House Churches

Although I have concentrated above on the House Churches in Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus, there were others: Colosse, Laodicea, Troas and Rome. The House Church in Rome was associated with Priscilla and Aquila who had moved back to Rome. There can be no doubt that they were prolific church planters.

³³ Acts 19:8-10. “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”

I have not gone into detail about these House Churches since I am concentrating mainly on the writings of Luke. These churches featured in the writings of Paul.

3.3.3 Observations drawn from the House Churches in Acts

“The private dwelling functioned for the church on two levels. It formed the environment for house churches strictly speaking, gatherings of Christians around one family in the home of that family. On the second broader level, the private dwelling formed the environment for gatherings of the local church, the assembly of all Christian households and individuals of a city. For such a group the home functioned as a house church, since the building remained the domicile of the host family” (Branick, 1989:13).

In Jewish culture, worship of Yahweh was central to their practice of Judaism. In the days of the early patriarchs the father fulfilled the role of the priest within the home. Upon his death that role was transferred to the eldest son. This practice continued until the tribe of Levi was appointed to fulfil the role and the function of priest.

The home was the focal point of worship. Within the home there was an altar where sacrifices were offered to God. “The altar in the home life of those early days helped to produce a sense of sin, a realization of God’s holiness and a knowledge that the way to approach God was through a sacrifice” (Wight, 1953:119).

Parents had the responsibility of training their children in the knowledge of God and His laws. This was a very significant responsibility and one that parents took very seriously. They had to teach their children the commandments and the meaning of religious observance. If the children grew up to reject God’s commands or turned their backs on their parents’ values, it reflected badly on the parents. It was their responsibility to train their children correctly.

3.3.3.1 Young people in the House Church

The New Testament House Churches placed enormous weight on the father or, in his absence, the mother. He was responsible for training his children in the ways of the Lord and salvation in Christ Jesus was made available to the whole family. In the House Churches referred to above, there are a few accounts where whole families and household became believers and were baptized together.

In these accounts of the House Churches we see no distinction between men, women and children; neither was there a distinction between slaves and masters. All were regarded as equal, whether rich or poor, slave or free. The teaching of Jesus in this regard was applied to the New Testament church. The barriers that had existed between culture, race, gender and age had been removed in the person of Jesus Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

“Christian families taught the ways of God in their homes every day. Parents were expected to model a Spirit-led lifestyle for their children, and families were to make their home a sanctuary for God. In a very real sense, the home was the early Church – supplemented by larger gatherings in the Temple and elsewhere, but never replaced by what took place in the homes of believers” (Barna, 2005:24).

Young people were constantly being exposed to church in their homes. It was natural and normal. This worshipping lifestyle would have affected their lives in every way; gathering together with other believers daily or weekly would have challenged them in their walk of faith and one could speculate that the foundation taking root in their lives would be unshakeable. It was not a case of them attending church - they were the church.

3.3.3.2 Hospitality in the House Church

“The hospitality among the early Christians promoted Christian fellowship, and thus strengthened growth in the faith. It must have exerted a great influence upon the youth growing up in the homes where it was practiced” (Wight, 1953:123).

The houses of the Christian families served a dual purpose: home and church. As is indicated in the above quote, young people were constantly surrounded by others who were a positive influence on them. This would probably have meant that they enjoyed an easy relationship with the adults and, as a result, their concept of church would have been of a faith community that was accepting, loving and totally inclusive.

“When most or many of the factors that make a family are present, the congregation will have a sense of family. And congregations with a sense of family, in partnership with families that are close to one another and close to God, will raise young people who have a committed faith in God” (Strommen & Hardel, 2000:185).

3.3.3.3 Liturgy in the House Church

A liturgy normally refers to the act of worship and, more specifically, the Eucharist (celebration of the Lord’s Supper). It normally takes place in a congregation as a dialogue between God and the assembly of believers. This dialogue can be verbal as well as in the form of gestures. The elements of worship normally include the reading of the Scriptures, the preaching of a sermon, the saying of prayers and the confession of faith.

If one studies the New Testament church in Jerusalem, one can see a liturgy emerging: in Acts chapter 2 (verses 42 to 47) we see a particular form or style of worship that they used every time they gathered. However, in the churches of Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and even those in Rome, there is no Biblical proof that they practised a set form of liturgy.

“The worship of God is a primary activity of the church, requiring no justification beyond itself. It accomplishes indeed ‘man’s chief end’, which according to the Westminster Catechism is ‘to glorify God and enjoy him for ever’. Worship is a faithful human response

to the revelation of God's being, character, beneficence and will. In worship, God is adored simply as God, God's character is praised, thanks are given for God's acts and conformity to God's will is sought" (Bradshaw, 2002:454).

3.3.4 Similarities between Biblical House Churches and Postmodern Independent House Churches

Having examined the early church in Luke-Acts one has to ask how we can apply its principles and practices to the church in the 21st Century. Are the practices that were used 2000 years ago relevant for today's postmodern context? Can we use the principles implemented in the early church and transplant them into another time, context and culture?

There are many principles and practices that were implemented in Judaism and Christendom those many centuries ago that we can no longer apply to our context today. Much is not relevant and civilization has supposedly progressed. Technological and electronic progress has been enormous over the centuries and the difference between the 1st Century and the 21st Century is vast. However, we need to ask ourselves this question, "Has mankind changed?"

According to the Bible we are made in the image of God – that is a fundamental, undisputed fact which has not changed. We are created to inhabit the earth – that has not changed. We are charged to take care of creation – that has not changed. We rebel against our Maker – that has not changed. We are in need of salvation – that has not changed. Many things have changed but there are many basic principles of life that have not changed. Although circumstances and times change, mankind as a unique and special creation of God has not changed. God has made us to be in relationship with Him and this fact will never change. His desire is for us to acknowledge Him as "our Father".

I believe that, although some of the practices of the early church might be foreign to us in the 21st Century, the underlying values and principles are as applicable to us as they were to the 1st Century church.

3.3.5 Liturgy in the Independent House Churches

I will consider the liturgy both as it was practised in the Acts church and as it is practised in traditional church structures. I will also examine how it is practised in the Independent House Churches. The latter is not an easy task since each church is autonomous and there is no prescribed way of “doing” liturgy. However, there is a tendency for Independent House Churches to use the church as described in Acts chapter 2 as a model.

3.3.5.1 Worship

The term “worship” has come to mean a number of things in the context of the modern church. We refer to the coming together of believers as the “worship service”, but we also refer to our singing of praise to God as worship. Generally, when people speak about worship, they are referring to the singing that is done during a service. My belief is that worship encompasses singing, dancing, poetry, contemplation, even silence – indeed, everything that brings glory and honour to God. In Acts 2 we read that the believers met together to praise God; however, in this particular passage, no details are given as to what form this praise took.

Within the Independent House Churches, worship includes singing, reflection, prayers, readings, poems, etc. and anything that helps the believer to focus on God in adoration and praise.

3.3.5.2 Eucharist or Lord’s Supper

In the traditional church, the Lord’s Supper is celebrated in various ways, depending on the denomination. In some communities it is practised weekly and in others monthly. The Acts 2 church broke bread in their homes and ate together on a regular basis, an aspect of community living that the modern church has neglected.

Like the early church, the Independent House Churches also break bread in their homes. They also regard the simple act of sharing of a meal together as celebrating the Lord's Supper.

3.3.5.3 Reading of the Scriptures

In the context of Acts 2, no mention is made of the believers reading the Old Testament. Although the reading of the Prophets, the Torah and the Wisdom literature are not actually mentioned, we can presume that, since the apostle's were teaching, they were quoting from these books. In the traditional church, the Scripture readings are a crucial part of the service.

When the Independent House Churches meet they read the Scriptures together if they are doing a Bible study. However, if something else is planned e.g. a social or an outreach, this might not happen. Although the Bible may not be read each time they meet, individuals in the group are strongly encouraged to read it regularly in order to hear what God is saying to them.

3.3.5.4 Praying

In all aspects of Christian life, prayer is important. As the reading of the Scriptures in the traditional church is central to the worship service, so is prayer. Communing with the Father remains a priority in the traditional church as it was in the Acts 2 churches.

Likewise, in the Independent House Churches, prayer is vital. It can happen either spontaneously or in a more structured manner. Time is set aside to pray corporately or in smaller groups. When two or three people pray together for each other, this allows for a level of intimacy and sharing which is difficult to attain in the larger traditional church setting. People are far more willing and able to share their deep needs and their requests when the group is small.

3.3.5.5 Preaching

In the traditional churches preaching is regarded as the most important aspect of the church service. It is not by accident that, especially in the older churches, the pulpit is in the centre of the church. Preaching is the exhortation of the members; teaching is more the instruction and encouragement of the people. In the early church, reference is made to teaching and not to preaching. The preaching was more evident when the apostles addressed large crowds in an attempt to share the Good News of God's salvation.

If we apply the above definitions of preaching and teaching, in the Independent House Churches the emphasis is more on teaching and encouragement where a group learns together. Generally speaking, preaching does not take place.

3.3.5.6 Confession

In the traditional church, the confession of one's sins is a regular part of the Eucharist and general prayers. In the Acts 2 passage there is no actual reference to the early church taking part in corporate confession. However, this does not mean that it didn't ever happen.

As with the early church, the Independent House Church does not specify that there must be confession as part of corporate prayer. On the other hand, because of the emphasis on relationship and fellowship, people are encouraged to be authentic and real. In an atmosphere of trust and security, people are more able to confess their sins to each other – whether to other individuals or the whole group – and to be open to receive God's forgiveness.

3.3.5.7 Other Practices

Worship, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, prayer, preaching and the confession of sins are all part of what the traditional church calls liturgy. However, we read in Acts chapter 2 that there are other practices which the early church performed which either have been overlooked or, through the course of time, have disappeared.

Firstly, fellowship was one of the characteristics that dominated the early church. It is the “lifeblood” of believers yet is not included within the liturgical context. Like the early church, it is the heartbeat of the Independent House Churches.

Secondly, the question of miracles is a controversial one. Many churches regard them with suspicion and many simply do not believe they still happen, claiming that they ceased after the time of the apostles. Independent House Churches, however, are expectant that God will “presence Himself” at every gathering and they acknowledge that, if He chooses to perform them, miracles can and will happen.

Thirdly, another characteristic that comes across very noticeably in the early church was the practice of sharing with those in need. Those that had, sold their possessions in order to help the needy. In the Independent House Churches this too is encouraged and, because of the level of intimacy within the groups, needs are more easily discovered and addressed.

In Chapter 4, I will investigate the history of youth ministry and its present practices. I will also observe the importance of families and their role and responsibility in the faith formation of their children. It is evident that the family was an important entity in the life of the early church and, increasingly, in postmodern society the family’s role in teaching and training children in the ways of God must become more significant if we are to produce a generation that is fervent in its love of and service to God.

CHAPTER 4

4. YOUTH, CHURCH AND PARENTS

In Chapter 2 we discovered what the autonomous, independent House Church is and how it functions. In Chapter 3 we discovered where the House Church started and the biblical basis for its existence. In this chapter, I will consider the history of youth ministry and the present practices in youth ministry, including the importance of family in the spiritual formation of the child. In the final chapter, I address a new liturgy for doing youth ministry in the 21st Century, specifically in the context of the House Church.

In order to see the “modern day youth ministry model” in context today, one needs to explore the past. Nowhere in the Bible does one see reference to a specific group that one would label as “teenagers” in modern day terminology i.e. people who are not children, but not yet adults. Labelling adolescents as “teenagers” became common in American culture in 1955. Prior to that time they were referred to as “young people” or were included in the category of “adults”.

At this point, let us investigate youth ministry as we now know it today.

4.1 The Present Status

In the course of approximately the past 50-60 years, we have grown accustomed to a certain model of youth ministry. This “form” of ministry is often practised without regularly being evaluated as to whether or not it is still effective. Models which work effectively in other nations, cultures, towns, denominations, tend to be copied and replicated, and one expects to see the same results in our own communities. However, experience shows that one cannot simply presume that what works for others will work for us. In fact, this often leads to frustration which, in turn, leads to desperation when these models don’t work. Following is a brief summary of several of these models.

4.2 Where it all Started

During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, various faith communities and denominations realized that young people were no longer attending services. What had been good enough for “Mom” and “Dad” was no longer good enough for their children. The influence of secular society was also impacting the lives of the young people. Due to the economic situation, young people were expected to go out and seek employment in order to contribute to their families’ survival, for example the young people working in the coal mines in Wales. Young people also moved from the rural areas into the cities seeking employment.³⁴ The status quo had been shaken and Christianity was not excluded. The churches were affected by the migration of young people from the towns into the inner-city communities. How was the Christian Church going to be effective in reaching out to young people, especially those moving to the cities? It would appear that the Church was at a loss to know how to minister to and be effective among young people.

4.2.1 Para-church Youth Organizations in the United Kingdom

Para-church organizations and movements were established by those who were passionate about young people and believed that churches had lost contact with the younger generation. Societies and communities were also becoming more secularized and formal Christian teaching was no longer a part of the young person’s circle of influence. Most of these organizations started with a real and tangible passion to reach out to children and teenagers who were not involved in the formal church situation.

These organizations established a programme that was geared specifically to the needs of young people. Often these programmes contained games that helped young people to connect with each other, music that was “hip” and relevant to the times talks that addressed the everyday issues that young people were grappling with. Most importantly, these groups and organizations were led by people who were “in touch” with the younger generation.

³⁴ “Today, most historians agree that the Industrial Revolution was a great turning point in the history of mankind. It changed the Western world from a basically rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial society. Industrialization brought many material benefits, but it also created a large number of problems that still remain critical in the modern world” (The World Book Encyclopedia, 1982:Vol.10:186).

4.2.1.1 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

The first para-church organization founded and geared specifically to work amongst young people was the Young Men's Christian Association ("YMCA" or the "Y") in 1844. On the 6 June of that year, George Williams (aged twenty three) established the movement in the United Kingdom. His desire was to "win souls for Christ in the midst of the unhealthy social conditions that existed in London during the Industrial Revolution. It uses a holistic approach to individual and social development encompassing spiritual, intellectual and physical methods."³⁵ George Williams was a draper who was drawn to London directly because of the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Here he discovered that young men were being influenced by taverns, brothels and other "temptations" since there were no other healthy and positive alternatives available.³⁶

The growth of the movement was rapid. By 1851 i.e. only seven years later, there were branches in Canada, the United States of America, Australia, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and France. In 1855 the First World Conference of YMCAs was held in Paris, France. This led to an ecumenical body, the World Alliance of YMCAs, being founded. In 1878, the World Alliance offices were established in Geneva, Switzerland, and they are still there to this day.

4.2.1.2 Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

The sister organization to the YMCA, viz. the Young Women's Christian Association, was founded in the United Kingdom in 1855. It was established as a "women's membership movement that strives to create opportunities for women's growth, leadership and power in order to attain a common vision – to eliminate racism and empower women."³⁷

³⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YMCA>

³⁶ In his book, "Growing up Evangelical", Peter Ward records the history of the YMCA (page 24).

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YWCA>

4.2.1.3 Scripture Union (SU)

Scripture Union, previously known as the Children's Special Service Mission, was founded on 2 June 1867.³⁸ Fifteen children between the ages of seven and twelve attended the first meeting in Islington, London, in the United Kingdom. Josiah Spiers was the guest speaker for the evening and he taught the children new hymns and choruses. "It was also so lively, so informal and so very different from the boring sermons they had sat through at the dry-as-dust Sunday Schools they attended normally that all the children returned the following week with some of their friends."³⁹ By 17 November 1867 this group had grown from fifteen to fifty children. On 26 August 1868 Scripture Union held their first beach mission in Llandudno, North Wales.

The first Scripture Union camp for young people was held in Littlehampton on the coast in West Sussex, United Kingdom. Two young students from Cambridge University felt that it would be a good idea to take a group of young boys away together. They wrote: "Our plan is as follows: to collect together as many as possible in tents, to provide for them all the sports and amusements dear to the heart of boys, and while in the midst of these enjoyments, to influence them more by example than by words."⁴⁰ In the United Kingdom, Scripture Union is regarded as the oldest Children's Ministry Organization.

4.2.1.4 Boys' Brigade

Another youth organization that had a major impact in the United Kingdom was the Boys' Brigade.⁴¹ It was conceived by William Alexander Smith in Glasgow, Scotland in 1883, as the first uniformed Christian organization. "The first Boys' Brigade company was set up by Sir William Smith on 4 October 1883 at Free Church Mission Hall, North Woodside Road, Glasgow, Scotland, to develop 'Christian manliness' by the use of a semi-military discipline and order, gymnastics, summer camps and religious services and classes."⁴² The object of

³⁸ Pete Ward – "Growing up Evangelical"(page 25).

³⁹ <http://www.su-international.org/ministry.php?Doo=ContentView&id=923>

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Pete Ward - "Growing up Evangelical" (page 25).

⁴² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys'_Brigade

the Boys' Brigade is "The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness"⁴³

4.2.1.5 Girls' Brigade

Unlike the Boys' Brigade, the Girls' Brigade was not established in Scotland where its headquarters are based, but in Dublin, Ireland. It started in 1893 and is an international interdenominational Christian youth organization, currently serving in over sixty countries.

4.2.1.6 Crusaders Christian Youth Movement

This interdenominational youth movement was founded by Albert Kestin in the United Kingdom in 1900, although its official launch was in 1906 with the formation of the Crusaders Union. At the start of this year, 2007, they changed their name to Urban Saints.

"The early Crusader Bible classes tended to follow a regular pattern. Most would meet on what they described as neutral ground, not in premises owned by any one church. A hymn would start events, followed by a Bible reading. After a few notices there would be a gospel talk" (Ward, 1996:35).

It is evident from the above information that most of these organizations and movements worked essentially amongst children. The YMCA and the YWCA worked predominantly amongst young adults – although it is difficult to clarify whether these were indeed young adults or "teenagers." It was only the Crusaders who were geared towards the "older" young people. This further substantiates the fact that the term "teenager" was unheard of or unknown until the middle of the 20th Century.

⁴³ *ibid.*

4.2.2 Para-church Organizations in the United States of America

The establishment of para-church organizations was not peculiar to the United Kingdom. In the United States of America the Church was experiencing a similar phenomenon. Within the context of the church, young people found themselves in a vacuum between childhood and adulthood. As was the case in the United Kingdom, the first “youth ministry” in America was the Young Men’s Christian Association which was established in 1851.

Apart from the YMCA, other significant ministries were also established which were geared specifically to young people.

4.2.2.1 Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavour

Francis Edward Clark established this nondenominational evangelical society in Portland, Maine in 1881.⁴⁴ It was born out of his Williston Congregational Church. Its professed object was ““to promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintanceship, and to make them more useful in the service of God.” Previously youth had been classified with children and not considered capable of active Christian involvement”⁴⁵

This organization is considered to be the father of all other youth ministries and operates in over eighty nations. Today it is training and equipping youth to help churches in their cause for Jesus Christ. The new name of the organization is “Christian Endeavour International” and it is now based in Edmore, Michigan.

4.2.2.2 Young Life

This organization is one of the most popular non-denominational youth ministries based in Colorado Springs, America. “Young Life” is its corporate name as it operates under different

⁴⁴ Pete Ward - “Growing up Evangelical” (page 26).

⁴⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_People's_Society_of_Christian_Endeavour

names in different settings. Young Life was founded by Jim Rayburn in Texas in 1941. “Young Life’s leaders state that their ministry philosophy is ‘incarnational’ or ‘relational’ ministry, which they define as a ministry where leaders share their lives with teenagers in order to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Leaders state that the purpose of Young Life is to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to students who would not otherwise hear it. As a result, campus groups attempt to recruit high school students who do not attend church regularly”⁴⁶

Young Life’s ministry is essentially active on high school campuses where they run weekly club meetings, bible studies, camps, and one of their main emphases is the building of relationships with adults and peers. They have quite a hierarchical structure as there are area directors who have volunteers that they train and release to do ministry in the different schools. Currently they operate in all fifty states in America and have clubs in approximately two thousand five hundred schools.

4.2.2.3 Youth for Christ (YFC)

Youth for Christ was founded in 1944 by Billy Graham and Charles Templeton and had as its emphasis youth evangelism and biblical Christianity. Billy Graham was the first full-time staff member. Out of this organization other ministries were born, such as World Vision, Gospel Films and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Some of the programmes that they present today are youth rallies, bible clubs, teen to teen evangelism and urban ministries.

The motto of Youth for Christ is “Geared to the times, anchored to the Rock” and a big emphasis in their ministry is equipping young people to minister to their peers. YFC operates in over one hundred countries worldwide.

4.2.2.4 Campus Crusade for Christ

⁴⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Life

This ministry to college students was founded in 1951 by Bill Bright at the University of California, Los Angeles. It now operates in over one hundred and ninety countries around the world. At present they have over twenty seven thousand full-time workers and they have trained two hundred and twenty five thousand volunteers. It is an interdenominational organization with a focus on evangelism and discipleship. Its mission is “to win people to Christ, build them in their faith and send them out to win, build and send others”⁴⁷

Like Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade has also branched out into other ministries such as Athletes in Action, FamilyLife and Josh McDowell Ministry, amongst others.

4.2.2.5 Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

Youth With A Mission is commonly referred to as “Why-wam” (YWAM). Started in 1960 by Loren Cunningham, it is an international, interdenominational, non-profit Christian missionary organization. As a twenty year old student, Cunningham was travelling in the Bahamas when he had a vision of waves breaking over the earth. To him this symbolised young people taking the good news of Jesus to all the nations of the earth. This vision birthed within him a desire to start an organization which would train and equip young school-leavers to be sent as missionaries (short term and long term) throughout the world.

YWAM now operates in over one hundred and fifty countries. Of the over sixteen thousand full-time workers, half of them come from non-Western countries. Each year it is estimated that more than twenty five thousand individuals worldwide participate in different YWAM training courses.

The above organizations are the most prominent children’s, teenagers’ and young adults’ ministries operating in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Most of these ministries i.e. para-church organizations, are operating around the world.

Most of these para-church organizations are represented in South Africa. As in the United Kingdom and America, their existence can be explained by the fact that the ministry to

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campus_Crusade_for_Christ

children and young people within the church context has not been as effective as it should have been. As a result, these organizations – specialists in their fields – were established to work alongside the Christian communities and assist them in their ministry to young people.

When these youth organizations are evaluated, there is no doubt that they have been extremely successful over the years and centuries. However, for many young people who do not go on to universities or colleges, once they move into young adulthood there are few Para-church organizations which cater specifically for them. The institutionalised church is often their only option, even though its structure and liturgy may be foreign to them. While a para-church organization like Youth With A Mission is there for those young people who want to be involved full time in missions – whether on a short term or long term basis – many young adults are left to fend for themselves in terms of their personal growth. Many choose not to “practise” their faith in terms of an organization. This does not imply, however, that they have “lost their faith”.

Over the last number of years, the role of these organizations has become confusing because many churches have established their own youth ministry departments. Often churches have viewed para-church organizations as a threat. The reason is twofold:

- they are scared that these organizations are “stealing” their young people;
- they are concerned about what is being taught to their young people.

Many churches prefer their young people to mix only with their “own kind” i.e. within the denominational context. This can lead to a very “closed system” that can isolate these young Christians from their fellow Christians simply because they belong to different denominations and live out their faith differently.

4.3 Church Youth Groups

During the past twenty to thirty years, church youth groups and other forms of youth ministry have become more prominent as churches have discovered the need to appoint specialists to work with their children and teenagers. Many of these church groups are based

on models that have been practised by para-church organizations. While these models have been very successful in the para-church context, they are now being copied and practised in very different contexts. At the time that the para-church organizations were established, churches did not cater specifically for children or teenagers, other than perhaps Sunday schools. This, therefore, meant that these para-church organizations were very effective in providing ministry geared to specific age groups.

Churches need to put together a plan of action before they launch out and establish their own youth ministries. Often the groundwork is overlooked when the needs are pressing. In this context, it would be wise to heed the words of the well-known English proverb, “More hurry, less speed”. Here it is preferable to go slowly in terms of establishing a youth ministry in a particular church and to prepare well.

Let us examine a “typical plan of action” as far as the establishing of a youth ministry is concerned.

Firstly, ministers and church leaders need to consult in order to gauge the needs of their teenagers. What they as adults feel would be appealing for their young people could well be irrelevant. It is essential that they as church leaders consult with those young people in the church who show natural leadership skills in order to discuss ideas and suggestions. Dealing with a small core group would be wise before communicating with the wider/bigger group of young people. The consultative process is not quick; in fact, in order for it to be genuine and effective it may take weeks, even months. However, a ministry that has been well prayed through, spoken through and worked through has a far greater chance of success than one that has been hastily and superficially put together.

Secondly, parents should be consulted in order to garner their support. If the proposed ministry does not have their encouragement and blessing, it will be the weaker. Parents who are in touch with the needs of their teenage children should be encouraged to join the planning group. Their input would be invaluable.

Thirdly, the wider group of young people in the church must be consulted in order to ascertain their support for such a ministry. If the church leaders are enthusiastic about their own ideas and suggestions but the young people are not, no amount of planning and

organization will build an effective ministry. The youth ministry should never become simply another “department” to fill up the church programme or to show-case the church’s image to the community.

Fourthly, choosing the right person to head up this ministry is vital. If there is no one in the church who has a passion for young people to head it up, then such a ministry should not be contemplated. A leader is needed who understands young people and accepts them as they are, who can identify with the teenage culture and the teenage mentality, and who appreciates their taste in music, their taste in clothing, their expression of friendship. He/she must be someone who is prepared to invest in their lives.

Fifthly, the youth culture must be understood. There are many churches who regard teenagers as irritants more than human beings who need loving, nurturing and Christian teaching. In these churches the youth ministry is often treated almost as “a necessary evil”. If the young people’s ministry is not appreciated and fully supported by the leaders and members and seen as a vital ministry on which to spend time, money and energy, it will never really reach its full potential.

I have spent time discussing the above since, in my own experience, I have seen many churches and church leaders who have been very concerned about “doing something” for their youth but follow their own agendas. They have missed the mark in terms of what teenage culture dictates and, when the ministry collapses, it is the young people themselves who are blamed.

The above situation results in conflict i.e. ministers with children/youth workers, church leaders amongst themselves, parents and leaders, parents and their own children. These conflicts could easily have been averted if proper communication had taken place right at the start and if there had been a measure of understanding with regard to how teenagers think, act and feel.

The most important aspect to starting and maintaining a successful youth ministry is, however, serious and ongoing prayer: prayer for the minister, the leaders, the parents and the young people themselves. “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

4.3.1 Postmodernism versus Modernism

Before one can consider how post-modernity and modernity are in conflict with each other, one needs first to define the terms. Once the terminology has been explained, we will be able to investigate more thoroughly how post-modernity affects youth ministry today.

4.3.1.1 Definition of Modernity

“Modernity is an understanding of the world through autonomous human rationality. The separation of life into public and private spheres and its compartmentalization into specialised areas resulted in the marginalization of religious faith from society and its reduction to a privatized matter for like-minded individuals to pursue without imposing their views on the public sphere. Religious faith becomes relativized, helpful as a resource for coping with the crisis of life, but having no legitimacy in claiming public truth” (Gibbs, 2000:27).

4.3.1.1.1 Modernism in Youth Ministry

The modernistic approach is the way in which youth ministry has been practised until recently. Even though society moved towards post-modernity, the church still operated – and many churches still operate – within a modern paradigm. Absolutes were the order of the day and young people were consciously subscribing to them. As long as young people could attend meetings which catered for their needs and, in a sense, entertained them, they were happy. Their lives revolved around programmes and activities. Again I speak from my own personal experience since this was “my generation”.

4.3.1.2 Definition of Post-Modernity

“The term ‘postmodern’ did not achieve prominence until it was used to describe tendencies reactive to modernism in art and literature in the 1960s and in architecture in the 1970s. Then in the 1980s its meaning was stretched to cover an emergent, comprehensive

worldview embracing philosophy, the arts, politics and certain branches of science, theology and popular culture. Postmodernism has been labelled as ‘pessimistic wishful thinking’, and as ‘nihilism with a smile’” (Gibbs, 2000:28).

4.3.1.2.1 Postmodernism in Youth Ministry

One of the major reasons for ineffectiveness in youth ministry is the changing times in which we live. Many Christian communities and churches have not acknowledged this change and consequently have not embraced this cultural shift. There was a time when young people were happy with youth ministry as a “form of entertainment”. However, society has changed radically over the last number of years and the old programmes no longer work. The church’s old way of doing things cannot compete with the attractions which society “out there” offers young people.

Postmodernism calls for a paradigm shift in “doing” youth ministry. Christian groups and churches need to think “out-of-the-box” in their efforts to engage with young people. At the beginning of this chapter, I presented a brief history of several different forms of para-church youth ministries. It is evident that these groups operated outside of the status quo. They did not think along the same lines as the traditional, institutionalized church; they were prepared to take a risk, to do things differently, in order to “be the Christ-light” to young people. In hindsight, one is able to admire their courage and innovation. However, it would be extremely interesting – and possibly encouraging to present-day youth leaders – to examine the response of the church at that time to their “new” methods. I would like to suggest that the response was not all favourable.

I believe that today we are at a similar crossroads. How do we effectively minister to postmodern youth? Clearly the Christian community needs to reassess its present methods in reaching young people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The traditional church with its traditional methods is having minimal success as is illustrated in the following excerpt concerning the church in the United Kingdom. “Almost half of the churchgoers in England are over 45; a quarter are over 65. If more young people don’t attend, churches will continue to empty simply because older people are passing away. Only a tiny proportion of children are now in the UK church. The figure is down from 35% in 1940 to 14% in 1970 and just

6% in 2000. That means that 94% of young people are not in church on Sunday” (Moynagh, 2004:60/61).

The above statistics confirm a trend that appears to be increasingly universal: the age of those attending churches is increasing; those attending church are predominantly from the older generation. Mike Regele in his book “Death of the Church” states that the average age of the American church member is 65 year and older. This is a worrying fact. George Barna, the well-known American church statistician, has come to the conclusion through his research that most Christians, approximately 83%, become Christians under the age of twenty years old.

“Consider the facts. People are much more likely to accept Christ as their Saviour when they are young. Absorption of biblical information and principles typically peaks during the preteen years. Attitudes about the viability and value of church participation form early in life. Habits related to the practice of one’s faith develop when one is young and change surprisingly little over time” (Barna, 2003:41).

This indicates that there is a widening gap; after studying the facts, clearly there is a generation of Christians that does not attend church. How do we address this problem? How do we rectify this situation?

Referring to my earlier analogy of pouring new wine into old wineskins, one must conclude that the old wineskins need to be discarded in terms of doing youth ministry. It is vital that we find new ways of reaching young people for Christ. In my own experience, I have found that it is too easy to fall into the pattern of the familiar in terms of programmes for youth ministry. It requires far more effort to attempt something new and creative, especially if the old model has been successful in the past.

“The reality is this: New wineskins eventually get old. We believe that God often places a burden in the younger generations to pioneer new churches because they have a different vision for a different era and a different generation. The younger generations come into God’s kingdom looking for reality, not religious structures. They want relationships, not outdated church programmes. Let’s help them start the new church structures that fit the needs of their generation” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:84).

4.3.2 Models of Modern Youth Ministry

Types of youth ministry that have been popular and practised over the past number of years e.g. youth groups, confirmation programmes, need to be evaluated in the context of a postmodern generation. This generation is fast becoming post-Christian and what appealed to them in the past is no longer relevant for them.

4.3.2.1 Church-Based Youth Meetings

Many church-based youth ministries function as a “baby-sitting service” where parents feel their children are being entertained and kept busy. Although this is not necessarily a healthy perception, these youth groups do encourage relationship building between teenagers. Leaders must, however, guard against “cliquishness”, something which happens very easily in youth groups where newcomers are not made to feel part of the group.

“If the faith is communicated so effectively from a life to a life, then the influence young people exercise upon one another will be enormous. It is extremely difficult for someone under sixteen to hold a set of values different from that of his or her friends ... The Christian life is about change: the transformation of the individual to be like Christ and the change this then produces in his or her social environment” (Ashton & Moon, 1995:72).

It is possible for church-based youth groups to become isolated in their outlook. This is especially so if they do not try to build relationships with other youth groups in their community. A sense of supremacy can exist, especially if a particular group is “successful” in terms of numbers, often resulting in self-satisfaction and complacency. Competition and division between groups within one geographical community because of this is extremely counter-productive. Unfortunately this trend is common not only to the youth ministry but sometimes in the churches themselves.

4.3.2.2 Church Confirmation Programmes

Confirmation or church membership classes, good as they are in instructing young people in the basics of the Christian faith, tend to develop young people who equate the church with the schooling system. A school-leaver writes his/her final exams, and puts his/her schooling behind him/her. Similarly, once a teenager has gone through confirmation, there is a tendency to regard that as a “final exam”. They have the right to be married and have their children christened in the church but, other than that, attendance is often minimal. It is as though they have “graduated” out of church into the real world. In many cases young people go through confirmation to satisfy their parents or simply because their peers do it. Instead of the confirmation being a positive step in guiding and establishing the young person as a member of the Body of Christ, it becomes a right of exit from the faith community.

A positive aspect of this confirmation, however, is the fact that similar age teens are together in a small group. If the group is structured to allow for questions and interaction between each other, then it has a more dynamic component to it. Similarly, if the facilitator or leader relates well to young people and hears what is on their hearts, this relationship could develop and be a significant one in the young person’s life.

4.3.2.3 Youth Services and Events

Other youth events have the same results. Most youth ministry happens separately from the main church body, further compartmentalizing the church. The church should be a place of relationships: relationships between people of all ages. However, it is precisely in this expression of Christian community where people find themselves separated from each other. Special youth services are planned and presented with the expectation that only young people will attend; older people avoid these services since they may be regarded as “messy” and amateur, further fragmenting the body.

On the whole, encouragement and support for the young people is lacking from the older generation. Expectations tend to be high and young people are not allowed to make mistakes as part of their spiritual growth. One forgets that, as Christians, the growth process never ends and age is not the determining factor.

“Maturity is not a static, and possibly rather boring, spiritual quality. It is dynamic. It urges us on. It tells us we are safe in the hands of the One who has made us his own, but it stirs up a great longing within us to become more like him” (Ashton & Woods, 1995:83).

The Christian life always remains a journey, never a final destination. In this journey, those who are more mature need to take the hands of those who are starting out on their journey, and walk the road with them. In 1 Samuel chapter 20, there is a wonderful illustration of Jonathan and David walking in the field together, symbolic, I feel, of what it should be like in the church.⁴⁸

We are called to live a life of interdependence with one another. We dare not live in seclusion and isolation – life is about relationships. This is the characteristic common to postmodernists: a strong desire for genuine, real and authentic relationships. In this context, therefore, youth ministry should be seen as an opportunity to build and establish meaningful relationships – relationships between peers and also between young people and significant adults. For young people this is a crucial step in their journey.

“That is why some Christian youth work is characterised by two apparently irreconcilable extremes. On the one hand it is massively irrelevant to any young person. Yet on the other hand it does, undeniably, change human lives” (Ashton & Wood, 1995:16).

Youth ministry is messy, boisterous, noisy, frustrating, but young people are heading through puberty and it is a very confusing time for them. They need to be guided and helped through this challenging stage of life. Change is evident in almost all parts of their lives i.e. physical, social, emotional and spiritual, and life can be frightening and confusing unless they have the right support and guidance.

“Adolescence is a transitional state; you are neither child nor adult. Everything begins to happen at once. You look in the mirror and see your body changing. The hormonal changes lead to feelings and drives you’ve never had before; members of the opposite sex become more attractive to you. Friendships and family relationships change. Emotional changes cause you to feel more but understand less. You start to think in new and different ways.

⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 20:10. “‘Come,’ Jonathan said, ‘let’s go out into the field.’ So they went there together.”

You even begin to question things that you always thought were true. Adolescence is a period full of demands and changes” (Mueller, 1999:16).

This is a phase in life where teenagers need love and acceptance; this is a time when they need nurturing and guidance, a time when they need patience and understanding. The church community can be the place where a young person can find all this, where he/she feels welcomed and accepted. However, it is not always the case. Often, for young people as a group, it is a place of isolation and disengagement from the rest of the church.

As previously mentioned, postmodern young people long for genuine relationships. They tend to “see through” people, regarding them as fake and phoney. In the following chapter I will examine this further and suggest a liturgy as to how to engage and build relationships with them.

4.4 Parents

I believe that the role of the parent is the most ignored and underrated factor in youth ministry. Those involved in working with children and teenagers focus their ministry on the young people, forgetting that central to their ministry should be the parents. In this section I will highlight how youth workers in particular can establish relationships with parents in order to strengthen and enhance their ministries. I will also highlight the role of parents in the faith formation of their children.

4.4.1 Parents as Models of Life

“The experiences of childhood have a very clear effect on adult life. Whilst it is plainly not as easy as saying that abused children will become abusers or that children of poorly educated parents will themselves do poorly at school, clearly a child’s experiences are vital for the rest of his or her life. It is astonishing that complex modern societies do very little in the way of systematic preparation or education to ensure that parents or carers are aware of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice” (Bernardes, 1997:108).

Fact: Through his life, it is the parent who spends the most time with his/her child. Parents give birth to, feed, educate and care for their children. For approximately eighteen years parents and children live under the same roof and interact with one another on a daily basis. Parents have an extremely significant influence on the lives of their children; parents are the models that young people base their lives on, for good or for bad. A statement that is commonly used is “you are just like your father (mother)”. In many cases, parents do not realize how significant their words and actions are in the lives of their children.

“It is almost impossible to reconstruct the home environment in any other setting. The home provides ‘wall-to-wall’, twenty-four-hour-a-day experiences. The family is normally a small unit of people (which varies from culture to culture), including all age levels, who eat together, play together, travel together, and sleep under the same roof” (Zuck & Clark, 1975:465).

Many parents regard babyhood as a stage where assimilation is limited. However, child psychologists have established that babies assimilate and learn far more during this developmental phase than at any other time of life. The first year of the child’s life is especially crucial in terms of laying a foundation for a sense of love and acceptance.

“The early years, then, are the crucial years and of course, the home provides the foundation on which mature spiritual development takes place. For example, the greatest psychological need of a child during his first year of life is for security and love. An environment that is filled with uncertainties, adult disagreements and impatience, creates insecurity for the child. Children in the first year of life need exposure to parents who are truly manifesting the fruit of the Spirit – ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’ (Galatians 5:22&23). The human being who manifests these characteristics makes the child’s environment a secure place for him to grow and to develop. In turn, a secure environment enables a child to develop those personality traits that prepare the way for biblical teaching and learning” (Zuck & Clark, 1975:469).

The quote by Bernardes in the first paragraph of this section indicates that many parents are not prepared for parenthood. In order to drive a car, a person requires a license and has to undergo rigorous training. When a couple gets married, pre-marriage counselling is recommended. However, for the most time-consuming and intensive life-shaping event of

all, parenthood, parents are generally left to their own devices, learning by trial and error. We are living at a time where broken families are no longer the exception in society: in some societies one out of three marriages end in divorce, in others the statistic is as high as one out of two marriages.⁴⁹ These facts are startling. However, today there is no guarantee that a marriage will last forever and, increasingly, a Christian marriage is no exception. Christian families are not exempt from the harsh realities of divorce. There has never been a greater need than now for the church to provide couples with the tools for marriage; I believe the same applies to parenthood.

In postmodernism, dysfunctional families abound. Parents have learned from their parents and unfortunately, in many cases, these behavioural practices and examples have been poor. Bad parenting tends to be perpetuated from generation to generation and it is the children who are the unfortunate victims in this situation. They watch their parents and, what they see and hear, they regard as normal. Unless they make a conscious decision not to be like their parents, they then tend to do the same with their children. This then results in a downward spiral of poor parenting. It is here where the church can provide an alternative model of parenting: young parents can be exposed to positive and healthy parenting skills where young couples are paired with older, mature couples who are positive role models and influences on their lives.

“One perennial question for parents, philosophers, psychologists and sociologists is the degree to which a child’s character and ability is determined by biological inheritance or social learning within families and formal education” (Bernardes, 1997:110).

This is a question that human behaviourists have struggled with for a long time. What causes children who grow up in a particular family with the same influences and structure, to act differently, with one child becoming integrated in society and the other child become a “drop-out”? The question is asked: is it due to economic circumstances, peer influences, postmodernism, cultural background, or the family environment? Sociologists and

⁴⁹ 2005 Statistics for South Africa: 180 657 Marriages took place and, in the same year, there were 32 484 Divorces (www.statsa.gov.za). Divorce rate percentages during 2002 in other countries are as follows: Australia – 46%; Denmark – 44.5%; Sweden – 54.9%; Germany 39.4%; UK – 42.6% and USA – 54.8%.

psychologists agree that the home is a very significant factor in this regard, often because of dysfunctional parents.

“More to the point, in the lack of any preparation or advice about ‘how to parent’, clearly our societies are happy to see large numbers of children made to suffer for the characteristics of their parents. Socialisation, then, is not only about how a helpless infant becomes a mature adult but rather how helpless new-born infants are channelled into becoming a wide range of very unequal mature adults” (Bernardes, 1997:111).

Arnold Mol, the well-known South African motivational speaker, titled one of his books “Parenting isn’t Child’s Play”. His choice of title is a very apt one: for many, parenting is regarded as just that i.e. child’s play.

Positive parenthood means being actively involved in the lives of one’s children. It is a sacrificial giving of oneself as a “love-offering” to them; it is putting their needs before one’s own. Love is a verb i.e. it is a “doing word”: one does not simply say to one’s child, “I love you” – one proves that love by one’s actions.

“You have no doubt heard the expression, “It’s not the quantity of time that matters, it’s the quality of time”. There may be a certain element of truth in this statement, in that half an hour spent playing games with a child is worth more than having the child with you in the house all day while you spend most of your time on household chores. On the other hand, to say that it’s the quality of time that matters may be an excuse on the part of the parent who is too busy to devote much time to the child. Quality time means spending sufficient time doing things together, so that an open channel of communication between parent and child can be established” (Mol, 1984:50).

In this regard, I am particularly concerned that fathers adopt this attitude in relation to their children. Modern-day pressures and demands result in fathers being extremely busy and, because of this, time spent with their families is often negligible, in many families even non-existent. A father has approximately eighteen years with his children before they move out of the home into the next phase of life. For the most part, the opportunity to then connect with his child is lost. I strongly believe that for fathers their priority should be the family, even if this temporarily affects the advancement in their careers. There are many young

people who grow up with absent fathers even though they may live in the same home: meaningful relationships between father and children are non-existent. This is a tragedy and, as the church, we can have a role in helping fathers re-connect with their families.

“When a child senses that his mom or dad, whom he idolizes, makes time to spend with him, it gives the child a tremendous sense of self-worth. I don’t think we as parents realize what it means to a child when we devote time to him” (Mol, 1984:50).

4.4.2 Parents as Agents of Change

Parents have an extremely important role to play in their children’s experience of God, and especially in their understanding of God. As mentioned in the previous section, many parents are not aware of the impact they have on their children’s lives. Often children imitate their parent’s mannerisms e.g. their manner of speaking, walking, their facial expressions. This is also applicable in the spiritual sphere: as parents how we experience God influences our children’s experience of God. We need to express our Christianity in the most natural way possible so that a relationship with God becomes simply an accepted and natural part of a child’s life.

“Close family relationships are important because faith is formed through personal, trusting relationships. Healthy relationships within families can be developed and strengthened in four ways, each contributing to the formation of committed children and youth: parental harmony, effective communication, wise parental control and parental nurturing” (Strommen & Hardel, 2000:37).

Faith cannot be proved in a test tube. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith moves beyond logic. Faith is difficult to explain to one’s children, but it is an abstract concept that we as parents can embody in our lives. The best way for us to “explain” it to our children is to live it: faith in action is far more effective than words.

“How might a parent answer a child who asks for a definition or description of a living faith? The question is not an easy one to answer because faith is both complex and dynamic. Faith

touches all dimensions of human life – the affective, cognitive, volitional and behavioural. In other words, a vibrant faith permeates every facet of our existence, manifesting itself in what we trust, value and do” (Strommen & Hardel, 2000:75).

The emphasis on parents as primary educators in terms of the spiritual growth of their children – as we see recorded in the Bible – has changed. Increasingly parents have shifted this responsibility onto someone else e.g. the Sunday school teacher or the youth leader at their church. Although these teachers and leaders may have received in-depth training for their ministry to children and youth, parents cannot abdicate from one of their primary responsibilities as parents, namely, the spiritual training and nurturing of their children.

The first community that God created after the “Godhead community” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was the family. Depending on the culture, “family” can refer to a nuclear family of father, mother and children, or to an extended family including grandparents, uncles, aunts and other members of the family.

“In God’s plan from the very beginning, children were sufficiently important to require the creation of the sophisticated concept of the family. The family was not a product of evolution, but of creation a concept and practice written into the primeval constitution of His people.

His plan for the family arose from His knowledge that a person in a social vacuum was incomplete and subnormal. Theologically this truth is self evident, because people made in the image of God need a family context to reflect the ‘sweet society’ of the Godhead. It was God’s intention that the solidarity and love of God should be reflected in the family. Thus by deduction to violate the solidarity and love of a family, is in a sense to deface the image of God in society” (Prest, 1992:55).

Parents must accept that they fulfil a vitally important role in the lives of their children. Christian parents provide for their children not only a model of the Christian faith but also a mediator of salvation. God blesses parents with children, not only to provide them with a godly home but also to act as mediators of faith on His behalf.

“If we do a great job of training children to love God with all their heart, mind, strength and soul, then we will no longer have to invest time battling over moral and spiritual issues such as abortion, homosexuality, gambling and pornography. The ways of God will flow naturally from the lives of people who have embraced him and His principles. We could trust our children to do what is right, because entrenched in their heart, mind and soul is an unshakable understanding of what is right and a compelling desire to act accordingly” (Barna, 2003:51).

I believe with absolute certainty that parents’ top priority is the nuclear family. I believe that we as parents dare not get involved in any form of ministry outside of the home unless we have first laid a strong foundation within the home. Earlier I stated that the first community God created was the family. It was only after that that the family of faith was established. I am convinced that the faith community ought to mirror the family i.e. all that makes up the family should be evident within the church – care, concern, love, compassion, dealing with conflict, good communication and acceptance.

The church should once again develop its sense of family. The institutional organization has become top-heavy and laden down with bureaucracy. Leadership teams and committees are regarded as central to its smooth running and yet members struggle to build deep relationships with one another. Management and business principles are essential to success in the corporate field, but the church is not a business. It is first and foremost a family. Postmodern young people are looking for depth of relationship in a church, not a church run on good management principles. This is one of the reasons for them turning their backs on the institution. If it does not offer them the real, genuine, authentic relationships, they will seek them elsewhere.

I end this chapter with two quotes from George Barna which, I believe, well summarise my thoughts which have gone before. We live in a postmodernist society; as far as youth ministry is concerned, old methods do not work anymore; we have to rethink the way we do youth ministry. I personally believe that once again the home will become the primary place of faith transference. In my final chapter I will propose a new liturgy for doing youth ministry in the 21st century i.e. amongst postmodernists within the context of the Independent House Churches.

“Our national surveys have shown that while more than 4 out of 5 parents (85 percent) believe that they have the primary responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of their children, more than two out of three of them abdicate that responsibility to their church. Their virtual abandonment of leading their children spiritually is evident in how infrequently they engage in faith-oriented activities with their young ones. For instance, we discovered that in a typical week, fewer than ten percent of parents who regularly attend church with their kids read the Bible together, pray together (other than at meal times) or participate in an act of service as a family unit. Even fewer families – 1 out of every 20 – have any type of worship experience together with their kids, other than while they are at church during a typical month” (Barna, 2003:77).

Churches need to support the parents to fulfil their mandate and be extremely careful that they do not remove this responsibility from the parents. The desired outcome is strong, healthy families, not crippled, dysfunctional individuals.

“When a church – intentionally or not – assumes a family’s responsibilities in the arena of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its biblical responsibility. We should be careful not to be too harsh on churches, for there are many situations in which a child’s family will have nothing to do with spiritual development. In those cases, a child must depend on the church to provide lessons in faith or he or she will essentially go without spiritual training. And there are millions of families who have a proper relationship with their church, providing spiritual direction and training to their child that is supplemented by their church. That is a very desirable situation – the family takes the lead in the process, and the church supports its efforts” (Barna, 2003:81).

CHAPTER 5

5. A HOUSE CHURCH LITURGY FOR POSTMODERN YOUTH

“This generation of high-tech young people is deficient of consistent, accountable relationships. Without face-to-face real-life relationships, they remain disconnected relationally, unequipped to face life and its challenges.

Deep inside they long for secure relationships. Today’s young people desire affirmation that their thoughts and feelings are valid. They look for this in relationships that are real” (Sauder & Mohler, 1997:17).

Postmodern young people are growing up in a technological age: new technology is developed so quickly only to be out of date within weeks, sometimes even days. Cell phones, I-pods, computers, and DVD recorders are just some of the technology that they use with easy familiarity. On the whole they are more technologically advanced than their parents and are masters at multi-tasking i.e. being able to do more than one thing at a time. Having lived in an age of televisions, computers, movies, DVDs etc, it is visual stimuli that hold their attention.

There is, however, one need that remains the same through the decades and across the generational divide: the need for relationships. Competent as they are with technology, there is still a deep need for relationships. A gadget remains a gadget; it is always an object, lifeless and devoid of feelings. Humans, however, are feeling beings with emotional needs.

As I conclude this thesis I will address the issues I raised in the introductory chapter. The basis of this study is to determine whether there is, in fact, a liturgy for doing youth ministry in the Independent House Churches. In Chapter 3, the biblical exegesis, I highlighted the liturgy as found in Luke 2; I suggested it as a possible example to follow in “doing” church. Here, I will discuss whether or not the same liturgy applies to postmodern young people. If it does, what form should it take? If it doesn’t, what is the alternative?

In Chapter 1 I made various statements with regard to ministering to the children of House Church members, as well as to those of unchurched friends. Following are the objectives which I would like to address.

5.1 Objectives of House Church Ministry to Young People

The House Church is not only about adults, but includes the whole family. If the House Church does not take care of the children they will remain without teaching and discipling. There is always the danger that House Church members expect the group to be a mini version of their previous church, especially in terms of ministering to their young people. If they come from a church where young people were not disciplined and cared for, it is very easy simply to ignore their needs and exclude them from the group.

5.1.1 Christian Young People

Independent House Churches consist of families and families have children. As much as the House Church is for the adults, so it is also for the young people.

“Clearly, people who maintain that evangelizing and discipling children is a waste of time – that is, such efforts are better reserved for older individuals, when such an investment can reap a return – are arguing from a base of human reasoning, not from a foundation of hard, cold facts. While we must acknowledge that neither age nor any other barriers preclude God’s sovereignty – there are millions of cases in which people connect with Him in their teenage or adult years – the truth is that such cases are not typical. More often than not, what a person decides about truth, sin, forgiveness and eternal consequences during the preteen years is the same perspective that person carries to the grave and beyond, wherever that may take him or her” (Barna, 2003:45) .

5.1.1.1 Parents as the Primary Teachers of Christian Faith

In studying the history of youth ministry in chapter 4, we noticed that during the previous centuries para-church organizations were established to minister to young people. These organizations were established to minister specifically to young people from unchurched backgrounds. Until the establishment of these organizations and church-based youth ministries, the parents were the primary influences in terms of the faith formation of their children.

In the Old Testament the following encouragement was given to parents: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

This instruction is still applicable today. It is the parents’ responsibility to teach and train their children, to prepare them for life, and this includes their spiritual training. When a good, solid foundation is laid in this regard, the child is better able to assimilate spiritual matters.

“Some parents have learned that seeing themselves as their children’s personal spiritual coach helps them to view common experiences and everyday circumstances as the training grounds on which to foster spiritual development” (Barna, 2003:73).

The Independent House Church provides a forum to encourage the parents who are members of the group in their parenting skills. If the group is an inter-generational group, younger parents can learn from those who have already passed through this particular phase. The church also provides a space for parents to discuss their views on parenting and to be given advice and prayer support from other parents.

5.1.1.2 Young People as Members of the Independent House Church

Certainly there is something seriously wrong if parents attend the House Church but the children are not welcome. As mentioned earlier, the church should be a mirror image of the family. The House Church provides a wonderful example of an extended family, with “uncles”, “aunts” and “cousins”. If these meetings take place informally around a meal table

or in a sitting-room where everyone is relaxed, the young people will have a sense of belonging and enjoy a relationship with each other and with the older members. One cannot emphasise enough the importance of these young people listening to and participating in the conversation around the table. It is here where they hear stories of God's faithfulness in the lives of the group, where they listen to discussions about various aspects of the Christian faith, where their young faith is modelled on those of older Christians.

"The final practice that we must facilitate for our children is that of engagement in a community of believers, where they are accepted, instructed, encouraged, supported and held accountable" (Barna, 2003:74).

Simply by being part of a family, young people are part of the Independent House Church. Families are inclusive: they accept each other, despite differences in age, outlook and opinion. By including young people in the group it could well mean a change in paradigm i.e. a shift from our understanding and practice of doing church to incorporate young people. Churches are generally geared towards adults; however, within the Independent House Churches we should aim to rectify this situation so that our expression of church is totally inclusive.

5.1.1.3 Young People Participating in the Independent House Church

As young people are accepted as members of the Independent House Church so they need to feel valued. They should have the freedom to contribute during the gatherings; they need to remind us of the world they live in. Their world is a very different world to ours in terms of peer pressure, morals, fashion, music and general outlook on life and we as adults need to hear their story. (Once again, the meal table is ideal for just such interaction.) Their interaction with peers is constant and, in order to understand them, we need to understand the culture in which they are growing up. It is to our own peril if we don't make that effort. Just as the traditional church is becoming increasingly "old", so will the House Church.

Young people need to be taught about the "Priesthood of all believers" in order that they too can participate in the full meaning of "serving one another". In the Body of Christ we are all called to this task. This is totally different to the model with which young people have grown

up: normally adults are regarded as the so-called experts and young people sit passively as the recipients. At other times they are separated from the adults and have a meeting with a programme or format that appeals to them.

Jesus regarded children as very important: as recorded in Luke 18, He rebuked His disciples because they wanted to chase the children away.⁵⁰ He welcomed them saying, “the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”.

In Acts 2 Peter also included children in the mission of the early church. Salvation and baptism is extended to the whole family, including children.⁵¹

5.1.2 Non-Christian Young People

As the Independent House Church we would be failing – and repeating the mistakes of the traditional church - if we ignored the unchurched, especially the unchurched young people. One needs to be constantly reminded of the statistics coming out of the George Barna Research Group which indicate that the majority of believers become Christians under the age of 20.

“Consider the facts. People are much more likely to accept Christ as their Saviour when they are young. Absorption of biblical information and principles typically peaks during the preteen years. Attitudes about the viability and value of church participation form early in life. Habits related to the practice of one’s faith develop when one is young and change surprisingly little over time” (Barna, 2003:41).

⁵⁰ Luke 18:15-17. “People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’.”

⁵¹ Acts 2:38&39. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call’.”

5.1.2.1 Building Relationships between the Churched and Unchurched Young People

Young people interact socially with peers from many different persuasions throughout their school careers. In a number of instances in the traditional church context, we try to protect them from contact with unchurched children e.g. church schools where only children from Christian families can attend. The opposite should apply. Young people should be trained and equipped to live out their faith amongst their unchurched friends. In the same way that we as parents attempt to model the Christian lifestyle to our children, so our children should be encouraged to do the same with their peers.

Young Christians ought to be a positive influence amongst their peers. Within the Independent House Church we should also provide opportunities for the churched young people to meet regularly with the unchurched young people e.g. a separate discipleship group where they can build relationships, social get-togethers.

5.1.2.2 Equipping Young People to Share their Faith with Unchurched Friends

I hesitate to prescribe the training or teaching of “evangelistic skills” to young people in order for them to share their faith with the unchurched. This can be more of a drawback for them than a help. Young people need to be taught to express their faith in as natural a way as possible.

“Equipping young people to not only embrace Jesus as their Lord and Saviour but also to accept His call to spread the news to those who are not yet eternally connected to Him through His grace is a privilege” (Barna, 2003:72).

The Independent House Church should encourage and equip its young members to live out their faith amongst their friends without “gimmicks” and programmes. Through building relationships and friendships, Christian young people should be encouraged to share Christ and His message of grace: unchurched friends should not be regarded as mere “souls to be saved”.

5.1.2.3 House Church as a Forum for Faith-Related Questions

Unchurched young people often have questions about the Christian faith but don't know who to speak to about it. Traditional churches and their youth groups are often geared towards their own Christian youth and sometimes don't have the opportunity to interact with those who are not their own. A forum needs to be created where unchurched young people feel accepted and where they are free to ask questions without feeling they are making a fool of themselves.

“The Christian faith is not meant to be hoarded but shared. Our faith is founded on the notion of expressing love in real ways, not simply discussing it as an intellectual concept” (Barna, 2003:74)

The Independent House Church can provide this opportunity for hosting unchurched young people, especially if there is a House Church member who is passionate about youth. This could provide a safe place for questions to be raised and for dialogue to take place between the church and unchurched. Such a forum could take place in a home which would provide an environment conducive to discussion and fellowship. A coffee shop or a restaurant is also a good alternative.

“Having devoted more than two decades of my life and all of my professional skills to studying and working with ministries of all types, I am now convinced that the greatest hope for the local church lies in raising godly children. Think about the tremendous influence these unassuming little people possess: Every year, tens of thousands of parents are brought to faith in Christ because one of their children was so changed by his or her own relationship with the Lord that the parent could not ignore the power of Christ any longer. Further, we have discovered that peer evangelism among young children – one kid leading another kid to the foot of the Cross for a life-changing encounter with Jesus – is one of the most prolific and effective means of evangelism in the nation” (Barna, 2003:49)

5.2 A Liturgy for Postmodern Youth Ministry

“Many of the younger generation in our churches desire to experience something new. They are no longer satisfied with the church structure of their present and prior experience. We have the opportunity to encourage them to build their own structures and to reproduce church as they imagine it” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:82).

Can the liturgy as practiced by the Acts 2 church be implemented amongst young people or do we need to devise a new form and style for them to connect with God?

For a long time I have struggled with this question. As I have read widely, attended seminars, lectured on the subject of youth ministry and interacted with others who are passionate about young people, I find that my answer to this question changes regularly.

I am not yet settled in my own mind as to whether youth ministry should be happening independently or whether it should be incorporated within the wider church family. Ideally I believe that it should not operate separately since this compartmentalizes the church further. However, if the existing church structures are not willing to be transformed, if young people are not acknowledged as being vitally important, then a separate youth ministry is unavoidable.

I believe that there does need to be some form or structure within which the young people in the House Church can operate – a system or style that is unique. There should be a specific way of doing things so that, if an outsider were to visit the group of young people, he would see a particular form being implemented. The visitor could come back the following week and experience a similar programme with minor variations.

On the other hand, we need to resist all forms of structure when ministering to young people. There is a tendency for “structure” to make us staid and, in the context of young people, it is essential that we remain fresh. Our youth ministry needs to be continually transforming itself and evolving. Our methods should be in a constant state of flux and change.

Through extensive reading, my concept of “liturgy” as a rigid, unchanging style or method has changed. The danger is, however, that we allow it too to become staid. Like the

Reformation, liturgy needs to be a continuous, present tense – always changing, always evolving. As I see it, liturgy needs to fit into our context of doing ministry, and not the reverse where ministry is fitted into a specific liturgy.

As is seen in the Acts 2 and the traditional churches, certain elements of the early liturgy were completely omitted or changed to suit the circumstances. Does this, therefore, give us liberty to discover a “new” liturgy within the context of postmodern youth ministry?

5.3 A New Liturgy for the Independent House Church Youth Ministry

“In addition to exposing your youth to ancient liturgies of our faith, we should encourage young people to create new liturgy for their communities. Creating liturgy can be as simple as having the youth write prayers or submit poetry to use for certain purposes or at special times. We might be surprised at the beauty that surfaces from our youth and becomes a part of group identity. We can recruit creative people in the congregation to nurture our youth and harness their creativity for community worship. Allowing youth to participate helps them feel linked to their faith community and ultimately to the story of God” (King, 2006:105).

Recently young people have rediscovered the ancient spiritual disciplines and are embracing them as a new style of connecting with God. One need look no further than the Taizé community in France where thousands of young people descend annually simply to spend time in silence, reflection and corporate repetitive singing. From March to November, they come from all over the world to join this community which is situated just outside of Lyon in the south of Burgundy.

Taizé, a community of men who work to support themselves, was founded by Brother Roger. When the young people arrive, they all share the workload since there is no paid staff. This teaches the young people the importance of serving each other, while emphasis is placed on prayer and reflection. Everyone’s experiences differ as each individual undergoes a personal journey inward and outward where they meet with God and share their lives with others.

The form of spirituality practised at Taizé is simple yet dynamic. A new richness of worship is offered to these young people who are reconnecting with traditional spiritual practices which have been discarded by the reformed churches. Hundreds have testified to it being a life-changing experience.

The traditional evangelical church has regarded the liturgy and practices of a place like Taizé as being “too Catholic” in essence. The more Pentecostal-style churches distance themselves from any form of liturgy since they prefer to worship in a more spontaneous manner. They feel that liturgy and structure restricts the work of the Holy Spirit in their services. However, despite their “freer” approach, they still practise a form of liturgy: although not the liturgy used by the Anglican Church, for example, there is a specific style or form which characterizes their services.

Here are some of the spiritual disciplines that young people are rediscovering and implementing as part of their own spirituality:

- The Labyrinth – praying while walking a labyrinth path
- The Lectio Divina – divine reading of scripture, meditating and reflecting
- Sacred Reading – reading aloud with responses
- Storytelling – reading the Bible as a story
- Keeping the Hours – set prayer times throughout the day
- Praying with Icons – visual inspiration to pray
- The Sign of the Cross – keeping God close to the heart and head
- Prayer Rope – beads and knots symbolizing different requests
- Respiratory Prayer – rhythmically praying while breathing in or out
- Examination of Conscience – Holy Spirit illumination of heart
- Imaginative Prayer – living in the story
- Silence & Solitude – being still in waiting on God

These disciplines are easier to initiate within an Independent House Church youth ministry where the groups are small and flexible. If we regard liturgy as a means to worship God, then the above practices would work extremely well in any small group. They can be implemented at any time and in any place (other than finding a labyrinth in which to walk).

“Christian practices mark us as and make us into Jesus’ followers. Our salvation comes by grace through faith, not through practice – but Christian practices are means of grace by which God strengthens individuals and the church to live faithfully. Together these practices form a river of holy water that washes over us day in and day out, shaping us and smoothing us into people recognizable as Christians” (Dean & Foster, 1998:107).

Dean and Foster mention further spiritual practices:

- Chastity
- Covenanting
- Fasting
- Forgiveness
- Healing
- Hospitality and care
- Intercession
- Justice
- Reconciliation
- Repentance
- Self-denial
- Simplicity
- Speaking truth in love
- Spiritual direction
- Spiritual friendship
- Stewardship
- Thanksgiving

“The ordinariness of Christian practices makes them easy to overlook. Practices are much like the back and forth, give and take rituals that happen around a family dinner table, ongoing activities that subtly shape us into people who bear a family resemblance beyond the nose on our faces. Practices constitute the daily rhythm of our life together. Through them God shapes us and uses us as a point of entry into the world. They align our steps with God’s and, in so doing, create holy vibrations that radiate far beyond the church” (Dean & Foster, 1998:108).

Two aspects to discovering a new liturgy for the House Church youth that are particularly exciting are the emphasis on creativity and the participation of all. These two aspects go hand-in-hand: as young people themselves discover their own creativity they are encouraged to share it with the others.

Perhaps the only thing that holds us back from experimenting with a new liturgy is our fear of moving into the unknown. We grow accustomed to and comfortable with the familiar. As leaders we need to take risks. Young people seem to be far more willing and able to try something new: it is us adults who are the reticent ones.

“This generation has a desire to get in touch with God and each other. They want God to be real to them. They want something that connects, that works, and that becomes a life-style. They are less interested in theology and intellectual arguments and more interested in encountering the supernatural. The old way of thinking taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new way of thinking teaches that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching. Subjective experience can become a great introduction to knowing God if it is followed up by objective teaching of the Word” (Sauder & Mohler, 1997:63).

Our goal is to deepen the faith of those who are Christians, but what about those who are non-Christians? These practices are non-threatening and anyone can participate in them. Approached in the right way, the unchurched should not find them strange or offensive. It is the leaders who need to have a shift in paradigm: we have grown used to thinking that God operates in a certain way and this often means that we are reticent to step “out-of-the-box” and encounter Him in a new way. It is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the unchurched that draws them to the Father, and not our efforts. The unchurched are “pre-Christians” waiting to be born of the Spirit of God.

Let us be creative, therefore, and embrace a new liturgy for youth ministry in the Independent House Churches.

5.4 An Alternative Liturgy for Postmodern Youth Ministry

Experimentation with alternative liturgical forms is taking place within the Emerging Church. Following is a brief summary of a few of these practices which are being used in the North American Emerging Church context. I believe that these practices could very easily be used in the Independent House Churches.

5.4.1 Artistic Expression

Churches provide space within their services/gatherings for young people to express their worship through art. A corner is set aside with paper, paint brushes, pencils, etc. where young people can move to during the services to paint or draw. This adds to their worship experience as they actively engage in an artistic expression of worship to God.

5.4.2 Creative Writing

Another space is provided where young people can express their thoughts on paper e.g. poetry, stories and lyrics for songs. As another expression of worship and thanksgiving, it also gives an opportunity for them to experience God beyond the ordinary.

5.4.3 Songwriting

Those with musical ability are encouraged to write and perform their music as an act of worship to God. Since it is “birthed” among them, the church uses this music instead of the songs of others. Again, this encourages the expression of creativity.

5.4.4 Dance

This is either rehearsed beforehand as part of worship or it is used spontaneously as an expression of worship. A private space in the gathering place e.g. behind a curtain, is allocated for those who prefer to dance without people watching them.

5.4.5 Drama

Drama is implemented for illustrative purposes and also as a tool in outreach. Drama is used to help people connect with God.

5.4.6 Other Liturgical Aids

Modern technology in the form of audio-visual presentations is also used for worship purposes. Either prior to worship or during the worship itself, images are flashed onto a screen in order to lead people into worship of God.

These are just a few of the new forms or styles of liturgy that are evolving in today's Emerging Church. Coloured lighting, electronic sound machines, candles, incense, the spiritual disciplines and practices mentioned above are all aids which are being incorporated in order to help young people experience God. Technological advancement has meant the incorporation of electronic equipment as part of worship. For those more traditionally-minded Christians this seems a strange and somewhat alien expression of worship, but for young people who live with it naturally in their daily life, it is a natural expression of their creativity. It enhances their worship experience.

5.5 “A Liturgy within a Liturgy”

“The reality is this: New wineskins eventually get old. We believe that God often places a burden in the younger generations to pioneer new churches because they have a different vision for a different era and a different generation. The younger generations come into

God's kingdom looking for reality, not religious structures. They want relationships, not outdated church programs. Let's help them start the new church structures that fit the needs of their generation" (Kreider & McClung, 2007:83).

The more I have considered the liturgy i.e. the practice of our worship to God, the more I have become aware of a liturgy within a liturgy i.e. the values we believe in that lead to these practices.

It is nonsensical if we receive the "new wine" i.e. liturgical practices, but are still using an "old wineskin" i.e. our values and principles. During this final section I will highlight some of these values which, for postmodern young people, are critical. If we do not sort out these values it will be a waste of time changing the practices. It simply will not work.

"God has created the church to be a dynamic, growing, relational movement. The Holy Spirit invites every generation and every race of people to create new expressions of church. Jesus called these new expression "wineskins". This is part of the adventure of being the church: The Father takes a lot of joy in allowing us to create new wineskins i.e. new ways of doing church. He wants us to break out of the old ways to find new ways of doing church, and He wants us, in the process, to discover the power that is latent in the Church as the ecclesia – the empowered people of God" (Kreider & McClung, 2007:62).

Following are some of these values that we as the House Church need to implement in order to impact the lives of the postmodern generation.

5.5.1 Relationships

Young people crave relationships, especially with their peers. They need to know that they are accepted for who they are, even if they are different. They ask that people see beyond their looks and their clothes and experience the real person within. God created man to live in relationship with Him, so within each one of us there is a longing to be connected to someone and to be loved by them.

Young people want to be accepted by the church and feel at home there, regardless of their appearance. Acceptance comes first; change in behaviour comes afterwards and, as the church, priority is placed on relationships. It should be the one value we uphold the most.

5.5.2 Realness

Young people have an immense capacity for “seeing through” people: they can see if people are being real or whether they are pretending. Postmodern young people detest phonies; therefore it is essential that our communication with them is real. There is a tendency among very many Christians to be someone that they are not. In their attempt to live a “spiritual life”, Christians can play-act, thereby covering up their own sins and weaknesses. Sometimes non-Christians are more real than Christians. Since they don’t feel the need to show a “sanitized version” of themselves to the community, they tend to be more open and honest about life and what they are going through.

“With a generation that is so sceptical because ‘image is everything,’ you have to work diligently to be real with them. What we mean by real is vulnerable, transparent, and imperfect. Real in our minds is akin to raw” (Celek & Zander, 1996:101).

As the church we need to be honest and real with the young people we deal with. For them, we are the human face of Jesus.

5.5.3 Relevance

For many young people church has become boring. It is irrelevant – in most cases it still operates out of the modern paradigm while society has moved on into postmodernism. For young people the church addresses issues that are not really relevant to them. They therefore write the church off as being out of touch and out of date, at the same time questioning whether the Bible is still relevant for today.

“The church needs to listen to young people and discover what it is that they are looking for. What questions are they asking? What unique and pressing dilemmas do they face?” (Fletcher, 1991:215).

As the church, we need to be in touch with the postmodern generation. We need to understand them and we need to connect with their world.

5.5.4 Mercy

Often the young person’s experience of church is one of harshness and criticism. They tend to feel judged and made to feel guilty instead of feeling loved and accepted. The church must be flavoured by the grace of God, giving away this grace freely as an act of mercy.

“The church ought to be giving the world a true picture of the nature and character of God. When it becomes legalistic, the church offers only a twisted caricature of the Lord and his ways” (Fletcher, 1991:221).

5.5.5 Accessibility

A criticism often flung at the church is that it is filled with hypocrites, people who are not genuine and who attend church as a show.

“One way in which the modern church can demonstrate its sincerity is by promoting the unique sense of family it can engender among its members. One of the greatest assets the Church has to offer, in a world bereft of meaningful relationships, is its capacity to bring people into caring networks” (Fletcher, 1991:222).

The church can offer young people a place where they are accepted. Families can open their homes to welcome a young person and to encourage him.

5.6 Conclusion

I believe that a major change needs to take place in terms of these values before we can initiate any form of liturgical practice amongst postmodern young people. As we change our values, we can start to build: the foundation needs to be properly laid before we can start building on it.

If the old wineskin is perished or has a hole in it, we need to discard it. We need to ask God to give us a new wineskin, one which is elastic and flexible so that He can pour out the new wine, wine that is rich and full-bodied.

“When the Lord pours out this new wine, we must have new wineskins prepared, or we could lose the harvest. The wineskins (church structures) of the Early Church were simple in nature: People met from house to house. We believe our Lord’s strategy to prepare for the harvest is still the same – He wants ordinary believers who have encountered an extraordinary God to meet together as spiritual families from house to house (and factory to factory, and business to business and school to school) to disciple and train each other in preparation for the harvest.

Many Christians today are thirsting for this great influx of new wine – new believers pouring into His kingdom. God is placing a desire within spiritual fathers and mothers to welcome these believers into the Kingdom and then to train them as spiritual sons and daughters. Small groups of believers who meet in homes provide an ideal structure for this kind of training” (Kreider & McClung, 2007:53).

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