

# Building Community: Are We There Yet?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to say Happy Mother's Day to all of you who have ever mothered anybody. And that includes people that are called mothers and people that don't always wear that title.

Today, you get two for the price of one. No extra charge. And we are, as Joe said, going to be talking about community. And really, I know that Joe has had a great deal of experience in building community out there.

But Beth and I are going to be talking more about building community in here. And we want to take a closer look at one branch of science, which we hear little about in this group, namely the behavioral sciences.

We don't hear about them at all, actually, in my recollection. But these sciences are primarily interested in why people behave the way they do. And that does affect our lives in the church and how we draw them in and how we keep them here once they get here.

What are they interested in? What are they looking for? Why do they stay? We'll mention some of the insights from these sciences that have been identified and how they relate to our life together in the church.

[ 1 : 14 ] We'll also have some narrative detail from what life can be like in a Christian community and the lessons those experiences may have for us. So we're particularly interested in those aspects of community that can enrich our lives.

But first, we will pray. Heavenly Father, we are so glad that you love us, that we are your special people, that you have brought us together.

You have called us by name and told us that we are precious in your sight. And we thank you for that. You have also called us to be a part, apart from the world that we live in, in many ways, in order to carry out your mission and our mission in the world.

But the other side of that coin, Lord, is that you want us also to be together, together in a community of love and faith that will be supportive, that will worship together, that will serve together, and that will continue to take your message together to the various parts of the world where we are located. So we ask that today, your spirit would lead us in our thinking about our personal relationship, how we demonstrate our love for you, and our community relationship, and how we demonstrate our love for others.

[ 2 : 44 ] These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, behavioral sciences used to elicit a degree of scorn from physical sciences.

Our research was described as soft, meaning not nearly as credible, as hard sciences like biology, chemistry, physics.

And this was actually a justifiable conclusion at one point, less difficult to prove these days. But it's partly because people are so much harder to study, to subject to empirical research.

They continue to demonstrate variables, even in the middle of the experiment. So it is much more difficult. If you put two gases together, I'm drawing something here that I know nothing about, in the same amount, at the same room temperature, time and time again, you will likely get the same result.

But if you combine two people in an experiment, you cannot really guarantee the result at all. Fortunately, there have been huge improvements in this area.

[ 3 : 56 ] In the design of research, for one thing, one branch of behavioral sciences, sociology, doesn't just study people. It also studies the research tools and methods of researching people.

So they've helped a lot. And there has been a huge amount of data produced, particularly since World War II. Just as a sidebar here, we had captive populations during wartime.

The United States, in particular, had one of the biggest armies in the world. And they all had to do what they were told. Right? It's called orders. And so if the government said we're going to develop, as they did, a national training institute to study people, they had a captive population that they could experiment with.

Were blacks different from whites in their response to things? Were Hispanics different from the rest? Did they all relate to authority in the same way? What people were willing to take more chances?

That can be important in warfare. And all sorts of things like that. In other words, it gave a huge impetus to the study of human behavior.

[ 5 : 10 ] And they were able to carry out those experiments. I suspect, but I do not know, that the Behavior Analysis Unit, stationed somewhere at Langley, not ours, but theirs, in Virginia, is the part of the American government that is continuing the studies that were started during the war.

Also, computers have made it possible to study huge samples of population, so that reliability has improved greatly. Now, you've all seen these ads on television that say, nine out of ten dentists say that if you clean your teeth with baking soda, you will sparkle.

Bing, bing. Little light bits going on the enamel, you know. Well, there was a time when you'd wonder, how did they get these ten people, you know? Were they from all over the place?

Or did they all have offices on Broadway, west of Camby? And were they all women? Were they all chosen from the first half of the alphabet? But, you know, now, with a few keystrokes, you can actually survey every dentist in Canada and say, yes or no, do you use this brand of toothpaste? Just, you know, it's instant. And computers have really done very well for us that way, especially for the branch of sociology that's called demography.

[ 6 : 29 ] Demography studies, demographers study changes in population. They're the people that can track. How did Fraser Street stop being mostly German and start being mostly Punjabi?

They watch that flow and they can tell you what's happening. And we'll talk about one of those people later on. The development of profiles in their use is one example that has helped us in many different ways.

In other words, developing a profile of people, a certain kind of person that you're looking for. Let's say serial killers. Well, okay, they are not like other killers, are they?

They are not like other killers. They aren't choosing people at random. They have a target. They are choosing the same kind of person every time. They are killing in the same way every time.

And they might very well be killing within a certain area. Now, there actually was a policeman on the BPD when I was working as a volunteer for the police who left his work to go to Simon Fraser, registered for a doctorate in criminology, and came up with a formula, a profile for studying serial killers.

[ 7 : 43 ] It is certainly used throughout the English-speaking world now. So, BPD was very slow to praise the achievements of this guy. But, you know, somebody who is really quite famous said, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.

And I think that was his fate because the BPD didn't take a huge interest in him and he was immediately offered six other jobs by the Americans. But we also use profiles and things that might sound more positive to you.

I was at one time related to the management of a psychiatric day program at the hospital where I worked. And we were looking at starting a program that would be mainly groups.

There were no individual interviews except with a psychiatrist. And that was a medication issue by and large. And we wanted to know how to choose people to be successful for two reasons in this program.

It was going to be 12 people for 12 weeks. And we were using four regular staff members, nine to five, and two sessions from a psychiatrist, which was like two mornings a week.

[ 8 : 55 ] That is a very expensive program for a hospital to operate, to use that many staff people for a very limited number of people. So we were quite determined that we had to find people who would, and this came from a profile, be within traveling distance of the hospital, be able to use the transportation system without help, be able to live alone and look after their ADLs.

These are activities of daily living, dressing, feeding yourself, etc. Be reliable, compliant is the word that medical people use. About taking medication.

That was a word I had to learn when I went to the hospital because so-and-so was non-compliant with taking meds. You know, social workers would have called that expressing self-determination. But that doesn't fly in a hospital where, again, taking medication reliably is very important. So this was an expensive program, and we wanted no dropouts. Universities consider this too when they're taking people into a program. You don't want to lose the participants because that is wasteful of resources.

[10:11] So we wanted them to stick it out for 12 weeks. We wanted all those other things that I mentioned, and we wanted people who could benefit from a group program.

And that helped us eliminate fairly quickly schizophrenics, people with personality disorders, and people whose depressions of various kinds was not under control enough to satisfy those other four things.

And so a profile or two did help us make those choices. Another reason that we can now take behavioral research more seriously is the advancement in neuropsychology and neuropsychiatry. Just as a sidebar here, psychiatry is not one of the behavioral sciences. It is a branch of medicine, a branch of medical practice. But that doesn't mean that we don't have coffee with those guys or work together on projects.

This is really the test tube side of behavioral sciences. This is where you can do empirical research. And we now know much more about the chemistry of the brain and its effect on behavior as a result of work in that area.

[11:20] And just as an example, I was practicing social work. When would this be? 1960s. It was common if a teenager was exhibiting peculiar behavioral signs, say at age 17, and clearly demonstrating something schizophrenic, to look at family dynamics as a first place that you would start.

You probably remember this too, Beth. No, maybe not. You're younger. All right. Gee, nearly goofed on that one. And really, it isn't that they are ignored now, but we now know that something bad is going on in the brain when somebody develops schizophrenia and that there are other ways of treating that.

So these things get channeled into the study of people nowadays. Well, I'm going to go backwards just a bit. This interest in human behavior has received serious attention starting in the 1800s, believe it or not, when a book written by a German author, Ferdinand Czernis, that name is spelled T-O-U-M-L-A-U-T-N-I-E-S, but my computer does not speak German, created interesting definitions for us.

He wanted to find out why are groups not attracting the same kind of people. So he wrote his book called, I'm glad, Joe, you mentioned Gemeinde. We're going to get some more Gemeinde here. Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. This means community and society. But most people never call his book community and society. They just use the German delicious words here.

[13:02] And later on, Emil Durkheim, one of the ancestors of anthropology, Max Weber, one of the ancestors of sociology, and even Karl Marx, added to the subjects that we now call anthropology, sociology, psychology, and economics.

Those are behavioral sciences. Well, let's look and see what Tony said. Can you see that? It's a little crooked. It's okay.

Is it all right? Yeah, it's fine. Okay. Okay. So, Gemeinschaft refers to groupings based on feelings of togetherness. Let's hang on to that thought.

which are felt to be goals to be kept up. If the goals are to be kept up by the membership, then keeping the togetherness is one of the goals. And Gesellschaft, meaning society, refers to groups that are sustained by being instrumental for the individual aims and goals of their members.

So, you have a different reason for joining a trade union or a professional association or something like that than you would for joining a fraternity, let's say, or a group like Learners Exchange.

[14:13] Now, that was 1887. Weber, coming along some years later, wrote a book about economy and society, which wouldn't actually suggest that it has a lot to do with behavior, but he wanted to fine-tune, for his own purposes, the definition that attorneys have given us.

So, he said, he emphasized that Gemeinschaft is rooted in subjective feeling, that members belong together in the same group.

Now, subjective feeling is very difficult to measure, but it means you come to a place and say, hmm, those are my kind of people, and you want to belong to that.

It's kind of an internal feeling, rather than an objective, rational, outside one. Gazelle-shaft-based relationships, he felt, are rooted in rational agreement by mutual consent.

Now, he doesn't actually say, Sheila's definition would say, the first one really means there's a draw from the heart, and the second one, there's a draw from the head. There are rational reasons, things that you can articulate a little more clearly.

[15:22] Well, now, I want you to get into the act, please. We already know that a great many people in this group are not cradle Anglicans.

Raise your hand if you are not a cradle Anglican. Ooh, look at this! So, you all came to try out St. John's, and then, and this is the important part, you came back.

You came back, and you got involved here. What made you do that? We've got time to hear very quickly from four people, three or four people. Just tell us. Why did you come back?

Why did you stay involved? Go ahead, Kurt. Well, Ruth Matheson is probably moving, probably all my life, because the Moen family and the Matheson family got invited to the Sofers Christmas parties.

And when I came to St. John's, I was a son that was looking for a hope, for a church home, that my mother would feel comfortable in, and also myself.

[16:27] Okay. That's good. And Ruth said, Kurt meet community. She said that. She said that.

And I discovered... No surprise there, when you know what kind of person Ruth was. I can remember the first time I went to Evensong and went into the kitchen. Yeah, and encountered Nora, right?

And Nora. So let's sing... Well, I know what it is, doxology. Yep. And that was like a Moen anthem for table briefs.

And my dad and my uncle, they would harmonize... Okay. I'm going to cut you off, because there were a lot of hands in the air here, Kurt. But you have just said, you have really just said, they were people like you.

Yeah. You've said it a different way. I found my guy. You found... Hey. Who could say it better than that? Anybody else want to chirp in here? A different reason? Thanks.

[17:23] Well, I came to St. Lawrence because I had my first child, and I was looking for a church. I mean, I hadn't been... That had babies. Oh, right. So, and then I got involved in the kids' things, and it was such a lovely children's program, and there was lots of...

And then I found that I became brand new in the mouths. I mean, it's just like going to a playground. It was church. Right. Right. Okay.

Meeting a need in your life at that point. Yeah. That's great. John, short one, please. I came from the United Church of Canada, but then to the Pentecostal Assemblies, and the youth minister, John, there's nothing here for you.

I like the aliveness of the Pentecostal Church, but... What did you like about us? Well, you had the aliveness, the atmosphere was alive, the Bible was alive, but it had a bit of the appearance of the United Church, because a building with stained glass windows, like the Broadway Pentecostal Church, it was too much for me.

So this was between the United Church of Canada and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Good point. In other words, you said, this is my kind of church. Yeah. Okay. A lot more younger people.

[18:39] Christine. Learner's Exchange. I was hoping we'd hear that. Okay, what about us? We've moved a lot through all my life, many, many times, and I've always looked for a church where I felt like I was learning.

And if I wasn't learning, then I didn't belong. So I started coming to Learner's Exchange and then going back to the church where I was working for their worship service, and eventually that didn't work, so I thought, okay, I'll just stay for the worship service.

So you belong in a place that gives you the right sort of intellectual environment. That's no bad thing, really. I'm sure we all have some of that. Anybody else? Okay, Michael.

Learner's Exchange. I think that the groups here is very intellectual. A lot of good discussions, which we're going to find in other churches. Well, I'm sure that that's the glue that holds quite a lot of us here.

But there is more than that. There really is more than that. Or we wouldn't all be jostling shoulders at the coffee urn and catching up with the members that are here.

[ 19 : 40 ] I hope you don't mind if I sit down. I'm a little wobbly. Well, community can mean a large group, and as you have pointed out, it can also mean a small one. It's true that St. John's is a church community, and there are people who come here for intellectual reasons and also people who come here because they are drawn for something else.

So it's often true, particularly in churches, that there's a big umbrella group and that there are smaller ones in it. Now, what is possible in a small group, a small community in the church, that is not possible in the big community?

Any ideas about that? Yeah, Edie. More a sense of knowing and being known. Oh, very important. There's your lead-in line, kiddo.

Intimacy, isn't it? Intimacy, yeah, yeah. But also accountability that can come from that intimacy because if your life is falling short even of your own aspirations and your moral life may be slipping or something, there are people who actually love you and hold you accountable.

And that's quite an important... Tough love. Yes. People can hide out easily if they're sort of anonymous. Yes. But in a small group...

[ 21 : 05 ] In a small group, it's hard to do that. And in a small group, it's easier to develop the kind of trust that makes intimacy possible because unless you feel safe, you are not going to reveal yourself in the way that might have a healing effect or that you might need.

Well, pushing on here. A modern sociologist, okay? This guy is still alive, still doing his stuff. And I think we... I particularly want us to look at the belonging part of this.

Reg Bibby, some of you know his work. A sociologist, a demographer. Yeah. He studies populations. He works at the University of Lesbridge and he's actually been studying religious involvement in Canada since the 1970s.

So he's got really quite a body of research for us to gain from. His approach has been shaped by two academic perspectives. Secularization, and we've all seen that going on in our society, and rational choice theory.

Now, rational choice theory is the kind of thing that Weber would have supported, Max Weber. Making a choice based on evaluating has this place got what I want?

[ 22 : 23 ] Bibby talks sometimes in a way that bothers me. This is an example. He talks about a marketplace for religion. Changing demand and a various number of suppliers, each vying for a greater market share.

Sounds a bit like the stock market report on the CBC. But, you know, we are that kind of business too. It's just that Christians hardly ever look at it in quite those words.

According to his theory, churches will be more or less successful in the marketplace depending on their ability to meet the contemporary needs of their members.

Now, that presupposes that we know what the contemporary needs are. And I don't know how that this church would kind of look in terms of, say, program development at what our contemporary needs are.

You know, are they looking at there are more babies coming to church these days, we've got to expand the nursery. Or are they looking at what we need, need in here? In his recent book, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, he moves past these theories.

[ 23 : 32 ] Somebody has sort of hunched that it's because he's older and he now has a granddaughter in university and he's getting more in touch with the other generations. I don't know if that's true.

But he reveals a more complex picture of religious belief and practice. The picture he now presents emphasizes the relationship between polarization and pluralism.

And also, personal well-being, spiritual well-being, and social well-being. Those are important. His studies reveal that Canadians are equally divided between churchgoers and non-churchgoers, a trend that he associates with the baby boomers.

Those on the religious end of the spectrum possess a stronger motivation towards social involvement and are much better able to cope with death.

Now, there is a huge, big topic for another day, but it's tantalizing, isn't it? He has studied... It bothers me that sociologists look at churches based on who's in a pew.

[ 24 : 38 ] Counting numbers doesn't go nearly far enough for me, but it is perhaps a starting place. So, he samples many people who are in or have been in the church.

And he has some views on people who move from one congregation to another, a trend that has certainly influenced the St. John's demographic. And I sort of wondered, well, partly this group, we've all said we came from somewhere that wasn't Anglican.

We used to, in the Baptist church, when I used to be a Baptist, we call this the circulation of the saints. You know, going after the best preacher, the best program, whatever.

And I am just not at all sure how this fits with the mission that Jesus left us with. Which wasn't, keep doing things that will get more Christians in here.

Was it? Well, with this in mind, I want you to look at two websites, and I don't actually know how good these are because the writing is pretty small.

[ 25 : 42 ] I have two churches here, one of which is St. John's. This is not good church, bad church. Both of these websites have good stuff on them. But I want you to look at, particularly, what kind of people do you think will be drawn to this?

Now, this is... Well, nobody will be drawn to that. Okay. This is the first one of St. John's.

So, it shows lots of people looking happy in different activities. And church programs and people and so on listed down here.

Whether you are considering attending St. John's or are already attending, we invite you... Pull this down just a bit.

To connect, thank you, with our church's family in a way that will deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ. Two really good words in there.

[ 26 : 53 ] What are they? Connect. Connect and... Jesus Christ. Thank you. The second page of that is... This one, which is a little more current.

You'll notice the date on it, given those times of the Easter services. The same stuff on the left-hand side. And it says more about us. What we're studying?

Well, our mission statement for the moment, our vision is faith, love, and hope. And love is emphasized there. We used to have a song saying they will know we are Christians by our love.

I don't know how many people really notice that about us. We're studying James. There's the calendar, register for classes. You want care? You want to talk about employment?

Here. So that's St. John's. Keep that in mind. And I chose this next church because Reg Bibby mentioned it in his book *To the Gods and Back*.

[ 27 : 59 ] And it is a fairly new church. It's a plant from a place in the Maritimes. And it's called Trinity Central.

This place moved from more or less a house group in Yaletown to the community center in Yaletown and another place that they mentioned that I don't know the location of.

And at the time that this was done, and I think this is still true, they're meeting at the Simon Fraser Dialogue Center at Seymour and Hastings. You said it was from the Maritimes.

It was a plant from the Maritimes, John. Yes. Mother Church is there somewhere. Actually, it says Ben Cicc Theatre. Yeah, Ben Cicc Theatre. Well, it's meeting at the, you know, this is, then it moved after this.

If you go to their website, it changes about every three weeks. One of the most up-to-date one is a map showing you where the Dialogue Center is. Because having to move people around is a bit difficult, I guess.

[ 29 : 07 ] Especially. I'm going to move again. Hmm? I'm going to move again. Oh, yeah. Yes.

Once again. Now, there is, there's one thing, just briefly, like to draw your attention to the bottom thing.

Weekend away. Trinity Central Church Weekend is our annual weekend away at Labor Day. And they're going to Camp Sunrise at Gibson's.

This is a Salvation Army camp, which is a few hundred yards from the ferry terminal. You can walk. And there it is, and you can sign up. What can you get from a weekend away that you can't get the rest of the, the week?

Or the rest of the church services? Yeah? Did you have your hand up? Tell us anyway. Anyway. What can you get?

Nora knows. Community. Community. Many, many community. And many of the things that we enjoy or would enjoy about the bigger group are entirely possible in the smaller one.

[ 30 : 17 ] But here, there are pictures, yes, that tells you something about what you can find there, but it tells you what kind of church are we. We're a community of people who love God.

That's the heart of everything we are and do. We're about God, and we're about people. That means that each of us is living toward a deeper love of Jesus and a knowledge of God personally. And they go on to say, is this the one? That they are Bible-centered and spirit-led. It might be in the other page. And I looked at that and wondered if we could describe ourselves that way. Yeah, it's down here.

They call themselves charismatic. We're spirit-filled. We believe that God gave the Holy Spirit to empower people for life as a Christian. We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today, and they're valuable to all believers.

[ 31 : 21 ] Could we describe ourselves that way? Edie's shaking her head. Well, we believe in the Holy Spirit.

We do. We say that every Sunday. So why are you all shaking your heads? Anybody going to be adventurous and say it out loud?

Because we don't speak in tongues out loud in the church. Well, I think... Thank you, John. I mean, it cuts to the heart of the problem. I think there's one of the things that because of the demographic of the group here today, if we've had Don Bennett here, who came from a brethren background, this description of what we did to St. John's, and everybody else will know that, as well as community, I am a big fan of the liturgical background.

Yes. For like a holy, Don and Maureen came to this church and he, if you ask him sometime, that brethren man started to cry when we, in those days, had the choir processing with a crucifer in robes and the organ and the choir processed from the back and he, every hair on the back of his neck stood up and, and, you know, the choir singing and then the people singing and his praise going up and he, uh, was surprised to find that he was a liturgical guy.

And the liturgy, uh, does, no one in this demographic mentioned that but I think there are a lot of Baptists, former Medellin, you know, people who also come because of what happens in, with liturgy.

[ 33 : 08 ] Yes, Nora, I agree with you. I, I would be one of those people who was moved by the liturgy and I don't understand why because I had attended a Lutheran church for four years in the early days.

But intersecting with the idea of the spirit aspect, yes, I think you're right. There, the praise coming, you know, what we teach with that, I think, is different from a church that would call itself charismatic.

I think there's some subtle things going on. Oh, yes. I was actually, you know, trying to relate to what you're asking. Thank you. We're going to move on here because we still have another speaker here who's got interesting things to say.

So, perhaps these two ads would appeal to a slightly different person. Now, there is one thing that sociologists will tell us not just about Canada, the world, or whatever, but specifically about Vancouver that the biggest problem we have here is not the bike lanes and the drug problem in downtown Eastside and what to do with older people.

It is loneliness. Loneliness. Sociologists are the ones that say it out loud. The more we live in little boxes and become cliff dwellers, the more, the harder it is to be close to each other, to be real to each other, and so we certainly have a mission there.

[ 34 : 34 ] In closing my bit here, I would like to highlight something about belonging. Belonging, if we went far enough along that path, would address the awkward problem of inclusion and exclusion.

Can you be in the group but not of the group? It took me a year of going to everything I could lay hands on in this church to begin to feel that I was going to be accepted into any part of the community, community, and I'm not unassertive.

I hope that nowadays no one is experiencing that, and I rather think that they don't. So I'd like to conclude with a statement from an ancestor of my profession in social work, founder of the settlement house movement in the United States, Jane Adams, who said, The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.

Thank you. Over to you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Switching seats here. Switching. Yeah. I have more of a narrative presentation, just talking about community from a personal perspective.

Since I was a young girl, I've had an interest in Christians coming together. What is it? The German word?

[ 36 : 26 ] Gemeinde. Gemeinde. That's it. I didn't know, I didn't have German for it, but that's what it was. I remember the feeling of growing up in a church where people enjoyed parish suppers and spring fairs and plays.

My dad was organizing a lot of this, which meant that I was going to be there anyway, but I liked it. For me, anything that involved my small parish, whether singing in the choir, joining in the activities of the girls' auxiliary, or being involved in the Anglican Young People's Group gave me real pleasure.

You can see I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Anglican. I didn't go away to a summer camp like Pioneer or Artaban, but rather I got involved in something called the Sorrento Anglican Lay Training Center on Shishwap Lake.

Some of you may have heard of this. It's no longer the Lay Training Center, I should say. But it ran camps to, when I was in my teens, it ran camps to establish the place as a center of retreat and study.

There was a big old house and we cleaned that and painted and cleared brush to make campsites. and then we'd go down to the lake and swim and sing folk songs.

[ 38 : 06 ] It was all lovely. And, you know, it had something to do with my faith. I wasn't, you know, I couldn't articulate it at that point.

I didn't know what it was. In the late 60s and early 70s, the winter course was established at Sorrento. And I think it ran for possibly five or six years.

I wanted to quit nursing and go. My father said, no, I think you ought to stay. I was so keen to go. I was in the OR and I thought, I've got to get out of here and go to the winter course.

And he said, no, I think you need to stay in nursing. I want you to have a profession. My father was wise. It was my, I did eventually get there and it was my first real experience of Christian where folks actually lived together.

There were about 25 young people sharing a lovely Panabode building with absolutely no soundproofing at all. Two or three or four of us shared rooms together.

[ 39 : 18 ] There was a lot of hilarity. There was Christian teaching and a variety of other topics presented. This was the time of encounter groups and things like that, so we did that.

I mean, people would shake their heads now. But there were, there was prayer, there was meals. We had Father Zygmunt come up and do Old Testament theology, so it wasn't all that bad. we were responsible for the maintenance of our living quarters and were required to help with meal preparations and cleanup.

And I've had other experiences of communities since that have expanded on that Sorrento winter course and maybe wonder and reflect just what it is that we have.

as Christians, when we come together in a, say, in a weekly Bible study or a Sunday service or a small group that goes out on a mission trip, what is it?

[ 40 : 29 ] And so Sheila's been talking about some of these things. I discovered Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer the first summer that I went to Regent College.

and it was the subject of one of the first papers I wrote there. And I was really, it articulated something of what I've experienced.

Of course, Bonhoeffer wrote this book after being the director of a seminary in Wingenwald from 1935 to 1937, just before before the war.

And it was a pretty Spartan place, originally built to train teachers. In fact, the seminarians slept in the classrooms and there weren't very many bathrooms.

I mean, it was tough going, I think. Bonhoeffer was criticized because people felt that the community life that he organized was coming out of a Catholic monasticism, which was just disaster as far as, you know, a good Protestant Lutheran was concerned, rather than, you know, they would have seen a Protestant tradition.

[ 41 : 52 ] But, of course, being Bonhoeffer, he won over his critics. So, what did Bonhoeffer think? He felt that Christianity meant community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.

He was, he writes a whole chapter on community. And he reasoned that we need others to proclaim the truth of Jesus to us.

As simple as that. In fact, he argued that we can't know Jesus otherwise. When I read that line, I thought, well, he didn't hear about the, some of the Islamic people who get visions of Jesus. But, anyway, they have to, at some point, come into community to know, they have to find some other person who's going to speak to them of the Lord.

In addition, he pointed out that we need fellow Christians to speak to us when we are uncertain or discouraged. Bonhoeffer stated that the whole goal of Christian community is to meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.

[ 43 : 18 ] We thank God for what his son Jesus has done for us, and we thank him for giving us brothers and sisters who live by his call, by his forgiveness, and by his promise.

I think we know that. Or at least, that's my experience. But I didn't have words for that, and so he did.

Bonhoeffer maintained that this spiritual love we have for our brothers and sisters knows that the most direct way to others is always through prayer to Jesus.

Now, I just, I thought, wow! love me. Like, that when we pray and intercede for others, like, this is so impactful.

And so, I read on. so he says, he quotes, I think it's Psalm 133, behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

[ 44 : 24 ] So, a praise of life together under the word. And Bonhoeffer suggested that we substitute in unity for, through Christ.

Christ. For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. He is our peace. Through him alone do we have access to one another, joy in one another, and fellowship with one another.

And he was, he thought that there was nothing better than actually living together with other Christians. This was, I mean, this is his one of his most famous books, and it's still being reprinted.

But let's go back to Finkenwald. What did an average day look like? Well, these seminarians committed themselves to silence until worship started their day together.

Daily morning worship comprised a long reading from the Psalms, and they endeavored to get through the Psalter each week. I mean, so you know that that was a long reading.

[ 45 : 44 ] In addition to some hymns, they did sing. And then there were readings from the Old and New Testament and an extemporaneous prayer by Bonhoeffer.

So they must have been there for a while. on Saturday he delivered a commentary on one of the readings. There was a modest breakfast and afterwards a 30-minute quiet time in one's room.

And absolutely no talking or phone calls were allowed during this time. No, yeah, this was the rule. Time alone was important, a time for keeping silence and listening to God, meditation, prayer, and intercession.

During the day at Finkenwald, there was coursework related to theological studies because these were seminarians. In the evening, there was music and games and evening prayer similar to the morning and then silence again.

Apparently, Bonhoeffer was very creative and had all sorts of ideas for entertainment. so it must have been a good time.

[ 47 : 02 ] There was a monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper, which was a high point of the community. Bonhoeffer encouraged the seminarians to make personal confessions to one another.

And this is, again, another chapter. He felt strongly that Christ became our brother to help us. In hearing our confession, confession, our brother or sister stands before us as the sign of truth and the grace of God.

And we've known that when we've been transparent with a friend. I'm sure. The community member hears the confession of our sins in Christ's dead and forgives our sins in Christ's name.

And just on a personal note, when I work with Living Waters, we do this. You know, the people make confession.

We accept that confession in the name of the Trinity. It's a very significant thing.

[ 48 : 11 ] In addition, this is interesting, the Finkenwald rule was an important part of the community where brothers obligated themselves not to talk about another who was absent.

Like, how hard would that be? Anyway, living in community, I'm sure they had a lot of things to say about their fellow seminarians.

but that was the rule. One of the things that I have observed and experienced about life in Christian community is that it's an ordered, disciplined life.

That certainly is reflected in life together. And I saw this in communities in which I visited in France. One year, when I was in my mid-twenties, I went to Europe to visit Christian communities.

And there's lots. And I found the Little Sisters of Bethlehem, who lived in a beautiful place on a mountaintop in France, an hour from Geneva.

[ 49 : 21 ] I highly recommend it. They had a ministry to those wishing to seek time for rest and reflection. A lot of people came out from Paris.

And Thèse was similar in that respect. both communities have sought to welcome others and bring them into dialogue about the faith. There was a rhythm to life which was acknowledged and established.

And members of these communities all had particular work to do. There were particular times for worship, reflection, and intercession.

And I felt that I was in a protected place where, for example, the Sisters ordered life made it possible for me, for the other visitors to be there.

It was protected. I certainly experience this when I go on retreat at Westminster Abbey. It's the same sort of thing in mission.

[ 50 : 27 ] In the early 80s, I spent a couple of weeks at Labrie in Switzerland where I studied for part of the day and worked for the other half.

I don't know. I didn't Google it to see if it's still happening. This was a long time ago when the Schaffers were both alive, and I saw how much hospitality was part of a ministry to visitors, of whom there were many.

Dinners, though not elaborate, were designed to delight. And it was not uncommon for guests to sit around the table for hours at a time sharing their experience of the faith.

another. I'll have to read quickly. All right.

I've just lost my place here. Anyways, so we sat around and talked, and I had, but learning was another big part of the experience of Labrie, and I had my first in-depth experience of Romans, expounded by Francis Schaeffer through a tape ministry.

[ 51 : 41 ] It opened my eyes to the riches of scriptures that I'd previously not known. So let me just gallop on here. In the mid-80s, for three years, I actually lived in an intentional Anglican lay community called the Company of the Cross, which ran a boys' boarding school.

some of you may have heard of this, St. John's School of Alberta. It was a pretty exciting high-energy place whose focused ministry was teaching and taming 100 teenage boys.

There was never any question about the mission of this community. There was always more work to do in a day than we as staff ever had time for. These boys, many of whom we rescued from unsuccessful experiences in public school, kept us very busy.

We needed all God's strength and guidance to manage, but it was an extremely satisfying and compelling life in many ways. I learned so much and I had a lot of fun.

For the staff, the day started early with morning prayers at 7 a.m. in the school chapel and closed with conflict about 9 p.m. and the boys could attend that.

[ 53 : 02 ] There was a communion service once a week which all the boys were expected to attend and each year the staff committed themselves to the work of the community and used the rule of life from the prayer book as a guide.

Some of you have a sheet there. It's in the prayer book. I think it's 555 right after the catechism. I won't go over it. It's interesting and it's good.

For each of the communities that I've mentioned, prayer was an integral part of life together. But the Sisters of the Cynical, for the Sisters of the Cynical, guiding others through a ministry of prayer and spiritual direction was their focus.

Up until 1996, I don't know if anybody has ever ever got to their wonderful big house in Shaughnessy where you could arrange to do a retreat.

I loved going there for a couple of days or for an afternoon. That was the cynicalness? Yeah. I often would organize doing a guided retreat and meeting with one of the sisters who would ask me what it was that I wanted to focus on in my retreat.

[ 54 : 23 ] And then they would suggest a couple of scriptures for me to pray through and then they would meet with me at an appointed time where we discerned what the Lord might be saying to me. It was great.

The Sisters of the Cynical still have a home in in Caresdale but it's not large enough. It's been sold.

Has it? Yeah. And they moved back. Okay. So there you go. But there are communities where one can go on a self-guided retreat like Rivendell and over on Bowen Island and with Misser Abbey. If you're going to Westminster Abbey you need to take a friend if you're a woman. Yes. Sometimes I find that time away in a beautiful place is just what I need to help me hear what the Lord might be saying.

For me an experience of knowing and being known ranks near the top of important elements of Christian community. I believe that what I've experienced in my church as a child and young adult I rediscovered here at St.

[ 55 : 47 ] John's. In the early 80s as St. John's grew with new people coming every week Harry Robinson began to feel that he was unable to meet the pastoral needs of his burgeoning parish.

His innovative solution was to put everybody in the church into small groups. According to their postal code. With the stated goal that we would get to know and then care for each other.

And then he designated facilitators for each of these PAGs as they were called and suggested that we meet for Bible study. Off you go. With my friend Brian Campbell who like me live downtown. I co-led what was called the West End PAG. We started off with perhaps four or five folks but our numbers quickly doubled. We were a fairly homogeneous lot working people in our twenties and thirties.

Some married though most were single. So we decided to meet on Friday nights and share a simple meal of soup and salad. And so most weeks were Bible study and we prayed for one another but other times we might just talk and pray.

[ 57 : 01 ] people in and because we lived in close proximity we began to see each other during the week. We got more and more involved in each other's lives. I think the West End PAG met like this for close to four years before a number of us moved away.

It was a joyous and rich experience of what I think Jesus intends for us. And there are more recent experiences of authentic Christian community. again right here at St.

John's. For example, at present there is a diverse community of people, some of you have been, which have been meeting for over 10 years, Nora tells me 13, on Tuesday evenings around Edesaw.

Yes. John is another. Harvey guest has been our lay leader and homilist for most of the time. Tim Bondette, our cantor, and Nora Johnson has been our cook and general.

We need a general. Even song is always followed by a delicious meal and we sit around the table and converse and get to know one another. And guests frequently join us.

[ 58 : 16 ] So, another aspect of Christian community, which people may experience as they gather together, is healing. more often a result, I think, rather than a reason for meeting.

We gather to have a Bible study and we pray for one another and share the answers to these prayers. It takes risk to speak of our needs with a group or even just with one other person.

But within the context of the Christian family, it is a part of knowing and being known. For example, keeping company with God, a worship service of prayer and reflection, which happens every second and fourth Monday evenings, does incorporate prayers for healing.

And those of us who attend are encouraged to be prayerful, listen to God, and to receive his grace and mercy in our lives. So, I've got a list there.

If you flip it over, what suggestions, and this is from Bonhoeffer, what we might be prepared to bring to a study group, to a larger group within the church family.

[ 59 : 33 ] And Bonhoeffer didn't mince any words. I mean, how about this one starting off the ministry of holding one's tongue? I mean, really? So, I mean, you know, we've just gone through James, so we know about this.

But his point, I think, was that when we seize and desist from scrutinizing the other person, we really get to know them as God intends them to be known.

The ministry of meekness. that we would consider our neighbor's will more important than ours.

The ministry of listening. Yeah, to listen with the ears of God and then speak the word of God.

Helpfulness. We know many of us have experienced the helpfulness of others, how important that is.

Bearing one another's burdens. The ministry of proclaiming, what Bonhoeffer is referring to here, is speaking the truth and love to someone. And it can't be done, he says, unless we first have listened, sought to be helpful, and suffered with that person.

[ 60 : 56 ] And the ministry of authority asserts that genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the other ministries are going on.

So, anyway, after looking at this list of attributes, I thought, well, this is not for the faint of heart, is it? And so I wonder how you feel. Returning to these elements of the Christian community, are there other things that you would add?

and, you know, which one do you think St. John's does particularly well?

Where are we weak? I throw these questions out to you. What do you think of Vonhofer's suggestions of what we should be prepared to bring?

[ 61 : 53 ] For me, this is the important thing. As members of the church family, we are given people to love and care for. Because we know the Lord Jesus, our relationship can have a different dynamic if we choose to live under his word and submit to scripture.

scripture's call on our life. This is not a call to live together in the same house or the same place necessarily, but it's a call to practical living out of the faith and the life of obedience to our Lord.

So, and.