

Article

Congregational Care: Philosophical Reflection on a Case Study

Joyce E. Bellous

Christian Faith Education, Taylor Seminary, Edmonton, AB T6J 4T3, Canada; joycebellous@gmail.com

Abstract: Congregational care strengthens relationships and supports spiritual growth. This article establishes groundwork for developing congregational care at First Baptist in Edmonton (FBC) by introducing a spiritual needs approach to engage people in conversation and by using a Spiritual Styles Assessment that has 36 questions to foster communication among congregational members. The article has four parts. The first introduces the congregation and a list of spiritual needs. The second part includes information about the Spiritual Styles Assessment and spirituality research. Parts three and four describe attitudes, skills and practices that enhance communicative action by helping people talk together and practice radical welcome as a foundation for congregational care. The purpose for establishing a foundation for congregational care is to suggest a way forward for a congregation that faces significant differences in values, beliefs, expectations, personal experience, and faith assumptions, even among people who have known each other for years. FBC is trying to find ways to reach understanding and offer care to all who enter the Sanctuary. The purpose of the article is to reflect philosophically on what congregants need from each other as signs of respect, inclusion and caring. The article outlines attitudes, skills, and practices that create communicative communities that are capable of nurturing congregational care by developing human understanding based on faith experience and communicative action.

Keywords: congregational care; communicative action; spirituality; spiritual conversation; spiritual needs; spiritual experiences; diversity; spiritual styles; communicative community



Citation: Bellous, Joyce E. 2023. Congregational Care: Philosophical Reflection on a Case Study. *Religions* 14: 450. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040450>

Academic Editors: Hendrik Pieter De Roest and Theo Pleizier

Received: 1 January 2023

Revised: 22 February 2023

Accepted: 14 March 2023

Published: 27 March 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Congregational care strengthens relationships and supports spiritual growth. This article establishes groundwork for developing congregational care at First Baptist Church (FBC) in Edmonton. The article is in four parts. The first part introduces FBC and provides several defining features of Baptist life that are relevant to building communicative action in this context. The first part also introduces a list of spiritual needs that allow congregants to converse with each other about these needs. The second part includes information about a Spiritual Styles Assessment tool (Bellous et al. 2009a, 2009b) that initiates and enhances conversation among congregants, and spirituality research from several sources. Parts three and four explore attitudes, skills and practices that help people form communicative community by talking together and by practising radical welcome as the foundation of congregational care.

The purpose for exploring congregational care is to suggest a way forward for a congregation that faces significant differences in values, beliefs, expectations, personal experience, and faith assumptions, particularly given COVID-19's tendency to reveal extreme points of view, even among people who have known each other for years. FBC is trying to find ways to reach understanding and offer care to all who enter the Sanctuary. The purpose of the article is to reflect philosophically on what people who journey together in faith need from each other as signs of respect, inclusion and caring. The article outlines attitudes, skills, and practices that help create communication that is capable of nurturing congregational care and developing human understanding based on faith experience.

A faith community is an ideal setting for connecting people meaningfully with others who share a religious tradition. The application of the Spiritual Styles Assessment in other

contexts has proven helpful in facilitating communication, which is why the article includes the Assessment. The purpose of the article is to imagine a context that leads people toward mature Christian faith and creates a basis for congregational care that is focused on radical welcome in a diverse community.

2. Part One: A Case Study Approach

During the Fall of 2022, different research options were initiated to describe aspects of the congregation that might lead to enhanced congregational care. Congregants were invited to consider and indicate their spiritual needs using a survey which was presented at three successive Sunday morning services as well as in the church's online weekly newsletter. A Spiritual Styles Assessment was completed in workshop sessions both in person and during online Zoom sessions. Face-to-face interviews added additional anecdotal information. In this article, themes emerging from research data provide the information for a descriptive background of FBC and inform the philosophical reflection developed in this article.

The following sections describe the congregation, offer a brief Baptist overview, and list spiritual needs that supported congregational discussions in the Fall of 2022, including comments on a communal aspect of people's comments on their spiritual needs.

2.1. First Baptist Church Edmonton: A Snapshot

FBC has continued to work and serve in downtown Edmonton, Alberta for 129 years. The church has a rich heritage of service. Following its motto, "seeking the peace and well-being of the city," FBC is active in providing liturgical worship, caring for members, education for all age groups and social justice. FBC was active in forming not-for-profit social agencies in Edmonton that work specifically with the poor and homeless, e.g., the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (E4C) established in 1970, and The Mustard Seed, established in 1984. These agencies flourish in their mission to people in Edmonton. An excellent music program is anchored by a pipe organ and a 25-member choir. The congregation is committed to the difficult work of healing relationships damaged by complicity with and indifference to forms of oppression through racism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, and classism.

The age groupings of congregants are as follows:

0–18 years = 14%

19–33 years = 15%

33–66 years = 48%

66+ years = 23%

At present, 327 congregants come from all areas of the city to the downtown core. Two full time and three part-time employees comprise the ministry staff, two focus primarily on music, one on children, one on youth and outreach, along with a senior team leader. An elected council provides governance and oversight to programs and administration. Many volunteers in the congregation fulfill work and service functions of the church.

2.2. A Baptist Overview

Baptists are an outgrowth of the Protestant Reformation. They fled from England to Amsterdam in 1609 seeking religious freedom. These believers were named "anabaptists" and condemned because of the controversial practice of adult believer's baptism. Influenced by the founders of Mennonite and Hutterite movements, Baptists soon moved back to England where the movement took root and grew. By 1650, there were 47 Baptist churches in and around London. Baptists currently number more than 41 million. According to church historian David Barrett, it is the largest Protestant denomination in the world.

Baptists are "non-creedal" but some accept statements of faith or confessions and may produce church covenants. Beliefs cluster around core distinctives that include the following categories: the centrality of scripture, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Priesthood of all believers, soul liberty and religious freedom, the separation of Church and State, a

congregational form of government in which all members have voice and vote in decision-making, and two ordinances: Believers' Baptism and Holy Communion.

Baptist communities tend to focus on personal freedom and are less experienced in practices of communal discernment that typify congregations such as those formed by Quaker groups, as one example. Baptists privilege individualism due to their emphasis on soul liberty. FBC works toward being hospitable on Sunday mornings and aims to offer radical welcome to anyone who enters the Sanctuary. Apart from members in the choir, small ministry groups or bible study groups, the knowledge people have of each other may be limited. The COVID-19 pandemic was an exception, in that applying rules around it allowed people to experience the strong beliefs of others they did not anticipate. Some left the community due to differences of belief and the emphasis on radical welcome. New people have joined FBC, also due to its emphasis on radical welcome.

Spiritual Needs Research

In November 2022, the congregation was invited to consider spiritual needs as an aspect of what it means to be a faith community. On three Sunday mornings, a list was read aloud. Congregants were invited to consider needs they found important, those which are seldom met, and those they want to emphasize in their responses to other people. Spiritual needs include the following:

All human beings need to be seen, heard, have a name that is remembered, play, tell their story, grieve, mourn, lament, enjoy the beauty of the world, connect with the past, make significant journeys, express themselves symbolically, convey emotion authentically, seek purpose and meaning, ask ultimate questions, have a satisfactory way to think and speak about the beginning and the end of life, survive, flourish, experience longing and enjoy its satisfaction, relax, cope with life circumstances, be part of a larger community, experience transcendence, pray, celebrate, mark significant moments, bear witness to truths learned about life, organize experience meaningfully so as to make sense of it, maintain human dignity and see the future as hopeful (Bellous and Clark 2022).

2.3. Data Responses

About 40% of Sunday morning attendees answered questions about spiritual needs they perceive as most important, those seldom met and those they want to emphasize. The first question (which are most important) produced the following results. Only responses to the first question are summarized below. Of the spiritual needs that are most important

- 46% selected needs that could be met only within community.
- 36% selected needs that could be met individually.
- 18% selected needs that could be met either communally or individually.

Only pastoral staff members have access to 2020 research data. During face-to-face interviews, positive comments were received from numerous congregants who expressed appreciation for the opportunity to consider their spiritual needs. In these interviews, people talked about how helpful it was to focus on spiritual needs, an activity they had not given attention to previously.

3. Part Two: Spirituality

With the goal of enhancing congregational conversation on the topic of spirituality in a Christian context, the following sections offer insight into a Spiritual Styles Assessments (one that has been used in this congregation before 2022) and research that supports communicative action and congregational care, including a biblical context, a social/science framework, a list of spiritual experiences, and reflections on spiritual needs in the Christian tradition. These sections offer a broad view of spirituality, including elements that support congregational care.

3.1. *Spiritual Styles*

Spiritual Styles assess what people care about but convey differently due to their use of word, emotion, symbol, and action. By the Fall of 2022, about 15% of FBC members had taken the Assessment. The purpose of the Assessment is to encourage conversations that address difficult issues people face as they move toward a more open stance to each other.

The four scenario descriptions are followed by a brief commentary. Please note: Jane, Sean, Frances, and John are extreme examples. The Assessment asks 36 questions. These scenarios describe people who score close to 36/36. Most participants do not express an extreme Style use. Most people convey two or three Styles in their approach.

3.1.1. Word

Jane prided herself on speaking and writing with accuracy and precision. She loved to study the history of words. In conversation, she often helped those who were not being clear, sometimes stopping them mid-sentence to suggest a better word. Her friends accused her of always needing to be right. She would gladly concede to a well-stated case, but so few people could challenge her arguments. Jane did not have a good working relationship with her boss. When he assigned a task, she would seek to clarify it, but even his expanded instructions were vague. She was good at her job, but any hope of advancement was quashed by the tension between them. She would write her concerns in emails, carefully crafted so there could be no misunderstanding. He complained she wasted his time by being too particular. She frequently felt misunderstood and repeatedly asked people if they understood what she meant. She did not need to be right. But she valued being correct. Why did other people not understand the difference?

Commentary: Word style users look for conceptual clarity and want to know if they are making sense to other people. Many make the world a better place through the scholarly work they do with the meaning of words.

3.1.2. Emotion

Sean was a musician. From an early age, he made music on whatever he could find, plunking harmoniously on a piano at age 3 and entertaining his mother by banging on pots and pans. People around him sang, danced or just moved to the music, rewarding his efforts. He seemed skilled at making people happy. He studiously watched their reactions. At 13 he got a break into the music world. He was a star by 19. During a successful career, he remained close to his mother and eventually moved her into his home to live with him. He felt safe with her because she always understood what he was feeling. He married several times, each time falling deeply and immediately in love with a woman he felt close to, but each one ended in failure. Those who knew him would be showered with attention at times yet ignored at other times. At the height of his career, he was overweight and so addicted to drugs he could not make it through a whole performance. He died at an early age of drug-related illnesses shortly after he divorced his fifth wife.

Commentary: Emotion style users are not necessarily emotional. They want to have the right feel in the room and share this feeling with other people who feel it too. They make the world a better place by offering emotional support and by drawing people into a group if they are on the margins of it.

3.1.3. Symbol

Frances lived in South America where her husband ran a computer business in the city of La Paz, Bolivia. They had a cottage on an island where they spent holiday time. One dry spring, they went to the cottage to get away from an outbreak of unrest, led by drastically underpaid schoolteachers. The teachers went on marches that stopped traffic, and lit firecrackers that sounded like bullets. Police were everywhere. Frances and her family took refuge on the island. She felt safe, but worried about people back home who were continually in her thoughts. Frances loved her city and longed for it to flourish. She wished that the poor children in city slums could be educated, a goal the teachers were

trying to achieve as well. Early one morning, with a cup of hot tea in hand, Frances went out on the porch. She was preoccupied with images of unrest back at home. When she sat down, she noticed a fine mist fall silently around her. As she watched it settle down quietly onto the grass, she whispered, "Please, God. Let it be so."

Commentary: Symbol style users want others to sense the Presence of the Unseen and simplify life to enjoy it through stillness and attentiveness. They want others to join them in meaningful rituals that allow the symbolic richness to permeate vision.

3.1.4. Action

John is a social activist for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that fights HIV/AIDS. He always lectures unshaven in crumpled beige pants, an old shirt and a khaki jacket that has seen better days. Yet he has fire in his eyes that draws attention away from his clothing. As he lectures, he speaks of African widows, of thousands of orphans running households at 8 years old. He talks about grandmothers who care for 12 grandchildren, all alone. These old women have no way to get food for their children's children. They have no support from an entire generation of parents who are dying of AIDS. John uses no pictures. The intensity of his vision sparks images of women racked with disease, waiting together to die from an illness they caught as they sold their bodies to try to earn their daily bread. John berated the audience as clueless and cowardly. If they could see how people suffer, they would join his efforts, instead of spending money on big houses, fancy cars, and carefree holidays, while people elsewhere starve. "I am tired of nice people," he said. "Your niceness is a stench to me. Give me Justice! Give These Broken People Justice!" The audience left in silence. A group of friends had come together to the lecture. One of them broke the silence, saying, "I feel like I've been hit in the stomach."

Commentary: Action style users want people to join them in world saving missions that promote justice and take the right action in the world. They are impatient, prophetic voices that often alienate those in leadership. But one person like John can change their world.

As with spiritual needs, the purpose of administering the Assessment was to provide new opportunities for congregants to talk together about what really matters to them. These conversations took place face-to-face and in Zoom meetings. At least one congregant is in a fifth category due to recording even numbers across all four Styles. In face-to-face conversation, this person realized a tendency to interpret and explain people to each other, e.g., when in a meeting where there is disagreement.

3.2. *The Human Spirit: A Scriptural Framework*

Given that FBC is a Christian context, spiritual conversation revolves around scripture and its meaning. From the perspective of the New Testament (NRSV)), spirituality is informed by 338 references to the word spirit or spirits. Terms describing the human spirit also apply to the Holy Spirit and include a sense of life, wind, energy, receptivity, movement, action, presence and feeling. Functions of spirit are named that cohere around its capacity as an agent of communication. The spirit indwells (Rom. 8:11), bears witness (Rom. 8:16), intercedes (Rom. 8:26), advocates (John 15:26), directs (Acts 11:12), prays (Eph. 6:18), interprets (1Cor. 2:13), reveals (1Tim 3:16), yearns (James 4:5), speaks (Rev. 2:11), strengthens (Rom 8:26), guides (Gal. 5:25), unifies (1Cor. 6:17), comforts (Acts 9:31), confirms truth (Rom. 9:1) and conveys Presence (Col. 2:5). Romans 8:27 says that God who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit; the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. The Holy Spirit connects humanity with God and is the agent of communication within the Holy Trinity.

In its capacity for communication, the human spirit and Holy Spirit are in significant relationship to one another and establish a link described in parental terms. The human spirit is an aspect of what it means to be a person and has a Father. Jesus distinguishes between those whose Father is the devil and those whose Father is God. (Matt. 10:20) In Christian cosmology, the human spirit is not simply good or neutral; it is connected to the

Trinity, specifically the Father. The outcome of that connection is evidenced through the life a person leads so that spirituality implies and shapes morality. In spirituality research, a link is also made between spirituality and morality. A sense of connection to others as well as a feeling of obligation for the way we treat them are directed by spiritual experience and assumptions and beliefs derived through that experience.

Christian cosmology—an interpretation of the universe as a whole—describes a spiritual kingdom that includes the following participants: the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, unclean spirits, demons, Your Father (the devil), Abba, Father (God), spirits of the prophets, spirits of the dead, foul spirits, elemental spirits of the world or the spirit of the world. While every person is understood as having a spirit, people can become unspiritual (1Cor. 2:14), i.e., dull to spiritual urgings. The spiritual kingdom is inhabited by angels (Heb. 1:14), messengers of God, and demons, unclean or evil spirits led by Satan. Christians are encouraged to stand against devilish schemes and recognize that their enemies are not human but spiritual. As scripture says: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). The spiritual kingdom is multi-layered; scripture affirms the human spirit’s strength to resist the enemy due to the power and Presence of God. As James 4:8b says: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” In this cosmological view of the world, our enemies are not other people.

3.3. *The Human Spirit: Social/Science Approaches*

From a Christian perspective, human beings are created in the image of God and their spirituality is formed through ordinary processes of everyday life. At the heart of spiritual experience is gaze behaviour between parent and infant that initiates inter-subjective encounters, introducing infants to personal, spiritual, and material worlds they inhabit the rest of their lives. There are five formative dimensions that develop the human spirit. They are

- Biological dimensions of spirituality, an issue of human survival.
- Culture transmits spiritual data to children through what are called memes.
- A sociological need to fit into environments and distinguish ourselves from them produces patterned behaviour that is characteristic of spiritual experience.
- A network of genes enables people to experience self-transcendence, which is essential for realizing connections to God, others, the world and the self.
- Object relations are at the heart of spirituality and are psychological in nature. American psychoanalyst Ana-Maria Rizzuto studied object relations theories that Sigmund Freud uncovered (Bellous 2015).

Freud had wanted to know how people come to possess actual belief in the existence of God (Rizzuto 1979). His theory of object relations answered his question. Object relation theories explain our need for others because they are theories about our relations to the ‘objects’ (people and things) to which we attach that give meaning to our lives (Klein 1987). Rizzuto was interested in subjective experience—the unconscious weaving of images, feelings and ideas that converge in the process of elaborating concepts (Rizzuto 1979) in our mental mythology. Rizzuto is clear that God concepts, for example, remain entwined in a complex way with one’s experience of parents (Rizzuto 1998). God concepts may be repressed or transformed but they do not go away. In communicative communities, listening to concepts people have for God is a central aspect of congregational care as someone hears how these concepts function in someone else’s faith.

In *The Spiritual Child*, American psychologist Lisa Miller argues, using scientific data, that spirituality is “an inner sense of living relationship to a higher power (God, nature, spirit, universe, the creator, or whatever your word is for the ultimate loving, guiding life-force” (Miller 2015). That living relationship must be personal and personally sought, secured, and lived out in the daily exercise of one’s values and behavior because the connection builds what she calls an inner spiritual compass. This compass is an innate,

concrete faculty. Like emotional intelligence, a spiritual compass is part of our biological endowment. She asserts that it can be cultivated in community.

Miller notes that her evidence for an inner compass is “hard, indisputable, and rigorously scientific” (Miller 2015). Her investigations have another important insight. She made use of a 1997 study, which was a landmark scientific article published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* to provide empirically derived evidence of a hugely beneficial dimension of spirituality. The study uncovered the significance of “a personal relationship with the transcendent” and argued that the relationship makes valuable contributions to good health, mental well-being, fulfillment, and success (Miller 2015).

Miller provides a caveat. She notes empirical data that methodically identified what is *not* meant by personal spirituality. Spirituality is unrelated statistically to strict adherence to a religion or a creed without a sense of personal choice or ownership. She says that rigid adherence to a creed without a sacred personal relationship is different from what she calls natural spirituality. She observes further that, while personal devotion is highly protective against heavy substance use and abuse, rigid adherence to a creed without a sense of sacred relationship does not prevent against substance abuse.

3.4. Spiritual Experiences

As mentioned, the human spirit gathers life experiences into a meaningful whole, which is not to suggest a worldview is without inaccuracies, internal contradictions, and conflict. It is a mental mythology shaped from birth that includes spiritual experiences. An aim of congregational care is to offer access to meaning people make personally, that they become effective at communicating, as appropriate, so that worldviews are open and not closed in a self-protective manner. There seems to be ample evidence that spiritual experiences inform daily life, e.g., in the work of British zoologist Alister Hardy.

The reason Hardy’s research matters to congregational care, is that he was certain human beings have potential for spiritual awareness (Hay 2007). He gave spirituality a biological basis. As human experience forms, it allows people to experience what cannot be seen, touched, tasted, heard, or smelled. In 1969, Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU) at Oxford University with the purpose of making a scientific study of the nature, function, and frequency of reports on religious experience in the human species (Hay 2007). British spirituality researcher David Hay continued Hardy’s research and summarized data gathered in 2000 that he compared with Hardy’s data gathered in 1989.

The comparisons Hay drew indicated an upsurge in reports of spiritual experiences in Britain between 1987 and 2000. In his book, *Something There*, Hay noted an increase in spiritual experiences and a decline in church attendance that was widespread. He provides a useful description of spiritual experiences, which include the following qualities:

- A patterning of events that persuade people these events were meant to happen due to a transcendent providence
- Awareness of the presence of God
- Awareness of prayer being answered
- Awareness of a sacred presence in nature
- Awareness of the presence of the dead
- Awareness of an evil presence (Hay 2007)

Hay supports congregational care with the data that spiritual awareness is part of the human condition. An aspect of his research does not fit well with congregational care. Most of these experiences could happen when people are alone. Faith is personal; congregational care is relational. We need other people to meet our spiritual needs. Congregational care addresses personal and communal aspects of faith formed within a Biblical narrative that meets our spiritual needs.

3.5. Spiritual Needs and Christian Tradition

Spiritual needs and spiritual experiences are the focus of congregational care. An assumption in this article is that the Christian Bible is a narrative that speaks to these needs

and echoes spiritual experiences. The Biblical narrative tells the story of human interaction with a self-revealing God. Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1912–1991) observes that the Bible sets up a mythological universe that offers a unified structure of narrative and imagery (Frye 1982). It has a beginning, middle, and end that illumine the scope of humanity's lifespan. To him, the Bible

begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse, and it surveys human history in between, or the aspect of human history it is interested in, under the symbolic name of Adam and Israel.

(Frye 1982, p. xiii)

Scripture is perspectival. It has a point of view on spiritual needs and experiences, rather than simply giving information about them.

Frye describes the Bible as myth. The word is a contranym—a word that contains its own opposite, like the word cleave. Frye is clear in the sense he uses. Myth (mythos) refers to plot, narrative, or the sequential ordering of words. All verbal structures are mythical in this sense (Frye 1982). He does not use the term to convey a narrative that is 'not really true'. The Bible is sacred, as distinct from profane, charged with special seriousness and importance, including its function as revelation and its capacity to bring unity to human experience. In its narrative, the Bible offers a slow reveal of God's relationship with people who believe. In its scope, we see how spiritual needs are met among God's people, as they work out what it means to believe. For Frye, a myth is designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to one situation. Its truth is inside its structure, not outside of it. Its truthfulness is not measured by what is external, but by its effect on the hearts of human beings.

For British author Karen Armstrong, myth is true because it is effective, not simply because it offers information. If it does not offer new meaning, new insight into life, it has failed. If it works, that is, if it forces us to change our minds and hearts, gives us new hope, and compels us to live more fully, it is a valid myth. Mythology will transform us only if we follow its directives. Myth is essentially a guide; it tells us what to do to live life richly. It shows us what happens if we do the wrong thing. But its motivation is to point us in the right direction. Like Lisa Miller's emphasis on the personal, to Armstrong, if we do not apply myth to our own situation, making it a reality in our own lives, it will remain incomprehensible and remote as do the rules of a board game, which often seem confusing and boring, until we start to play the game (Armstrong 2005). She cautions us that reading a myth without the transforming rituals that go with it is as incomplete as reading the lyrics of an opera without the music. Unless it is encountered as part of a process of regeneration, of death and rebirth, myth makes no sense. Mythology tells us what to do if we want to become a fully human person (Armstrong 2005).

Within the Biblical narrative, one can argue and object—rage, yet remain with God. Christ is the material offering, the sacrificial lamb—a role taken volitionally that connects ordinary people to God through his death and resurrection. Dying and living again, Jesus offers life to all who come into his presence and acknowledge the efficacy of his sacrifice that provides new life for them. Through the Incarnation, Jesus is the wholly other one who comes near and dwells among us. After his resurrection, God's holiness is conveyed through the Holy Spirit (Bellous 2002).

For both Frye and Armstrong, sacred myth happens once and continues to be experienced in its efficacy to offer saving faith, a term Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) used to signify God's grace (Kant 1998). The sacred events within a myth are continually experienced in its relationship to the first event, e.g., each time believers share Holy Communion, they are linked to the last supper Jesus celebrated with his disciples (Iliade 1968). Unless a historical event is mythologized, it cannot become a source of religious inspiration, but it requires a transformative ritual to go along with it. This is what Apostle Paul did with Jesus. In addition to Jesus' teaching, which Paul rarely quoted, in addition to the events of Christ's life, Paul knew Jesus as a historical figure who is alive now, interceding for us in heaven. To the disciples and all who believe

Jesus was no longer a mere historical figure but a spiritual reality in the lives of Christians by means of ritual and the ethical discipline of living the same selfless life as Jesus himself. Christians no longer knew him ‘in the flesh’ but they would encounter him in other human beings, in the study of scripture, and in the Eucharist. They knew that this myth was true, not because of the historical evidence, but because they *had* experienced transformation. Thus, the death and resurrection of Jesus was myth: it happened once to Jesus and is now happening all the time to them in their Christian experience.

(Armstrong 2005, p. 108)

Followers of Jesus are ‘resurrection people’. Myth leads to imitation and participation, not mere passive contemplation. Contemplation is actively engaged with a meaningful world. Participation takes place personally, in community. In faith education, the mythological unity of scripture lays down beside the mental mythology each believer brings to church. In this side-by-side conversation, Deep calls to deep; personal renewal is possible.

The Christian tradition satisfies spiritual needs because, as Frye notes, it is a whole, unified universe that covers the beginning, middle and end of life and offers reasons that suffice even in times of distress. If we apply Max Weber’s assessment of the reasonableness of a religion, he identified the following:

To judge the level of rationalization a religion represents there are two principal yardsticks, which are in many ways interrelated. One is the degree to which the religion has divested itself of magic; the other is the degree of systematic unity it gives to the relation between God and the world and . . . its own ethical relation to the world.

(Habermas 1984, p. 205)

A religion is reasonable, i.e., has access to valid reasons, to the extent that it provides a sustainable way to make sense of the world and our place in it. To Frye, life has no shape; literature has (Frye 1976). The Christian narrative is a systemic worldview believers choose to live by. It counts as more rational, the more clearly it makes it possible to grasp and deal with the world so that each person acts toward the wholeness of the world from an ethic of conviction (Habermas 1984).

As one example, prayer in Christian tradition is neither magic nor superstition. In superstition and magic, human agents believe their action is the deciding factor in whether what is desired is secured. Prayer, in contrast, releases an actor (prayer is action) into the Presence of Sovereign God whose providential care holds the universe in a Parental grasp. Prayers hold this view of the Divine with conviction. The grounding attitude of the faithful is an affirmation that takes the shape of a truthful adjustment to the world (Habermas 1984), (which is not apathy or resignation) and that does not believe human beings carry the weight of the world on their own shoulders. In all its forms, superstition and magic try to manipulate the world as if it were an enemy to be seduced. They place the self at the centre of the universe. This pretense of gaining control is paid for with a loss of meaning (Habermas 1984). As Habermas notes, relying on superstition or magic “blocks the development of a personal communication between the faithful and God or the divine being” (Habermas 1984). Faith is personal, or it is not faith.

4. Part Three: Community, Communication and Development

In a Christian narrative, there are two dimensions: God is Self-revealing to unique individuals; God is Author of humanity. Christians are invited into two citizenships. Faith’s reasonableness and its dual identity contribute directly to creating communicative community with the attitudes, skills, and practices required to care for others.

Sections that follow address one issue that was evident in the Fall of 2022: FBC’s response to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008–2015). The Indigenous issue impacts the congregation because there is significant diversity in people’s views on the subject, yet there is also an overarching inclusion of Indigenous rituals and acknowl-

edgements that seems to convey a homogeneous culture. The following sections present attitudes, skills and practices that might allow FBC to reach understanding about the Indigenous question. The third part of the article outlines the nature of community and attitudes of empathy and cosmopolitanism, then looks at stages of communication, and finally explores what it means that Christianity develops over time. The purpose of the third part is to present attitudes that might develop and support an ethos of congregational care based on radical welcome.

4.1. Building Community

The word community is a noun, adjective and activity. One may live in an urban or rural community or be part of a community group. It is something people create. In one view (Hillery 1972), communities are smaller groups within society made up of people and things that share space and engage regularly and predictably in social interaction. Members offer each other mutual aid, but most communities rely on aspects of self-sufficiency within family units that are part of the group. A community is distinguished from formal organizations. A hospital is a formal organization designed to restore people to health: people enter, get well, or die. Whatever the outcome, patients leave hospitals because a hospital is not a community.

A community is more than what it accomplishes. Being together defines a community. Communities, like villages, find themselves in the same location, sharing resources over many lifetimes. The quality of community life is measured by the way members treat each other, particularly the most vulnerable members—the sick, infirm, aged and the young. The difference between communities and formal organizations is picked out in the following comparison:

- **Formal Organizations:** Have sharp, recognizable goals. Members must contribute to their achievement. Other goals may exist, but they must not detract from attaining established goals that mark the group as an organization, e.g., family life is secondary. Social value and sense of belonging are based on one's contribution to primary goals.
- **Communal Groups:** Have no goals that apply to the whole group. Social relations form around the cooperation of members and families. No goal is given priority so that specific goals do not interfere with the aim of living together. Social value and a sense of belonging are granted based on an inclusive group membership (Hillery 1972, p. 147).

In community, families are foundational to the possibility of staying together over time. As families maintain themselves, they forestall the collapse of the community.

If a religious group operates as community, the needs of everyone are addressed for as long as people are involved. Lives continue to influence community after people die because they are part of its corporate memory. If religious groups act like formal organizations, many needs are unrecognized, dismissed, or postponed. Communities hold values and interests in common, which means that contests over values and interests impact communal well-being. What unifies community is the enduring value placed on the humanity of each member. Needs are met, merely because they exist. They are addressed, or the community suffers. Ideally, there is no favouritism in whose needs are and whose are not met. To be left out is to be excluded, which is more than a simple problem. It prevents a group of people from becoming community and from demonstrating a communal sense of mutual obligation to every member.

All practices of exclusion foreclose on community. This is not to say everyone gets what they want. But everyone can ask to have needs met because obligation to individuals is clear. A community is a local group that responds positively to felt needs, holds some rules and principles in common, honours the humanity of everyone and has members that are good neighbours. This does not imply that everyone holds all the same beliefs. To address diversity in community, two attitudes are necessary: empathy and an attitude best described as cosmopolitanism.

Empathy encourages the freedom to tell others the truth about who we are (Bellous 2015). It requires a set of skills people develop if they are free to exercise voice and value in the group. Empathy allows people to tell stories of personal and communal harm that are obstacles to their effort to join fully in community. Empathetic people allow others to tell their story. Empathetic settings offer opportunities to witness exuberance, sorrow, success, failure and leave time to celebrate victories as well as to grieve and lament losses. While there are other kinds, relational empathy offers a set of affective (feeling), conative (persistence in being) and cognitive (thinking) skills that are the core of congregational care. Empathy has an overall effect of allowing people to relax. When we are understood, anxiety-produced and producing strategies we rely on to calm ourselves down are unnecessary. If the truthful story of our lives is welcomed and heard, we no longer feel compelled to endlessly repeat it. There is a sigh of relief. Building community needs more than empathy, but its skills provide a solid foundation. Building community also requires another attitude toward humanity as a whole.

Cosmopolitanism is that attitude. It is a term moral theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) offers as an antidote to social dislocation, competition, and isolation. At its center are two interwoven strands of thought. One thought is that we have obligations to others that stretch beyond kith and kin. We share a common humanity that cannot be set aside to secure private interests. The second thought is that this obligation is not meant to neutralize important values, beliefs, and ways of life (Appiah 2006). Cosmopolitanism challenges our need to live together in local and global groups. Obligations inherent in community derive from the thread of common humanity that unites the human tribe. Respect for difference arises from commitments, values, practices, and concerns that each person takes on and that shapes their personal worldview.

Appiah's first thread, tied to the idea that earth's citizens are connected through their common humanity, is congruent with Immanuel Kant's modern moral framework. Kant thought that obligation applies to everyone since the earth is round and connected. Every part of the earth affects other parts. No one can escape these effects without leaving the face of the earth. To ground moral obligation, Kant made a model for humanity *as a sensible being* and *as a free being* (Kant 1996). He shaped the modern idea of humanity. Appiah supports Kant's notion; like Kant, he marries individual obligations to membership in the human family.

Appiah's second thread is necessary to cosmopolitanism because people live in proximity to those who are very different. In working out his second thought, Appiah does not fall prey to racism and sexism Kant failed to notice in his own view. To be cosmopolitan is to be a world citizen and a citizen of one's own hometown. Appiah shares with Kant a view that an obligation (duty to Kant) to show love/benevolence to neighbours is a sign and affirmation of the respect we show for the humanity in our own being (Kant 1996). Kant expressed love for neighbours as the duty to make their ends our own (provided only they are not immoral). He summarized this belief by saying that we may never use a neighbour as a means to our own ends. Under no circumstances may we reduce neighbours to mere material objects. Humanity itself is the basis of our obligation to love others with beneficence. A duty or obligation of beneficence promotes the happiness of others in need, according to our means, without hoping for anything in return. It is everyone's duty.

Cosmopolitanism is an attitude toward neighbours: we all belong to our own city and to the universe, to humanity as a whole and a particular community. As Appiah put it,

Each person you know about and can affect is someone to whom you have responsibilities: to say this is just to affirm the very idea of morality. The challenge, then, is to take minds and hearts formed over long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become.

(Appiah 2006, p. xiii)

But Appiah observes a twentieth century attitude among Western liberals to disdain their own religious or cultural tribe to accommodate the differences of strangers. In his view, that move is mistaken. World citizens do not denigrate their own people to appear magnanimous to those who are different. Cosmopolitanism is a dual claim: it requires people to be loyal to their own tribe and loyal to humanity itself. Local loyalties never justify forgetting that each person has responsibilities to every other; yet in saying this, Appiah does not minimize the importance of local loyalties. We are not authentic if we disdain our own tribe. We are not integrated unless we support everyone's humanity. Caring for strangers does not require us to abandon our people. Learning to build unity in diversity among our own people is very good practice for learning how to welcome and include those who differ in ways that tend to surprise us.

Caring for neighbours is different from love we show friends. As French philosopher Simone Weil (1909–1943) observed, a certain reciprocity is essential in friendship (Weil 1951). Caring for neighbours differs from the love and responsibility we have for family. Love for family situates radical welcome in a context of caring that supports the discoveries and existential doubts youth experience as they grow up at church. Radical welcome creates a safe haven for the young as they experience life as participants in an empathetic, cosmopolitan culture during tumultuous events of childhood and adolescence. At FBC, while the issue is beyond the scope of this article, a commonly expressed reason for supporting LGBTQ+ communities is the love people have for family members. Family well-being is central to healthy communities. In terms of the question of loving one's neighbour (plus friends and family), we first must ask how talking together works to enable congregational care to flourish in a communicative community.

4.2. Stages of Communication

If we ask about communicative community, we first want to know about barriers to the aim of reaching understanding. American linguist Noam Chomsky noted that on "the rare occasions in which I have the opportunity to discuss controversial issues, I often find not so much disagreement as an inability to hear" (Chomsky 1987). His point goes to the heart of differences that emerge as people express deeply held beliefs. Northrop Frye focused on communication in his essay, "The Search for Acceptable Words." In that essay, he identified three stages in communicative culture: a garrison mentality, a uniform or improved communication (which demonstrates symptoms of the communicative problem itself) and a stage that recognizes a form of knowledge that has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere (Frye 1976). Frye did not explore the third stage in his essay, but his statement intimates a way to practice communicative action that is discussed later.

A garrison mentality is an initial stage of separation, in which communication is physically difficult and precarious. Points of view are isolated in self-contained silos. Canadian culture is a background for his observation. Its vast, regional differences go deep into Canadian soil. The province of Quebec's Separatist movement, beginning as the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, influenced Frye's understanding of strains on communication if origin narratives (francophones versus anglophones) drive a deep communicative divide. In Canadian culture, the cleavage is referred to as Two Solitudes. A garrison mentality is associated with the heroism of survival and the penalties assigned for being different from one's group.

The second communicative phase is a shift away from separation, but Frye believed its initial impact is destructive. He uses an example from nature. If one is building a road through outlying areas, the first thing to do is to bulldoze the underbrush so that building can start on level ground. He also uses a school analogy. When teaching a young farm boy in an urban high school, the first thing one does (in his view) is to disabuse the boy of the underbrush of his anxieties, prejudices, and snobberies by which he attempts to maintain the isolated security of a farm boy identity. The boy comes with beliefs about the farm that keep him centered on its richness and health. Urban city streets may seem dirty, crowded,

lonely, and unattractive. Of course, a farm boy might be happy to leave the farm but less happy to have other people disparage it.

To Frye, the immediate result of the destructive second stage is uniformity and loss of individuality. Is a farm boy safe to extol the virtues of his early life to urban high school students that have no experience of farms? Does he need to become like everyone else? What does this farm boy have to do to fit in? What does urban culture have to include for him to feel welcome and respected? It must be noted that our farm boy might be lucky; he might use his farm-based strength and skill to join the hockey team. If he is successful in fitting in, what will be his attitude toward others who cannot get on hockey teams, or who may be angry at the way they were prevented from succeeding due to disadvantages they could not overcome? The farm boy experience is much like minority groups that migrated to Canada and survived during the mid-twentieth century. They experienced prejudice and hardship due to their country of origin, especially if it was Germany or Japan; yet many survived and flourished.

Canadian farm boys may underestimate the social advantage playing hockey gave them. They may come to believe that everyone has equal opportunity to fit in. They may see the rink as a level playing field. They may come to think that people can succeed if they put in the effort. If our farm boy takes a level playing field analogy seriously, he may come to believe that no one has an excuse for personal failure. If there is a level playing field, no one should be center staged on it. His position conforms to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's (1931–) description of an equal dignity stance (Taylor 1992). As noted, in community no one goal should be given privilege if everyone's needs are of equal value.

In terms of Frye's second communicative phase, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) adds to its complexity. Bourdieu grew up in working-class French culture. He won a place in an elite French university, where he saw in himself embodied differences that would prevent him from being successful. Teachers and students read his otherness as a deficit. Based on his experience, he framed a theory about mismatches between the social body and the personal body. He summarized his insights by saying that, if people's bodies (including values attached to them) fail to resemble the privileged social body (and its values), they find it hard to succeed.

He gives an example of the subtlety of embodied mismatches. As a working-class man, he spoke with what is called a big mouth. His mouth was very active as he spoke. Men in his elite university followed an aristocratic pattern of speaking with a small mouth. They pronounced their words with very little lip movement. Bourdieu realized that, if he wanted to succeed, he had to speak with a small mouth to convey his competence. In that setting, he learned to do just that. However, this was a double loss for him. In working-class culture, women spoke with a small mouth. To fit in, he compromised his working-class maleness. However, he was at least able to make the shift. He was able to steer behaviour in the direction of conformity (Bourdieu 1990). In his lifetime, he was the most widely read public intellectual in France (Bourdieu 1998).

Unlike Bourdieu, in Minneapolis, George Floyd was unable to change the colour of his skin to save himself from being killed by police. His murder fuelled the Black Lives Matter movement that erupted all over the globe in 2020. Freedom to fit in and be recognized is limited by conditions, e.g., skin colour and gender, that most of us cannot change. As another example, German immigrants to Canada in the mid-twentieth century may have experienced prejudice based on WWII they could not overcome through personal effort. What happens if the conditions of exclusion are not due to skin color or national origin but are due to deeply held beliefs a person sees as essential to their faith?

If we apply Frye's insights to FBC, its congregational identity is shifting toward progressive inclusion. Before and during COVID-19, moves were made to acknowledge minorities, many of whom were harmed historically by Canadian Christian communities. Indigenous groups are a prime example. In response to recommendations from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, FBC culture

- Acknowledges and studies the role Treaties play in every Canadian's life.

- Occasionally holds sweet grass listening sessions led by a long-time Indigenous FBC member who is a survivor of Residential Schools and a Cree-trained Elder.
- Opens some worship services by acknowledging that we meet on land (Treaty Six) that was home to specific Indigenous groups who lived in the Edmonton area, which at the time was known as Beaver House.
- Recognizes the role played by an FBC member who is the federal government official that helped organize the Pope's Canadian visit in the summer of 2022 and has been involved at the Federal level in Indigenous affairs for 30 years, helping to secure justice and their inclusion as full members of Canadian society.
- Occasionally holds Blanket Ceremonies led by Indigenous Elders to demonstrate what Indigenous people suffered in Canada due to Residential Schools and systemic racism.

Blanket Ceremonies are experiential events that reveal atrocities suffered by Indigenous people in Canada from the 17th century to the 1990s. The Pope's visit to Edmonton and other areas in Canada was the Church's attempt to seek forgiveness for its role in Residential Schools. Protestant groups have made similar apologies in recent years.

The Indigenous situation is seen by some at FBC as centre staged. They believe this is not right. The conflict conforms to Charles Taylor's analysis of the social logics of equal dignity, difference and recognition (Bellous 2016). The last logic is congruent with attempts to reach understanding within community. Our farm boy expresses the equal dignity stance which requires people to treat everyone the same. It is a belief in level playing fields and is difference blind. In contrast, the shift that overtook equal dignity in the mid-twentieth century is a logic of difference that requires people to acknowledge human differences—and centre stage them. If equal dignity emphasizes common humanity, a logic of difference prizes authenticity. With a logic of difference, being oneself matters most and implies living from the inside rather than being outwardly directed by what others think and do. This second logic asks people to see what is distinct in others and take that difference into account during social interaction.

As is evident, the patterns of equal dignity and difference offend each other—they are opposed at pivotal points. Proponents find each other hard to tolerate, difficult to understand. Since they grew out of unfolding ideas (equal dignity needed to emerge before difference was seen as important), their patterns do not merge well. They cause dissonance in families and institutions, a conflict potentially addressed by Appiah's cosmopolitanism.

Taylor's logic of recognition attempts to balance authenticity and common humanity. A logic of recognition depends on seeing the humanity in others and realizing how their different practices express that humanity. It calls on people to notice if social practices dehumanize, as in slavery, child abuse and rape. A logic of recognition is an attempt to bring together demands of dignity and difference. Recognition is an attempt to escape the stalemate between dignity and difference. A proponent of recognition engages in the spiritual work of listening to people whose experiences differ vastly from their own. While FBC membership comprises mostly white, middle class, professional people, the congregation is home to people from varied backgrounds. FBC currently fits into Frye's second phase of communication. Pastoral staff members report that a few people have left due to what is perceived as a constant emphasis on Indigenous culture and its violation of traditional Christian values. One face-to-face interview with a member who left the church in 2022 confirmed that the Indigenous issue was the reason for leaving.

There is no consensus at FBC on the Indigenous question. Diversity has escaped the confines of the garrison. The gossamer of agreement in the second stage does not draw the community together. Can Frye's second stage encompass radical welcome for all? What does congregational care look like during shifts like the one faced in the first decades of the twenty-first century? What do congregants need to sense, believe, and know to feel welcome, included, recognized, and respected so they remain connected to the congregation? What are legitimate changes in Christian tradition that are congruent with orthodox belief and practice?

4.3. Developing Faith

On many fronts, Christianity is seen as needing to change. This is not the first time Christianity faced challenges to the way it presents itself to culture, due to its abuses and failures. The 13th century is an example. In his book on Thomas Aquinas, G.K. Chesterton makes the following observation about evolutionary development within Christianity. His comment is worth repeating in full:

About the medieval movement there are two facts that must first be emphasized. They are not, of course, contrary facts, but they are perhaps answers to contrary fallacies. First, in spite of all that was once said about superstition, the Dark Ages and the sterility of Scholasticism, it was in every sense a movement of enlargement, always moving toward greater light and even greater liberty. Second, in spite of all that was said later on about progress and the Renaissance and forerunners of modern thought, it was almost entirely a movement of orthodox theological enthusiasm, unfolded from within. It was not a compromise with the world, or a surrender to heathens or heretics, or even a mere borrowing of external aids, even when it did borrow them. In so far as it did reach out to the light of common day, it was like the action of a plant which by its own force thrusts out its leaves into the sun; not like the action of one who merely lets daylight into a prison.

(Chesterton 2012, p. 10)

The issue for development is whether external influences on the Church invade her or whether she evolves in ways that are intrinsic to her very being.

To explain development within the faith, Chesterton uses an example of a boy that everyone can see is well-developed—he has grown bigger and stronger with his own strength, not because he is padded with borrowed pillows or walks on stilts to make him look taller. If we say a puppy has developed into a dog, we do not mean that its growth is a gradual compromise with a cat. Chesterton saw development as an expansion of possibilities and implications of Christian doctrines, as an era takes the time to distinguish them and draw them out. To him, the enlargement of medieval theology was simply the full comprehension of theology that was possible at the time. Chesterton was confident that shifts of focus during this period—which was no less complex than our own—were based on Christianity's authentic identity and were only dependent on external aspects of culture in the same way that every living and growing thing depends on features of its environment: it digests and transforms them but continues in its own image and not in theirs (Chesterton 2012).

While Aquinas embodied the essence of his era and responded by marrying good science (Aristotle) with an unwavering commitment to scripture, he did not reconcile Christ to Aristotle, he reconciled Aristotle to Christ. Revelation is central for Aquinas. He drew the conclusion that, while he viewed Reason highly, for him, people must receive the highest moral truths in a miraculous manner, or most people will not receive them at all. During the medieval period, changes in the Church were based on growth in theology from within, rather than the outcome of external cultural pressure to change (Chesterton 2012).

What are we to make of the era we live in? Some features of development that point the way are as follows: God is Creator; Christianity is larger than the way it has been lived out for the last while; growth in the faith is moved by authentic evolution rather than by external cultural pressure to conform; Christ is central; culture is reconciled to Christ, not the other way around. Evolutionary change rests on the absolute certainty we are created in God's image, God knows us and loves us. Change eventually allows itself to relax into truth. Medieval philosophers, in studying Aristotle and Plato, wished to know all those things and only those things which were true. If the truths in philosophies are incomplete, they asked themselves, how might they complete them (Pieper 1991)? In our era, we delve into truths of science and the human condition and make good use of their insights, as did Aquinas.

Aquinas justified his view of the world by a strict theology of Incarnation (Pieper 1991). For him, there are no bad things, only bad uses of things. There are no bad things, only bad thoughts, and especially bad intentions. He thought it was possible to have bad intentions about good things. He was not afraid of reality—God’s creation. For him, the greatest ideas comprehensively reveal the truth of things and possess some of the obligatory quality of reality itself. As Joseph Pieper observes Aquinas’s contribution to Christianity, he says

We simply cannot succeed in living, without uneasiness, in terms of a worldliness wholly divorced from all supramundane calls. It is likewise impossible for us to live, without uneasiness, in terms of a ‘religionistic’ religiousness wholly divorced from all obligations toward the world.

(Pieper 1991, p. 133)

The medieval period was characterized by religious diversity, as is our own age. As medieval scholar Etienne Gilson points out,

We have no right to isolate in our history things that in fact were united in reality. Christian thought, Jewish thought, and [Muslim] thought acted and reacted on each other... it would not be at all satisfactory to study them as so many closed and isolated systems.

(Gilson 2009, p. 5)

There is something about seeing the whole of Christianity and grasping the interrelatedness of all its parts that allows faith to seek understanding, as Anselm wished to do (Gilson 2009). For Pieper, grounded on Aquinas, revelation is prerequisite for theology. The second prerequisite is that people hear these tidings, accept, and believe them. Theology rests on existential confidence and epistemological humility (Bellous and Clark 2022).

Believers interpret revelation and remain confident that God is Self-revealing, that God’s revelation extends to all humanity, even as they remain faithful to the Incarnation. If one begins with the belief that there is one Self-revealing God, we may agree with Aquinas that God’s speech, sounding and resounding throughout the mythical tradition of many nations, means that divine speech (about the meaning of the universe and about human salvation) is spread over the whole breadth of humanity’s mental life. His view reflects the assertion that every human being is spiritual; each person is made in the image of God. The spiritual aspect of humanity requires an education that ties reality to faith, allowing reality to inform faith as we look carefully at our current situation. For Christians,

to philosophize means to concentrate their gaze on the totality of encountered phenomena and methodically to investigate the coherence of them all and the ultimate meaning of the Whole. To philosophize is to examine what ‘something real’ actually is, what [humanity] is, including [the human] mind and the complete total of things. To pursue theology means endeavouring to discover what really was said in the divine revelation.

(Pieper 1991, pp. 147–48)

In a community skilled in communicative action, faith has doubt as its intellectual partner. Faith and doubt unite as people investigate reality and use attitudes, skills and practices to shape the growth of faith. As with Aquinas, this forward movement does not burrow itself away from reality. As Ricoeur notes,

What I want to discover is the truth of things themselves. What I doubt is . . . that things are actually as they seem The deceit consists precisely in making seeming pass for ‘true being’.

(Ricoeur 1992, p. 15)

If we intend to re-think Christian faith in the twenty-first century, due to our need to give and receive congregational care, we are led to philosophize, to see things as they really are, to think and act in new ways. Given the nature of development, insight we need is already present in Christian tradition—in ways we have not yet seen or perhaps forgotten.

5. Part Four: Practices of Radical Welcome

Frye does not go into detail about the third communication stage but observes that moving from a garrison to uniformity is not a permanent solution. If the second stage emphasizes uniformity, how do people who think differently feel safe enough to express themselves? The human spirit is shy. In the absence of safety, shyness is conveyed through silence. Only radical welcome creates enough safety to say what one thinks, based on what one has come to believe. Sections that follow focus on skills and practices of radical welcome. These skills strengthen our ability to be inclusive, engage in spiritual conversation and show interest in other people.

5.1. *The Body Communicates*

From Christ's example, radical welcome is a viable way to follow Jesus—to do on earth as it is done in heaven. How does the ethos of a congregation offer freedom for everyone who comes into the Sanctuary? Our common humanity provides what we need to offer radical welcome—even to ourselves. The human body is created for connection. The discovery of mirror neurons in the 1990s provides a basis for the brain's capacity to connect with others. Mirror neurons fire (send an electrical pulse to other neurons) as one person acts, and another person observes that same action. These neurons “mirror” the behavior of others, as though an observer is also acting. Mirror neurons enable people to pick up emotional states and intentions sufficiently enough to attend to another and have the presence of mind to pause and wait to hear what is going on.

In addition to mirror neurons, human beings have a many-branched Vagus Nerve Complex (VNC) that is the body's social-engagement system. When the VNC runs the show, we smile when someone smiles at us and nod our head when we agree with someone. We frown as friends tell us of their misfortune (Van der Kolk 2015). The VNC is the longest of 12 cranial nerves. It extends from the brainstem to the abdomen and connects multiple organs including the heart, esophagus, and lungs. The VNC promotes communication between brain and body. From the perspective of its functioning, for our physiology to calm down, heal and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety. When we are safe, the VNC is engaged and sends signals to the heart and lungs, slowing the heart rate and increasing the depth of breathing. As a result, we feel calm, relaxed, centered, or pleurably aroused. The VNC also registers heartbreak and gut-wrenching sensations, such as a dry throat, tense voice, racing heart and respiration that becomes shallow and rapid (Van der Kolk 2015).

The body uses mirror neurons and the VNC to meet spiritual needs. The body also reveals what happens if spiritual needs are unmet, e.g., if people are not seen, heard, accepted, believed, or hold a hopeless view of the future. What human spirituality makes possible is a felt sense of connection. The human spirit longs to be included personally in a social network that matters, in which people care for each other and feel included in the social fabric of community. Cultivating congregational care in which equity, diversity and inclusion thrive is becoming a critical necessity for twenty-first century congregations. In an inclusionary-status continuum, American psychologist Mark Leary identified a range of inclusion and exclusion behaviors. He identifies a continuum described as

- Maximal inclusion: others make the effort to seek out an individual
- Active inclusion: others welcome the individual but do not seek out him or her
- Passive inclusion: others allow an individual to be included
- Ambivalence: others do not care whether an individual is included or excluded
- Passive exclusion: others ignore an individual
- Active exclusion: others avoid an individual
- Maximal exclusion: others physically reject, ostracize, abandon, or banish an individual (Leary 2005, p. 5).

Inclusion begins with openness to those who are like, not like, or seem not to be like oneself. Inclusion takes place in shared space, over time. If it is to be effective in building

communicative action, the human spirit needs attention from others, from those who matter to us, and relational empathy even from strangers.

5.2. *Spiritual Conversation*

In addition to focusing on spiritual needs, the practice of spiritual conversation is an approach for reaching understanding among people with strong, divergent beliefs. For followers of Jesus, his example stands at the center of the inquiry. He talked with people who differed from him in their beliefs. He engaged with Nicodemus and a Samaritan woman, as two examples. In these conversations, we can identify aspects of spiritual conversation. Nicodemus came to Jesus with a vague question that was personally important, even if it seemed like a test. In response, Jesus raised the question of being born again. Nicodemus reacted with incredulity. Their conversation opened the possibility for a Jewish religious ruler to realize there might be something missing in his beliefs about the Messiah and his own life. We are not told the outcome of the conversation (John 3:1–21) but we know Nicodemus later offered support for Jesus (John 7:50) and took his body after the crucifixion (John 19:39). Their conversation sparked a connection Nicodemus followed up at considerable personal cost.

With the Samaritan woman, Jesus initiated a conversation and during it, revealed to her his identity as Messiah. He began the conversation with a request for water that put her in charge of the encounter. They spoke about issues of ultimate concern. Consequently, the woman returned to her village to wonder aloud whether he might be the Messiah. Her connection to Jesus enabled her to have courage to name her past and overcome shame that silenced and isolated her, if we take the point that she came to the well at midday as an indication of her lack of social status (John 4: 1–42).

Spiritual conversation allows people to express to others their best current sense of the truth as they understand it. These conversations are primarily about beliefs so that, as with Socratic conversation, a slow reveal of inadequacies in one's beliefs show up to the one who holds them, if they have ears to hear, as did Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus does not force his truth; he allows two people to hear the beliefs they live by as they currently understand them. Speaking truth is central to a life of faith (Ephesians 4:25) but telling the truth is not the same as proclaiming Truth. Our view of the world is full of beliefs that are not necessarily true. Mental mythologies are gathering places for the meaning we accumulate through experience. Based on experience, people held certain beliefs about the Messiah. Jesus did not conform to all their expectations.

As we engage together in spiritual conversation, we listen, speak, hear and give reasons for the meaning we hold. Spiritual conversation in communicative community allows meaning to surface and be heard—if there is safety. Questions surface. Doubts show up. We express thought without fearing rejection. In conversation, beliefs are considered and may be revised as we engage other worldviews and with God, who lives above our little concepts. Safety and love collaborate, truthfulness flourishes.

Spiritual conversation invites us to think through what we believe as we apply healthy reason to belief (Bellous and Clark 2022). Understanding is an outcome of talking together truthfully in love. To paraphrase French philosopher Simone Weil, the community in which we converse “is the country which God has given us to love. He has willed that it should be difficult but possible to love it” (Weil 1951). What effort does it take to love others who believe differently? To Weil, it is like effort that brings the soul to salvation. It is an effort of looking, listening. It is an act of attention and consent, not the language of human will, which suggests something that requires muscular effort (Weil 1951). The model for the effort of looking and listening is love God demonstrates to us. Contempt for the other is its opposite. Love calls for denying oneself and becoming capable of establishing someone else through an act of creative affirmation (Weil 1951). What of the self that is denied? Does it get lost in showing interest to others?

In the twenty-first century, the question of self-denial is complex. Its complexity rests on two features of popular culture and a third tendency to keep thought to ourselves. First,

we have come to think of our beliefs as ‘our truth’. They are based on life experience. They are true in the sense that they are useful; we say we live by them, although we may be unobservant of our inconsistency in doing so. We may be unaware of how we allow others to feed our beliefs as we consume what they say without questioning their statements, as many do by accepting ubiquitous on-line logic. Weil explores self-denial by revealing an overgrown self that has shifted its position to the center of the universe. It is an imagined self—self-sufficient, self-expansive, perceived as limitless in its capacity.

Whether this self is loved to the exclusion of all others or whether the self is hated, self-absorbed isolation is the outcome. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur could not conceal the encouragement he felt from an insight he quoted, “It is easier than one thinks to hate oneself. Grace means forgetting oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the grace of graces would be to love oneself humbly, as one would any of the suffering members of Jesus Christ” (Ricoeur 1992). To deny self-loving and self-loathing is to give up an illusion; it is to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of the soul and to awaken to what is real and eternal. As Weil notes, “God denied himself for our sakes in order to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for him” (Weil 1951).

There is something in self-denial that is essential to spiritual conversation. From Weil’s perspective, the Good Samaritan was good precisely because he did not think about being or doing good. He did not think of historical conflicts between Jews and Samaritans. If he had paid attention to these thoughts, he would have lost the moment. He denied himself. His attention was focused entirely on the other. All else faded. If we come to a situation that calls for compassion, and we think or say to ourselves: Well, I am a Christian. I should . . . we have lost the moment. Our attention is self-absorbed. Weil goes further to say we do not even focus attention on God; we attend only to another human being. If we hear someone say, “I am doing this because I am a Christian,” we regretfully realize they have lost touch with radical welcome.

The difficulty of giving attention is explored by American sociologist Charles Derber (Derber 2000). He notes that attention getting bestows recognition. Attention keeping conveys that our value is secure and permanent. He analyzed attention to say that people in Western cultures are addicted to getting attention. We are so driven to seek attention from others for ourselves that no one is left to give it. A modern self carries a unique distress: each person has received a burdensome gift of an overgrown self. We enjoy its positive, attractive features, but fail to appreciate how much it costs us as well (Derber 2000), and how much it costs those who want to offer congregational care.

Charles Taylor describes this overblown self as narcissistic and as lacking any moral ideal other than self-interest. To him, a moral ideal is a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ or ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire but what offers a standard for what we ought to desire (Taylor 1991). With narcissism there is no moral ideal other than self-indulgence. To Taylor, extreme emphasis on human freedom is new and peculiar to our time. People do not simply follow their desires; what is novel is that people seem *to feel called* to sacrifice love relationships, and the care of children, to pursue their careers, (Taylor 1991) or their own wishes. Taylor argues that authenticity, properly understood, rejects narcissism, which is an unstable identity that is perpetually and petulantly at the mercy of constant, casual, or effusive affirmation from other people. Self-denial is not the rejection of an authentic self; it rejects the imagined centrality of the self and its companion—the manipulation of others that is built on contempt for them. Once a bloated sense of self-importance dissipates, a person can relax, as can everyone else.

A second feature of modern life wraps itself around the first and works against self-denial. We loosened our grip on a common foundation to establish what is true. Nietzsche declared “there are no facts” (as adequate foundations for seeking truth) “there are only interpretations” (Ricoeur 1992); people employ Nietzsche’s *interpretation* as their foundation for personal truth. Prior to Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant based healthy reason (an act of thinking) on God’s existence. In his essay, “What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking,”

he said, theoretically and practically, reason needs a “first *original being* as a supreme intelligence and at the same time as the highest good” (Kant 1998). God’s existence as Intelligence and Goodness is the foundation for healthy thinking. Christianity rests its theological foundation on God’s nature as Self-revealing. A believer’s foundation is found in God’s existence. On this foundation, we offer each other our best understanding and hold our interpretations humbly while engaged in spiritual conversation.

A third feature of our difficulty with self-denial is the role inner conversation plays in revising meaning. For example, think of inner conversation you have if you are trying to work out something. You wrestle with something (someone) and start an internal dialogue that relies on aspects of real experience as its guide. You imagine the talk you might have if the person were present. Note the conversation: while it seems real and satisfying, it is imaginary. You invent yourself and the other, motives, words, outcomes, along with your own courage and cleverness. You rely on real encounters you have had with this person. Inner conversation is based on knowledge and observation. It is based on real experience, or it would not satisfy you. You do not invent others, but neither are you entirely accurate in portraying them. Sanity requires us to rely on intersubjectivity. The only way to know others is to have a spiritual conversation in which you let them speak for themselves. You need the other to know the other. All else is imaginary. When our dialogue partners are real people, there is mutual recognition of our value and voice. They permit us to speak authentically by creating safety. It is the same in conversing with God: a Self-revealing God speaks for God’s own Self.

If these three features dominate a congregation’s ethos, it is difficult to establish congregational care. The third feature, hoarding thought, perpetuates isolation and is a barrier to communicative action. If communication is effective, it addresses the spiritual needs of an overblown self through gentleness that persuades congregants to see every person as a beloved child of God. Spiritual conversation reveals personal knowledge that lets others hear why we believe what we do. In conversation, we also learn how to show interest in people with whom we are in communion.

5.3. *Showing Interest*

A just distribution of attention allows people to show interest in others. Attention is an embodied presentation of self during spiritual conversation that includes pausing, regulating gaze behavior and modifying bodily expressions until we attune to others and take them fully into account. Leary’s continuum identifies a willingness and ability to offer others our full attention. Charles Derber analyzed attention to make the point that it is a commodity, like money. He believes kindly attention is more important than wealth as a sign of personal and social worth. Those who get attention easily are seen as more valuable, as movie stars and athletes can attest. Those who are clumsy at getting attention are set aside and live on the margins of a group.

There is affinity between inclusion, attention, and social value in congregational care. If these three are absent, a faith community is a social club and nothing more; it is a fake. If others give us their full attention, stand quietly before us, express their interest in what is happening, listen to us and (perhaps) ask questions, they create a space for us to express ourselves and demonstrate what we are capable of being and doing, of what we hope, understand, and suffer. A relational space opens through their involvement with us. We become more aware of ourselves. This awareness produces inner strength under conditions in which we do not experience unkindness, ridicule, disdain, or isolation.

The gift of full attention may be quite rare for many people. As adults, if someone shows interest in us, we may be quite surprised. We may wait for them to turn to their own interests after a moment or two. If they persist in showing interest, without staring or expressing mockery, or making us feel alone and strange, and we continue to feel comfort in their gaze, there may be inner movement in us—a shift of some kind. If a third person were to observe the encounter, she might see a change in our facial expression as we receive someone’s genuine interest. We might stand up straighter and pay closer attention to the

other person's face. We may smile. Our shoulders might relax. When someone shows interest in us, often our face gains color, our eyes become livelier and may sometimes seem to shine, which is evidence that something is occurring internally in us.

American psychologist Daniel Stern describes this engagement. He was involved in research with moms and infants to help understand these encounters. He wrote about them in *The Intrapersonal World of the Infant* (Stern 1985). After years of observation, he analyzed an interaction he thought was accessible to all adults. He called this engagement 'a present moment'. In his book, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, Stern provides a framework for showing interest by describing social interaction that is full of presence and participation. A *present moment* is

a special kind of mental contact—namely, an inter-subjective contact . . . [that involves] the mutual interpenetration of minds that permits us to say, 'I know that you know what I know' or 'I feel that you feel what I feel'. [During one of these moments, there is] a reading of the contents of the other's mind . . . [People] are capable of 'reading' other people's intentions and [of feeling within their own bodies what another is feeling]. Not in any mystical way, but from watching their face, body movements, and posture, hearing the tone of voice, and noticing the immediate context for their behavior, even though [these] intuitions need verifying and fine-tuning.

(Stern 2004, pp. 75–76)

The embodied human ability to show interest is at the heart of congregational care. A present moment is expressed through a felt sense of connection. Being engaged with another is fulfilling at the deepest level. The effects of showing interest are easy to test. Enter a shop and request something from a salesperson and show interest in them. Note the results. In another shop, observe social interactions among sales staff and customers. See what happens if customers show interest versus keeping their eyes on their purchases.

The human body is made for showing interest. People deploy the body's social engagement system every time they show interest. Simone Weil spoke of showing interest by using the expression 'creative attention' (Weil 1951). For her, giving full attention to another, as did the Good Samaritan, is an occasion for bringing the humanity of the other into focus, and of vitalizing the humanity of the other. As she says,

one person stops; one sees; one pays attention. The actions that follow are just the automatic effect of this moment of attention. The attention is creative. But at the moment when it is engaged, it is a renunciation.

(Weil 1951, p. 88)

What is this renunciation as far as Weil understands it? It allows one who pays attention to deny herself and give herself to the other for that moment. For Weil, in denying oneself, one becomes capable under God of establishing someone else by offering a creative affirmation. One gives oneself in ransom for the other. To Weil, it is a redemptive act. While the man lying in the ditch was to the first two men, only a bit of matter, an object, perhaps a threat to their safety, to the Good Samaritan he was a man—just like himself—full of humanity.

5.4. Guidelines for Communicative Action

Communicative community that has capacity for talking together and reaching understanding is prejudiced from the start by a modern theme initiated by French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596–1650) (Descartes 1962). He emphasized the solitary thinker. It was 'man alone' who was capable of radical reflection on knowledge and morality (Habermas 1984); the male solitary thinker continued to hold sway during twentieth century philosophy, except (e.g.,) for German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1929–). Not only Descartes, but Kant privileged a solitary thinker in assessing reason, with an important difference referred to later. A solitary thinker may find self-denial too difficult to imagine. Solitary thinkers are not an adequate basis for communicative community. Thinking and talking

together replaces the methodological solipsism of a solitary thinker. What is a methodology suitable for talking together that can reach for understanding?

In addition to solitary thinking, reason lost connection with the Divine during modernity. Kant reversed a historic emphasis on reason that had served Christianity well. Before Kant, reason that could be trusted was based on Revelation (*nous, sapientia*) rather than on human reason (*dianoia, scientia*). Prior to Kant, human reason was inferior to knowledge got directly from God. While Kant continued to argue that healthy reason had a need for God's existence (Kant 1998), those who followed him severed that link and privileged human reason above all else. An Enlightenment belief that scientific progress is necessarily accompanied by progress in morality (Habermas 1984) furthered alienated reason and religious faith. The aim of getting rid of superstition and dogmatism was accompanied by fragmentation, discontinuity, and the loss of meaning. Critical distance from religious tradition went hand in hand with anomie and alienation, unstable identities, and existential insecurities (Habermas 1984).

To Habermas, monological thinking had another serious defect for those who care about communicative action—individualism privileges one person's worldview over others and may be driven by self-interest. He focused on language-in-use or speech to develop his view of communicative action. As he notes, if we assume the human species maintains itself through socially coordinated activities and that this coordination is established through communication aimed at reaching agreement, it also requires us to satisfy conditions of rationality that are inherent in communicative action (Habermas 1984). He stripped communicative action of the privilege given to solitary thinkers and pointed to a universal core in a generalizable human ability to communicate with others, even those who speak a different language. Habermas agreed there is something beneath personal experience that unites the whole human tribe.

The idea of a community capable of reaching agreement animated Habermas. Frye's third stage is Habermas's main interest. Habermas explores its possibility in the opening of his second volume on communicative action. For him, an ideal (but realizable)

communication community serves to reconstruct an undamaged intersubjectivity that allows both for unconstrained mutual understanding among individuals and for the identities of individuals who come to an unconstrained understanding with themselves.

(Habermas 1992, p. 2)

Habermas's approach to communicative action confronts the uniformity of Frye's second stage and the radical individualism of solitary thinkers. In so doing, he opens a path to attitudes, skills, and practices for reaching understanding.

Baptist churches are formed through congregational government. Members have a voice and vote in church decisions. Reaching understanding ought to be of interest to them. But uniformity may dominate a group in one of three ways: one strong member influences the church narrative based on his or her idiosyncratic worldview and strong opinion; a strong family shapes the core narrative of the community; a church Board of Deacons or Elders stipulates the church narrative without relying on congregational collaboration. Whoever wins the battle, the outcome produces constraint; only voices that conform to the dominant narrative are recognized as having something to say. Uniformity is secured through coercion. Unity is a sham. Uniformity damages a community through its role in silencing dissent because 'everyone knows' what to say and not say through nuances of social affirmation, or its absence. The road to uniformity is often taken for three reasons: people have only experienced uniformity and have no model for resolving conflict; they believe their view is so correct they see their position as protecting a community against grievous error; they do not believe reaching understanding is possible due to differences in the group, many they believe are wrong, and people with those views should/can leave the group.

Profound differences are never gratuitous or invented. They grow out of conflicting elements in a genuine problem. Significant problems involve aspects that for the moment

contradict each other. Solution comes only by getting away from a meaning for terms that is already fixed upon and seeing the situation from another point of view, hence in a fresh light (Dewey 1902). There is an assumption in communicative action that self-preservation can only be achieved through social solidarity (Habermas 1992). Self-preservation is served by hearing reasons other people have for beliefs they prize and by reflecting thoughtfully on those reasons.

Social solidarity (not uniformity) requires two levels of effort and an attitude shaped by a willingness and ability to learn, especially from one's own mistakes. The first effort relies on moving to a level of reflection in the following way: we can think about ourselves; we can perceive ourselves thinking, so that we turn what we think into an object for reflection, like removing our glasses to see how we see the world. This shift is a move away from being immersed in our mental mythology—like fish that do not see the water they swim in. Reflection means stopping to consider the meaning we have made. We look to see what we think and realize it is based on a personal background we have known from birth. This is not a process of disposing of what we think. It is to see it clearly, perhaps for the first time. Grieving together over losses of meaning and potential embarrassment is a task for congregational care.

The second effort in learning is the hard work of reflecting on meaning from two dimensions: the personal and universal mentioned earlier. The universal dimension is used by Habermas throughout his analysis of communicative action. Kant based his categorical imperative on a universal human ability to act upon a maxim (a subjective principle) that can also hold as a universal law (Kant 1996). While Kant seemed to privilege solitary thinkers in one way, he insisted we are members of humanity, and ought to act so that the maxim of our action could become a universal law.

From a Christian perspective, Kant explicated the Golden Rule, "Do to others as you would have them do to you," which requires thinking that is embedded in learning and that is open to reflexivity—of thinking about what we are thinking about, what we need, what we offer others, and by considering the impact of our beliefs on another's lifeworld once we have a sense of it through conversation. Reflexivity requires a willingness to listen to the stream of thoughts running through our own mind. These thoughts come unbidden. In reflexivity, we pay close attention to them, without silencing them at the outset, so that we can choose which ones we want to have direct our action. As John Dewey put it, thought affords the sole method of escape from purely impulsive or routine behaviour. People who do not attend to their own thinking are pushed from behind as it were; they do not see or foresee the end for which they are acting (Dewey 1997). Listening to reasons other people give for their action implies listening attentively to our own.

Communicative action is the hard work of realizing how different other people are from us. Each lifeworld is the background someone has experienced and comes with attitudes, skills, and knowledge from that context. Sometimes it seems easier to remain in conflict due to these differences and not reflect on them because they threaten our own already formed ideas. It seems easier to detach from other people, to hang onto facts we have already gathered, to stick with what has already been said, to look for something to buttress ourselves against an attack from other views that currently occupy the problem space we find ourselves in (Dewey 1902). But ideas of development and a willingness to learn promote opportunities to come to understand one another—even from a deep divide of differences that are held to be Christian truths.

In communicative action, Habermas unveils a core attitude that does not succumb to uniformity or individualism. Communicative action incorporates language as a medium for reaching understanding by negotiating a common definition of a situation:

A situation definition by another party that *prima facie* diverges from one's own presents a problem of a peculiar sort; for in cooperative processes of interpretation no participant has a monopoly on correct interpretation. For both [all] parties the interpretive task consists in incorporating the other's interpretation of the

situation into one's own in such a way that . . . divergent situation definitions can be brought to coincide sufficiently.

(Habermas 1984, p. xiii)

The way definitions of a situation are brought to coincide sufficiently is through reflecting on them, refusing uniformity, and recognizing the common humanity that unites all those involved, whether some people are directly impacted by a particular interpretation of the situation and others are observers of it and less directly impacted. In the FBC congregation, there are people who

- Have worked for years to ameliorate injustice for Indigenous Canadians and have succeeded in creating change at the national level.
- Have Indigenous friends and have seen their life circumstances change dramatically through their mutual friendship.
- Are directly impacted by abuse carried out in Residential schools.
- Are Christian Cree-trained Elders that suffered in Residential schools.
- Are theoretically informed about this part of Canada's history.
- Are observers of Indigenous suffering who consciously share humanity with Residential School survivors (though their experience differs widely and may contain abuse from other sources).
- Have suffered similar (but not the same) abuse and still feel unrecognized.
- Police the downtown core and work with Indigenous people that habitually cause harm to other people in Edmonton.
- Do not see the Indigenous situation as worthy of being centre staged at FBC.
- Have childhood media-based fears associated with Indigenous people.
- Never think about Indigenous peoples except if they consider giving a handout to someone on the street.
- See Indigenous ceremonies such as a Sweet Grass ceremony as unChristian rituals.

Habermas's proposal to have interpretations coincide sufficiently is based on using reason. The key to reaching understanding is the possibility, during conversation, of giving reasons to each other that gain intersubjective recognition for validity claims that people remain open to discussing (Habermas 1984, p. x). Yet, in the final analysis, values are not proved through using reason, they are chosen (Habermas 1984, p. xviii). Radical welcome is a value at FBC that has the support of reasons, but it is a choice not everyone might make.

The possibility of reaching understanding, however, is through argumentation (which is not arguing). It is reasoning together. Habermas believes analytic philosophy is a theory of meaning that offers a promising link for reaching understanding. Analytic philosophy's move from formal to informal logic lies behind his assertions about what constitutes a valid reason. He relies on German psychologist and linguist Karl Buhler who identifies three aspects of an utterance. When speakers send messages to hearers, their speech involves three functions (Habermas 1984, p. 275):

- Cognitive: representing a situation (its symbols)
- Expressive: making known the experiences of the speaker (its symptoms)
- Appellative: directing requests to hearers to influence their behaviour (its signals)

An utterance includes symbols, symptoms, and signals that are explicitly stated or implied; listeners work to hear accurately what the symbols, symptoms and signals mean.

In conversation, speakers give and receive reasons and propose validity claims to support their cognitive, expressive, and appellative intentions. Habermas uses ordinary speech as his example. In everyday speech, we constantly make claims, even if only indirectly, about the validity of what we are saying, implying, or presupposing. Giving reasons and offering validity claims creates a context for communicative action. Validity claims give insight into speakers' lifeworld. Others may come to see the authenticity, i.e., truthfulness and sincerity, and affirm their generalizable (universal) quality. Validity claims may be criticized so there is a possibility of identifying and correcting mistakes and learning from them during communicative action.

During spiritual conversation, listeners wait to hear the meaning invested in an utterance. As they hear reasons and validity claims, they pay attention to the cognitive meaning, the experiences of the speaker and the persuasion implied. A communicative event is incomplete until hearers realize what speakers mean to say in a way that speakers affirm is accurate, which is a requirement of relational empathy. As people talk together, they offer personally important validity claims that appeal to the common interests of those affected, as claims that deserve general recognition. Reasoning together is a single steady trend toward a unifying conclusion that is supported by the need for thinking to accomplish something beyond mere thinking—an achievement that is more potent than thinking for its own sake (Dewey 1997). In communicative action, ego identity centers around learning to *realize oneself under conditions of communicatively shared intersubjectivity* (Habermas 1984) and reach understanding in an environment characterized by unity in diversity.

In the solipsism of solitary thinking, we easily believe everyone thinks the same way we do. We assume there is only one lifeworld—or at least—only one that is correct and worth having. Communicative action rests on developing the ability to recognize the intersubjective validity of claims on which social cooperation depends. In reaching understanding, participants stand in a religious tradition they rely on, and at the same time, renew by taking together. They gain solidarity within the legitimacy of religious tradition.

5.5. Unity in Diversity

Two expressions in this article state the aims of communicative action: reaching understanding and reaching agreement. Does one imply the other? If understanding must always secure agreement, the outcome is uniformity and we are stuck in Frye's second communicative stage. The book of John chapters 14–17 record Jesus' command that his disciples remain in unity with him and each other. Frye's third stage, with its center everywhere and circumference nowhere, conveys unity in diversity. With unity in diversity, Christianity is distinguished from other traditions. Its edges hover over diversity that is authentically within its developing tradition.

Baptists emphasize soul liberty which means that unity in diversity is (potentially) a watchword for the tradition. The expression unity in diversity requires people to ascertain what is essential to Christian faith from a Biblical perspective and what is not central but is within its purview. In communicative action, two terms, welcoming and affirming, shed light on practices that demonstrate unity in diversity. For FBC, radical welcome is a value the church has taken on. Radical welcome is central because it is taken from Jesus' example. It is conveyed in practices that meet spiritual needs, engage in spiritual conversation, and show interest until people believe they are seen, heard and safe.

Radical welcome is offered to the humanity of everyone who enters the Sanctuary. Attitudes and skills explored earlier in the article secure that welcome as a felt experience. If reaching understanding does not mean always reaching agreement, how does it proceed? To begin, communicative community is not a loose collection of solitary individuals. The community is not owned by any one person or group. There is no force, no coercion. In the practice of reasoning together, argumentation holds a central place. If we recall the description of an utterance in which acting subjects state symbols, symptoms and signals, a conversation begins by hearing other people and moving to argumentation. Argumentation conveys reasons or grounds connected in a systematic way with the validity claims that go with these reasons. Communicative action may be as follows: argumentation is an experience of unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing effort. Argumentative speech

- Relies on people giving their reasons for what they believe and do.
- Offers reasons that conform to qualities of personal and universal citizenship so that people orient their action to intersubjectively recognized validity claims.
- Gives reasons that are sincere: a person who gives them also lives consistently by them; sincerity must be shown.

- Includes reasons that stand up to criticism and have equal validity and meaning for observers and non-participants that they have for acting subjects who state them.
- Includes scope for reasons that include the following kinds of claims:
 - Propositional truths that conform to subjective and objective worldviews.
 - Interventions that prove themselves effective in addressing a situation.
 - Appeals to norms that are legitimate in personal and communal worlds.
 - Reasons that are subjective but achieve intersubjective validity.
 - Evaluative expressions that demonstrate a generalizable interest (Habermas 1984, pp. 8–42).

Of course, claims can go wrong, reasons may be indefensible, people may be insincere and untruthful; therefore, communicative action continues to learn from its communal mistakes.

Radical welcome is essential for talking together. Argumentation provides clues to what everyone represented in the Indigenous issue listed above may be able to affirm. Our common humanity and human flourishing are core to that affirmation. Argumentation aims to find reasons everyone can affirm, regardless of their initial point of view. An affirming stance may work so that unity in diversity is realized in communicative community. The achievement of unity in diversity and ongoing attempts to learn from communal mistakes (of many kinds) offers the potential for congregational care to succeed and to flourish.

In terms of Spiritual Styles, Habermas's communicative action appeals most readily to Word and Emotion Style users. These two Styles tend to create a talking culture. Word style users look for clarity and contribute precise language as they try to reach understanding. Emotion Style users focus on the impact of emotion during argumentation and reach out to people who seem to be on the margins. Action Style users may be drawn to interventions they believe will be effective in reaching understanding. In the context of congregational care, the concept of myth appeals to Symbol Style users as they willingly initiate and engage in rituals that accompany faith. All Style users are drawn into finding their role in a relational web that creates and sustains congregational care.

6. Conclusions

It is not easy to see how identities formed in cultures of deep-going individualism might become members of communicative community. For individuals, questions abound. Am I being true to myself if I stay in community with people who think so differently? When do I speak up? How do I speak up? What is the role of scripture in this context? Am I being true to its message? What do I do with the inheritance of my childhood if others do not share my past? Am I compromised? Am I disloyal to Christianity?

In communicative action, there are several dimensions to consider as people reach for understanding. First, there is becoming reflexively aware of an internal, personal lifeworld that may differ sharply from others. Second, there are external, universal, generalizable dimensions of experience expressed by our shared humanity. Third, there are large-scale patterns that shape how we think about the world and our ethical response to it, e.g., Taylor's logics of equal dignity, difference, and recognition. (It may be that FBC's value conflicts are more influenced by the language of Taylor's logics than by theological or biblical values, but that hypothesis requires research beyond the scope of this article. However, anecdotal data from face-to-face interviews tend to support the hypothesis.) Fourth, there is the willingness to be a learning community in which attitudes, skills, and practices such as meeting spiritual needs, realizing what a human body is capable of conveying, demonstrating inclusion, engaging in spiritual conversation, showing interest and talking together are acquired by congregants as they learn to create an ethos of radical welcome that allows them to really hear what others are saying.

Radical welcome and communicative action create opportunities for reaching agreement through congregational care. This article introduces the Indigenous issue at FBC. Building Residential schools for Indigenous children is Canada's social sin, along with the colonialism and systemic racism that made it so easy to institute—two attitudes that

continue to cause harm to Indigenous peoples. Canadians are not alone. The scale of the Holocaust, the Shoah, beggars the imagination. Social harm erupts all over the globe. The past is not erased, it is only faced and redeemed. The question for FBC is how to live now. Communicative action in a context of radical welcome is one way forward.

The scope and unity of scripture comes to mind. The New Testament book of Revelation provides a picture of heaven in which resurrection people, transformed through personal experience with a Self-revealing God, gather from every tribe and language and people and nation. That is an image for the end of all things. How then should we live? As those who prepare in advance through communicative action for a life in which our differences are addressed as we stand in solidarity around God's unveiled Presence.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Armstrong, Karen. 2005. *A Short History of Myth*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Bellous, Joyce. 2002. "Children, Sex and Sacredness", *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. Edited by Cathy Ota. Chichester: Institute of Higher Education.
- Bellous, Joyce E. 2015. *Educating Faith: An Approach to Christian Formation*. Edmonton: Tall Pine Press.
- Bellous, Joyce E. 2016. *Learning Social Literacy*. Edmonton: Tall Pine Press.
- Bellous, Joyce E., and Margaret Clark. 2022. *Thick Listening at Thin Moments: Theoretical Groundwork for Spiritual Care Practice*. Edmonton: Tall Pine Press.
- Bellous, Joyce E., David Csinos, and Denise Peltomaki. 2009a. *Spiritual Styles Assessment—Adult*. Edmonton: Tall Pine Press.
- Bellous, Joyce E., David Csinos, Denise Peltomaki, and Karen Bellous. 2009b. *Spiritual Styles Assessment—Children*. Edmonton: Tall Pine Press, Both Assessments are available through Amazon.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Translated by Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Acts of Resistance*. New York: The New Press.
- Chesterton, G. K. 2012. *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1987. *The Chomsky Reader*. Edited by James Peck. New York: Pantheon Book.
- Derber, Charles. 2000. *The Pursuit of Attention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Descartes, Rene. 1962. *Discourse on Method*. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company.
- Dewey, John. 1902. *The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Available online: http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/dewey_child.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2022).
- Dewey, John. 1997. *How We Think*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Frye, Northrop. 1976. *Spiritus Mundi*. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.
- Frye, Northrop. 1982. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book.
- Gilson, Etienne. 2009. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1992. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hay, David. 2007. *Something There: The Biology of the Human Spirit*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Hillery, G. A. 1972. *Communal Organizations*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Iliade, Mercea. 1968. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harper One.
- Kant, I. 1996. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Edited by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. 1998. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Edited by Allan Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, Josephine. 1987. *Our Need for Others and Its Roots in Infancy*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Leary, Mark. 2005. *The Social Outcast*. Edited by Kipling D. Williams, Joseph P. Forgas and William Von Hippel. New York: Psychology Press.
- Miller, Lisa. 2015. *The Spiritual Child*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Pieper, Josef. 1991. *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*. San Francisco: Ignatius.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: The Chicago University Press.

- Rizzuto, Ana-María. 1979. *The Birth of the Living God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rizzuto, Ana-María. 1998. *Why Did Freud Reject God?* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Stern, Daniel N. 1985. *The Intrapersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stern, Daniel N. 2004. *The Present Moment in Psychopathology and Everyday Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Taylor, Charles. 1991. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1992. The Logic of Recognition. In *Multiculturalism and the Logic of Recognition*. Edited by Amy Gutman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel. 2015. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Weil, Simone. 1951. *Waiting on God*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.