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The odd couple: A developmental perspective in pastoral relationship dynamics

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The Odd Couple:

A Developmental Perspective in Pastoral Relationship Dynamics

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THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the complex nature of the relationship between the pastor of a congregation and the members of the parish. The relationship is first viewed from a number of different perspectives: self psychology, systems theory and object relations. Each perspective adds new insight to the nature of this many-sided relationship. These perspectives, however, look primarily at a static view of the relationship.

A qualitative research study was conducted to investigate the following research question: *Do pastors and congregational members experience the pastor-parish relationship as developing over time?* Fourteen pastors and nine parishioners were asked to comment on their own experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship. The data indicated that the relationship does indeed change over time.

The study argues that the developmental models of other intimate relationships provide useful paradigms for understanding people's experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship.

The concept of *differentiation* was important in the development of other intimate relationships and that the degree of differentiation between the cleric and the congregation may influence the course of the development of the pastor-parish relationship.

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PART 1: PERSONAL LOCATION

The Church has always been an important part of my life. As the son of an Anglican cleric, most of my formative years were spent in and around the church. Growing up in the Rectory, I was able to see aspects of Church life that few others saw: I was privy to seeing how life in the Church affected the pastor. I saw that at times the pastor was elated by the progress that he saw in the spiritual life of the congregation. I also saw the times that the pastor came home angry, frustrated or hurt. It gave me the beginnings of insight into the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. When, later on in life, I too was to join the ministry I experienced that relationship first-hand.

I experienced the relationship between the pastor and the congregation as being intense and at times all-consuming. So much of my time, physical and emotional energy was wrapped up in this relationship that my wife would sometimes refer to the congregation as "the other woman" in my life.

Much of my own sense of self was wrapped up in this complex relationship between pastor and people. When the congregation had needs (be they physical, emotional or spiritual needs), I would do everything within my power to see that the needs were met. If I was able to meet the needs, I felt good about myself. If I had not been able to meet the needs, I would castigate myself for not trying hard enough. Somehow, in my mind, if anything went wrong I saw it as being my fault.

When I began studying at Wilfrid Laurier and the Interfaith Pastoral Counselling Centre I was no longer in the role of pastor to a parish. There was a sense of grief as I left (for a time) this part of my identity behind. Yet the distance also gave me the opportunity to reflect more deeply upon myself, upon parish ministry and upon the relationship between pastor and parish.

As I began to study the dynamics of other intimate relationships, both functional and dysfunctional, I saw many parallels in the relationship between pastor and people. I began to notice dynamics related to systems

theory, object relations theory, self psychology, the list went on and on. Aspects of the relationship which previously had been unexamined, demanded my attention. The more that I looked into this complex relationship, the more I saw new perspectives which would cast additional light on how pastor and congregation function in relationship.

Subsequent to my graduation from Wilfrid Laurier, I was employed in "interim" ministry, for two different congregations while they searched for a full-time pastor. Both were two-point congregations, and both of these situations had an inherent amount of conflict and I was asked to help the congregations to explore the processes that had gotten them to this troubled state. In both cases the interim lasted over a year. Following this I was appointed as a part-time pastor (but the sole cleric) to a different troubled congregation. The previous pastor had left very suddenly and both the pastor and the congregation had experienced a great deal of pain during the latter part of his ministry. Again, my task was to help to focus the congregation on building healthier relationships. The other half of my time is spent in marriage and family therapy as well as teaching and consulting

in parishes and offering mediation to troubled parishes.

As I approached each of these new congregational experiences, I attempted to explore the dynamics of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, integrating the theories that I had learned about other intimate relationships. What I discovered was that no one psychological theory was adequate to fully explain all of the troubled situations of ministry.

The relationship between the pastor of a congregation and the members of the parish is quite complex. Often when difficulties arise between pastor and parish simple solutions are sought and the intricacies of the relationship are disregarded. Pastors, seeking a simple solution, are prone to blame themselves for all of the problems in the parish. Focussing on only one perspective ("It's all my fault.") leads to only one intervention ("I must try harder."). If "trying harder" doesn't solve the issues, clergy often become "burned out."

There are, in fact, numerous ways to investigate the relationship between pastor and parish. Each perspective offers its own methods of intervention. Looking at the relationship from many different perspectives gives parish clergy more options and decreases the self-blame. Thus increasing the number of perspectives is a way to increase the healing offered to both pastor and congregation.

This thesis will outline different lenses with which one can view the pastor-parish relationship.

INTRODUCTION

PART 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have shown that intimate relationships develop over time. Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975) have studied the development of the relationship between parent and child. Bader and Pearson (1988) have applied that study to the development of the marital relationship. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the development of the pastor-parish relationship and to see if it does in fact go through different "stages." If it does, then research from the development of other intimate relationships may help to inform our understanding of the pastor-parish relationship.

Little has been written about the *development* of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Some give metaphors of what the relationship is *like* which imply development.

Hunter (1985) speaks of the need of the pastor to "romance" the congregation:

> In seminary I thought of the local church as a complex engine needing a mechanic: me. My best move in ministry has been to toss that image away. The local church is not a machine but more like a Person - a Person with a complex personality. Christ even pictured this Person as his bride.... Instead of mechanical procedures, my approach to leadership now resembles courtly romance. I nourish the same attitude toward my congregation that a suitor has towards a sweetheart. (Hunter, 1985, p. 114)

Scott (1991) also uses the marital model to describe the relationship between pastor and parish:

> Like couples, congregations look forward to the honeymoon. After the anxiety and excitement of calling a new pastor, they long to settle into an unhurried time where pastor and congregation can get to know one another.

But then what? Congregations and pastors may not argue about where to squeeze the toothpaste tube, but after the first year,

sometimes the first month, they have to figure out how to live together and resolve the myriad conflicts that inevitably arise in daily life. (Scott, 1991, p. 75)

Stevens and Collins, referring to the process by which a cleric joins a congregation, likens the process to a marriage:

> One cannot merely replace one's membership in an old church with membership in a new one. It is similar, once again, to a marriage. A remarriage will never be successful until a person genuinely "mourns" the loss, whether through death or divorce, of the first partner and embraces the new marriage as a *new* marriage. (Stevens and Collins, 1993, p. 4)

Although these authors use the marital model, they say nothing about how the relationship may change and develop over time. Even Friedman (1985), whose whole book is on the pastor-parish relationship, says little about the *development* of the relationship. He focuses on the need for the self-differentiation of the leader.

> An organism tends to function best when its "head" is well differentiated. The key to successful spiritual leadership, therefore, with success understood not only as moving people towards a goal, but also in terms of the survival of the family (and its leader), has more to do with the leader's capacity for self-definition than with the ability to motivate others. (Friedman, 1985, p.221)

Friedman does talk about the "change back" messages that the congregation will give in order to try to re-establish the old homeostasis, but it would seem that he does not see the relationship developing much beyond the symbiotic-differentiating (Bader and Pearson, 1988) stage.

Pattison (1977), develops a proposal of "stages of system development" in the relationship between pastor and parish, but he does not use a marital model. He outlines four stages in the development of the relationship:

> Stage 1. Storming. Amorphous, unstructured, individually autonomous behaviour. Systemic behaviour generated only by the

leader.

Stage 2. Forming. Development of a common identity and unity. Individual autonomy subverted in the cause of group cohesion and group identity, the development of a "group mind" and "group will." The leader is separate from the system but allowed to relate to it.

Stage 3. Norming. Members experiencing anxiety over threatened loss of individual identity and autonomy. Individuals distancing themselves from the group. The leader is caught in the same tension between identification with the system and assertion of one's unique leadership role.

Stage 4. Performing. Dialectical tension between individual identity and system identity, between commitment to self and to the system. The leader role is found to be only one example of the general tension shared by all. (Pattison, 1977, p. 61)

Fletcher (1985) proposes a three-stage model for the development of the pastor-parish relationship. Stage 1 has as its task the testing of personal strength. In order to progress beyond what Fletcher calls the "honeymoon

period" the congregation has to "test" the new minister. He states:

> I emphasize the word "testing" because that indeed is what both clergyperson and congregation appear to be doing in the first phase of development. Every serious human relationship begins with testing. A period of anxiety sets in as the honeymoon feeling begins to fade. The people begin to see a human being with human problems, and the clergyperson begins to suspect that things will not go swimmingly forever... The objective of the testing is to discover if there is enough personal reality in the minister and the congregation to lure them into any kind of deeper level of relationship at which the issues of power, authority, purpose, etc., can be negotiated. The role of the congregation is to test the personal reality and integrity of the clergyperson. If they are too weak to test him or her, nothing of significance can be done with the disappointment of early hopes. The first period of mutual self-discovery is pain-producing. As long as pain is avoided, growth is arrested. (Fletcher 1985 p. 2-3)

Fletcher's second stage is professional authenticity. He sees the need for the congregation to "call" the minister into their deeper life problems:

> The second crisis point of authentication of the clergypersons begins around the issue of whether anyone is going to invite them into a serious religious relationship. If no one invites, nothing happens. If no doors are opened, no work can be done. When people do begin to open doors and the clergyperson does become a credible interpreter of the meaning of the religious tradition in their lives, the word spreads rapidly, and the crisis begins to build. As one Protestant minister put it, "crowds gather." People make their needs known without fear. The word spreads to the community that the minister, priest, or rabbi is really effective. As the chorus of approval and sound of door opening increases, the stage is set for a new turning point. (ibid p. 5)

The crisis that ensues is that the clergyperson attempts to meet all needs. The outflow of energy often reaches a climax resulting in either a physical or emotional breakdown. The crisis is resolved when the cleric

reaches out for spiritual guidance with the help of laity who draw upon their own journey in faith to help their leader. This leads on to the third stage, particular authenticity:

> After the experience of despair and new life generated through the second crisis, a period of harmony and well-being sets in that, nonetheless, contains a turning point. I call it the crisis of particular authenticity because the basic issue concerns the discovery of the clergyperson's own particular skills and capacities, and how the work of the ministry will be shared. Recognizing that he or she cannot do all things well, and intensely sobered by the physical and emotional dangers of spiritual illusion, the clergyperson wants to share the ministry. The laity, at this point, trust the clergyperson a great deal more and are more motivated to share the work and to honor his or her own unique gifts. (ibid pp. 6-7)

Fletcher definitely sees development in the pastor-parish relationship, with each stage preceded by a crisis that must be overcome. I believe that he has captured some of the essence of the pastor-parish

relationship which is distinct from the marital model.

From the review of the literature some observations can be made. First, it seems that there is a proclivity to use the analogy of a "marriage" when discussing the relationship between pastor and parish. The marital model seems to capture salient points in the selection process, the intimate nature of the relationship and the demands that each place upon the other. Second, there appears to be a development in the relationship between pastors and parishes. Authors cite different "crises" which are crucial to the movement from one stage of the relationship to the next.

In all of the literature, however, I was unable to find any study which sought to validate the "popular" opinion that the relationship did in fact develop over time. Many articles maintained that the relationship did go through various stages, but none offered any studies to substantiate their claims. An ethnographic investigation of the experience of both clergy and parishioners could ascertain whether or not they observed development in the relationship over time.

This gives rise to the following research question: *Do pastors and congregational members experience the pastor-parish relationship as developing over time?*

In accordance with the principle of *triangulation* (Berg, 1995 and O'Connor 1997) the subject was approached from many different perspectives. Triangulation is used by qualitative researchers to ensure accuracy. Triangulation research is based on a concept taken from map making, navigation, and surveying practices. An unknown object is located at the point of intersection of various lines of sight. Similarly in research, the use of varied methods and perspectives will give a clearer view of the subject which is under investigation. In this study the first method of triangulating the data is theoretical triangulation, in which different psychological theories were used to examine the pastor-parish relationship. The second is methodological triangulation, in which a research design was devised to examine the relationship from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The third is sample triangulation, which included choices which would maximize the diversity of the sample as well as some elements

of random chance to lessen experimenter bias.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

PART 1: SELF PSYCHOLOGY

Heinz Kohut engaged in the study of narcissistically disturbed outpatients and from his investigations he developed a theoretical framework known now as "self psychology" which maintains that for healthy self-esteem and self-cohesion we rely upon the responses of key people with whom we form external relationships.

Whereas Freud focussed his theory of personality development upon human drives, Kohut broke from traditional psychoanalysis and focussed on the importance of early external relationships in psychic development. He stressed that in order to develop an appropriate sense of self-cohesion and self-esteem, we need certain responses from our primary caretakers. Kohut isolated three functions within the parent-child relationship which contribute to the development of an integrated sense of self. These functions are mirroring, idealizing and alter-ego functions.

The maturing child needs to be noticed by the parents. The child develops an age-appropriate grandiose and exhibitionistic self. As the parents affirm the uniqueness and special character of this child they are engaged in the process of *mirroring*. These approving responses, according to Kohut, are essential for normal development in that they provide the child with a sense of self-worth.

The child also needs to be able to look up to an all powerful parent who is able to soothe and heal. The child basks in the reflected light from the omnipotent and omniscient parent. As the parent takes on this sovereign role, they are engaged in the process of *idealization* for the child.

In his later writings Kohut (1984) added a third process of *twinship* or *alter-ego* functioning. It has its developmental origins in a wish for merger with the other that is gradually transformed into imitative behaviour. In adult life it is usually expressed through the seeking of peer relationships with those who are "just like me." Thus the three transferences, mirroring, idealizing, and twinning promote healthy development of the self.

Other people, then, came to be viewed not so much as separate persons, but more as extensions of the self who were used to gratify the needs of the self. The term *selfobject* came to be used as a term denoting the function that other persons perform for the self in regard to mirroring and idealizing.

Kill (1986) outlines how important the parental selfobjects are in the development of the emotional health of the child:

> Sufficiently admiring, strong and available parental selfobjects serve as mirrors for the young child's healthy grandiosity and exhibitionism (i.e., the infant's sense of "I am Perfect,") which, when appropriately mirrored, matures into basic ambition and self-confidence. Parents also serve as idealized omnipotent figures with whom the child can merge (i.e., in the infant's experience of "You are Perfect, and I am part of You.") This idealized merger, when empathically received, matures into the child's own high ideals, deeply held convictions and moral principles. (Kill, 1986, p. 20)

No parent, however, can be perfectly available to his/her child to fulfil all of their mirroring and idealizing needs. The inability of the parents to meet all of the needs becomes a source of frustration to the child. If the empathetic failures of the parents are non-traumatic and appropriate to the child's stage of development, the child can utilize this frustration as a means of internalizing the idealizing and mirroring functions within him/herself. Thus the child learns to self-soothe instead of relying upon external validation.

In some cases, however, these frustrations are perceived by the child as a form of rejection by the parent. It is then possible for the development of the self to become "frozen" at that stage, and the mirroring and/or idealizing functions fail to become internalized. The self continues to rely upon external relationships for these functions. As Kill explains, the arresting of the healthy development can lead to fragmentation of the adult:

> If, however, the emerging fragile self of a child experiences traumatic, sudden, unempathic failures or rejections by a selfobject (e.g. a self-preoccupied, non-mirroring or non-engaging parent) the

> healthy grandiosity and/or idealizing functions of the nuclear self "go underground" by psychic splitting or repression. They are not internalized as accessible parts of the self. The person is left feeling enfeebled, empty, defective at his/her core, and highly vulnerable to attack or violation, for one of the constitutive elements of a cohesive self has been lost or damaged. ... Defensive and/or compensatory structures develop to cover over the deep vacuum of deprivation and the intense power of raging neediness that lurk at the very center of one's being. (Kill, 1986, p. 21)

Both clergy and their parishioners can, as adults, still be seeking to repair old wounds through their current relationships with each other. Thus some clergy would depend on mirroring from the congregation. Every Sunday morning they would expect to hear flattering comments about the sermon. After every crisis they would expect family members to tell them how they couldn't have managed without her/him. When the compliments come, they feel secure. When the compliments don't come, they are filled with rage against this unempathetic "selfobject" who had failed to mirror

for them in the way that they expected. Their sense of self-esteem was based more upon external than internal validation. Likewise parishioners can depend upon an idealization of their pastor as being perfect and the parishioners may want to associate themselves with this paragon of virtue in the hopes that they too will have their sense of self enhanced through this association.

Olsen (1991), writing on clergy burnout from the perspective of self psychology, was able to outline the process whereby the congregation's need for congregational transference and idealization colludes with the grandiose self the pastor is invested in and the pastor's need for mirroring. This starts a vicious feedback loop. The more the pastor attempts to be all that the congregation expects him or her to be (thereby using the congregation as a selfobject), the more the congregation expects.

Case Example

A pastor, dealing with an inadequate sense of self sought to be affirmed by his congregation. The need for mirroring resulted in his taking

on more and more responsibilities in the hopes of getting noticed and affirmed. One late night emergency visit set up a pattern of more and more late night visits until the congregation began to expect this type of pastoral service. As a result the pastor worked even harder to keep up with the congregational expectations so as to preserve the grandiose self.

As the pastor was drawn even deeper into the congregation system, he was drawn away from the life of his own spouse and children. This was true for any number of reasons. Initially it was explained as "doing the Lord's work," or handling another crisis. However, the deeper motivation was that the family was no longer supporting the grandiose self of the pastor. While at church he was "Reverend" and seen as the spokesperson for God; at home he was just Daddy who was never available to play or to assist with household responsibilities. While parishioners saw the pastor as their ideal mate, his wife saw him as distant, preoccupied, and unavailable.

The family's frustration and anger at not having their needs met (since so much time is going to meet congregational needs) resulted in them

being unable to mirror the grandiose self. As opposed to mirroring the pastor's "God complex" they began confronting the pastor with the needs that were not being met at home, particularly in times of family development transition. Thus the pastor who was admired as a hero at church was seen as something considerably less at home, setting up a negative feedback loop. Obviously, the parish or needy persons within the parish became much more attractive with its mirroring potential than the family which was much more confrontational. This pushed the pastor to work even harder to support the grandiose self by being more involved with the congregation. Consistently working long hours because of feeling compelled to do more for the congregation, combined with tensions at home, as well as little or no recreation, can eventually lead to burnout.

It can be seen that the pastor is working out his/her own needs through the parish, and that parishioners are working out their needs through the pastor. Thus the pastor-parish dynamic can become quite involved. Randall (1988, p. 119) looks at Kohut's three functions: mirroring, idealization and alter-ego as experienced by both pastor and

parish. This would result in nine possible narcissistic configurations in the pastor-parish dynamic:

TABLE 1: PASTOR-PARISH TRANSFERENCE MATRIX

	Parish: need to idealize pastor	Parish: need to be mirrored by pastor	Parish: need for alter-ego pastor
Pastor: need to idealize parish			
Pastor: need to be mirrored by parish			
Pastor: need for alter-ego parish			

What this table indicates is that both the pastor and the parish could be working out their own needs through the other. In order to understand

the pastor-parish relationship, we need to understand the underlying emotional needs that each brings to the relationship.

Self Psychology would maintain that we all continue to have needs for both mirroring and idealizing. It is my contention that the more we are able to openly acknowledge our need for healing relationships, the easier it is to have those needs met in appropriate ways. The more we hide behind the facade of self-sufficiency, the more likely we are to get our needs met in inappropriate ways. What is clearly lacking is a "safe place" where the pastor can be free to explore his or her vulnerable self without fear of criticism or attack.

The Christian church provides an ideal place for healing relationships to occur. It is the place where we should be able to be "real" and acknowledge our own needs. The Christian church is built upon a foundation of accepting relationships. God is our selfobject par excellence who reaches out to his people with an unconditional love. To experience the love of God and the love of the community can be restorative to our

sense of self. Such a process requires the open recognition of our own brokenness.

Humanity is prone, however, to hide our infirmities under the mask of artificial grandiosity. We come to church both to acknowledge our need of a saviour, and to become a saviour for others. Both clergy and laity use the opportunities provided by the parish to display our exhibitionistic selves. Volunteerism becomes an opportunity to take up good "causes," to chair committees, to prove our worth. We meet our narcissistic needs by engaging in activities which will induce others to tell us how good we are.

Since the church is powered through volunteers, we have always valued the willing worker. The one who gives selflessly of time and talent has been honoured as the pillar of the church. We have interpreted this overachievement as an indication that they have already met their own needs, and that now they are able to give selflessly to the needs of others. Self Psychology would warn us, however, that the tireless worker (clergy or lay) may in fact be dealing with too little self love. Their efforts to make

themselves indispensable may be a covert way to get others to become the mirroring selfobject who will fill up their depleted sense of self.

I believe that one way to minister to both clergy and congregations is to provide a context in which they can acknowledge their own self-doubt. Openly facing our humanity can transform it from being a curse (which needs to be hidden) to a blessing (which can be used in the service of others).

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

PART 2: SYSTEMS THEORY

Virginia Satir (1991 p.36) analyses a relationship in terms of three components: the self, the other and the context. Some clergy are more focussed upon the self to the exclusion of the other two. Thus each time conflict occurred, they are prone to blaming themselves, rather than look at how the other or the context might influence the situation. Daniel and Rogers (1981), who undertook a survey of the literature on burnout in many helping professions, discovered this same phenomenon:

> Another major theoretical aspect of burnout is what Maslach [in an unpublished paper] has called the tendency toward dispositional and not situational variables to explain problems. Even when people-helpers recognize the special situational stresses of their work they are still prone to lay blame for their problems on some flaw within themselves, resulting in a loss of self-esteem and depression. Added to this is the fact that people are often unable to identify accurately the situational variables that influence their behavior. (p. 238)

In Generation to Generation (1985) Friedman demonstrates that clergy are, in fact, a part of a whole system. If their vision can be broadened to include the wider systemic interactions, it is possible that their sense of personal guilt will be lessened, and their ability to offer effective interventions will be increased.

Friedman introduced a liberating piece of theory: the difference between content and process. Often clergy and congregations focus on content issues (the number of parish visits, preaching style, time management, etc.) but are completely unaware of underlying process issues. It became clear that the content was merely the symptom of a deeper underlying process problem. Certainly there will be times when these content issues are legitimate concerns which need to be addressed. If, however, after careful attention to the issue it fails to become resolved, or if the intensity of the conflict is out of proportion to the issue, it is more likely that one is dealing with a process issue and that further attention to the content will have little impact. Attending to the symptom would alleviate the situation temporarily, however if the underlying process issue had not

been resolved the issue would resurface at a later date through another content issue.

General Systems Theory maintains that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. One can look at the disassembled parts which comprise the engine of an automobile, but looking at them independently would not give us any idea how they function in relation to each other. In order to understand the functioning of the engine, we would have to see how each part is affected by and in turn affects other parts in the system. Looking only at one part in isolation will not tell us how that part will function when influenced by the system as a whole. This is true for any system: a solar system, an ecosystem, a family system or a parish system.

Thinking of the Church as a system is not new. St. Paul in Romans 12:4-8 and again in I Corinthians 12:12-31 uses the concept of the body as a metaphor for the Church. The analogy stresses the interdependent nature of all members of the church with each other. No one member can function without it affecting the whole. "If one member suffers, all suffer together

with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (I Cor. 12:26). Thus it is necessary to look at the interrelationship between all of the parts of the body.

Murray Bowen applied natural systems theory to families and found that relationships are characterized by two conflicting tendencies: the need for togetherness and the need for separation. Too much of one or the other will cause anxiety in the system. The conflict and anxiety can be examined through five basic concepts, namely: the "identified patient," homeostasis, differentiation of self, extended family and emotional triangles.

The Identified Patient

The concept of the "identified patient" comes from clinical work with families. When a family comes for therapy often one individual will be labelled as being the "problem" that the rest of the family wants "fixed." Previously it had been thought that "mental disorders" were a result of a dysfunction with the *individual* and the best way to treat an individual suffering from a disorder was to isolate the individual from the family and

treat the individual alone (perhaps in an institutional setting). It was discovered, however, that often when the "cured" individual was returned to the family setting, the symptomatic behaviour re-appeared or another family member took over the identified patient role.

Seeing the individual in isolation failed to depict the interaction between the one individual and the whole of the family system. It is as we observe the functioning of the whole system that we can understand the functioning of each part. The person that the family identifies as the "problem" (the "identified patient") may in fact merely be the one in whom the *family* pathology has surfaced. Efforts to "cure" the problem person will simply result in the pathology re-surfacing in a different fashion.

Systems theory advocates that we try to discover what *effect* the behaviour of the identified patient has on the whole family. For example, an adolescent may light fires in garbage cans at the school. The effect of the behaviour of the identified patient is to get the parents to unite together to help the child. They put aside the differences that have been causing them

to fight continuously. Thus, at one level, the child's behaviour has been "helpful" to the family. If the child was convinced not to light fires, there is the possibility that the frequency of fights between his parents would increase, necessitating some other form of "acting out" in order to unite the parents. A systems solution for this family might be to focus on the impact of the parents' fighting on the children. If the parents were able to resolve their differences, setting fires might no longer be necessary. Thus, resolution is achieved by focussing on the system and not on the identified patient.

In parish settings, often it is the pastor who becomes the "identified patient." Stress in the pastor's family or in the parish family can lead to anxiety, resulting in the pastor's "acting out." Pastors become alcoholics, drug addicts, engage in inappropriate sexual relationships with members of the congregation or in the most tragic of cases commit suicide (sometimes within the church building). It becomes easy for the congregation to blame all of the ills upon the inadequacy of the pastor. "Get rid of the pastor," they say, "and all of our problems will be over.". What is ignored, however,

is the systemic interaction between pastor and parish. To look only at one part of a parish system, such as the functioning of the pastor, isolates that one part from the whole of the system and will give an inadequate perception. Rather, we must look at how pastor and parish mutually affect each other. Something in the pastor-parish relationship (or, as will be outlined below, in the extended family of the pastor or a key parishioner) has gone out of balance to cause the anxiety and the acting out. This brings us to the second concept, homeostasis.

Homeostasis

Sieburg (1985 pp. 16-17) outlines that one of the characteristics of any system is that it resists change, seeking to keep itself in a state of balance. This is called homeostasis and can be explained rather simply as a control device for keeping the behaviour of the system within desired limits. Whenever something occurs that is outside the system's acceptable range, the system becomes unbalanced and tension is created. When this happens, the system's homeostatic mechanism is triggered in order to regain its balance. Now the system scans itself, decides what is creating the

imbalance, and adjusts itself to a desirable range with subsequent return to a low-tension state.

A thermostat is an example of a regulating device which maintains homeostasis. If the temperature in a room goes outside of a certain acceptable range, the thermostat will invoke a mechanism (either a furnace or an air conditioner) which will return the temperature of the room to an acceptable level. In a similar way relationships have a homeostatic balance which seems comfortable. If the relationship gets either too "hot" or too "cold" action will be taken to redress the imbalance.

A pastor and parish will develop a relationship which feels comfortable to both of them. There is a delicate balance achieved between intimacy and isolation. If one gets emotionally too close or too distant there will be anxiety in the system. Some form of action will be taken to try to return the system to its former balance.

Case Example

A cleric assisted a family who was experiencing a crisis. Previously he had not been very close to this family. The crisis ensued when the son was in a serious car accident. He was on life support in hospital and was not expected to live. The pastor devoted his time exclusively to this family for about a week. Driving them to and from the hospital, spending time with them in the I.C.U. waiting room, relaying messages to other family members, he eventually got quite close to them and knew many intimate details of their lives. He felt that he had given to this family the best attention that one could possibly give. Shortly after the crisis had passed, the boy's mother and the pastor had a serious argument. She maintained that he was not as "spiritual" as the previous pastor. She began telling others in the congregation that his theological views were unsound and that he should be removed from the parish.

At the time, of course, the pastor looked at the situation from only one perspective: "I must do more, I must try harder." But the harder he tried to appease her, the more cantankerous she became. In looking from a

systems perspective, however, one can see a different dynamic. By spending so much time with her through the crisis, he had begun to get closer than they were accustomed to in their relationship. The homeostasis had become unbalanced. He was now too close. The way to restore the balance was to create more distance, which she accomplished through conflict. When he tried harder to appease her, he was in fact pushing to retain the closeness that they had achieved during the crisis, whereas she was trying harder to create more distance.

The same dynamic can occur if the pastor becomes too distant as any pastor who makes a personal commitment to professional development will discover. The time commitment to commute to the class and to do the required assignments makes the pastor less available to the parish during that time period. The closeness/distance balance becomes disturbed. All of a sudden minor "emergencies" crop up in the parish which need the pastor's attention. Often the pastor feels angry at being called upon to deal with problems that could easily have been solved without him/her. The effect of

the problems, however, is to try to draw the pastor back into the parish in order to reduce the anxiety of those members who felt "abandoned" when the pastor turns his/her interests to further studies.

Another factor which can go out of balance is the use of overt power. The factors involved in this balance would be similar to those in any family. Using the Beaver's Interactional Scale of Family Competence (Beavers, 1990) it would be possible to assess the pastor/parish balance. How are decisions made in this parish? In some cases the pastor is clearly defined as the leader. In other cases, individual parishioners or small groups have enough power to be considered as leaders of the parish. In still other cases, no one has enough power to be considered leader and the system spends much of its time in chaos. If there is a leader, how is the leadership exercised? The leadership style could be placed on a continuum between marked dominance (characterized by absolute control with no negotiation) and egalitarian leadership (characterized by shared leadership between pastor and parish which changes with the nature of the situation). If the pastor upsets the balance by becoming either more or less controlling in the

decision making process, s/he can expect a reaction from the parish which tries to return the system to its former homeostatic balance.

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation in marital or congregational systems has to do with the ability of the individual to define him/herself apart from the rest of the system and yet remain connected to the system. Friedman (1985, p. 27) defines differentiation as meaning the capacity of a family [or congregational] member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures; to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we."

Differentiation has to do with boundaries between pastor and parish. At the low end of the scale boundaries are vague or nonexistent. There is no clear distinction between individuals, but rather an amorphous "we" develops. In this cult-like setting, all are expected to think, feel, believe, and behave the same. It is not necessary to clarify expectations, because each assumes that the other will intuitively know what actions are required.

At the higher levels on the scale each is seen as an autonomous, separate individual. A closeness may develop, but it is not based upon fusion, but rather upon respect for the uniqueness of the individual.

The concept of boundaries may become evident in issues around availability of the pastor. In some relationships, the pastor is always available, putting the needs of the parishioners before personal and/or family needs. Other pastors specify boundaries around when and to whom they will be available.

Another aspect of differentiation is the extent to which the individuals are able to take personal responsibility for their past, present and future. At the lowest levels, personal responsibility is avoided. Blaming, scapegoating, denying, and forgetting are all mechanisms used to insulate the self from personal responsibility. At the higher levels, there is less blame and appropriate personal responsibility is accepted for actions.

When there is a healthy amount of differentiation between pastor and parish there is an ability to tolerate differences. However when the pastor-parish relationship is characterized by fusion, differences cause anxiety. This anxiety will usually force one to try to get the other to change in order to minimize the differences and lessen the anxiety. The one asked to change will usually invoke one of four reactive stances (Richardson, 1985, pp. 26-33): compliance (pretending that there are no differences); rebellion (putting all their energy in not doing or not being what the other wants instead of defining self independently of the other); attacking (blaming the other and labelling them as "bad" or "evil"); or by cutting off (leaving the situation but harboring resentments and never being free of the other).

Knowing the level of differentiation within parish families will often give insight into why a particular individual reacts to the pastor in a certain way. If they have a high need for fusion, they will not be able to tolerate difference and will often try to force the pastor into a particular "mold." Knowing something of their family background may help the pastor to deal

with this individual.

Extended Family

Some people (both clergy and lay) become so involved in the life of the parish church that it becomes a surrogate family for them. Although the closeness that develops in the church family is a blessing, it can also bring with it a curse. The church can become the arena in which unresolved issues from one's family of origin are deposited. More will be said about this below relating to object relations and the transference process. But suffice it to say at this point that much of what happens in church relationships overlaps with issues from our home life.

Clergy have a unique privilege in that they become involved with a family in all nodal events of the life cycle. They become involved at each major transition from birth to death. Unfortunately, however, they often fail to use the wealth of information that they possess. When a parishioner becomes a source of distress, clergy often neglect to look at what is going on in the wider family context. Clergy would take the anger of a

parishioner at "face value" instead of looking at other process issues within the parishioner's nuclear family or family of origin.

Case Example

When one conscientious parishioner started to become very irresponsible in the performance of duties it coincided with the fact that her mother (who had always told her that she would never amount to anything) had moved in for an extended visit. She was becoming the irresponsible child that the mother expected her to be, and this was also being lived out in her duties at church.

The church can become, then, a place of overlapping systems. Nuclear family meets family of origin which meets church family. Often this results in the pastor trying to become a referee, sorting out the emotional turmoil. The pastor then becomes involved in emotional triangles.

Emotional Triangles

When two people, two groups, or a combination of the two become important to each other, a relationship develops. As long as the anxiety level of each partner is low, they begin to develop a shared understanding about what they have in common, and what it is that makes them different. Both their closeness and their separateness are exercised and enjoyed between them. When issues arise they are thought through and worked through with a sense of mutual satisfaction. Eventually, for more reasons than one can count, the level of anxiety in one or both of the partners may reach a level where it cannot be contained within the relationship and one partner reaches out to another. This movement from handling the "closeness/separateness" issues from within a dyad to using a third party is called "triangulation."

This strategy of "me and you against him/her" is all too common in pastor-parish dynamics. If the pastor and the organist are in conflict over an issue around worship one or the other will try to triangle in the choir so as to have additional "leverage." If there is conflict among members in the

finance committee some one will try to triangle in key contributors. In major conflict between pastor and parish one or other may try to triangle in a denominational official (such as a bishop) or a pastor from a neighbouring congregation.

One who is particularly prone to frequent triangulation is the pastor's spouse (more typically for male clergy). The wife will often be given pieces of information by parishioners who feel too threatened to speak to the pastor directly. "Your husband is too busy to bother with a little matter like this, so I'll tell you..." becomes a classical triangulation ploy. The assumption is that the pastor will be more receptive to a new idea if it is put forward to him by his wife than by another member of the congregation. The pastor too will try to influence his/her spouse to present the pastor's position in a way that will be more readily received by the congregation.

There are some predictable outcomes from the process of triangulation. If A and B are experiencing conflict, and A tries to solve the problem by reaching out to C, Whybrew (1984) outlines the effects of the

triangulation as follows:

1) an immediate sense of oneness between A & C.

2) Since A builds a relationship with C partly on the basis of conflict with B, and they diagnose the problem with B not present, B tends to be identified as the cause of the issues.

3) B may never know that A is uncomfortable.

4) Relationship A-C will continue until the anxiety level goes down in relationship A-B.

5) A process is put in place which absorbs the dysfunction within relationship A-B giving the relationship more longevity and stability while at the same time mitigating against A and B resolving their issues and finding mutually agreeable solutions. (Whybrew 1984, p. 14)

The process of triangulation would seem to give a false sense of rightness to A, it would increase B's anxiety, but most importantly it would ensure that the conflict between A and B is never resolved.

Case Example

In one parish there was a man who caused the pastor great difficulty. She perceived him as being manipulative and deceitful. Since he was a major figure in the parish she could not ignore the situation. Her own method was to "triangle in" other key people and get them on her side. In their efforts to offer "support" to the pastor, they allowed and even encouraged her to vent her anger surrounding this protagonist. The effect of the triangulation was that she became extremely close to the "support group" she felt justified in her own position, and she made no attempt to resolve her differences with the individual. The triangle ensured that the relationship would become "frozen" at the stalemate, and no attempts at reconciliation were ever made. The protagonist began to realize that a growing number of parishioners were siding with the pastor against him and eventually left the parish, but not before maligning the pastor's character.

Detriangulation is the process by which the third party seeks to become an agent in the resolution of the conflict between the two

protagonists.

> A more permanent solution could be attained if the outsider (C) could gain some level of perspective on the relationship A-B and, rather than seeing it as someone's fault, view it as a process for which both A and B share a responsibility. If C can withstand the invitation of an artificial relationship with B and keep enough emotional distance to stay connected to A and B yet maintain a nonaligned stance, then A and B will begin to resolve their own problems. Sometimes this posture is only possible with the coaching and support of an outsider, who him/herself is trained not to become triangulated into the system. (Whybrew, 1984, p. 17)

It would seem beneficial to have denominational specialists who could act as consultants in parish conflicts without becoming themselves triangled into the process.

Systems theory has given some principles which can be used to great advantage in the pastor-parish relationship. Some of these principles will

now be outlined.

Systems thinking tells us that in order to fully understand the pastor-parish dynamics one must look at all of the related components and not at one individual (or group) only. Thus when content and triangulation symptoms appear in a parish it is always best to look at what has gone out of balance to force the system to make this corrective change. Asking questions which may try to isolate why the symptom has occurred now, as opposed to six months ago or six months hence may give a clue as to what part of the system has gone out of balance.

One place to start would be to determine if any of the major participants are going through any life-cycle crises which could affect their functioning in the parish. Any predictable crisis (birth of a child, adolescent rebellion, children leaving home) or unexpected crisis (accidents or illness within any member of the family) or opportunity for professional development in either the pastor or key lay leaders could cause a period of emotional withdrawal from the parish. The parish as a whole my be

undergoing change: ethnic changes in the neighbourhood, change in key leadership from "old guard" to "new guard", changes in the building (either expansion or decline). In any of these cases the parish may be going through a period of mourning as it reacts to the loss of what it once was.

Systems theory has shown that much of the pastor-parish dynamic has to do with the anxiety that is created by either too much intimacy or by too much distance. Often the pastor deals with the anxiety in a way which increases, rather than decreases the congregational dis-ease. For example, if a pastor begins to distance him/herself emotionally from the congregation, the people begin to feel anxious. Unable to express the true nature of the anxiety, they begin to raise content issues around specific tasks which are not being performed to their liking. The pastor, "hooked" by the content issues, also becomes anxious. The more anxious the pastor becomes, the more s/he will tend to distance from those who are attacking him/her. This increases the congregational anxiety. Thus a positive feedback loop has been established which tends to amplify the deviation. The pastor will be of more benefit to the parish if s/he can maintain a "non-anxious presence."

Being "non-anxious" means being able to define oneself apart from the system. This is accomplished by attempting to become less reactive to the specifics of the content charges, and getting some emotional distance from the system in order to see more clearly some of the process issues which may be at work.

> The capacity of members of the clergy to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters, both those related to them as well as those where they become the identified focus, may be the most significant capability in their arsenal. Not only can such capacity enable religious leaders to be more clear-headed about solutions and more adroit in triangles but, because of the systemic effect that a leader's functioning always has on an entire organism, a nonanxious presence will modify anxiety throughout the entire congregation. (Friedman, 1985, p. 208)

Clergy often see themselves as the "saviour" of the parish. They don't like to see people in pain, and try to relieve their distress as quickly as possible. This too increases their own level of anxiety. If they raise their

own ability to tolerate the pain of others, their threshold will also increase, thus expanding their range of functioning. As Friedman (1985) points out, when clergy are too quick to alleviate the pain of others, it can make the parishioner dependent upon the clergy. In addition, the parishioner will become addicted to having pain relieved through someone else's functioning. Conversely, when clergy can tolerate the pain of others, the parishioners' own tolerance will increase, and so will their ability to solve their own problems. Thus clergy need to train themselves in the ability to contain their own anxiety in the midst of the emotional pain of another. The more we try to "fix" their problem, the more of a disservice we may be performing.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

PART 3: OBJECT RELATIONS

Object relations theory attempts to analyse the unconscious needs of the ego, how the needs develop over time and how these needs are met through interpersonal relationships. Nichols outlines how, according to this theory, an individual functions in current relationships can be related to the desire to resolve anxieties that remain from childhood:

> Human organisms from birth onward are seen to be primarily object seeking, rather than driven, as in Freud's theory, by a need to alleviate tensions and seek pleasure. An individual's major need is not merely to discharge tensions but to be involved in social interaction and relationships. Both the capacity to enter into and develop intimate human relationships and the origin of psychopathology have roots in the stage of infantile dependency. The quality of the early object relations determines to a significant degree the integrity of the ego of individuals when they become adults. (Nichols, 1988, pp. 50-51)

As children, we all experienced times when our primary caretaker(s) were present and able to look after our physical and emotional needs and times when they were unavailable. Through these experiences we developed internal representations not only of the self and the other but also of the relationship. A prototype of loving, positive experience is formed during periods when the infant is nursing. This prototype includes a positive experience of the self (the nursing infant), a positive experience of the object (the attentive, caretaking mother), and a positive affective experience (pleasure, satiation). When hunger returns and the infant's mother is not immediately available, a prototype of negative experiences occurs, including a negative experience of the self (the frustrating, demanding infant), an inattentive, frustrating object (the unavailable mother), and a negative affective experience of anger and perhaps terror. Ultimately, these two experiences are internalized as two opposing sets of object relationships consisting of a self-representation, an object representation, and an affect linking the two (Gabbard, 1990). As a result of these past relationships, we carry these "object relations" in our memory.

If the child is always satisfied, s/he can deal with the self and the object on a conscious level, retaining a positive image of the interaction in the memory. If, however, the needs are not immediately met the child is faced with an object that is both good and bad. Unable to integrate the two concepts into one person, the child splits the object into the "good" object and the "bad" object. Not only is there a good and bad object, but there is also a good and bad self.

The child is now faced with parts of the self and parts of the object which are intolerable. The bad parts of the self are eliminated through projecting them onto the object. The object then becomes a container for the unwanted parts of the self. As well, the object cannot be controlled so long as it remains external, so in an effort to dominate the object, the child internalizes parts of the object into the self. Thus, there begins a cycle of introjection-projection that many individuals carry into later life as a prototype for intimate interpersonal relationships (Nichols, 1988).

Current relationships are evaluated in terms of the old ones. In that way we may not appreciate the unique nature of a present interpersonal encounter, rather we may be evaluating this person in terms of previous object relations. Therefore when investigating the dynamics of a relationship, one may ask: To what extent are these individuals relating to the real person that they are encountering and to what extent are they relating to an internalized representation of a different person from a relationship that is based in their childhood?

Take, for example, the process of mate selection. Couples will often describe the overwhelming power of "romantic love" which makes this one individual absolutely irresistible. Although it removes much of the "mystery" it is possible to look at romantic love and mate selection from the perspective of object relations. Hendrix (1990), in looking at the highly selective way that we choose our mates concludes the following:

> What we are doing, I have discovered from years of theoretical research and clinical observation, is looking for someone who has the predominant character traits of the people who raised us. Our old

> brain [the portion of the brain that includes both the brain stem and the limbic system], trapped in the eternal now and having only a dim awareness of the outside world, is trying to re-create the environment of childhood. And the reason the old brain is trying to resurrect the past is not a matter of habit or blind compulsion but of a compelling need to heal old childhood wounds. (Hendrix, 1990, p. 14).

It would seem that the selection of our mate may be at least partially based upon unconscious associations with our childhood and that we are not entirely seeing the person for who they are but for whom they *represent*.

In order to heal these old childhood wounds, we must find a person who will play the complementary role so that we can re-live the drama. If no such person can be found, we will "create" such a person by *inducing* the person to play the required part. This unconscious process is known as projective identification.

Projective identification involves more than just projecting unwanted parts of ourselves onto the other. It also involves the manipulation of the other to actually *feel* the split off parts of the self. Greenberg explains that the process of projective identification is different from the two Freudian concepts of projection and identification:

> The concept of "projective identification" was developed to describe extensions of splitting in which parts of the ego are separated from the rest of the self and projected into objects. In projection proper, as Freud had originated and Klein uses the term, discrete impulses are attributed to objects; in projective identification the attribution concerns actual segments of the ego. Consequently, projective identification is a more interactional concept than the Freudian concepts of both projection and identification. There is a much closer relation to the object, which now "stands for" the projected aspect of the self. (Greenberg, 1983, p. 128)

The fantasy is that *this* relationship will work, unlike the failed relationships of the past. However the one who is the recipient of the

induction eventually begins to feel angry at the way s/he has been used and then withdraws. The cycle then repeats itself in a new relationship.

Cashdan (1988) has identified four specific types of projective identification. These are: dependency ("I can't survive without you."); power ("You can't survive without me."); ingratiation ("You owe me."); and sexuality ("I will make you feel sexually competent.") The relevance of each of these projective identifications to the pastor-parish relationship will now be outlined.

Dependency

The underlying message here is "I can't survive without you." These persons presents as being chronically helpless. They are unable to make decisions about inconsequential matters and are always coming asking for advice. They convince others around them of the dire consequences that will happen if they are not properly cared for. They induce in others the need to care for and worry about them. The object of the projective identification will often become overly responsible, making themselves

available day or night to look after the needs of the dependent one. Eventually the object begins to feel drained and exploited and looks to find ways to end the relationship. When this happens, the dependent one seeks out another object to repeat the cycle. The fact is that they can be resourceful in finding new objects and keeping themselves helpless. This indicates that they are not really dependent at all. They can exert a great deal of power through their "helplessness."

Case Example

The adult daughter of a parishioner called the church asking for the pastor's help. Her presenting problem was that her welfare cheque had run out and she had no money for groceries. The pastor paid her a visit, during which time the pastor heard more of her story. She was under the care of a psychiatrist, but she related that her psychiatrist was so uncaring; he never really listened, and he never did anything that really helped. The pastor rushed to her rescue and became available whenever the woman was in need. The number of telephone calls increased, and the degree of

"seriousness" of the issue decreased. It degenerated to the point that she called with the crisis of: "I can't decide what to cook for supper tonight, please help me." Every time the pastor tried to decline the invitation to help, the pastor was reminded of the dire consequences: that she would go crazy and become institutionalized if the pastor didn't help her through this crisis. Not wanting to have a guilty conscience, the pastor usually acquiesced to her demands. Tired, frustrated and angry at being the target of the projective identification of helplessness, the pastor eventually refused to help. Later the pastor discovered that she had developed a whole network of caregivers and that when one refused to help she would merely call upon the next one on her list.

Power

The flip side of dependency is power. Its underlying message is: "You can't survive without me." This is played out by inducing feelings of weakness and incompetence in others. The purpose is to create a relationship in which the other is forced into a subservient role. Any accomplishments made by the object are minimized and ridiculed. Unable

to trust their own abilities, the object becomes attached to the "benevolent dictator." Eventually the object becomes tired of the domination and tries to end the relationship.

Case Example

A salesman made it his mission to "educate" the new pastor and teach her how to run the parish. He would often critique her strategies for effecting change in the parish and show her where she was in error. He would impart to her his "wisdom" from years of dealing with (manipulating?) the public. He had honed the ability to locate and capitalize upon the insecurities of others. After each encounter with him, she began to mistrust her own abilities. When making decisions about the parish she would often ask herself: "What would he do here?" and found herself tempted to call him to ask for his advice. She had become the recipient of his projective identification and she felt less and less able to manage the parish without his "fatherly" advice.

Ingratiation

The major component of this projective identification is self-sacrifice. The underlying message is: "You owe me." They feel that they cannot be accepted for who they are, but only for what they do. As a result they are constantly appearing to put the needs of others before their own. The aim is to keep the other in the relationship through guilt. The object of the projective identification is induced to feel grateful for all the sacrifices that the "martyr" has made on their behalf. Eventually the object becomes tired of always having to appreciate the other, and begins to suspect that the gracious deeds might be manipulative.

Parishioners will often want to ingratiate themselves to the pastor, and so will provide the pastor with little "gifts." However, it is often the case that the pastor neither needs nor wants the gifts, yet is obliged to be grateful for them anyway. While at one level this can be seen as Christian caring, at another level it initiates a process whereby the pastor feels indebted to this person. The underlying attitude seems to be that they need to earn the pastor's attention because they themselves feel too insignificant

to be noticed.

Sexuality

The projective identification of sexuality is designed to produce an erotic response in the other. The underlying message is: "I will make you feel sexually competent." The relationship is characterized by the driven nature of the sexual activity. Instead of sex being a part of the relationship, sex *is* the relationship. It is the message of conveying sexual wholeness that keeps the other in the relationship. Eventually the object begins to want more than just a sexual relationship. Attempts to achieve intimacy on levels other than sexuality are usually unsuccessful leading to the end of the relationship.

Clergy do seem to be susceptible to this way of relating. Often we hear of yet another pastor who has left spouse and family to take up with a member of the congregation. Not all of these cases are built upon a foundation of sexuality, but it certainly seems to be an issue.

Given that the church is known to be a place of unconditional love and acceptance and that the clergy are expected to epitomize this absolute positive regard, the clergy easily become targets of projections. The parishioner may in fact not be seeing the pastor as the individual that s/he is, but as a representation of a parent in an attempt to undo psychological traumas from childhood. There may be more than meets the eye when in certain church circles the polite form of address for clergy is "Father."

Clergy who are unaware of the process of projection and transference will not be able to separate feelings directed at them as an individual and feelings directed at who they represent to a given parishioner. The parishioner with "unfinished business" from childhood may be overly hostile towards his/her parents and may direct that hostility towards the all-loving pastor. The pastor in turn, unaware of the transference, may accept the validity of the hostility and try to change him/herself so as to be more loving and caring towards this particular individual. However since the parishioner is not dealing with the *real* pastor, but with whom s/he *represents*, changes that the pastor makes will

be ineffective. It is only as the parishioner can be directed to deal with the true hurts from the past that healing can occur. In the mean time, the pastor becomes the receptacle of feelings that s/he ought not to own, for they are really from a different relationship entirely.

If pastors are to deal effectively with parishioners they need to have an understanding of the processes of projection, introjection and transference. Switzer points out, though, that even when understood, there are differences of opinion as to how the process should be handled:

> Certainly anyone who has done long-term counseling knows that there is a tendency on the part of the other person to project childhood-based emotions and fantasies onto their counselors. Therapists differ as to how this process within the relationship should be handled. Orthodox psychoanalysis has encouraged the development of the transference neurosis in order that through the resolution of this therapy-produced neurosis the difficulties which led the person to therapy might be resolved. Other therapists now believe that such a process is too costly in terms of time and energy,

> and that the most direct route to helping is to meet each appearance of transference with responses concerning the reality of who the therapist actually is as a human being and a professional, the reality of the nature of the present relationship, and the discussion of realistic expectations of the therapeutic process. This continual insistence on being received as an honest, uncertain, limited, but technically skilled person is important in reducing transference, an archenemy of intimacy. (Switzer, 1983, p. 31)

No matter how loving a pastor may be, there will always be at least one parishioner with which s/he will have trouble. Clergy are reticent to admit that they may intensely dislike certain parish members, and may tend to accept responsibility for the problem. In fact, however, the difficulties may be due to a transference issue. A valuable resource for parish clergy would be the opportunity to discuss with a trained professional, either individually or in group, some of the feelings that they have towards their parishioners. By openly discussing the relationship, they may see that feelings are being induced by the other, and this may lead to a more helpful

way of resolving the issue.

CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to focus on the *development* of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Given that I am interested in exploring how others *experience* the pastor-parish relationship, the preferred method would be to engage in qualitative research.

Moon Dillon & Sprenkle, maintain that qualitative research is a phenomenological perspective which is applicable when one is wanting to understand the experience of another:

> Researchers operating in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved. These researchers look for universal principles by examining a small number of cases intensively. Further, they are concerned with holistic understanding of phenomena. (Moon, et al 1990 p.357)

Sprenkle and Moon (1996) outline that within the field of qualitative research there are several methods: naturalistic research, social constructionist research, and critical theory research. The method most suited to this study was the naturalistic research using grounded theory methodology.

> Grounded theory allows for the generation of a theory from the data: Grounded theory is a methodology based on theory development from data that are collected and analyzed systematically and recursively. It is a way of thinking about or conceptualizing data as the essential element from which theory evolves. Its key feature is what is commonly known in qualitative research as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This inductive analytical process involves a constant interplay between data collection and data analysis. Essentially, as data are collected, they are analyzed for emergent theoretical categories, which are systematically looped back into the collection of data and analyzed further for their interrelationships and meaning (Strauss & Corbin,

1990). (Rafuls and Moon, 1996 page 65)

In order to investigate the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation the following research question was posed: *Do pastors and congregational members experience the pastor-parish relationship as developing over time?*

The next decision was to determine the substantive frame (Berg, 1995) for the study. Since the perspective of clergy and laity may be different, members of both groups would be included. Since different denominations may have different perspectives, a number of different denominations would be consulted. Male and female respondents may have different experiences, so both genders would be included. The other factor that was considered was activity level in the church for the laity. It is my assumption that "active" members will have a more informed sense of the development of the pastor-parish relationship than will "inactive" members. I therefore decided to limit the field to the responses of people who were "active" in the church. "Active", for our terminology, was defined as

"attending worship and/or involved in some form of parish ministry an average of at least once per month." The sample (as further outlined below) was chosen purposefully to maximize the variety in respondents.

The next area that I considered was the ethical issues related to the study. In terms of recruiting subjects, I wanted each subject to know that s/he had free choice about participating in the study. It was decided that each subject would be recruited by letter (as outlined under the recruitment section below). I would then follow up on the letter with a personal phone call. Having had the letter in advance, the potential subject would have had an opportunity to decide whether or not they wished to participate, and would (hopefully!) be more free to either accept or decline the invitation to participate. Each subject was asked to sign a "consent form" (see Appendix #4) and received a copy of the signed form. The consent form outlined the procedures of having the interview audio taped and it gave the participant the freedom to decline to answer any questions and to end the interview at any time. The issue of confidentiality will be outlined below.

The other ethical issue related to the sensitive nature of the material. Potentially the conversation could touch on painful areas if either cleric or parishioner has been (or is currently) in a painful pastor-parish relationship. Since I would not know this ahead of time, I had to decide what I would do if the issue arose. While I was unwilling to offer "therapy" over the issue, I was willing to extend the session (following the completion of the interview) to talk about any of the painful issues and to point out resources where they might receive further healing. Various resources around mediation could also be offered where appropriate. As it turned out, this never became an issue in any of the interviews. One cleric, however, did ask that his congregation not be used as part of the study. His requests were honoured. Another potential risk is that either the cleric or the parishioner become party to hurtful information that has been said by the other. Under the "confidentiality" section below I will outline the efforts to keep this from happening.

The proposed research design was submitted to the Ethics Committee for Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. The proposal was accepted

by the committee.

Recruitment: Given that I currently serve a congregation and that I am an active member of the local Ministerial Association and have established a relationship with many of the area clergy I have access to a field population which could be studied.

In order to gain as much information as possible the study included many different congregations. The congregations were selected from among local parishes in such a way as to maximize diversity in the following factors: denomination, gender of the pastor, length of stay of the pastor.

The pastors were recruited by means of the letter found in Appendix #1. Once recruited, the pastor was asked to generate a list of 10 possible congregational members who would be willing to participate in the study. The only criterion was that they be "active" members of the congregation.

From the list of 10 active members generated by the pastor I selected one name using as the only criterion the maintaining of a balance of both genders among the lay participants. By using this method the pastor would not ever know who among the list was selected, thus preserving confidentiality. Thus the congregational member could speak more openly because they would know that they would not be identified to the pastor. The congregational member was recruited by using the letter found in Appendix #2. The pastor was also be asked to write a letter of endorsement which was sent to the parishioner. This would help the parishioner to know that the study was legitimate. A sample of a suggested text of that letter will be found in Appendix #3.

After all subjects were recruited, the researcher conducted a semi-standardized interview (Berg, 1995) with each subject. Each interview was tape recorded. Each participant was asked to sign the consent form found in appendix #4. The aim of the interview was to explore the subjects' personal experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship. An "open ended" approach was used, giving the participants as much

freedom as possible.

After all of the data were collected the tapes were transcribed and analysed. Participants were coded. Thus all tapes and transcriptions were identified only as "Clergy (or Lay) Interview #1." There is only one list of the corresponding names with the codes and it was kept in the researcher's private files (along with the signed consent forms). Neither the secretary nor the committee had access to the coding list or the consent forms. All identifying remarks including personal names, names of churches and names of cities or towns were removed from the final transcription in an effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

In order to test the interviewing procedure I decided to first conduct a "pilot study" with three clergy. I chose these particular clergy because I knew them well, and knew that it would put me more at ease as I began the interviewing process. Two of the three had had additional training in marriage and family therapy and were accustomed to analysing interpersonal relationships. The questions used in the pilot study are listed

in appendix #5. I determined that questions such as: "Describe the process by which it was determined that you would serve in this congregation." and "What attracted you to this congregation?" were not really relevant to the study. Following the pilot study I revised the questions and the questions used for the rest of the participants will be found in Appendix #6.

Following the "pilot study" I contacted four clergy from my local geographic area. Each agreed to be a participant in the study. and each gave me a list of 10 parishioners. From the list I contacted one parishioner from each congregation and in each case they agreed to participate in the study. I then had a total of 11 interviews (three from the pilot study, and eight from the parishes.) Upon examining the data I decided that it would be good to continue to broaden the base and get more interviews from different sectors.

When I was attending a church conference I took my tape recorder with me and sought out people who would be willing to participate in the study. I was able to interview one cleric who came from a remote part of

the Canadian North and three lay people, all from Southern Ontario, but outside of my own geographic area. (Each of these participants was given a brief summary similar to the recruitment letter and was asked to sign the consent form.)

I also contacted one more cleric in my local area who agreed to participate. He, however, elected not to have his congregation involved. There were some internal issues which were being dealt with within the congregation and he felt it best not to include laity in the study. I agreed to his request and did not consult any lay members from his congregation.

In order to ensure that the data were as rich as possible I sought as much diversity as I could find. This is in accord with the principle of triangulation in qualitative research (Berg, 1995). To ensure theoretical triangulation I used different theoretical views in the review of the literature. To ensure data triangulation I looked for other strategies that might add to the quality of the data.

I decided upon the strategy of using a "focus group." Focus groups allow many individuals to come together and to interact around the questions posed by the researcher. The group dynamic stimulates the thought process and brings a richness that is not possible by interviewing one person alone. So I sought out an opportunity to interview a group of either clergy or laity to see if this would add a new dimension to the data.

The first focus group consisted of five members (three clergy and two lay). The second focus group consisted of a clergy team who both pastor the same congregation. The team consisted of a female "senior pastor" and a male "associate pastor." They were invited to reflect on their experiences both in being in positions as sole cleric (in previous situations) and in the current team situation.

A total of 23 people participated in the study: 14 clergy and 9 laity. Of the clergy, five were female and nine were male. Of the laity, five were female and four were male. One oversight in the design was that the age of the participant was not taken into account, so none of the participants

was asked to state their age. My best guess, however, would be that all of the participants were in a range between mid 40's and mid 60's.

Not all of the clergy were currently serving in parish settings. The three clergy in "focus group #1" were all in chaplaincy or counselling positions. (However they had had parish experience prior to their current positions.) Of those currently in parish ministry, the average number of years since their ordination was 14 years. The range extended from a low of 5 years since ordination to a high of 23 years. Of those currently in parish ministry, the average length of stay in their current congregation was 6 years. The range extended from a low of 2 years to a high of 13 years.

Most of the lay people had been in the same denomination the whole of their adult life. One had attended the church that was geographically closest, regardless of denomination. One had left the denomination of his youth and attended a para-church for a time and had then returned to the denomination of his youth. One had come to faith as an adult and had spent all of his Christian life in the same congregation. It was not possible to

come up with an average length of stay in the current congregation for the parishioners. The range, however, was from a low of 3 years in the current congregation to a high of "all my adult life" in the current congregation.

The denominations of the candidates included the following: Anglican, Baptist, Brethren in Christ, Christian Reformed, Free Methodist, Lutheran, Missionary Alliance, Roman Catholic, and United Church of Canada.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PART 1: THE METAPHORS

During the interviews I introduced one analogy about the pastor-parish relationship. I likened it to a book and asked participants to identify the number of "chapters" that they thought the pastor-parish relationship would have. The analogy was specifically chosen because it was inanimate and would not lead participants in any one direction. Later in the interview I asked participants to identify what analogy/metaphor *they* would choose to represent the relationship. I will now examine the metaphors chosen. Below is a summary of the metaphors used by both clergy and laity:

TABLE 2: USE OF METAPHORS

Metaphor	**Respondents**	**Number of Responses**
marriage	10 clergy, 1 lay	47
family	3 clergy, 2 lay	7
shepherd/sheep	2 clergy, 3 lay	6
equal partnership teamwork	1 clergy, 2 lay	3

teacher/pupil	1 clergy, 1 lay	2
coach/players	2 clergy	3
captain/crew	1 clergy	1
dance partners	1 clergy	2
"collaborating artists"	1 clergy	1
chamber orchestra	1 clergy	1
symphony/sonata	1 clergy	1
yeast	1 clergy	1
a wave moving along	1 clergy	1
a relief map(flat plains, foothills. Rockies)	1 clergy	1
a burr under the saddle	1 clergy	1
chair of board of directors	1 clergy	1
a General Practitioner	1 clergy	1
a body (with differing gifts)	1 lay	1
going into business together	1 lay	1
being on a pedestal (one up/one down)	1 lay	3
roller coaster	1 lay	1

By far the most numerically frequent metaphor was that of "marriage." This metaphor included a number of other subsets comprising the following terms: "honeymoon", "courtship", "divorce", "battered spouse", "spousal abuse", and "three to five year itch."

A few illustrations from the clergy responses will help to illustrate the variety of references to the relationship between cleric and congregation as being like a marriage:

> "I said to someone that I think second calls are like second marriages. After the honeymoon and after all the excitement you realize that they still snore and that they still leave their socks under the bed."

> "There's the period from the time of accepting [a call] to arriving [in a parish] called "preparing for the wedding." And I guess part of where I get these images from is this... I was not married when I was ordained and my first call I was not married and so I said to my

family, I treated both my ordination and the installation in the congregation as "weddings" and I said to my family: "This, folks, may be as good as it gets, so if you want to be a part of this..." [implying that the ordination and installation may be the only "wedding" that the family will be able to attend.]

"I'll try different things as a renewal for the congregation and a renewal for me. So I presume in a marriage it is similar to a couple deciding to go on something as intentional as Marriage Encounter or just talking out their relationship or re-evaluating their goals. But I also have a sense, and again from my own personal marriage, that maybe there are some situations where you are very intentional about doing that and there are others where you are not. My husband and I don't talk on a daily basis of an evaluation of our marriage, we celebrate our wedding anniversary. We tend to say "Life goes on" and so I see some of that parallelled in the congregation."

I was talking about the stages....the honeymoon and the trust, the confidentiality, and then I would say that there is a stage which is in marriage, of maturity, of having arrived, but more arrival points, more growing points to go,....but having come to that point where you've arrived. I find that now since being here twelve years, with persons in the congregation, and probably somewhat on the whole with the congregation, as you sort of brought that to my mind. That's a very fulfilling place to come to, and I know not all pastors experience that, and I sort of feel for them.

[acknowledging that the pastor-parish relationship is *not* like a marriage] "I remember my very first pastoral charge, one of the loving farmers there said: "[pastor's name], we're never going to be really close to you; we're never going to be very intimate with you because pastors come and go." And I think that's it! You get into a marriage and you know its a life-long commitment. You get into a pastoral relationship and you know its not. Its exactly what I tell couples you can't put in your marriage vows: "As long as the dove

shall fly and the flowers shall bloom and the love shall last." I think that knowledge makes it a little too easy to try to opt out and end the relationship when you do have a crisis. But both they and I know that I'm not going to be here until I retire. They will be. To me that's the biggest difference. You don't quite open up as much as you want to, as much as I would hope that you do in the marriage relationship."

The following chart lists some of the details of the use of the marriage metaphor:

TABLE 3: USE OF MARRIAGE METAPHOR

	Total Number of Reference to "marriage" metaphor	Total number of individual respondents who used "marriage" metaphor	Percentage of number of individuals who used the "marriage" metaphor	Range of number of times the "marriage" metaphor was used by one individual
Clergy	44	10 out of 14	71%	low - 1 high - 11
Laity	3	1 out of 9	11%	low - 3 high - 3

The most striking information that comes out of this data is the propensity for clergy to see the relationship between pastor and parish to be similar to a marriage. Some used "marriage" as the base model, then showed how the pastor-parish relationship both *is* and *is not* like a marriage. The respondents did acknowledge that the main place where the

analogy broke down was that one goes into a marriage expecting that it will be a life-long commitment, whereas when a cleric enters a parish, everyone knows that the relationship will be for a limited amount of time (although the length of time may be variable). Even knowing that the time is limited, there is still something about the relationship which, to clergy, has the intensity and depth which feels like a marriage. Equally of interest is the fact that for the laity, the marriage analogy was used by only one respondent.

Even though marriage is, perhaps, the most intimate of all human relationships, most of the analogies which were used by both clergy and laity *did* imply a level of deep commitment and intimacy between the pastor and the congregation. It was not always possible to infer what level of intimacy was intended by specific metaphors. The relationship between "captain and crew", for example, could be based on mutual caring and respect, or it could be one of hierarchical domination. Some respondents, however, chose to clarify their use of the analogy. I will outline some of the intended meaning behind a few of the metaphors.

The next numerically significant metaphor was that of "family." This included the images of "parent and child," [and the relationship developing from parent and young child to the relationship that a parent has with a grown adult child] "blended family" [with pastor and parish bringing their own "children" into a new relationship], "birthing children" [when people come to a new experience of faith], and "two adolescents [pastor and congregation] in search of identity." There were 3 clergy and 2 lay people who referred to the "family" metaphor for a combined total of 7 references.

The "dance partners" image, used by one cleric, involved more than the typical image of graceful ballroom dancers. This metaphor involved the deep sense of trust developed between partners. When, in the respondent's analogy, the cleric takes a "leap," they have to trust that their partner will be there to catch them. The respondent also implied that there is much grief when, as he put it, "you fall flat on the stage" when the congregation fails to be there for the pastor.

The "collaborating artists" metaphor was outlined in this way:

"One [metaphor] that comes to mind for me, and I'm still trying to work it through, is the idea of collaborating artists, the idea that there is something creative happening (hopefully!). But it requires two components, the parish and the pastor. And when one works alone it becomes not what it's meant to be. And I guess what's built into that [metaphor] is the potential for it to turn ugly, or not as beautiful as it should be, or could be."

The "chamber orchestra" image used by one cleric was chosen specifically because the chamber group is small and intimate. There is no external "conductor;" leadership is provided, primarily, by the first violin who is him/herself a member of the group and leading from within.

The "yeast" analogy was selected because, the respondent said, "[the yeast] actually becomes a part of this thing [that is] born."

The "symphony/sonata" metaphor was selected because musically, there is a theme. This theme will reoccur many times throughout the sonata. It may have different variations, but it will be essentially the same theme over and over.

It can be seen, then, that by far the majority of the metaphors involve an intimate relationship. Only a few involve non-intimate metaphors such as symphony/sonata, a wave, a relief map, a roller coaster.

The first item of interest is that clergy had a range and depth of analogies that was (numerically) superior to the laity. When asked for a metaphor, most clergy were readily able to find at least one, if not several. Laity, on the other hand, struggled with finding an acceptable image of what the relationship is like. Some, instead, chose to cite roles of the pastor: "He is a counsellor, he's a mediator, he's a helper..." Some laity were completely unable to come up with any metaphor/analogy for the relationship.

Clergy metaphors, for the most part, implied a relationship of intimacy, trust and mutuality. Laity metaphors implied less intimacy than did the clergy. While some laity saw the relationship as an "equal partnership," others saw more of a hierarchical nature to the relationship. When laity used the "family" metaphor it was more along the lines of a "parent-child." They also used the shepherd/sheep metaphor (which *may* have a hierarchical component) more than clergy, and one lay person spoke of clergy being on a pedestal, with clergy "up there" and us "down here."

I will now discuss the meaning behind the metaphors chosen by both clergy and laity. It would appear that clergy are more "invested" in the relationship than are the laity. For clergy, it would appear, the relationship with the congregation is their most significant relationship apart from the clerics' own spouse/family. Each day the clergy are entering into an intense relationship with *a few* parishioners as they journey with the parishioner through the highs and lows of human existence. The following day, the face of the parishioner may change, but the intensity, for the cleric, remains the same. For each lay person, however, the intensity of the

relationship with the pastor may vary over time. One lay person acknowledged that personal crisis can dramatically alter the depth of the relationship with the pastor. Thus for individuals within the congregation there may be seasons (due to personal crisis, increased involvement in the life and ministry of the congregation etc.) when they enter into a more intense/intimate relationship with the pastor, and that season may end and the intensity wane. The lay person may then intensify relationships apart from the pastor. For the pastor, however, the focus just shifts to another parishioner, and another intense relationship.

The second thing that I believe the data illustrate is the paradigm shift around leadership styles within the church. For centuries the church was very hierarchical in structure. Clergy were among the most highly educated, and laity often saw themselves in an inferior position. Over time that situation has changed, resulting in the necessity of modifying leadership styles within the church. In my view, clergy are often much more willing to come down off the "pedestal" than laity are willing to permit. Many clergy, therefore, see the relationship as being a mutual,

intimate, partnership whereas laity may not yet be comfortable with this level of closeness. This idea will be amplified further below in the section on the development of the relationship.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PART 2: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

Each subject was asked to talk about whether or not the relationship between the pastor and the congregation changed or developed over time. All 23 of the candidates acknowledged that there was a definite change over time. 11 of the 14 clergy and 2 of the 9 laity outlined definite "stages" or "phases" that they perceived the relationship went through. For example, one cleric summarized the stages as follows:

> Interviewer: If we were to say that the relationship between the congregation and the pastor is like a book. How many chapters would you say are in this book?
>
> Interviewee: It depends on how you divide them up. If you said they're broad chapters, the titles are broad, then you've got the... you'd start with "the introduction" so you see chapter 1 which is "the arrival," settling in period. I think it depends on how quickly

the pastor gets into it. So for me there is a year or so for chapter 1. Then when the theology, the style of the pastor, begins to pinch, the shoe begins to pinch, there is the conflict period. We'll say that that is chapter 2. Chapter 3 could be when those differences are worked out. Maybe chapters 2 & 3 are pretty short. Then chapter 4 is the working on from there. And then, depending on the individual, chapter 5 could be when there is no real change. That they then wander off into the sunset. Get deeper into their rut. Then it depends on if the church then moves into "renewal" and then there may be several chapters after that. But this is for the normal conservative parish.

A lay person outlined the following stages:

Interviewee: [referring to the analogy of chapters in a book] Probably four maybe. The first one is the introduction, sort of the warming up, getting to know one another. Everyone is on their best behaviour and doesn't want to maybe be honest and say too much.

Then the next one is more the socializing. Once you get to know one another, sort of get on committees and you have more of a personal interest in the ministry in a congregation and vice versa, and I think it starts to grow, and I think the third one is then when you get more confidence, then there is more sharing some of those things we keep back.....the things we protect. We don't want people to get to really know us and to know our inner secrets, and I think it's at that stage, that's when it comes and then I've seen it go further when it becomes too friendly, too personal and then you loose something I think, and then from there it's just down hill. And it's too bad when it reaches that stage because then you find there becomes a lot of unrest, distrust and it's very difficult for a minister then.

Others talked not so much about "stages" as they did the "process" that the relationship must go through. Still others spoke of different "levels" in the relationship which changed over time. Whereas they were not able to delineate specific "stages," they were able to talk about a "deepening" of the relationship over time.

The transcript of each interview was analysed, looking for any reference to the development of the relationship. Each subject saw the developmental process differently, yet there were common themes which recurred among the subjects. By examining the sequential steps which each subject identified, a composite picture emerged which consisted mainly of a marriage metaphor but included other images as well. The following is a synthesis of the experience of the subjects on the development of the relationship.

Stage 1: The Courtship

The first stage in the relationship is the "courtship." Although the process may vary among the denominations, there is still a selection process whereby the pastor and the congregation determine whether or not there is a "match." In all of the subjects interviewed there was an element of choice, even those under Episcopal systems where the bishop has the right to appoint.

A common element described in this stage involved choosing how much of the self to reveal to the other. This courtship phase was described as "dancing a two-step around each other" and "putting on the best face for company" as both the cleric and the congregation decided just how open and honest they wanted to be. Each wants to look their best, so may hide any "blemishes" that they may have.

One cleric, describing the attitude of the congregation, said of them: "We [the congregation] can't let him [the cleric] see who we are because he'll tell the bishop and we'll be closed!" Other clergy spoke of the congregational "secrets" that weren't revealed until after the cleric had already been in the parish for a time. One spoke of painful parts of the parish history which were concealed during the courtship stage:

> "I think that there were things that I should have known about this church... there was a minister that committed suicide in the manse, that has an impact. This church had gotten rid of a minister, that is important to know. This particular church had a minister that they

saw through Bright's disease, it was a very long and difficult process. [The other congregation] had a minister who went through two still births. Those are all really important things that I think I should have known coming in to this relationship, but for some reason or another we have a system where you just "start new."

Subjects also acknowledged that the expectations of both the cleric or the congregation are not always clearly outlined in the interview process. Some of the expectations may be known, but not revealed; in other cases the expectations may be out of conscious awareness and not be expressed. One lay person, in talking about expectations said: "Not *purposefully* hidden, but maybe just not properly explained. Maybe not even thought out. They just haven't given thought. In other words I think some churches blindly go and say: "We're going to get a new pastor, and he's going to do great things for us."

The transition out of stage #1 is brought about by the "Induction" service or liturgical service of welcoming the pastor into the congregation.

This inaugurates stage #2.

Stage 2: The "honeymoon"

The phrase "honeymoon" was *the* most common term of reference. Some maintained that they did not experience a "honeymoon" yet it certainly was the benchmark against which they measured their experience.

The honeymoon phase seems to be characterized by a sense of idealism during which both pastor and congregation choose to see only the good points in each other. Given that, in most cases, both the pastor and the congregation have had a choice in forming this new relationship, there is a stage when both focus only on the *good* in the other. One cleric described that initial time: "things that later became annoying were at first charming. So me running over to the church in my jeans was ok at first, and later maybe it wasn't. But they were on their best behaviour, when I first got there and once the behaviour fell, they were all putting on this front." Another said: "At first it wouldn't have mattered. I could've skate

boarded up the aisle in my boxer shorts and they would've found a reason for why that was ok."

The honeymoon phase was also characterized by a sense of excitement and anticipation. Even though the style of the cleric may be very different from their predecessor, it is seen as being wonderful. It was described as: "A new broom sweeps clean." A cleric described this time: "But it was very exciting. Everyone was wanting to try new things; everyone was full of hope. Some of which came to fruition, so that made it even more exciting...There was always something for us to discover about one another. It was quite supportive too." A lay person: "You look at what they have to offer and they come in and they are fresh and new and its sort of an exciting time I think. You learn quite a bit about what they are about: you learn quite a bit about what <u>each</u> <u>other</u> is about. I think it works on both sides. So you learn quite a bit about what they're about and each gets pretty strong support from the other. I think that, normally speaking, there should be a bond made in that period of time that will carry you through some of the rougher times, the more difficult times."

Although the subjects may describe it differently, each sees this introductory phase as being critical to the development of the relationship and that several processes are happening during this time. Firstly, this is a time of keenly observing the other. A clergy subject noted that he spent the first year observing and absorbing how the parish ran, where the power structures were, who made the decisions, how the parish celebrated the major liturgical festivals etc.

A cleric described the initial stage as a time when the congregation was testing, to see if the cleric was trustworthy: "I don't want to say it was a honeymoon phase because it wasn't. There was just too much pain here for there to be a honeymoon. It was sort of like the battered spouse who goes to the therapist and doesn't really trust the therapist until the therapist proves herself to be trustworthy."

A lay subject speaks of a time of testing the new pastor to see if s/he can "earn" the parishioner's respect. She noted that in times past, the clergy were given respect just because of their office. Now, however, they

had to demonstrate that they were worthy of respect. This would be done by seeing how the clergy would respond in different situations, which would determine if the parishioner would open up the "real" issues.

A cleric spoke about a time of mutual "testing." The congregation was testing the cleric to see how the cleric would relate to seniors and youth, whether the cleric would do all of the required home visiting, and whether the cleric would be able to attract new people. The cleric, on the other hand was also testing the congregation to see if *they* were committed to the same works of ministry.

One of the experiences common to the clergy was the sense of the congregation's testing of their *commitment* to the congregation. This was most often gaged by whether or not the congregation perceived that the cleric was going to stay in the congregation or were they merely using this congregation as a stop off point until they could move on to something better.

The transition out of the honeymoon stage seems to be signalled by pastor or congregation beginning to show more of their personal characteristics. A Clergy subject on the ending of the honeymoon:

> "I would say that when you sense that people begin to be honest, and sort of come out of any shell that might be there, they level with you, you can tell that they speak their mind, their feelings, they're not trying to make it easy."

One clergy subject outlined that when he started to express his own opinions it led on to conflict. He spoke against the curriculum that was in use in the Sunday School and all of the Sunday School teachers immediately quit! Others said that they knew that the honeymoon had ended when all of the criticisms began.

Others saw the transition out of the honeymoon as having to do with unmet expectations. People said that he knew the honeymoon was over when they began to realize that the other wasn't as perfect as they thought,

that some of the hopes that they had for the relationship had not been realized. Some likened it to their own marriage when they saw their partner with new eyes and they asked themselves: "What have I gotten myself into?"

Stage 3: The Reality

Once the honeymoon is over, the "rose coloured glasses" come off and reality sets in. This phase was described as: "the reality phase", "getting down to business", "settling in", "the day-to-day" and "The party's over, lets get down to work." This is the phase that is likely the longest in the relationship. It is the time when people begin to face the real issues within the relationship and deal with them. It is a time when the idealism comes to an end, and a disillusionment or resentment may begin.

Some of what happens in this "reality phase" seems to be taking each other for granted. The "special treatment" that was proffered during

the honeymoon is no longer present. Some clerics also experienced an erosion of their sense of power or authority as the congregation made decisions without consulting the pastor. In some cases there was a retaliatory mentality which said: "If you're going to ignore me, I'll ignore you too!"

For some, being taken for granted was seen as a *good* sign. It indicated that the congregation knew that the pastor was committed to the congregation and that the congregation no longer had to mollify the pastor. Thus when the gloves came off it was seen as a way of acknowledging the security of the relationship.

One of the factors that seems important to the further development of the relationship is the sharing of common goals between the pastor and the congregation. One used the metaphor of the "captain of a ship," maintaining that it only works if we are all heading for the same destination. When both get this sense, there is a deepening of the commitment to the relationship. It is here that the goal setting process

becomes critical. There seemed to be much confusion on the part of both the clergy and the laity as to who was responsible for setting the goals. Clergy often spoke of their reluctance to "set the agenda" for the congregation, and laity spoke of resentment against clergy who imposed goals upon them. When goals are *not* shared, the limiting factor in the development of the relationship seems to be the ability to accommodate to the needs of the other.

The personal involvement of the cleric in the lives of the parishioners is important in the development of the relationship. People spoke not only about the involvement of the pastor in the "religious" events, such as the baptisms, funerals, etc. but also the in the social, and recreational events as well. One cleric spoke of building relationships through swinging a hammer as they literally built the church together. Others spoke of the pastor's involvement on the church baseball team etc. The level of involvement of the pastor can, however, be a double-edged sword. A cleric was told: "Pastor so-and-so didn't get as involved as you do." Sometimes that is seen as a positive thing; the congregation is happy

that the pastor is involved. Sometimes it seemed like the pastor was getting *too* involved and the congregation resented the intrusion.

There is debate, however, on the boundaries of the involvement of the clergy in the lives of the parishioners. Should they interact socially with parishioners? Should they become friends with parishioners? There are opinions on both sides. On the one hand, both clergy and laity expressed the idea that the increased involvement (as expressed above) deepens the relationship. However, there was also concern expressed about developing close friendships with parishioners. One of the potential dangers is that there will be an "in-group" - "out-group" phenomenon in which some see themselves as being either close to or excluded from the pastor's inner circle. This could lead to dissension within the congregation. Also a lay person also spoke of the concept that "familiarity breeds contempt", suggesting that it was not good for the cleric to form close bonds. As a result some of the clergy said that they have made conscious decisions *not* to form close personal friendships. However another cleric spoke of the personal pain and isolation which develops from knowing that

everyone in the parish *except* the cleric and spouse were invited to the Christmas parties and other lighthearted social gatherings.

There is also a tension between wanting to see the pastor as "role" and wanting to see the pastor as "real person;" wanting him/her to be a model of Christian perfection and allowing them to be human and make mistakes. A lay subject spoke of the dichotomy that clergy experience: On the one hand s/he is supposed to be the authority figure and people put her/him on this pedestal and they are supposed to act that way. They are supposed to be proper and spiritual and holy and all of these wonderful Christian virtues. They are supposed to do all of the things and be all of the things that the laity think they don't have to be because they are not at that level. On the other hand clergy are also supposed to be people that can relate to parishioners and understand them, be their confident when they need one, be part of the parish. They are supposed to exist in these two worlds: be part of the parish but not really part of it, be on the pedestal but be approachable and real.

For the relationship to develop, there is a need for the laity to see the clergy as being "just like us," sharing the same problems and difficulties as the lay people do. A lay person spoke about a conversation with her therapist in which the therapist told her of the number of nuns who came to him for counselling. The subject said it was surprising, and informative for her to know that nuns and clergy would have the same problems as everyone else. A different lay person said: "And I think people are starting to realize that they're human too, and that they have needs too and they are not infallible either. I think that that's an important part of a congregation's relationship with the minister." Another lay person spoke about how the relationship with the pastor changed when the pastor was able to share his own pain and his own vulnerability and that: "he can't expect his parish to open up their hearts and share their pain unless he can do the same. Basically he has to do that to give them permission."

During these times of closeness with the pastor, a certain level of trust is developed. The laity see the cleric as a person of integrity. As the laity come to trust the pastor more, they tend to reveal more of themselves.

There is less pretense and more honesty from people as to what's *really* going on in their lives and people are not reluctant to bring their issues. As this happens trust is slowly gained.

The trust that the pastor has in the parishioner is often demonstrated through the delegation of responsibilities. If the parishioner fulfils the responsibilities, more tasks are given. Eventually a trust relationship is developed so that the parishioner will initiate tasks without being asked.

Stage 4: The Savouring

Some described a fourth stage, where there was a new calm in the relationship. One cleric described it as moving from "labouring to savouring." The conflicts had, for the most part, ended and there was sufficient trust each to the other that people could focus on doing the "real ministry" without having to second-guess each other. The focus of ministry shifts from the "maintenance" items such as property and finances to the deeper issues of spiritual growth and development.

It was interesting to note, however, that one cleric described this new phase as being "boring" because there was no spark or fire in the relationship. Another noted that once this stage is reached, it becomes very difficult to confront the congregation. After spending five to seven years developing the relationship, they reach a point where everything is very comfortable and the people become more intimately connected. Therefore the ability to confront each other and raise issues and challenge each other becomes more difficult. As one cleric said, she knows that at some point she must open a discussion within the congregation about the issue of homosexuality, but is very hesitant to revisit what she called "conflict city."

Stage 5: The Ending

The final stage is initiated when, as one put it, there are "inklings of closure:" that either the pastor or the congregation is ready for a change. There were differing perceptions around the ending of the relationship. For some, the ending was a smooth transition with little or no observable change in the relationship. For others it was more traumatic. One cleric

put it this way: "It was almost like the woman who says to her husband, "I'm leaving" and then the husband does all kinds of things to change and she says, "I don't care. I'm still leaving" and then he turns around and says, "Well you were never any good in bed anyway."

A lay subject describes the final phase in the relationship and what brings on what he calls the "good bye kiss phase." He maintained that it is primarily the result of confrontations or crises that are not properly managed. If both parties were able to resolve the situations day-to-day then the ending of the relationship might be forestalled.

A pastor spoke of the guilt engendered by having an interview with a selection committee while still employed by a congregation. She likened it to being in an adulterous relationship without her partner's knowledge. When meeting with members of a selection committee from a different congregation it felt to her like getting "picked up" in a bar. The ensuing guilt made her question the church's sanctioned methods of selecting clergy.

Even the leaving can take place in stages. Clerics spoke about the exiting process: helping the congregation to come to terms with the reality of the departure; making lists of useful information for their successor(s) (yet fully acknowledging that the successor may have a different way of doing things and may not use the lists); and trying to complete all the unfinished projects. One cleric spoke of an unfinished task that she needed to take with her to her next congregation. She likened it to a divorced person who opens the closet door and finds something that belonged to their former spouse, and the relief that was engendered when she was able to finish the task and send it back to her former "spouse."

Summary

The chapter summarizes the results of the interview responses of both clergy and laity in seeing the relationship as developing over time. The following chart summarizes people's experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship, that it goes through certain "stages," that there are common characteristics of each stage, and that there is a marker

event that ushers in the transition to the next stage.

TABLE 4: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

OF THE PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONSHIP

STAGE NUMBER	STAGE NAME	CHARACTERISTICS	TRANSITION TO NEXT STAGE
Stage #1	The Courtship	establishing a relationship concealing one's blemishes concealing one's expectations	service of welcoming
Stage #2	The Honeymoon	bonding focus on similarities focus on strengths of the other sense of excitement/anticipation observing the other testing the other beginning to express self	first major conflict/disillusionment
Stage #3	The Reality	end of idealism focus on unmet expectations taking each other for granted establishing common goals personal involvement of pastor pastor from "role" to "person" development of trust	sufficient trust developed

Stage #4	The Savouring	sufficient trust so that each can work with a degree of autonomy, but still be connected a time of peace and stability increased focus on "tasks of ministry" and less focus on the maintenance of the relationship less ability to confront each other	inklings of closure
Stage #5	The Ending	process of disengaging	

Even though people outlined their experience of the *existence* of each stage, not every pastor-parish relationship will develop through all of the stages. Some people said that they never had a "honeymoon," but jumped right into "reality." Some maintained that not everyone got to the "savouring" stage, but that in some cases the relationship ended without the "savouring" having been developed.

One maintained that the progress (or lack thereof) through the stages was largely governed by the way that relationship issues were handled. Thus when conflicts were handled appropriately, the relationship was able

to develop further. When issues were *not* handled appropriately, the relationship often ended prematurely. In order to validate this finding, it will be necessary to explore the development of other intimate relationships, to see what stages might be involved, and to see what helps or hinders in the development of the relationship.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PART 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP

I would now like to compare the developmental process in the pastor-parish relationship with the development which takes place in other intimate relationships. I propose object relations developmental theory as a useful paradigm for examining the pastor-parish relationship.

Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975) explored the development of the relationship between a mother and her child. Through careful observation they performed a longitudinal study with several mothers and their children. They focussed on how the relationship changed over time as the child went through the process of individuation from the mother and emerged with his/her own characteristics. They concluded that after the relationship gets beyond the initial stage of symbiosis it goes through a series of four stages: differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, and "on the way to libidinal object constancy."

The "symbiotic" stage is characterized by the lack of differentiation between the mother and the child.

> The term *symbiosis* in this context is a metaphor. Unlike the biological concept of symbiosis, it does not describe what actually happens in a mutually beneficial relationship between two *separate* individuals of different species. It describes that state of undifferentiation, of fusion with mother, in which the "I" is not yet differentiated from the "not-I" and in which inside and outside are only gradually coming to be sensed as different. (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975 p. 44)

As the child grows and develops, the process of separation from the mother begins. This is described as the "hatching" process. The infant's attention, which during the first months of symbiosis was in large part *inwardly* directed, gradually expands and becomes more outwardly directed during the child's increasing periods of wakefulness.

At the end of the first year and in the early months of the second year the child begins to differentiate his/her own body from that of the mother's. This process has two different components. One is the track of individuation, the evolution of intrapsychic autonomy, perception, memory, cognition, reality testing; the other is the intrapsychic developmental track of separation that runs along differentiation, distancing, boundary formation, and disengagement from mother. The end result will be an internal self-representations, as distinct from internal object representations (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975).

The stage of differentiation is characterized by the beginning of goal directed behaviour. In *practicing*, the "love affair with the world" begins as the child becomes more curious and adventuresome. In *rapprochement* the child begins to feel the anxiety of the separation and desires to reconnect with the mother, trying to undo the separateness. No matter how hard the child tries, though, s/he can no longer return to the fusion with the mother.

Thus Mahler, Pine, and Bergman have attempted to show that the relationship between parent and child develops over time as the separation-individuation process unfolds.

Bader and Pearson (1988) took the studies of Mahler, Pine, and Bergman and applied the findings, not to the parent-child relationship, but to couples in a marital relationship. They discovered that there are many parallels between what Mahler found with individuals and what they found with couples. Bader and Pearson came to the following conclusions:

1. Couples relationships go through a progression of normal developmental stages. These stages parallel the stages of early childhood development described by Margaret Mahler.
2. Early childhood development therefore significantly affects couples relationships.
3. Each couples stage has specific tasks to be mastered.
4. Each stage is more complex than the preceding one and requires new skills based on the integration and transformation of what

existed previously into a new form. When individuals are unable to progress through these stages in order, difficulties will emerge in their relationship.

5. A primary source of conflict and division in a relationship occurs when one or both individuals are not able to master the developmental tasks necessary to facilitate movement to the next stage.

6. The stages of couples development can be diagnosed.

7. Therapeutic interventions can be tailored to the specific developmental stage. (Bader and Pearson, 1988, p. 3)

They found that couples can progress through the same five stages which resemble those of early childhood development: Symbiosis, differentiation, practicing, rapprochement and mutual interdependence. Their definition of terms, however, is slightly different from that of Mahler's.

The symbiotic stage is initially characterized by being "madly in love." The task that must be accomplished is that of attachment. To this end similarities are magnified and differences are overlooked. Neither wants to upset this wonderful state by appearing needy. If each partner receives sufficient nurturing and caring from their partner during this time, and there is mutual agreement to form a couple relationship, there will be a solid foundation on which to build the relationship. This will allow both partners to move beyond symbiosis into differentiation.

What Bader and Pearson discovered is that when this foundation is not successfully established, both partners may remain in the symbiotic stage. Usually the relationship will evolve into one of two different forms of dysfunctional symbiotic union. One type - the *enmeshed* - is characterized by merger, avoidance of conflict, and the minimization of differences. The other type - the *hostile-dependent* - is dominated by anger and conflict. Too terrified to end the relationship and not mature enough to end the battles, the couple remain locked in endless rounds of mutually inflicted pain (Bader and Pearson, 1988).

During *differentiation*, the partner is seen with more objectivity. The differences between the individuals become more noticeable. Each may want to have more privacy, but feel guilty about wanting time alone. The "magical" state of symbiosis erodes. For some, the process of differentiation provides the couple with a challenge to develop new ways of relating; for others the end of the fantasy creates disillusionment.

During the *practicing* stage more time and attention is directed outside of the relationship as partners re-discover themselves as individuals. Autonomy and individuation are primary; at this point the partners are rediscovering themselves as individuals. Developing self becomes more important than developing the relationship. Here, issues of self-esteem, individual power, and worthwhileness become central. Conflicts intensify and a healthy process for resolving conflicting aims is necessary for the couple to maintain an emotional connection while developing themselves in the world.

Having become more assured of their own individuality, partners become more able to express their vulnerability, seeking comfort and support from their partner. This stage, whereby they alternate between intimacy and independence is known as *rapprochement*. Having already established a clear sense of self, there is less fear of being engulfed in the earlier stage of symbiosis.

Mutual interdependence is the final stage of the relationship. Having been encouraged to grow through external contacts in the world and strengthened by the knowledge that they are loved by each other, the couple enters a secure and peaceful state. Here, two well-integrated individuals have found satisfaction in their own lives, have developed a bond that is deep and mutually satisfying, and have built a relationship based on a foundation of growth rather than primarily on one of need.

The stages and developmental tasks could be summarized in the following chart:

TABLE 5: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

OF A MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

STAGE NUMBER	STAGE NAME	DEVELOPMENTAL TASK	DEVELOPMENTAL STALEMATE
Stage #1	Symbiosis	Bonding falling in love emphasis on similarities nurturing establishment of "coupleness"	consuming need to merge inseparable dependency loss of trust loss of individuality poorly developed sense of self fear of abandonment interactions focussed on masking differences
Stage #2	Differentiating	learning to express self clearly and openly internally defining sense of self independent thoughts, feelings and wants reestablishment of boundaries developing capacity to tolerate differences learning to risk expressing one's differences defining clear areas of responsibility and authority	feelings of guilt anger at denial of differences increased efforts to define identity use of projection and manipulation to push partner toward change successful fight style not yet developed

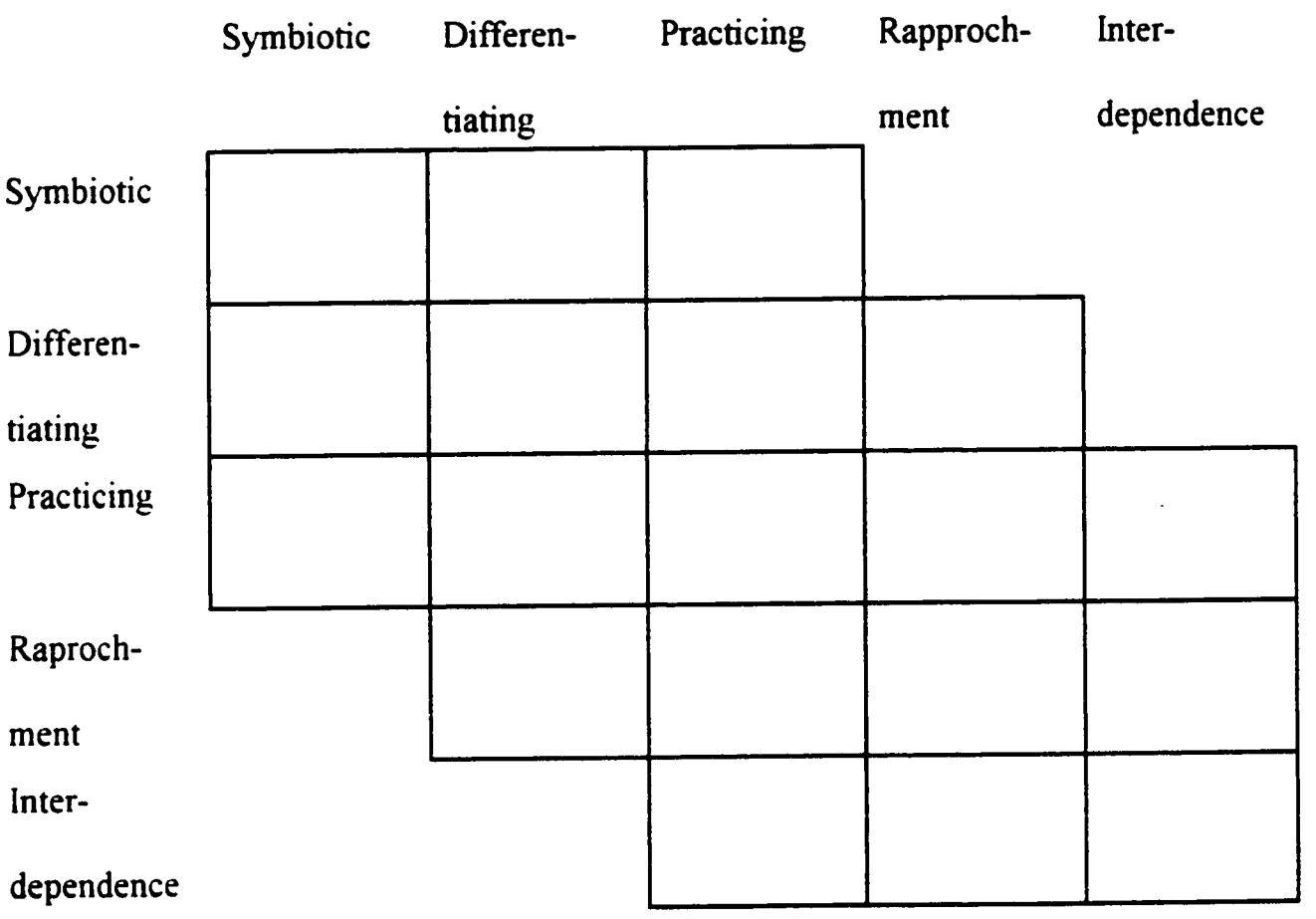
Stage #3	Practicing	attention directed to external world, independent activities and relationships rediscovery of self as individual consolidation of self esteem and individual power development of healthy fight style the individual learns to express him/herself creatively in the world	stance of stubbornness and self-centredness loss of empathy for partner's needs lack of emotional connection to partner - withdrawal energy overinvested in self-development and expression relationship viewed as secondary fear that greater intimacy will lead to loss of self staunch defence of boundaries equating *intimacy* with *sacrifice*
Stage #4	Rapprochement	return shift toward relationship for intimacy and emotional sustenance re-emergence of vulnerability greater ease in negotiating capacity to give to partner even when inconvenient to do so balance between "I" and "us" becomes more firmly established	alternates between periods of intimacy and efforts to reestablish independence conflict over supporting partner's growth and independence versus seeking to gratify personal needs for greater intimacy

(adapted from Bader and Pearson, 1988 pp. 244 - 250)

What Bader and Pearson in fact discovered is that not every relationship will progress through all stages. Further, each partner in the couple may progress through the stages at different rates. One partner may be trying to maintain the symbiotic stage, while the other partner may have gone on to either differentiating or practicing. Thus it is necessary to try to diagnose which stage each partner is in at a given time. It is significant to note that in their research they never found couples to be more than two

stages apart. Thus nineteen total possible combinations emerge. These relationship states could be represented in the following chart:

TABLE #6: COUPLE INDIVIDUATION MATRIX



A "textbook case" of a couple relationship might develop in the following way: During the "honeymoon" stage, each would see the other as being perfect; differences would be denied. The couple would then

experience their first major disillusionment, after which the differences would be highlighted more than the similarities. Recognizing that their partner is not the "perfect" mate and is unable to meet all of their emotional needs, they begin to look for additional emotional support outside of the marital relationship. Discovering the limits of independence for emotional satisfaction, attention returns to further developing and balancing the relationship. Finally a stage is achieved in which a deep and satisfying bond is achieved.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PART 4: INTEGRATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BADER & PEARSON MODEL

This section proposes that there is a similarity between the "stages" in the development of the pastor-parish relationship as experienced by the clergy and lay subjects and the development of the marital relationship as outlined by Bader and Pearson. An attempt will now be made to integrate these two developmental models.

The process of selecting a new pastor for a congregation is stressful for both the congregation and for the prospective clergy candidates who are being considered for the position. Likely the congregation has experienced an interim period (following the exit of the previous pastor) of at least several months during the selection process. This interim is usually characterized by high anxiety levels within the congregation: anxiety over the lack of a clear pastoral leader and the resultant power struggles between

individuals and/or groups who seek to fill the leadership vacuum; anxiety over how long it will be before a new leader is selected; anxiety over whether or not the new pastor will be able to fulfil all of the required tasks to the satisfaction of the congregation.

The prospective pastor also goes through periods of anxiety in preparing to come to the new congregation: anxiety about whether or not this is the "right time" to consider a move; anxiety about the discernment of the hand of God in the decision making process; anxiety about leaving behind the old congregation with all of its "unfinished business;" performance anxiety about being able to minister to a new congregation in a new setting with new needs.

Depending upon the situation, the congregation may be in a more desperate situation than the cleric. The cleric may be already settled in a congregation, so the new parish needs to convince the cleric of the benefits in uprooting and taking on the leadership in the new congregation. In order to make the new situation as attractive as possible, the selection committee

may be tempted to minimize any difficulties in the parish which might make them less marketable. The cleric too may, depending upon how badly s/he wants to leave their current situation, extol her/his areas of competence while diminishing his/her deficits.

Thus both pastor and parish are seeking to reduce their own anxiety through making themselves look as attractive as possible, and at the same time are accepting at "face value" the portrayal of the other. This would tend to account for the "putting on the best face for company" and the withholding of important information that was experienced by both clergy and laity in the "courtship" stage.

Once the decision has been made to appoint the new pastor, whether or not the pastor has even arrived, the relationship begins the symbiotic-symbiotic phase. During this time of being "madly in love" with each other, each is delighted with the decision and each makes a conscientious effort to give to the other. (One cleric commented on the extent to which the parish went out of its way to prepare the Manse/Rectory for the new

family; renovations which were badly needed during the tenure of the former pastor were now finally being accomplished to impress the new cleric.) During this start-up phase, the new cleric often expends enormous amounts of energy in visiting the homes of as many key families from the congregation as possible.

This symbiotic phase is characterized by extolling each other's virtues and focussing on the similarities. Differences are seemingly not noticed. The amount of nurturance is extraordinarily high, as each gives unconditionally. There are few requests for the other to change, but rather there is a high degree of tolerance and accommodation to the style of the other. Neither wants to risk disrupting this idyllic state of affairs by placing demands upon the other.

The purpose of this symbiotic phase (which can encompass both the "courtship" and "honeymoon" phase) is to form a lasting bond between pastor and parish. Looking at the symbiotic state from the perspective of the cleric it would be possible to say that the pastor can become fused with

the congregation. There may be no distinct sense of autonomy, no sense of "I," rather everything is seen in terms of "us." The pastor's whole life can come to revolve around the parish. Social and cultural needs are all met within the confines of the congregation. The identity of the pastor is so melded to the congregation that perceived separations can become threatening. The thought of spending time away from the parish can produce anxiety. Holidays become a source of frustration as the pastor can't wait to get home and feel connected once again to the parish. Every effort is made to keep peace with the congregation because the thought of separation is terrifying.

From the parish's point of view, this symbiotic merger can be equally important. In most denominational churches, the existence of the congregation is based upon having a cleric who will pastor the congregation. Should it be that a willing pastor is not found, the life of the congregation could be in jeopardy. As a result, when a "match" is made, there is a high degree of importance attached to making this relationship work. The identity of the congregation will become fused with the identity

of the pastor. So long as the congregation can keep bonded with the pastor, the congregation has life.

It is possible that the pastor-parish relationship may never develop beyond the symbiotic-symbiotic stage. If that is the case, it will tend to move either towards what the Bader & Pearson model calls the "enmeshed" or the "hostile dependent" states. In both cases, the pastor and parish are fused in an unhealthy relationship. In the enmeshed state, each is dependent upon the other. Fearing that the other will abandon them, the differences between pastor and parish are avoided. In the hostile dependent state, each is still dependent upon the other, but the closeness is maintained through conflict. Neither could stand the anxiety of ending the relationship, but neither is being nurtured by the other. Pastor and parish remain locked to each other in a closeness which is characterized by bitter animosity.

Thankfully not all pastors and parishes remain entangled in symbiotic-symbiotic relationships. However for the relationship to develop beyond this state there must be a capacity to acknowledge difference and

individuality. The cleric and congregation must be able to re-establish their own boundaries. This is brought about as the relationship begins the process of differentiating.

This is the time when both begin to be more realistic about their own needs, and more realistic about what the other can or cannot give in the relationship. There is more of a sense of objectivity. The partner comes "down off the pedestal." The hidden expectations are expressed, and the beginnings of disillusionment about the expectations which have not been met. This is the time when the individual characteristics become more pronounced, as in the case of the cleric who maintained that he could no longer allow the Sunday School to use a certain curriculum because it offended his theological stance. It is also when the congregation begins to tell the cleric "This is the way we do things here" and expect him/her to accede to their demands.

This beginning of the process of differentiation is usually the source of much pain and it moves the relationship out of the "honeymoon" stage

and into the "reality" stage. Both pastor and parish begin to wonder: "What have I gotten myself into?" As Bader and Pearson note, partners may enter into a new phase at different times. The one who is still in the symbiotic stage will see his/her differentiating partner as being cold or distant or uncaring and may begin to become anxious about the separation. Whereas the differentiating one may see their partner as being selfish, clingy, stifling. Although it is more healthy for the pastor and the parish to be able to acknowledge their own needs and opinions and to develop a concept of self apart from the other, the symbiotic partner will see this as being "selfish" and will feel threatened and betrayed by the other. This usually results in the differentiating one feeling guilty for seeking time away from the symbiotic one. The relationship becomes characterized by guilt, anger and disillusionment.

As the relationship enters the practicing stage, the pastor and/or members of the congregation may find that they have individual demands that need to be met outside of the confines of the parish. Either may develop social, cultural and recreational interests with groups other than

those connected to the parish. Intellectual interest: the pastor may decide to embark on a programme of continuing education which may not be related to this particular parish; parishioners may enroll in "lay school" theology courses so as to learn things that the pastor is unable or unwilling to teach. Special interests: the pastor may dedicate a portion of his/her time to ministry beyond the local congregation through service to regional denominational committees or projects; parishioners may become involved in hospital chaplaincy programmes and offer their ministry to those beyond the congregation. There is a myriad of ways in which the pastor and the parish can initiate a process of individuation.

Over time, the cleric and/or the congregation begin to realize that their primary relationship with the other can still be a place of nurturance. The focus shifts from outside the relationship to inside. They begin to realize that they have not fully mined all of the potential of the relationship, and begin to make a concerted effort to re-connect. This would be the stage of rapprochement, as each alternates between intimacy and independence. So the "reality" phase is where the processes of practicing and

rapprochement are being worked out.

Assuming that the relationship survives the stresses brought about by the defining of self, the relationship takes on a new life as each begins to trust and respect each other. Both pastor and congregation come to know that even though their "mate" may be involved in areas outside of the relationship, they are still committed to each other. The fear of abandonment is diminished. The relationship is now able to move "from labouring to savouring" as the conflict ceases and a new time of harmony exists. This would correspond with the stage of mutual interdependence or object constancy in which both pastor and parish have been able to develop a sense of personal identity which allows them to be in a healthy relationship.

The "ending" stage can take place virtually anywhere along the life-cycle of the relationship. Some of the subjects said that it was their experience that in some relationships they never got beyond the "honeymoon" stage. Others progressed in their relationship right through

to the "savouring" stage. However, the premature closure may be invoked to resolve relationship issues. There may be other, more appropriate methods to deal with the developmental relationship crises rather than merely ending the relationship.

Two clergy also spoke about the fact that some clerics are unable to bring closure to the relationship and return to the congregation to minister at weddings, funerals etc. long after they have been appointed to other congregations. This posed a problem for the current incumbent who had to confront the previous pastor about the ongoing relationship with the congregation.

If a relationship becomes "stuck" at a particular developmental stage, an impartial facilitator may be necessary to help both the congregation and the cleric to overcome the impasse. Bader and Pearson (1988, pg. 21) list six diagnostic areas related to couple dynamics which might also be used by a facilitator to examine the pastor/parish relationship:

1) capacity for self definition.

2) Management of boundaries between self and other

3) Recognition of the separate wholeness of the other

4) capacity to handle conflict

5) ability to negotiate

6) capacity to give and receive

Bader and Pearson also give a set of principles that they use in helping couples to navigate through the stages:

1. We structure the therapeutic process in an active manner that seeks to facilitate positive risk taking, while respecting the couple's autonomy.

2. We ask partners to move autonomously in making changes without relying on a simultaneous change in the other. This request interrupts the symbiotic connection between the two partners and gives each an opportunity to experience growth that is self-directed.

3. We direct our emphasis away from the content of the specific problems - away from blame and rationalizations - and toward a

future focus involving the development of new skills and the realization of personal, heartfelt goals.

4. We also ask each individual to create the environment that is conducive to the change that is being requested of the partner. As a general rule of thumb, the greater the developmental change that is being requested, the more the requester needs to be involved in creating the conditions to facilitate the change.

5. We introduce the concept of "selling change" to partners as a means of evoking motivation and enthusiasm for creating change in the relationship.

6. When indicated, we use individual therapy as an adjunct to the therapeutic work with the couple. (Bader & Pearson, 1988, pp. 53-4).

In pastor/parish couples, as with married couples, one of the aims would be to encourage all parties to be responsible for their own change. Often, however, one will take the unhealthy position of "I will change if you will change". This represents a symbiotic position in which the partner

feels *obligated* to make the requested change. Thus each is invited to make changes in his/her own way of relating which *may* elicit a helpful response in the other.

In order to assist the pastor/parish couple to progress through the stages, the facilitator will need to help each participant to be able to empathize with the other:

Case Example:

A senior pastor was working in a large congregation. The associate pastor accepted a call to a different congregation. The senior pastor approached the board about hiring a new staff person. The board's response was that the current financial state of the congregation would not allow them to hire additional staff at that time. The senior pastor then became responsible for his own duties *plus* those that had been assigned to the associate. After several months of doing the work of two, the pastor began to show signs of fatigue. At the next board meeting one member said: "I have noticed that our pastor is becoming more and more exhausted. I would like to put

forward the following proposal: Let us put an insurance policy on the pastor, with the church as the beneficiary, so that *when we kill him* at least we will profit by it!"

Obviously this lack of empathy serves only to inflict deeper wounds. A number of communication strategies could be used by the facilitator to increase the empathy. These might include: *active listening* (encouraging the listener to rephrase and repeat, without editorial comment, what the listener has heard), *role reversals* (asking each to function from the other's position), and *neutralizing history* (seeking to make restitution for past injuries).

The danger, however, of too much empathy is that it can lead to further enmeshment. It would also be necessary to encourage the use of "*I statements*" which would help to encourage the differentiation. Each party would need to be able to take the risk of expressing their own thoughts and feelings to the other. This open and differentiated communication pattern will counteract the symbiotic method of "mind reading" whereby each, in

effect, says to the other: "You don't have to tell me, I already know what you're thinking."

Summary

If we put the two developmental models side by side, I would propose the following integration: the "courtship" and "honeymoon" stages correspond to the symbiotic-symbiotic phase during which similarities are highlighted and differences are ignored. As soon as either cleric or congregation begins the process of differentiation the relationship moves from the "honeymoon" into the "reality" stage. During the "reality" stage, the differentiating one may focus time and energy outside of the relationship, entering the phase of practicing. If those differences can be tolerated, rapprochement may result, whereby the focus returns to the primary relationship. This would make possible moving from the "reality" stage to the "savouring" stage as the relationship develops mutual interdependency and object constancy.

TABLE #7: INTEGRATION OF PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONSHIP

WITH THE BADER & PEARSON MODEL

Pastor/parish relationship	**Bader/Pearson Model**	**developmental characteristics**
the courtship		establishing a relationship
the honeymoon	symbiosis	focus on strengths/similarities
the reality	differentiating	beginning to notice differences
the reality	practicing	development of self (often to exclusion of partner)
the savouring	rapprochement	trust in the relationship
the ending		disengaging

CHAPTER 4: THE PASTORAL PRAXIS OF DIFFERENTIATION

Having drawn a parallel between people's experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship and the developmental model proposed by Bader and Pearson, I will now outline how this knowledge may be useful in bringing healing to troubled pastor-parish relationships.

According to Mahler et al (1975) the separation-individuation process is key to developing a sense of self. The individuation process leads to an intrapsychic representation of the self that is distinct from the object world. It leads to the acquisition of a unique individuality which is autonomous. The separation process leads to boundary formation and disengagement from the object. "Both processes are believed to culminate eventually in internalized self-representations, which are distinct from internal object representations." (Bohlander, 1995 p. 169) Differentiation is the first stage of the separation-individuation process during which time the sense of distinctness between the infant's self and the object world begins to develop.

The successful enactment of the separation-individuation process, and the corresponding sense of self that develops will greatly influence one's ability to form other intimate relationships later on in life. If one develops a sense of self which is distinct from the surrounding object, one is able to tolerate differences in other intimate objects. Klein (1990) writes about how separation and differentiation from one's parents affects the relationship with a spouse. He concludes that the more one's identity is experienced as being separate and distinguishable from significant external objects (primarily one's parents), the more readily they will be open to, and the less they will be threatened by, the emergence of the spouse's identity. One will then be able to acknowledge, accept, and affirm the real, true personality of their spouse and develop their own personality in relation to that of the spouse's.

Conversely, when the separation-individuation process becomes stalled, and the internal and external object relations are incomplete, the adult may develop fear of object loss and/or fusion with the object. The individual may then use adult intimate relationships to try to make up for

the childhood deficits. Klein (1990), referring to marital relationships, sees the potential of using the partner to deal with adult narcissistic tendencies:

> To the extent that self-object differentiation fails to develop properly and pathological internalizations of identificatory and introjective types permeate the internal object world, the individual will experience difficulty in regulating its narcissistic equilibrium. Unable to maintain a stable and functional narcissistic balance, individuals will look to external objects to guide the self's tenuous perception of its value and worthiness as a person among persons. Individuals who experience difficulty in maintaining their self-esteem without the excessive elicited feedback from external others are subject to the experience of intense conscious and unconscious fantasies of narcissistic gratification. Even though narcissistic needs characterize all individuals in their quest for the gratifying love object, it is the extent to which such needs are manifest that determines whether object-seeking and intimate love is of functional or dysfunctional processing. (Klein, 1990 pp. 56-57)

We may conclude that when the separation-individuation process has been successfully negotiated, one will have an ability to differentiate from the primary object and develop a cohesive sense of self that is separate and autonomous. This will allow one to form intimate relationships in adult life which will allow the partner to develop his/her own unique self as well. However, if the differentiation process is incomplete, one may use adult relationships to work out the unresolved issues from the past. The Church, synonymous with unconditional love and acceptance, may provide one arena in which these object relations are readdressed.

One way in which this issue may surface is through performance orientation whereby people deal with their self-esteem issues through working hard enough, hoping that others will acknowledge their personal worth. Both clergy and laity can be prone to this "need to be noticed." Gross (1989) conducted a survey of twenty-four Lutheran Pastors. Each was given a Pastoral Concerns Questionnaire comprised of 15 items. Each participant was to rate each item on a five-point rating scale. Gross concludes:

> The belief that self-esteem is conditional upon standards of performance was found to be highly associated with the burnout dimension. It appears that pastors on the road to burnout feel badly about themselves unless they are achieving certain "ideal" results. Pastors would probably be the first to agree that an individual's personal worth is not dependent upon his practical ability and efficiency. Nor would they be surprised by the proposition that the ultimate value of a person's work (especially in the spiritual realm) may not be easily or accurately judged by that person (or other people). It is central to the doctrine they preach that salvation is "not by works" and that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Yet pastors appear as ready as others to assume that "success" in their lives depends upon the achievement of visible results, and that their self-worth is conditional upon such "success." (p. 29)

Thus over-involvement in the pastor-parish relationship may be evidence of issues around differentiation. However, even though the personal involvement in the parish may increase, there is a potential danger

that people may still become increasingly isolated. A study by Warner and Carter (1984) using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the M.M.P.I. L & K scales compared pastors and pastors' wives with a control group. This study concluded that even though pastors did experience significantly more involvement than subjects in other groups, both pastors and pastors' wives experienced significantly more loneliness than those in the non-pastoral roles. High involvement with parishioners does not cure the loneliness, it seems to *create* the loneliness. Overinvolvement in the life of the parish does *not* lead to deeper relationships, rather it seems to lead to emotional exhaustion which prevents close relationships from happening. Hauerwas and Willimon (1990) propose a reason why the increased involvement increases the loneliness: The excessive demands of parish life, and the motivation of the pastor to be caring and to fulfill all of the demands, can lead to emotional exhaustion in the cleric. At those times it can feel like the cleric is being emotionally abused by the congregation. Rather than express the anger at the congregation, clerics can turn the anger upon themselves, hating themselves for being so abused. No wonder pastors often seem so lonely;

self-hate creates a person who cannot make friends worth having.

In an attempt to find a sense of self, some will cohere to the pastor-parish relationship with an intense attachment; some will stand aloof, fearing the potential of rejection. Holmes (1996) integrates the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969) with object-relations to show how both the enmeshed and the detached are dealing with issues of differentiation. The insecure-ambivalent individuals cling to the object, terrified of separation. From the relational perspective the world appears to the ambivalent person as inherently unreliable; clinging is the best way of maintaining proximity to an object that s/he expects will let her/him down. The insecure-avoidant individuals shy away from their objects, fearful or dismissing of closeness. The avoidant person has suffered repeated rebuffs or intrusions; s/he gets just close enough to her/his object to remain in touch, not so close as to be hurt or obliterated yet again. In both cases no stable differentiation of self and object has occurred. The world is seen so colored by projective identification that the object conforms to an inner expectation of intrusiveness, aggression, rejection, or neglect. Neither true intimacy nor

true autonomy is possible.

Bowen theory also talks about the need for "differentiation," but the meaning is similar to, but different from that of Mahler's use of the term. Bowen (1976) believed that a person's emotional well-being was based upon the balance of the forces of togetherness and individuality. Differentiation of self was seen as the ability to separate thinking and feeling, particularly in situations in which the tendency for emotionality to override thinking is the greater. Friedman outlines the distinctive Bowenian use of "differentiation":

> *Differentiation is not to be equated, however, with similar sounding ideas such as individuation, autonomy, or independence.* First of all, it has less to do with a person's behaviour than, as mentioned, with his or her emotional being. Second, there is a sense of connectedness to the concept that prevents the mere gaining of distance or leaving, no less cutting off, from being the way to achieve it. Third, as stated above, it has to do with the fabric of one's existence, one's integrity. Obviously, differentiation has its

origin in the biological notion that cells can have no identity, purpose, or distinctiveness until they have separated from - that is, left - their progenitors (differentiation is a prerequisite to specialization even if one is ultimately going to fuse to accomplish one's purpose). But also implicit in this biological metaphor or homologue is the idea that such self has little meaning if the cell cannot connect. In its simplest terms, therefore, differentiation is the capacity to be one's own integrated aggregate-of-cells person while still belonging to, or being able to relate to, a larger colony. (Friedman, 1991 p. 141)

Family systems theory (Kerr and Bowen, 1988) maintains that there are two different life forces: differentiation, that encourages the developing child to become an emotionally separate person with the ability to think, feel and act for her/himself and the force of togetherness which encourages the child to remain emotionally connected with the family so that they think, feel and act as one. Those who are low on the differentiation scale are unable to distinguish between thoughts and feelings and most of their

functioning is governed by emotional reactions to those around them and they will have no capacity for autonomous functioning. Those who are higher on the scale of differentiation are able to tolerate intense feelings without having to act automatically to alleviate them. They can listen without reacting and communicate without antagonizing. They have the ability to choose between having one's functioning guided by feelings or by thoughts. The well-differentiated person is a complete person who can direct her/his life without the continual need of reinforcement from others. To be differentiated, one can be both separate from the other, yet remain connected to the other.

Poorly differentiated people look to others to affirm their sense of self. The more dependent they are on reinforcement from others, the more obsessed they will be about other's attitudes towards them. Paradoxically, they have a greater need for emotionally supportive relationships, yet are unable to maintain an intact network.

The level of differentiation that one achieves will also affect one's

response to anxiety. The less a person is differentiated from the emotional system, the more s/he will experience anxiety about being on his/her own and assuming responsibility for him/herself. The more interdependent a person is, the more easily they feel threatened. The increased perception of threat increases the anxiety and the more energy is expended in anxiety reduction. When this cycle begins, actions feel more compelled, and there is less flexibility in ones responses. Thus chronic anxiety in response to a perceived threat increases as the level of differentiation decreases. The higher the level of differentiation, the more stress is required to trigger a physical, emotional or social response (Kerr and Bowen, 1988).

What Bowen systems theory says, then, is that there are two biological forces: one that bonds us together with others, and one that forces us to be unique individuals. It is important that the child bond with the care giver, but it is equally important that the child learn to separate from the care giver. Likewise, in a marital relationship, it is important that the couple form a lasting bond, but not at the expense of their own individual personality. It is the couple who cannot differentiate who

develop the pathologically enmeshed or hostile-dependent relationship. As the philosopher Kahlil Gibran said: "Let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you." (Gibran, 1971 pp. 15)

The Christian church has always had to deal with these concepts of togetherness and individuality. When God looked over the goodness of creation, God said that there was one thing that was *not* good: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 1:18) Jesus prayed that the early church would achieve a sense of unity; he prayed "that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one" (John 17:22-23). Thus togetherness is seen as a Christian virtue.

Yet the Christian scriptures also give us examples of being individuals and separate from others. Jesus, at age twelve, accompanied his parents to the temple at Jerusalem. A Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve. He then became a "*son of the law*" and had to take the

obligations of the law upon him. One of the first acts that Jesus performed as an adult male was that of self-definition by separating himself from his family. He stayed behind in the temple while Joseph and Mary went on their way without him. He got "lost" to one family because he was "found" by a larger family. Jesus also increased the differentiation by referring to being about his *Father's* business (Luke 2:41-51). In fact Jesus could be so differentiated from his family that they thought that he was out of his mind. (Mark 3:21)

Following his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness alone (Luke 4:1-14); after performing many miracles, and the crowd was pressing in, Jesus withdraws to a lonely place to pray (Luke 5: 15-16); on the night before choosing his disciples, Jesus withdraws and prays (Luke 6: 12-13). Jesus modelled both that he could be a part of the group, and that he could separate from the group.

It seems that the present day church is much better at dealing with togetherness than it is dealing with differences. Christian unity seems to

imply *uniformity*, and that differentness is seen as being contrary to the Gospel. Yet this was not the case in the early church. A brief look into the chronicles of the early church will indicate that there were many differences between the local followings and the leadership. In Acts 6:1-7 the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected; in Acts 11:1-18 Peter justifies his preaching to the Gentiles to those of the circumcision party who oppose him; in Acts 15:1-21 the Council of Jerusalem attempts to reconcile those who have opposing views on the circumcision of the Gentiles; in Acts 15:36-41 Paul and Barnabas part company over the issue of whether or not John Mark should accompany them on the next leg of the journey. Thus, the early church was accustomed to dealing with both togetherness and differences.

In the modern church, it seems that the "togetherness" forces tend to overrule the "individual" forces at times of high anxiety. The emotional glue tends to force people into thinking that everyone in the congregation must think, feel, and behave in the same way, or that everyone *must* fulfill their roles in a particular, expected way. As the level of chronic anxiety

goes up and the level of emotional maturity goes down, a congregation has less tolerance for differences or deviations from what is expected. Emotional closeness becomes defined in those times as "sameness." (Richardson, 1996, pp. 58-59)

When either pastor or parish senses the differentiation it can increase the anxiety level. Unable to focus on the true nature of the anxiety, conflict may erupt over "content" issues rather than the "process" issue of the differentiation. Savage (1985) outlines the self-reinforcing negative cycle that can develop when issues of differences and conflict are handled inappropriately in which a pattern in relationships begins when conflict occurs from a variety of forms, i.e. goals, misinformation, methodology, and role confusion. Due to a lack of conflict resolution and management skills, the congregation operates on avoidance and denial behaviors which produce frustration and disappointment. The unresolved frustration turns to anger. The emotion of anger is usually perceived as either inappropriate or sinful and therefore is suppressed and unexpressed. With a lack of expression in creative and open ways, the emotions are now confined to the

unconscious. Corporate pain means that many persons in the organization are sitting on their emotions and have no creative, open way to get them expressed When this occurs, the individual members begin to "act out." (Acting out is when the emotions drive the person's behavior but the emotions are not in his/her awareness.) The acting out can be heard in meetings where persons make accusations not based on reality, where gossip is frequently received without questioning its authenticity, and the Christian Gospel is used as a weapon rather than a healer. Persons are "shot with the Gospel gun" rather than healed by the balm of Gilead.

Savage describes this only from the point of view of the congregation acting out against the cleric. I would maintain that the cleric can be equally guilty of acting out against the congregation, often using the pulpit to express his/his own anger and frustration against the congregation.

With the combination of high anxiety and low maturity the tendency towards enmeshment increases. When the sense of emotional separateness is lost, the sense of personal responsibility is also diminished. People are

less likely to look at the part that *they* play in the dynamic, and are more prone to blame the other as being totally at fault. Lederach (1993) has observed that often in church conflict what starts out as a disagreement is transformed into *personal antagonism*. Differences over specific problems get translated into charges against the other person and inferences about their character, intentions and motives. Instead of focussing on the problem they share, the people view the other person as the problem.

Case Example

A pastor was asked to take on leadership in a troubled congregation. During the previous year many long time members of the congregation left the church. This decimated the congregation both numerically and financially. By the time the new pastor arrived, closing the church was a distinct possibility. This fear of closure increased the anxiety in the congregation. The heightened anxiety led to an inability to tolerate any change. Those who tried new ideas were chastised for being disloyal to the history and tradition of the church. It was common to have members publicly berate each other and/or the leadership. Customarily people left

the annual meeting in tears. Those lay people who *would* take on positions of leadership found themselves to be targets at which others would hurl abuse. The end result was that no one would volunteer to take on leadership positions, thus the whole system slowly ran out of energy and began to come to a halt. This increased the anxiety of closure, thus perpetuating the cycle.

The immediate question facing the new pastor was: How could he lovingly lead in this situation without becoming enmeshed in the anxiety? He knew that to become reactive himself would only add to the malady. Within the first week in the parish he came upon a starting point which was symbolic of his self differentiation. The architecture of the church was such that there is a door from the Pastor's office right into the church sanctuary. In times past the ladies who prepare the church for worship had found it more convenient to use this door to enter and exit the sanctuary. The other access door was down a flight of stairs and was less convenient. As a result the pastor's office had always remained unlocked and people used the office as a thoroughfare to the sanctuary. In looking at the

situation the new pastor saw it as an issue of boundaries. The congregation felt it appropriate to invade the pastor's space with or without his/her knowledge or consent. As his first act of differentiation he installed a lock on the door. This forced everyone to use the other access door.

The response from the congregation was swift. Accusations of being uncaring were hurled at him. "How can you expect all of these poor old ladies to have to navigate a flight of stairs in order to get into the sanctuary whereas they have *always* been allowed to pass through the pastor's office? They will all quit, you know, and you will have *no one* willing to prepare the church. Where will you be then, after they all resign because of your selfishness?" He had to resist the tendency to get "hooked" by their anxiety. His strategy at that time was to work with individuals and encourage them to speak for themselves and to eliminate the globalized speaking for others. He asked the "spokesperson" if she herself had any difficulty managing the stairs. No, she replied, she herself did not, but *they* would have a terribly difficult time. He asked if *they* were too intimidated to speak to him about it personally. No, *they* were not intimidated, and

could indeed speak for themselves. Through this slow process of encouraging one-on-one discussions, he was able to lessen the fear and anger that resulted from his differentiation.

Another strategy was to build up those who were willing to take on leadership. This was mostly accomplished through increasing their systems perspective on some of the events in the congregation. For example, one Sunday morning through a mechanical failure the church furnace failed to come on at its scheduled time and as people arrived the building was cold. Following the worship service one of the key lay officials came to the pastor and told him that he was going to resign. Upon further investigation the pastor learned that the church official had received an unjustified chastisement from another member of the congregation about small and inconsequential matters. This barrage was more than he was willing to take, especially since none of it was his fault. The pastor offered a different perspective on what had just happened: his sense was that when people found the church cold that morning some jumped to an erroneous conclusion, namely that the congregation's financial situation had become

so bad that they were no longer able to afford fuel for the furnace. This increased the general level of anxiety in the congregation. Rather than getting the appropriate information, some jumped to conclusions and acted out the fear through blame and criticism. Once he heard this perspective he was more willing to forgive the accuser and be less reactive himself.

To offer this kind of differentiation in the midst of an anxious system can be difficult for both the pastor and the congregation. The choice not to enter the enmeshment can be interpreted as being uncaring.

> Self-differentiated caring is a paradoxical concept which easily jars pastoral sensitivities. Terms like *creative indifference, holy detachment,* and *benign neglect* point to the paradox that distancing in playful ministry is caring and leads to healing. Such playfulness, rather than being callous disregard, pays serious respect to the troubled and wounded as capable and creative people. (VanKatwyk, 1997, pp. 291-292)

In conclusion, even though the terminology may be different, the

theorists are saying similar things: For Mahler it is the shift from symbiosis to separation-individuation, for Kohut it is from dependence on the selfobject for self-definition to self-cohesiveness based on one's own ambitions, values and ideals, for Bowlby from secure attachment to stable relationships which provide security and can tolerate frustration and ambivalence, for Bowen it is by becoming attuned to one's own integrity that the nature of one's relationship to the group becomes less anxious and reactive. All these theories pose a similar dynamic of a paradoxical relationship: the better the attachment the better the development of separation into selfhood. Thus adult intimate relationships, be they marital or be they pastor-parish require the ability to connect to others *and* to define a self. As well as the necessity to bond, there is also the necessity to maintain a sense of separateness, of distinction between the two.

What is needed, then, for the clergy and congregation relationship to develop beyond the symbiotic state is the ability to both connect and be distinct. To be able to find our "object" but not become fused with it. To resolve the issue of both attachment and detachment. Each must be able to

invest energy into the relationship and yet retain energy to direct life apart from the relationship.

The concept of "autonomy" has often been interpreted as being "selfish," where as it is possible to be autonomous with the ability to be self-directed and still make choices which will be guided by the best interests of the whole group. One can still enhance one's own welfare without impinging on the welfare of others. Autonomy does not imply *lack* of feelings or emotions, but rather the ability to choose one's response, rather than be compelled to make automatic reactions. Thus the more differentiated the self, the more the person can be an individual while still in emotional contact with the group. Holmes coins a new term, *nonattachment*, which he defines as "a nonpossessive, nonambivalent, autonomous, freely entered into attachment, in which the object is held and cherished but not controlled. Conversely, nonattachment transcends detachment in that it implies a separation from the object based on respect rather than anger or avoidance." (Holmes, 1996 p. 84)

The original research question was: *Do pastors and congregational members experience the pastor-parish relationship as developing over time?* I followed up this question with another one: do the developmental models of other intimate relationships provide a useful paradigm for understanding people's experience of the development of the pastor-parish relationship? At this point I offer some tentative answers to these questions and propose some suggestions based upon the implications of the research.

The first observation that can be made is that both pastors and congregational members do experience the relationship as developing over time. Not all were able to delineate specific *stages* of that development, but the majority were able to give descriptions of changes in the relationship and either marker events or a change in process which ushered in a new phase of the relationship. There was also consistency between the experience of both clergy and laity as to what the different developmental phases were and how one progressed through the phases/stages.

There was, however, a significant difference between the experience

of the clergy and the laity regarding the *intensity* of the relationship. Clergy overwhelmingly spoke of an intense relationship using marriage metaphors; for laity the metaphors were much less intense, indicating that the relationship was significant, but not as overarching as it was for clergy. This difference may hold the key to the successful development of the relationship.

When clergy view the relationship so intensely, it often results in an exaggerated seriousness about their role. This seriousness can lay a heavy burden upon the clergy, making them feel overly responsible for fixing the "marriage" whenever they notice any signs of "marital discord." This results in clergy becoming even more invested in the relationship, trying harder and harder to make the relationship work. If "trying harder" doesn't work, clergy are apt to blame themselves for not being effective in ministry. This can erode their sense of self, resulting in even more investment in the relationship as their means of building up their self-esteem. Thus a cyclical pattern can develop whereby the more troublesome a pastor-parish relationship becomes, the more invested the pastor becomes in fixing the

situation.

Laity, it would appear, are not as invested in the relationship as are the clergy. Yet laity are quite content to let the clergy take the responsibility for making the relationship work. This too can increase the sense of urgency for the clergy who say to themselves: "If I don't fix it, it won't get fixed!", thus increasing their investment and their "Messiah complex." If, on the other hand, clergy were able to see the laity's lower investment as a *positive* stance, it might help clergy to become less anxious and more differentiated.

The research of Bader and Pearson concludes that the potential for a relationship to develop will be determined largely by the ability of both partners to differentiate. If either partner's sense of self is overly invested in the relationship, they will not allow the other to grow and develop. Thus the relationship will become stalled. In a similar way, if either the clergy or the congregation become too invested in the relationship, they may prevent the relationship from developing beyond the symbiotic stage. Bader and

Pearson maintain that without adequate differentiation the relationship will become stuck in either a hostile-dependent state (in which differences are highlighted) or an enmeshed state (in which differences are minimized). The development of the clergy-congregation relationship, therefore, will be contingent upon the successful differentiation of both the cleric and the people. If the relationship is to get to the "savouring" stage, in which each feels at peace with the other, both have to have the ability to develop a sense of self that is distinct from the relationship.

Even though the technical concept of *differentiation* is used differently by the object-relations, systems, and self-psychology schools, there is a common element among them which is paradoxical: the better the attachment foundation, the better the differentiation potential.

Friedman (1996), in his writings on leadership, proposes that whether in business relationships or in pastor-parish relationships, the group will rarely rise above the maturity level of the leader regardless of the leader's skill or knowledge base. Thus the place that will have the greatest

impact in the development of the pastor-parish relationship will be the maturity level of the cleric, and the cleric's ability to be connected yet distinct from the parish. This has obvious implications for the training of clergy in leadership styles.

When I graduated from theological college in 1979, the leadership training given at that time was based upon the research of Rensis Likert and his colleagues at the University of Michigan who had studied organizational research and identified specific causal factors which make a major difference in how well an organization can perform its work. Likert formulated the following principle of supportive relationships:

> The leadership and other processes of the organization must be such as to ensure a maximum probability that in all interactions and all relationships with the organization each member will, in light of his/her background, values and expectations, view the experience as supportive and one which builds and maintains his/her sense of personal worth and importance. (Likert, 1961)

From Likert's work, four different styles or "systems" of leadership were outlined:

Table #8: Likert's Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Characteristics
System 1	authoritarian and leader dominated
System 2	asks advice of members on a one-to-one basis
System 3	adopts a consultation style of interaction with members on a one-to-one basis
System 4	employs a collaborative style, using the collective wisdom of all concerned to arrive at an optimum decision

One of the key ingredients in this kind of collaborative leadership was the *supportiveness* of the leader. A supportive leader is one who is perceived as approachable by members and who will listen to them sympathetically, non-judgementally and non-defensively. Supportive leaders were encouraged to present their own contributions tentatively or framed as questions, such as, "I wonder if it would make sense to do it this way...?" Thus the leader was encouraged not to "own" his/her own

perspective but to put it forward almost as an aside. Supportive leaders were encouraged never to use "I" or "my" but to always use "we" or "our" when referring to aspects of parish life. Evaluation of the supportive nature of the leader was to come from the congregation. Parishioner surveys would be used to indicate whether or not the members felt that the cleric was being supportive.

According to this research there is a major difficulty with this leadership style. The leader is discouraged from offering any personal opinion. The leader's own thoughts, feelings and opinions must be subjugated to the principle of being "supportive" to each member of the congregation. Being "supportive" is described in ways that would maintain enmeshment. Any differentiation of the leader is viewed as autocratic and dictatorial. This study would maintain, however, that healthy development of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation will be governed by the ability of the pastor to differentiate from the congregation; to be able to say "Here I stand" when all of the emotional forces are encouraging the pastor to say "we."

Another difficulty with the "supportive" leadership style is that evaluation of the leader comes solely from the parishioners' sense of whether or not the leader *is* supportive. To achieve a successful evaluation, a cleric would have to be seen as being *supportive* to the entire congregation. The congregation, however, does not usually have one group "personality," but rather is a collection of many individuals, each with their own needs/desires/tastes around liturgy and worship. The cleric's future and security then become governed by his/her supportive nature. Whether or not a cleric's position is to be continued will be governed by the cleric's ability to make each parishioner feel supported (regardless of whether or not the parishioner's ideas are seen as holding any merit). This too could *increase* the anxiety and the enmeshment within the cleric as his/her future becomes based upon a form of popularity contest. Such methods of evaluation do not lend themselves to developing differentiation of the cleric. What is needed, however, is a leader who is giving direction based upon an inner sense of direction rather than continually taking the congregational "temperature" and using it to chart the future course. This study would indicate that the health of the pastor-parish relationship will

increase when the cleric's sense of self and security is not tied to the feelings of the congregation.

What is needed is a new conception of Christian leadership which will encourage a strong sense of self in both the cleric and the congregation. Jesus, I believe, demonstrated this kind of differentiated leadership. Jesus was able to say: "You have heard it said of old..., but *I* say to you..." He was not afraid of defining his own position. Yet he also gave people the choice of holding on to their own beliefs. When the "rich young ruler" turned and left (Matthew 19:16-22) Jesus let him go. He did not try to coerce him into believing the same way that Jesus himself did. Neither did Jesus castigate himself for being an ineffective teacher because one refused to hear his message. Jesus was secure in his own sense of self, without being autocratic, coercive, selfish or narcissistic. He also took full responsibility for the decisions that he made, never blaming others for his own actions.

What would be needed to develop this kind of differentiation in the pastor-parish relationship? It would seem that the place to start will be to increase the differentiation of the pastor. If s/he can grow in this concept, then s/he will be able to tolerate more differences within the congregation, thus enabling the congregation to increase its sense of differentiation as well. There is, I suspect, a reluctance on the part of clergy to embrace this style of leadership.

One place to begin this process will be at the Seminary level. One of the functions of a Seminary is to develop and teach a praxis of ministry. The practice of forming relationships within the congregation will need to be informed by the theory of differentiation, and the theory of differentiation will need to be informed by the practice of ministry. Texts such as Friedman's Generation to Generation and Richardson's Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life will help the theological student to reflect on the concept of differentiation as it relates to parish leadership. Instilling this critical reflection will increase the likelihood that clergy will be able to respond to

highly charged emotional situations in a more appropriate fashion.

Seminary training will need to be supported by other avenues of training such as clinical pastoral education and parish field placements. The process of supervision can increase the student's sense of self and ability to differentiate. During the early stages of supervision the student will likely be more focussed on her/himself. As confidence develops, the student will be more able to focus on the other. As skill develops the student will be more able to focus on the process between the student and the other and how the interventions offered by the student affect the system. A skilled supervisor, whether in the parish or clinical setting, can be instrumental in helping the student to focus on the relationship dynamics while helping to contain the student's anxiety and reactivity.

Post-ordination training programmes offer another avenue of continued support. In the model in place within the Anglican diocese of Toronto, the newly ordained clergy meet together one day every other month for a two-year period. The advantage of the post-ordination model is

that it recognizes the need for some form of transition between the Seminary and the parish. This thesis has demonstrated that there are many factors at work within the pastor-parish relationship, and those entering into a full-time pastoral role for the first time could benefit from additional support.

New strategies for evaluating ministry will need to be devised which include the concept of differentiation. So long as the tenure of the cleric is tied to people *liking* him/her, the anxiety level in the cleric will go up, forcing him/her to retain the symbiotic enmeshment and to subdue any initiative which might arouse conflict in the parish.

Clerics will need to know that they have the support of their denomination's hierarchy before they will be willing to adopt a self-differentiated leadership style. Denominational officials will need to grow in their understanding of the concept of differentiation so as to provide additional support to the clergy who embark on this journey. Clergy conferences on the topic would provide forums whereby denominational

officials and parish clergy could sit together and discuss new models of parish leadership and how to support one another.

One possible step that could come out of such a discussion would be the development of clergy peer groups. The "lone wolf" nature of parish ministry has diminished over time. Clerics are becoming more at ease at sharing their questions as well as their certainties. Peer groups could study cases together from their congregational experiences. A facilitator could lead the group. S/he would need to be conversant with the implications of psychoanalytic theory as it pertains to the pastor-parish relationship. Through the sharing of "critical incidents," the group members could begin to examine their experience of ministry. The facilitator could help the group to develop multiple perspectives upon the situations which are presented. The new perspectives would help to increase the ability of the cleric to maintain a non-anxious presence in troubling circumstances. The supportive nature of the group would encourage healthy differentiation in the congregational setting. The support from the group would help to counter the "change back" messages sent by the congregation. The perspectives of

those outside the situation could help the one who is involved with the case to see some of the relationship dynamics which are at work.

Based on this research project, I propose that the relationship between the pastor and the congregation does indeed develop over time. I further propose that a key in the development of the relationship will be the ability of the cleric and the congregation to differentiate from one another, yet remain connected. This suggested the untested hypothesis that if the cleric is able to increase his/her differentiation from the congregation, the congregation will also increase in their ability to differentiate, leading to further positive development of the relationship. This opens the door for further study to test this hypothesis.

APPENDIX #1

Letter to recruit clergy participants:

Dear Rev. X

As you may know I am currently involved in graduate studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. As part of my programme I am conducting a research study. The data gathered from this study will be used as a partial requirement for a thesis in the Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Studies and Pastoral Counselling at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

The purpose of this research is to examine the nature of the relationship between pastor and parishioner. Specifically asking the question "Does the relationship change over time?" If so, are there different "stages" that the relationship goes through?

In order to answer these questions I would like to interview a number of clergy and parishioners. I would like to ask you if you would be willing to

participate in an interview as part of the research process. The interview will last no more than 45 minutes. The interview will focus on your perception of how the relationship between the pastor and the parishioners changes over time. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, I am interested in your experience.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and you are, of course, under no obligation to take part.

I would also like to interview one active member (or couple) from your congregation. ("Active," for our terminology, will be defined as "attending worship and/or involved in some form of parish ministry an average of at least once per month.") So as to maintain confidentiality, I would ask you to generate a list of at least 10 active members. From this list I will select one at random. This way you never need know who was selected.

All interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. All material in these interviews is confidential. Names, as well as any other identifying

remarks, will be changed to protect confidentiality. The audiotape will be erased once it has been transcribed. My thesis advisor (the Rev. Dr. Peter Van Katwyk) and my readers (Dr. Tom O'Connor and Mrs. Elizabeth Huss) and my secretary will be the only ones to see the transcribed text of the interview. The final thesis will make reference to the content of the interview and may contain a few direct quotes in order to substantiate the findings.

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and can stop the interview at any point.

It is my hope that the information gathered from this research will be of benefit in furthering our understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between pastor and people.

At the completion of the project I would be willing to make available an abbreviated summary of the findings to those participants who request a copy.

I will contact you by telephone within the next few days to answer any questions that you may have and to see if you would be willing to participate in the study.

I'll look forward to speaking with you soon.

Blessings.

The Rev. Paul D. Scuse

APPENDIX 2

Letter to recruit congregational participants:

Dear X

Allow me a moment to introduce myself. My name is Paul Scuse and I am the minister of St. John's Anglican Church in Oak Ridges. As well as performing my ministerial duties at the church I am also an accredited pastoral counsellor. As part of my ongoing education I am currently involved in graduate studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. As part of my programme I am conducting a research study. The data gathered from this study will be used as a partial requirement for a thesis in the Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Studies and Pastoral Counselling at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

The purpose of this research is to examine the nature of the relationship between pastor and parishioner. Specifically asking the question "Does the relationship change over time?" If so, are there different "stages" that the

relationship goes through?

In order to answer these questions I would like to interview a number of clergy and parishioners. I would like to ask you if you would be willing to participate in an interview as part of the research process. The interview will last no more than 45 minutes. The interview will focus on your perception of how the relationship between the pastor and the parishioners changes over time. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, I am interested in your experience.

I have spoken to the Rev. X from your congregation and [s/he] has agreed to participate [him/herself] in the study. [S/he] has also written a letter of endorsement for the project and you will find a copy of the letter enclosed. This research project is strictly voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate and your pastor will not know whether or not you have chosen to participate.

All interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. All material in

these interviews is confidential. Names, as well as any other identifying remarks, will be changed to protect confidentiality. The audiotape will be erased once it has been transcribed. My thesis advisor (the Rev. Dr. Peter Van Katwyk) and my readers (Dr. Tom O'Connor and Mrs. Elizabeth Huss) and my secretary will be the only ones to see the transcribed text of the interview. The final thesis will make reference to the content of the interview and may contain a few direct quotes in order to substantiate the findings.

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and can stop the interview at any point.

It is my hope that the information gathered from this research will be of benefit in furthering our understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between pastor and people.

At the completion of the project I would be willing to make available an abbreviated summary of the findings to those participants who request a

copy.

I will contact you by telephone within the next few days to answer any questions that you may have and to see if you would be willing to participate in the study.

I'll look forward to speaking with you soon.

Blessings,

The Rev. Paul D. Scuse

APPENDIX #3

Sample Letter of endorsement from the pastor to the parishioner

Dear X,

You will find enclosed a letter from the Rev. Paul Scuse outlining a research project that he is initiating. I have spoken with Paul and have agreed to participate myself in this project. I have also given him the names of several parishioners who might be willing to participate in the research. Paul will not be using every name I have given him, but will be selecting only the required number of names at random. That way I have no way of knowing who he has selected.

This project is strictly voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate.

If you have any further questions please feel free to talk to me or to Rev. Scuse.

Thank you for assistance,

Yours truly,

Rev. X. Pastor

APPENDIX #4

Consent Form (the participant was given a carbon copy)

The purpose of this interview is to examine the development of the pastor-parish relationship. The data gathered from this interview will be used as a partial requirement for a thesis in the Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Studies and Pastoral Counselling at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. The advisor for the thesis is the Rev. Dr. Peter Van Katwyk and he can be reached at (519)884-1970.

The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. All material in this interview is confidential. Names, as well as any other identifying remarks, will be changed to protect confidentiality. The audiotape will be erased once it has been transcribed. My advisor (the Rev. Dr. Peter Van Katwyk), my readers (Dr. Tom O'Connor and Mrs. Elizabeth Huss), my secretary and I will be the only ones to see the transcribed text of the interview. The final thesis will make reference to the content of the interview and may contain a few direct quotes in order to substantiate the findings.

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and can stop the interview at any point.

I,_____, give permission to Paul Scuse to audiotape my interview with him. This permission is based upon the above qualifying statements.

(Signature)_____ (Date)_____

APPENDIX #5: Pilot Interview Questions

Are you currently employed in parish ministry? In what capacity?

How long have you been serving in this particular congregation?

Describe the process by which it was determined that you would serve in this congregation.

What attracted you to this congregation?

Do you have an analogy/metaphor that could be used to describe the relationship between you and the parish?

Have you noticed any change or development in the relationship over time?

What was the very beginning of your relationship like? How long did this phase last?

Some people describe the first phase in the parish as being like a "honeymoon". Was this your experience?

Do you spend time in activities away from the congregation? If so, how often? How does the congregation respond when you do?

Has the congregation looked for spiritual direction beyond what you could offer? How did that affect you?

APPENDIX #6

Interview questions for participants (both pastor and parishioner)

How long have you been a member of [pastor of] this congregation?

How many other congregations have you belonged to [pastored]?

Thinking about <u>your</u> experience of the relationships that develops between a congregation and a pastor (both from your experience in this congregation and other congregations): Imagine that the relationship was a book and that you were constructing a "table of contents" of the chapters in that book. How many chapters would there be?

Could you give a title to each chapter which would in some way capture the essence of that chapter?

Could you elaborate on each chapter, giving a more expanded description

of what that chapter of the relationship was all about?

Can you outline the transition points from one chapter to the next?

Can you think of a metaphor that best describes the relationship between a congregation and their pastor?

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