SHOWING OUR COLOURS:
ENCOURAGING SELF-DIFFERENTIATION
IN AN URBAN MENNONITE CONGREGATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Two stories converge in this thesis - the story of Warden Woods Mennonite Church, and the writer's story. Both are of Mennonites who in many ways have integrated into the surrounding culture but who are still strongly influenced by the theology and practices of their tradition. Both have been shaped by the emphasis on the church as a visible body - in the world, but not of the world. Both have placed a high value on peacemaking, on loving their neighbours, and on belonging to a close community.

In some ways they have left their tradition. They question theological language which does not speak to the issues they face in their multi-racial, multi-faith urban ethos. They clothe themselves in varied and colourful dress, and look for fresh ways of expressing their theology that leave room for differences. But they emphasize a strong sense of community and belonging. They want the congregation to be diverse and creative, but it has become more homogeneous.

The author's story is one of coming into pastoral ministry in mid-life. This congregation was her first pastorate, after spending two decades in a number of roles as a caregiver - in her professional life as a public health nurse, in her family, and as a volunteer in the church. The research grows out of her personal experiences as the pastor to a congregation in which a significant number of the members had spent several years of their young adult lives in voluntary service to their neighbours who lived in the area around the church or in other parts of the world.

This study is based on the premise that in order for a community to be creative and life-giving both for those who belong and those who want to join, it needs to respect the unique stories of individuals and create a safe environment for them to express differences. The study draws on the insights of family systems theory, in particular the concept of self-differentiation. The research process was designed to explore self-differentiation with a selected group of diverse persons from the congregation, with the hope that the experience would affect their participation in the larger congregation. While not the primary focus of this thesis, the analysis includes observations on how a major crisis in the congregation during the research process both influenced and highlighted self-differentiation within relationships. The thesis concludes with the study's impact on the researcher's own ministry and suggests some implications for pastoral leaders in the North American Mennonite Church.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

My early years were spent growing up and going to a one-room country school in a predominantly Mennonite neighbourhood in rural Waterloo County. Involvement in Erb St. Mennonite Church which is an urban congregation in the City of Waterloo, and attending Rockway Mennonite High School provided me with many significant opportunities for growth, both in my faith and in exercising my gifts for leadership. After spending my last year of high school in a public high school, I went on to attend McMaster University, where I completed a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and was married. My professional life began with a brief career in public health nursing, and was interrupted for ten years as I took on the role of primary caregiver for our two children.

My experiences in ministry began long before I began formal seminary studies. In addition to public health nursing and parenting, my ministry roles included many hours of volunteering as coordinator of community outreach ministry for the church I was attending, leading and participating in several community women's groups, and providing vision and leadership in a community development project in a nearby low-income neighbourhood. During those years, I completed a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at the Cambridge Interfaith Pastoral Counselling Centre, and later joined the Board of Directors for the Centre. These ecumenical experiences along with my community involvement raised new faith questions and career issues for me, and awakened in me an interest in pursuing studies in theology. I spent a brief but immensely satisfying year receiving training and working in the field of conflict mediation, until 1983 when my husband accepted a position as Administrator of the newly built St. Clair O'Connor Community and our family moved to Toronto.

During our first year in Toronto I enrolled and began taking courses at the Toronto School of Theology. A year later, I was invited by the Danforth Mennonite Church to accept a staff position as their Congregational Coordinator during an interim year between pastors. This experience, along with my excitement about seminary studies and the encouragement of friends, several of whom were experienced pastors, launched me on an exciting journey of full-time studies at Emmanuel College, which in 1989 granted me a Masters of Divinity degree and scholarships to do further studies in theology. I had already begun serving as pastor of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church in Scarborough in 1988. After four years of pastoral ministry, I entered the Doctor of Ministry Programme at the Toronto School of Theology. Some of the fruits of that decision are described in this thesis, and others are still being realized in my practice of ongoing ministry in the Warden Woods congregation.
DEDICATION

To all whose colours and textures have added depth and beauty to the tapestry of my life, especially Dave, whose constant support has made this project possible.
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It is impossible to thank adequately all the people who have contributed to my learning and the completion of this project. I only hope that the experience itself has provided some intrinsic rewards to compensate for the encouragement, support, challenges, feedback, and practical assistance I have received from so many people. Because of the collaborative nature of the Doctor of Ministry Programme, I was privileged to benefit from:

The eight persons in my research group, who took the risk of allowing me to use their experiences as part of my learning.

The members of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church, whose support made it possible for me to combine ministry and studies.

The members of my Ministry Base Group, whose wisdom and insights, garnished with good food and warm hospitality, gave form to the beginnings of this project.

My faculty advisor and other members of my Thesis Committee, who always found a way to combine challenge with encouragement.

My peers in the Doctor of Ministry Programme, whose persistence and creative processes often enhanced mine.

My spiritual director and design consultant, both of whom encouraged me first to listen for the wisdom in my own instincts, and then to look for other resources.

The professors and support staff of the Toronto School of Theology and member colleges, particularly those who give leadership in the Doctor of Ministry Programme.

My mother, who taught me that anything worth doing is worth doing with others.

My family, whose encouragement and support were mixed with frequent reminders that one cannot live by studies alone.
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Chapter 1

A MATTER OF LIFE AND WHOLENESS

It had been a frustrating Council meeting. The decisions facing the members were perplexing, and there had been long periods of silence, punctuated by the occasional remarks by one or two of the more vocal participants. Finally, in exasperation, the Council Chair said to the others, "I wish people would show their colours!"

Her remark echoed within me, as I sat among that group of gifted, insightful, creative, but silent individuals. I knew they were effective and innovative leaders in other areas of their lives, but their rich colours seemed to blend together and fade or sometimes disappear altogether when they were addressing issues in the life of the church, particularly the more perplexing ones.

The Council Chair had grown up in another Christian denomination. She probably did not realize how counter cultural her remark was among this group of Mennonites. She was only beginning to discover how reticent some of them could be to "show their colours" within the community. She did not know that, as a people, Mennonites, especially those of the Swiss tradition, tend to have a deeply ingrained sense of being separate and distinguishable from the rest of the world, but within the community they have been schooled in humility and self-effacement, and taught "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to

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1 Among North American Mennonites, there are some differences between Swiss and Russian Mennonites, who shared the same origins, but whose ways of relating vary due to cultural and political influences in their history. Warden Woods Church was begun by Swiss Mennonites, but includes equal numbers from both traditions. These distinctions are less significant in the worldwide Mennonite Church.
Her challenge stayed with me as I began to observe and reflect on my experiences in the Mennonite Church, particularly the congregation in Warden Woods. This was not the first time I had heard someone in the congregation say they found it hard to know what others were thinking. I had heard the wistfulness in some newer participants in the congregation who said they liked individual people in the congregation, but found it difficult to get to know them in the group. I had heard the frustration of others who wanted to engage in more open and direct discussion of differences on difficult issues.

On the other hand, I had also seen outspoken members of the congregation attack each other verbally in public over issues on which they disagreed, while others sat and watched silently. I had sat in a congregational meeting where an individual took the risk of voicing his opinions boldly, and then said afterward how vulnerable and alone he felt because there was no response except silence. I had heard people express their frustration with always having to be politically correct in leading worship and music. For members of this congregation, there was more at stake in "showing their colours" than was apparent to the casual onlooker or relative newcomer. It seemed that spontaneity had become a risk few people would take.

When viewed within its historical context, it is easy to see that there were

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2 Rom. 12:3 NRSV. All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.
compelling reasons for people in this congregation to minimize their differences for the sake of a greater good. They had a vision of community and mission which could not have been accomplished without considerable sacrifice and unified effort from everyone. Many of the people who joined the vision were young adults who had left their predominantly Mennonite communities and transferred all the intensity and energy of their own hopeful idealism to this new congregation and its visionary and compassionate leader. Furthermore, since the hope was that people from many different backgrounds and life experiences would feel part of this congregation, deliberate attempts were made to function as if differences of race, class, or religious background were nonexistent, and to accept and love everyone unconditionally. This willingness to sacrifice individual differences for the sake of the community was familiar to Mennonites, though the way it was expressed varied with the history and identity of the particular group.

Within the longer history and theological tradition of Mennonites, the tendency to downplay differences within the community is no surprise. It might seem inconsistent that there was not a stronger value placed on the expression of individual differences, since sixteenth century Anabaptists died in defence of their beliefs about voluntary adult baptism and church membership, and the freedom of the individual conscience in spiritual matters was central to their faith.

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3 This vision is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

However, suppressing individual differences in order to form strong cohesive communities could also be seen as a normal response to the fact that Mennonites have often been relatively few in number, and were often persecuted for their radical beliefs. If members needed their communities for protection in situations of vulnerability and for strength and encouragement to live out the rigorous demands of Christian discipleship, it might be expected that they would give priority to the unity and cohesiveness of their communities and sacrifice their personal needs and goals.

However, long after the economic and physical survival of these communities was no longer at stake, they continued to maintain strong boundaries between themselves and the world. They lived as if their corporate religious identity depended on being different from the world but similar within their communities, though the nature of that conformity varied from community to community. For some the emphasis was on theological conformity, while for others there was more concern about visible differences such as distinctive dress. Often those who "showed their colours" were seen as a threat to the community's cohesiveness, and sometimes such individuation resulted in schisms or people leaving the community.\textsuperscript{5}

My concern is that, if urban Mennonites continue to live as if their survival depends on being so closely connected to others like them, they will lose their

\textsuperscript{5} One such story is Rudy Wiebe's novel, \textit{Peace Shall Destroy Many} (Canada: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1962).
vitality and prophetic Christian vision. They will become less and less able to appreciate the gifts which individuals in all their diversity can bring to a community. I fear that, if Mennonites continue to base their sense of corporate identity on being different from the rest of the world, they will fail to hear the perspectives of others and to recognize that the world is also within Mennonite hearts and communities. Without this process of reflective self-examination, urban Mennonites will be ill-prepared for the opportunities and challenges of being a Christian presence in a complex world.

I believe that urban Mennonites have unique and important contributions to make to the fabric of society today. Furthermore, their communities would be greatly enriched and enlivened if they could find ways of weaving more connections between themselves and those who come from different cultural and denominational experiences and who bring their perspectives. I believe that can happen as Mennonites find ways to appreciate and express the full range of their own colours. Respecting their own differences will make it easier to welcome the same from others without feeling as if they are being threatened or diminished.

The plea for people to "show their colours" was compelling for me on a personal level as well. Like many women, I had learned to make family needs the primary determinants for many of my choices. Over the years I had struggled to value my own dreams and aspirations and to distinguish between others' expectations and my own goals. Many opportunities had come my way to use my gifts and exercise leadership in the church, but always at the edge of the church
and not at the centre.\textsuperscript{6}

It was after our family moved to Toronto and I enrolled in several courses at the Toronto School of Theology that, gradually, with the encouragement of friends, I began to own my sense of call to pastoral ministry. After completing seminary studies in 1988, that call was confirmed when the Warden Woods Mennonite Church in Scarborough invited me to be their pastor.

I knew the challenge would be a difficult one, since I would be following a visionary male pastor who had given leadership to the congregation for thirty-one years, and an energetic and gifted female co-pastor who had worked with him for the last seven years. Even though I heard the Search Committee's assurances that they wanted someone quite different as their next pastor, I knew that I would often be compared both favourably and unfavourably with my predecessors. I knew there were high expectations of me in the congregation. I felt the high expectations especially from a group of feminist women and their partners who were eager to have a pastor who would understand and address their issues, and also from a second group of people who were committed to having the pastor be a strong presence in the Community Centre.

The Search Committee had told me during my interviews that because previous pastors had given so much of their time and attention to the needs of

\textsuperscript{6} Renee Sauder refers to other women's similar experiences in "Inner Call/Inner Ambivalence: Conflicting Messages in a Fragile Conversation," \textit{Understanding Ministerial Leadership: Essays contributing to a developing theology of ministry}, ed. John A. Esau, Text Reader Series 6 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1995), 58.
people in the surrounding neighbourhood, the people in the congregation were looking for someone who would give more priority to their pastoral needs and concerns. So I began my ministry at Warden Woods by doing what I thought I did best. I decided that I would excel in giving pastoral care. I patterned my ways of functioning after the many women I had known who were primary caregivers, and the role fit me well.

Initially I derived a lot of satisfaction and met my own needs by sacrificing myself in service to others. However, in time I began to grow weary under the burden of feeling responsible to care for everyone. I started to feel resentful of those in the congregation who said they wanted their community to be a "welcoming and caring community" for many different people. I grew weary of being a "specialist" charged with caring for those on the edges of the congregation. Gradually I began to realize that my efforts at exemplary caring and love of neighbour were debilitating and no longer life-giving to me.

Just as earlier I had begun to study theology to find answers to my perplexing faith questions, so now I began my doctoral studies to explore some of the pressing ministry issues I was facing by the end of my fourth year as pastor of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church. It was the convergence of these two different but related concerns - my concern for what individuals in the congregation were experiencing, and my concern for my own well-being as a person and pastor - which led me to explore the concept of self-differentiation through my studies in the Doctor of Ministry programme. In addition to my concern for creativity and
vitality in the congregation, I wanted to find out whether the differentiation or
definition of the self is in fact for leaders "a more important agent of change than
expertise," and whether it indeed "unifies our healing power with that which also
promotes our own health (literally, our wholeness)."7

As I have used the term, self-differentiation is the ability to honour one’s own
goals and values while staying connected to others; it is the ability to be a self
while remaining part of the system. According to Friedman, the key to health in
any community is the pastor’s ability both to define self and remain in touch with
the rest of the body, which in turn invites others to respond by defining their own
positions. The self-differentiated leader is no longer responsible for the whole
system, but focuses instead on the position of leadership by asking: what do I
want to accomplish, and what kind of leadership will achieve those goals?8

I began this study with the recognition that self-differentiation is a complex
phenomenon which is only partially expressed by "showing one’s colours."
However, I thought there was a connection since openly expressing one’s
perspectives was a concrete way of being connected with others, whereas silence
often created distance or disconnection. I saw speaking out and active
participation as one way of demonstrating the connection which was essential to
the process of self-differentiation.

7 Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church

8 Friedman, *Generation*, 228-230.
While Friedman and others who follow his approach to family systems theory emphasize the importance of the leader's self-differentiation, I chose instead to focus on encouraging members of the congregation to define themselves. This decision was based on my observation that the people in the Warden Woods Church had many years of experience following a leader who was clear about his goals and values. What I thought the members of the congregation needed at this point was encouragement to take responsibility for their own goals and values, both individually and corporately, while continuing to respect and build on their experiences with the previous pastor's vision and work. Although my primary focus was encouraging members of the congregation to define themselves, I fully expected that in the research process I would also become more differentiated as a leader. The problem which I identified as the focus for my research was this:

*In my action in ministry I will explore how encouraging self-differentiation of participants in a group process affects their participation in a contemporary urban Mennonite congregation.*

I hoped that as a result of my "action in ministry" participants would begin to function differently in the congregation, and more creative energy would be released. I also wanted to find ways of functioning in my pastoral role that would be more lifegiving to me. The context for this research was the Warden Woods Mennonite Church, whose story is rich and inspiring, but also coloured by pain and struggle.

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9 "Action in Ministry" refers to the research process which was carried out in the congregation or "ministry context."
Chapter 2

CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

When the Warden Woods Mennonite Church called me to be their full-time pastor, a member of the Pastoral Search Committee said, "We are excited about the opportunity not only to benefit from your ministry, but also to be part of your formation as a beginning pastor." With high hopes for a satisfying mutual relationship, we embarked on the process of weaving our collective story while defining and differentiating ourselves within that story.

I. Informed By The Past

The Warden Woods Mennonite Church which provides the context for this study, is located in southwest Scarborough. Originally called the Warden Park Mennonite Church, the congregation began in 1937 as an outreach ministry of the Swiss Mennonite churches in Toronto and north of the city. They provided Sunday School programmes for neighbourhood children in a residential area that was being settled predominantly by Anglo-Saxon working class people who were struggling to get re-established after the war. Many of the people who made up the congregation during those years had lived in poverty at some time in their lives, so it is not surprising that they were drawn to ministry with the poor. Many of them soon became actively involved with residents of a subsidized housing community which began to be developed on the edge of their neighbourhood.10

The vision and dedicated efforts of many persons from the congregation and its pastor, John Hess, supported by mission funds from the wider Mennonite Church, culminated in 1970 with the building of the Warden Woods Church and Community Centre. After struggling to mediate between sharply differing opinions, the Warden Park congregation decided to move into the new facilities at Warden Woods along with a small group from the nearby Danforth Gardens community where "The Rev," as Hess was affectionately called, and several others had been providing leadership for Bible studies and children's programs. Some charter members left the church at that time, but the vision for the Community Centre and the new Warden Woods Mennonite Church prevailed. By their worship and their efforts at building community and improving the quality of life among residents of the Warden Woods neighbourhood, they would minister in both "word and deed."\(^{11}\)

The pastor who had the longest tenure and greatest impact in that community was Pastor Hess, affectionately known as "the Rev," whose ministry spanned thirty-four years. He spent more time with the Community Centre and residents of the surrounding neighbourhood than members of the congregation. "He spent many hours each week getting to know Warden Woods residents and encouraging

\(^{11}\) The focus of the Community Centre was the neighbourhood of Warden Woods. The vision was that people from the church, community centre, and neighbourhood would all worship, work, and play together, somewhat like an extended family.
his congregation to be servants of the people." When Connie Zehr became the Associate Minister in 1979, her job description also designated that half of her time be given to working with youth and families through Community Centre’s programs.

Although the Church and the Community Centre were separate entities from the beginning, the distinction between the two institutions was blurred in order to keep proclamation and practice together. During the early years, this was evident not only in the use of the pastors’ time and energy but also in the fact that many of the staff of the Centre were members of the congregation and church members volunteered countless hours to the Centre’s programs. Over the years young adults from other North American Mennonite churches, both Swiss and Russian, came to the city to work as service volunteers at Warden Woods.

A number of these individuals remain active members of the congregation today. They still tell stories of how their experiences in this congregation transformed their faith as they asked perplexing theological questions and encountered complex issues in this urban context which was so different from those they had left. Over the years some people have left the congregation because they preferred more traditional beliefs and practices. Among those who stayed, loyalty to the vision of Warden Woods and Hess’s leadership created a church community among people of different backgrounds, races, abilities, ages, and classes. While earlier pastors of the congregation have always been from

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12 Hincks, Living Words, 25, 180.
Swiss Mennonite background, many of the active members were from Russian Mennonite and other Christian traditions.

II. An Overview of The Present

Today the Church and the Community Centre still share the same building, but many things have changed. I became pastor of the Warden Woods Church in 1988, following a year of interim leadership by two lay leaders from the congregation.\(^\text{13}\) Since then leadership in the Community Centre has changed. Eight years ago, all but one of the department managers of the Community Centre were still actively involved in the Mennonite Church. Today there are no Mennonites on that leadership team. The Centre’s staff has changed from being predominantly white and Christian to including people from a variety of races and faith perspectives.\(^\text{14}\) There have been changes in the surrounding neighbourhood as well: more racially mixed, fewer seniors, more families.

These factors have changed the Community Centre and Church. In order to increase outside funding and community ownership of the Centre’s programs, deliberate steps were taken to downplay the presence of the church. In fact, today recent arrivals in the neighbourhood often know about the Centre, but not about the church. The two organizations work together much less closely than they did in earlier times. Only a few people from the adjacent neighbourhood

\(^{13}\) Hincks, *Living Words*, 179-183.

\(^{14}\) Hincks, *Living Words*, 190-191.
participate in the present congregation.

Although people from other parts of the city have continued to be attracted by the congregation's informal worship style and friendships, the congregation has become more homogeneous in race and class.\textsuperscript{15} However, other differences have surfaced. In recent years, feminist women and homosexual persons began to speak out in the congregation about their experiences of being marginalized in the broader Mennonite church. Issues of gender and sexual preference, began to dominate discussions, while issues of race and class receded from the congregational agenda.

The formal and informal leaders, most of whom were white and middle class, supported these directions. While anger was seldom expressed in public settings, discussions on these issues were often laced with pain as members tried to reach consensus on issues about which they had deep feelings. Some who preferred more "traditional preaching and teaching" stated that they did not feel free to express their opinions openly. Several of them stopped attending after a time, again narrowing the range of differences among people in the congregation.

These developments and other conflicts associated with the ambiguous Church-Centre relationship have left deep hurts and bitterness. The decision to implement a congregational Renewal Process also surfaced differences in the

\textsuperscript{15} Hincks, \textit{Living Words}, 182.
congregation, some of which were not resolved. These struggles are seldom discussed publicly any more, although occasionally the painful memories are still recounted in private conversations or pastoral care situations.

The demographics of the congregation have changed. It still includes much diversity: persons on social assistance, working class persons, people who are well-educated, a growing number who are employed in or preparing for professions, and several who own and run their own businesses. Levels of income vary, as do religious and cultural backgrounds. However, there are fewer seniors, and the creative energy of young adults which characterized the early years has all but disappeared. Those young adults are now parents who carry the responsibility of caring for their young children. There are only a few persons of colour in the present congregation.

As a result of these changes, there are deep feelings of loss in the Warden Woods congregation - loss of the sense of unique mission and of a cohesive identity. The Renewal Process confirmed that, although the congregation appeared more homogeneous, people's expectations were still diverse and often conflicting.

During the past few years several long-term members who helped develop and carry out the original vision have moved out of the city. During the year

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17 See Renewal Report.
prior to the initiation of this research process, several individuals and families left the congregation without giving any reason or saying good-bye. A few of them stated their reasons in conversations with the pastor. According to long-term members, leaving without saying good-bye is not a recent phenomenon. Over the years there have been a number of active participants who left the congregation suddenly without any explanation or closure.

During this research process, the congregation had to face another crisis when they learned of incidents of sexual abuse by a respected and trusted leader in the congregation. The events which followed these disclosures disrupted long-standing friendships, and resulted in grief, polarization and loss of energy in the congregation. Again some members left the congregation without any closure. While the events of the past two years added urgency to the need for research and analysis and for exploring creative pastoral alternatives, they also profoundly affected the research process and outcomes.\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, the "shaking up" of longstanding patterns of functioning in the congregation provided opportunities for encouraging new ways of relating.

The current congregation has approximately 120 adult members, with a usual Sunday morning worship attendance of forty to sixty-five persons. Twenty preschool and school-age children attend regularly. There are ten to fifteen teens and young adults, who attend sporadically or not at all, and are associated with

\textsuperscript{18} For further description of the effects of the crisis of betrayed trust on the research process, see pages 79, 85, 152, and 192-3.
the congregation primarily through their families. A few of these were survivors of the sexual misconduct. Two-thirds of the present active members are from Mennonite background, both Swiss and Russian. The other third come from a variety of other religious and ethnic backgrounds, and enrich the life of the congregation with their active participation and leadership. Most of the participants in the present congregation are scattered throughout the Metro Toronto area and many of them drive into the community for worship and other meetings.

Currently as pastor I supervise the work of two other part-time staff persons (Assistant Pastor and Administrative Assistant) who, with me, make up the leadership team. A small proportion of my pastoral time is still spent with staff and clientele of the Community Centre.

III. Refocusing Visions

Warden Woods congregation was formed with the expectation that its members would be committed to a common vision: to express the radical life and teachings of Jesus Christ in their simple lifestyle, their relationships with their neighbours in Warden Woods, and their worship. However, with all of the changes in the congregation and their environment, Warden Woods Church has found it difficult to its purpose and identity. Many of the leaders in the present congregation came to the city as middle class young adults full of energy and idealism about being a significant influence for change in the neighbourhood in
which the church was located. Today their energy is taken up by their families
and jobs and by their own neighbourhoods and interests.

The Renewal Report made it clear that "many people no longer see Warden
Woods as a community-based church." While there was ambivalence about
whether others should be actively encouraged to join, vision statements developed
by committees as recently as 1994 still expressed the hope that a wide diversity of
people would feel they belonged in this congregation. "Belonging" had to do with
not only "knowing each other better," but also with "being well informed" and
"being given opportunities to contribute to the life of the congregation in
significant ways."19

However, these vision and goal statements of the congregation have not borne
the fruit which they said promised. The tapestry of this "inclusive" congregation
has become less colourful and varied than it was in the past. In spite of inspired
visions of being a multi-coloured body of Christ in this diverse neighbourhood,
the congregation has gradually become more homogeneous.

I became interested in finding out more about the congregations in which
people grew up, and began to talk to individuals in the congregation who had
grown up in close ethnic and family-based church communities. These persons
reported that, as children they felt affirmed and included in their congregations,
and grew up with an unquestioned trust in their community's leaders and

19 Renewal Report, 3-5, 11.
authority figures. However, when as young adults they began to separate and differentiate from their family, church and its leaders, a significant number of these persons experienced "cutoff."  

IV. Focussing the Picture

As I began to realize how many of the active participants in the Warden Woods congregation felt cut-off in their process of differentiating from either their family or church of origin, I began to wonder how their past experiences might still be influencing the way they deal with differences in this present community of faith. I wondered whether memories of painful conflicts and abrupt endings, both at Warden Woods and in previous settings, added to the fear of expressing their opinions, especially if it meant disagreeing with others for whom they cared deeply and with whom they wanted to remain connected.

I began to wonder if perhaps the pain of some of their experiences in the congregation had evoked fears and reactions associated with similar (isomorphic) experiences much earlier in their lives. Perhaps the reluctance to "show their colours" was an example of people choosing to suppress intense feelings and

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20 These observations are based on interviews which I conducted for an essay entitled "Being Separate Together: Self-Differentiation in the Congregation."

21 Family systems theory uses the term "cutoff" to describe withdrawal from significant relationships, either physically or emotionally. See Ronald W. Richardson, Family Ties That Bind, (Vancouver, B.C.: Self-Counsel Press, 1984), 32-34.

22 "Isomorphic" transactions are events or interactions which appear different in surface details, but on a deeper emotional level they are alike. For more information, see Salvador Minuchin and H. Charles Fishman, Family Therapy Techniques (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 123-129.
differences of opinion for the sake of closer relationships with each other.\textsuperscript{23} Whatever the reasons, I observed that there was a loss of creativity and energy in the congregation. It became my goal to find a way to release some of the creativity and gifts which I saw in many of the congregation's members.

I had incorporated several things into my approach as a pastor. I was unapologetic about my feminist biases and diligent about using inclusive language, a practice which the congregation had adopted formally as its policy. I tried to form friendships with other women in the congregation. I pointed out some of the patterns in the congregation which I thought were excluding of newcomers in the hope that some of the systems might change and recent arrivals would feel more welcome. I emphasized similarities rather than respecting differences to try to avoid risking any further painful conflicts. I encouraged those who were dissatisfied with the direction of the congregation or my ministry to speak to me directly about their concerns. Several major decisions were made with what some members felt was insufficient input or processing by the congregation: adjusting my pastoral responsibilities to facilitate my enrolment in the Doctor of Ministry programme, the hiring of a Pastoral Assistant, and the initiation of a Renewal Process in the congregation in the hopes that it would result in spiritual growth in the congregation. Even after the extensive Renewal Process, the decline in members and creative energy continued, and little else changed.

By the time I began the Doctor of Ministry program, I knew that I had to find another paradigm for pastoral ministry, one that would not be as draining for me as trying to please others and meet everyone's needs. At a deep level, I knew that my survival, both as a person and as a pastor, depended on finding ways of functioning which replace frantic activity and exhaustion with health and life.

My search culminated in this study, the goal of which has been to learn to love self along with loving God and neighbour, in the hope that, as a congregation and as individuals, we would discover life for ourselves and life to share with others. In this study I have tried to weave together the strands of my experience and my theology, my practice and my beliefs, my vulnerabilities and my gifts.
Chapter 3

THEOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I. Introduction

Belief and life experience have formed the warp and woof of my theological tapestry. Their rich colours and varied textures provided the basic shape out of which I have developed this thesis.

The threads of my Anabaptist Mennonite tradition were the first to appear in the tapestry of my life and thought. They received their particular textures and hues from the context in which I spent much of my early life - among Mennonites of the Swiss tradition. The colours which this tradition contributed were largely the solid and natural earth tones that blended together peaceably. However, my repertoire of colours expanded as I became involved with people of other denominations and faiths in ecumenical projects and community development in urban neighbourhoods.

By mid-life, after a decade of leading and participating in several women's groups, I was ripe for friendships with feminist women I met and for the prophetic challenges of their theology. These women introduced me to a whole new range of textures and colours. They were passionate and bold, often angry and strident, at times overpowering the muted tones of my pacifist Mennonite tradition.

When I became a pastor in an urban Mennonite congregation, I sought for a framework that would provide me with a way to make sense of the sometimes incongruous and incompatible threads of my Mennonite tradition, my feminist
perspective, and the complex realities of my "real life" ministry setting. Systems theory, with its interest in the larger picture, helped me to see some connections between the resilience and strength of my Mennonite tradition and the vibrancy and boldness of my prophetic feminist convictions, and to recognize how my personal style of ministry was interacting with my present congregational context. Describing the tapestry at this particular point in time has been an important step in my self-differentiation as a leader, but the weaving continues.

II. Contributions of Mennonite Theology

As I describe the Mennonite theology which has informed me, I am mindful of the fact that, as Anabaptist Mennonites today, we interpret the biblical texts and our own religious heritage and tradition in many different ways. It is important that readers of this thesis keep in mind that the theology which I describe is pieced together out of a very particular set of experiences which have shaped my life and thought.

A. Learning to Live the Mennonite Way

My need to learn about self-differentiation originated in my family of origin where, as the oldest child in a rural family, I was schooled to be the responsible one. I grew up in an urban Swiss Mennonite church, where this sense of personal responsibility was engraved still deeper into my being. I heard often the words of

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Hans Denck, one of the sixteenth century Anabaptists: "no one can truly know [Christ] unless he follow him in his life." Scripture reminded us that every part of a person's life was to be a radiant example of sacrifice and obedience to God, of separation from the world, and of humility.

In practical terms, "following Christ" or living a life of discipleship meant living as Christ taught us to live - truthfully, peaceably, simply, sacrificing self and helping our neighbour, with an attitude of humility. Practical expressions of love, not only toward the neighbour but also toward the enemy, were seen as more important ways of knowing the truth of Christ's teachings than intellectual assent.

Although not within the Mennonite tradition, James Wm. McClendon, Jr. reflects well the theology of the community in which I grew up. He identifies the beginning point for theology in the "baptist" tradition as the conviction that the way we live is one fabric with what we believe, and that "convictions are not fully intelligible until we see how they are lived out." He states that:

Christians are a people formed by their shared convictions. As participants in a common story, they are bound together by convictions, moral convictions, about God and neighbour, about self and community,

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26 A text that was read and preached about frequently was Rom. 12:1-3.

27 Harder, Doors, 88.

about where they have been and whither they are bound.\textsuperscript{29}

As a community, Mennonites placed a strong emphasis on being different from "the world," but within the community expression of differences was often played down. A high value was placed on living at peace with each other so that the church would be the visible body of Christ, "without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, . . . holy and without blemish."\textsuperscript{30} In fact, Marlin Miller, Mennonite scholar and theologian, in his address to the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada suggested that for Mennonites the church is sacrament. Differences and disagreements marred the body of Christ.

While, as individual Christians, we were responsible for our faith and actions, in my experience the specifics of that faith and those actions were defined by the community's male leaders and seldom questioned. However, I was aware of other Mennonite churches whose members were divided by bitter disagreements over matters of doctrine or practice.

B. A Framework

I have found McClendon's three-stranded rope to be a useful metaphor for relating Mennonite theology to my study of self-differentiation. It highlights the distinctions between the individual (which McClendon calls the body strand), the

\textsuperscript{29} James Wm. McClendon, Jr., \textit{Systematic Theology: Ethics} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 19-20, 62. Although not a Mennonite himself, McClendon's term "baptist" includes groups such as Mennonites and others who identify themselves with the Radical Reformers, the Anabaptists, the Believers' Church, or the Free Church tradition.

\textsuperscript{30} Eph. 5:28 NRSV.
social and the resurrection strands, while emphasizing the integrity and strength of the Christian moral life which keeps these three together.

In this metaphor, the rope with three strands depicts the wholism of the moral life lived in relation to God, self, and neighbour, "three ways in which we have to do with God": 1) the body (individual) strand, which has to do with our embodied selves in continuity with our environment, and in response to our Creator; 2) the social strand, which has to do with our social interactions with our neighbours as members of society and the church, all of which are part of God's social creation; and 3) the resurrection strand, which witnesses that we live in the presence of the resurrected One who makes us and all things new by his Spirit. As Christians we interact with the world in these same three ways: we are embodied individual beings in continuity with creation, we are participants in the social systems and practices of our various communities and our world, and we are part of the new creation that is being brought to birth by the power and spirit of the risen Christ.31

Mennonites have also codified their central beliefs in confessions of faith. I will relate my discussion of Mennonite theology to the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, which was accepted in 1995 at a North American joint conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite

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31 McClendon, Ethics, 66.
Church. I will also note a few changes in emphasis from the older Dordrecht Confession of Faith, which was signed in 1632 in Holland and viewed as authoritative among most Swiss Mennonites for over four hundred years.

1. The Individual Strand

The 1995 Confession affirms the inherent goodness and "special dignity" of the human being as well as the innate need for individuals to live in relationship with God, each other, and all of creation. It emphasizes the divine capacity which is given to each person at creation. From his study of primary sources of early Anabaptist writings, Walter Klaassen identifies the early Anabaptists' belief that these high ideals were possible. Salvation for them meant that the will of the individual person was freed by God's grace to choose the good that God desires. The Dutch Anabaptists, in particular, believed that when God's Spirit works in a person's life, that person is changed into a divine being "after the image of Jesus."

The term "original sin" does not appear in either the earlier Dordrecht Confession or the present one. Sin is recognized as part of the human condition.

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32 General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church, Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995), 9.

33 John W. Weaver, Conversation on Saving Faith for the Young, in Questions and Answers, and A Confession of Faith of the Mennonites, with An Appendix (Union Grove, Pa.: Bibles and Religious Books, 1921), 147-167.

34 Mennonite Confession 1995, 28.

in which we all participate, but it is not seen as an ontological state of the human being. Rather, sin results from the human willingness to participate in it. It "involves personal responsibility and has real consequences."36

Salvation, while a response to God's initiative, also had to do with individual responsibility. The centrality of individual responsibility was underscored by the emphasis on making a voluntary decision to accept God's gift of salvation and to join the church. It was symbolized publicly through confession of faith and baptism. Anabaptists defended the freedom of the individual, but this resulted in placing more importance on the need for personal responsibility. Mennonites learned that, along with holy living, their responsibility to love their neighbour and to live a life of service to others was an important indication of love for God. In contrast, love of self tended to be equated with pride.

In McClendon's individual strand, he alludes indirectly to loving self and neighbour. He emphasizes that the knowing and telling of personal stories is what gives strength to the individual strand. Through the narrative process, individual members make the connection between their story and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the story through which the Spirit confronts and transforms theirs.37 Through telling and listening to each other's stories, individuals learn to trust the truth in their own experiences and story, and also to recognize the integrity of other's stories. This telling and hearing of stories

36 Mennonite Confession 1995, 32.

37 McClendon, Ethics, 332.
becomes an act of love toward self and neighbour, and opens the door to further dialogue and action on behalf of self and others. This exchange of stories enables the individual to know her- or himself, not only as a unique person created and loved by God, but also as deeply connected to others in the social strand.

2. The Social Strand

In contrast to the Dordrecht Confession with its emphasis on individual salvation, the 1995 confession includes references to the social aspects of theological concepts such as "sin" and "salvation." It acknowledges not only that individual members of the faith community need to refrain and repent from sin and be accountable to each other, but also that the church as a body may need to repent at times.  

It recognizes that the collective "spirit" can "incite" people to sin:

Sin is thus not only an individual matter, but involves groups, nations, and structures. Such organizations have a "spirit" that can incite persons to do evil they would not have chosen on their own. Governments, military forces, economic systems, educational or religious institutions, family systems, and structures determined by class, race, gender, or nationality are susceptible to demonic spirits.

While salvation is a gift of God's grace which the individual accepts, the 1996 confession also describes God's salvation as it relates to the community:

God saves us as individuals in community. The Lord's saving activity embraced an entire people in bondage (Exod. 15). Jesus called a company of disciples. The church is the context of the message of salvation. (Eph.2:11-22; I Pet. 2:1-10). There covenants are made in the

38 Mennonite Confession 1995, 17, 39.

39 Mennonite Confession 1995, 32.
presence of witnesses, and members are held accountable. God's covenant with us also brings about right relationships within the people of God, in which former hostilities are reconciled.\textsuperscript{40}

The practical implications of these changes are especially relevant to the practice of interpreting scripture as a guide for life, which is so central for Mennonites. The expectation has been that their individual and corporate life would be shaped, not so much by systematic doctrinal statements as by engaging in reading and interpreting scripture.\textsuperscript{41} The task of the church is not to prescribe normative moral behaviour and doctrine, but to create the setting and process in the community that will help its members to discover, understand, and creatively transform their shared and lived story in the light of the mission and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the realm he proclaims.\textsuperscript{42} Sometimes, in the process, the Bible will "interrupt" comfortable interpretations and ingrained patterns of functioning in the community. Other times, someone's experience will "interrupt" the community's cherished interpretations of the Bible and familiar ways of relating.\textsuperscript{43}

One strength of this vision is the ideal that every individual is entitled to a voice in the church's ongoing conversations about the interpretation of scripture

\textsuperscript{40} Mennonite Confession 1995, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{41} Mennonite Confession 1995, 22.

\textsuperscript{42} McClendon, Ethics, 332.

\textsuperscript{43} Lydia Harder, \textit{A Hermeneutics of Discipleship: Toward a Mennonite/Feminist Approach to Biblical Authority}, (Th.D. diss., Emmanuel College, 1993). Note especially chapters 2 and 3.
and what shape its life lived in the church and the world should take. However, for this ideal to be practised, individuals need to be able to differentiate or define their own particular perspectives in relation to each other. Practically speaking, in the Mennonite church, as in many religious communities, there are factors which keep some voices from being heard while others dominate such conversations.

In his discussion of the social strand, McClendon draws on Alasdair MacIntyre’s approach to examining a community’s life for its common human social practices and its shared narrative understanding of life. McClendon defines practices as coherent and complex forms of socially established cooperative human activity which have the potential both to yield internal goods, i.e. the benefits that one reaps from engaging in the activity, and to extend goods to some parts of the system or to divert them from others. The traditional practices of a community become a significant expression of its theology and identity. Some practices are institutionalized, such as communion or baptism, while others are informal, such as worship patterns and friendship networks.\textsuperscript{44}

McClendon refers to these as "powerful practices," and points out that they are found not only in government, large corporations, school systems, police forces, mass communications, or country clubs, but also in the church.\textsuperscript{45} These practices are not only subject to sin and corruption, but also capable of

\textsuperscript{44} McClendon, \textit{Ethics}, 162, 166.

\textsuperscript{45} McClendon, \textit{Ethics}, 173ff.
contributing to salvation and redemption. McClendon states that

To see the church as a set of "powerful practices" is to turn from
dogmatic blindness to the historical realities of church. Not every 'church' is a font of Christian practice and faith, nor is every liturgy life-breathing. . . . That nevertheless many are, even in sparse spiritual times, is a matter of divine gift and promise. . . . Even corrupted powers may be redeemed.46

Each society (or community or culture) has a narrative tradition, a story that provides a setting for its practices, like a web that unites its members in a single meaning. For the Christian community, this narrative includes the story of Jesus' and the early church's mission and ministry. This is the narrative tradition which both guides and judges us in our own powerful individual and communal practices and in our encounters with principalities and powers in all their dynamic forms and varied places. "The stories a people tell, the memories and traditions they share, the history that they receive and modify by their own lives and pass on to their children - these are the carriers of social value."47 They define the collective "we."

MacIntyre also defines a tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument" which recognizes that these traditions are living in that they change people's minds. They are also changed and developed as people within raise questions about certain values and practices.48 However, such a living,

46 McClendon, Ethics, 219.

47 McClendon, Ethics, 171-175.

growing tradition requires that individuals and groups within it can differentiate and articulate their experiences and their expectations of the community.

People who are at the centre of any community often find it difficult to recognize practices which are oppressive, especially those which mask or legitimate patterns of behaviour from which some participants benefit and others do not. They are often the ones who help to define and maintain the church's normative beliefs and practices. They tend to tell stories that legitimate rather than critique their own "powerful practices" because they often do not experience the hurt and exclusion they cause.

They need the perspective of the marginalized to see where the line between the church and the world passes through their own hearts and through the hearts of their cherished churchly practices. The ones who have been on the edges of the community often challenge the whole Christian community to see beyond their present ways of doing things for signs of God's greater purposes. As a community listens carefully to the hopes of all of its members, it is better able to distinguish between those practices which give life and those which lead to death. It is precisely for this reason that the social strand needs the individual and the resurrection strand.

3. The Resurrection Strand

McClendon's resurrection strand is based on the hope that Christ's resurrection from the dead is a sign that everything is being made new, and that

the old age is giving way to the new. This strand fulfills a longing that is essential to the individual and the social strand. It restores a new freedom to participate in both without being controlled by the old roles and identities. Just as Jesus was able to take the way of the kingdom without being confined by legalism and guilt, so in his resurrection all who follow his way have the hope of sharing in this new transformed existence as well. This new creation depends not only on individuals, but also on the willingness of communities to change their practices so that all of God’s children can experience their full redemption.50

For Mennonites, the transformed community, as described in Acts 2:41-47, has been seen as central to the resurrection strand. Both then and today, something radically new happens when the Spirit of the risen Christ, speaking through individuals and groups, becomes a lively participant in the community’s life and conversations. This happened in Acts 6:1-7 when the early church responded to a group of widows who pointed out an unjust "powerful practice" in the social strand of their community by differentiating themselves and explaining their collective experience to the church leaders.

When "the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food," the leaders called the whole community together to find a way to respond.51 There would have been no new life or resurrection strand if these widows had remained silent, or if the

50 Romans 8:18-25.
apostles had ignored their stories and expressions of self-concern that their needs were not being addressed by the "powerful practices" of the Christian community.

Such resurrection usually does not happen without struggle. Although early Anabaptists defended the freedom of the individual conscience and separation from the world, they did not live easily with differences within the community. Historically their emphasis on being like-minded rather than differentiated within the community has been a powerful force in shaping the beliefs and practices of their members.

Today one often hears deep concern among Mennonite leaders about the plethora of diverse beliefs and practices which they see among members who are influenced by the prevailing shift from accepting the authority of outside experts to following their own inner intuitive judgments about truth and how they should live their individual and communal lives. Some Mennonites want stronger communities in response to the individualism of society, while for others "the subordination of the individual to the community [has been] an embrace of bondage."

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52 Krall, *Anger and Feminist Hermeneutic*, 151, citing Willis Harmon, "The Mystery of Medicine: How Do We Know What We Think We Know?" (lecture in Medicine and Philosophy Evening Lecture Series, San Francisco, CA, November 28, 1995).


54 Epp-Stobbe, "People of Spirit," 189. Several articles reflecting this perspective were published in Mennonite Central Committee's *Women's Concerns Report*, No. 121 (July-August 1995).
It is important to recognize that the tendency to resist changes initiated by differentiated people is not confined to those who want more traditional emphasis on agreement within their communities. Those who want more diversity may "respect each other's right to make up their own minds," but still resist changing their cherished practices by not taking seriously dissenting voices, and instead treating them as simply a few more voices among many others. In groups where relativism is the norm, the voices of prophetic visionaries who might be calling for a more profound understanding of what God wants to accomplish are easily ignored or discounted.

Allowing for diversity is sometimes given as a reason for not defining the community's beliefs or values on theological or ethical and moral issues. Ironically, however, a community which bases its identity primarily on being "inclusive" and commits itself to no other shared convictions or priorities is more likely to become an exclusive church which is maintained primarily by social and ethnic ties, or by its common interests and history.\(^5^5\)

Resistance to change is a normal and essential human response. Protective responses provide stability in communities. Most people at times find themselves resisting the breakup of the world as they have known it and the loss of those things that gave them an identity, even though they agree that certain changes are

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needed. However, the tendency to suppress individual differences within the community and to avoid defining our identity as a group contributes to the marginalization of individuals and groups whom we want to welcome but who feel they can never really belong. If Mennonites as a people want to be equipped to take up the opportunities and problems in their increasingly complex world, they will also need to be prepared to engage in the self-examination that is called for by those who have differing viewpoints both from inside and outside the community.

As pastor of this urban Mennonite congregation, I resonate with its ongoing vision and desire to be "inclusive" of a variety of colours within the Mennonite tradition. However, I am concerned that, despite its best intentions, the Warden Woods congregation has become more homogeneous. Some of its members are especially committed to peace-making and justice issues in the wider world, while others focus more on their immediate environment and experiences as individuals and as a community. I believe that learning how to express more openly and live more creatively with these differences would restore life and vitality in the congregation's life.

For me the contributions of feminist theology have added intensity and vibrancy to my explorations in self-differentiation in the Mennonite community.

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III. Contributions of the Christian Feminist Community

My experience of the modern feminist movement began much as it did for many other Christian women. As women met together in small groups and shared their stories of exclusion and sometimes violence in society and in the church, the intense colours of anger and pain began to appear in my tapestry. These new strands had a pronounced effect on the whole. Sometimes their intense and passionate colours dominated the larger tapestry.

This section describes a few basic principles of feminist theology and deals with the effect on women of the strong priority on loving the neighbour over loving the self. Feminism also adds an important component that was overlooked in Anabaptist Mennonite theology - the importance of acknowledging differences, particularly in gender and power. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for recognizing differences and encouraging differentiation in the community.

A. Background

Feminist theology draws heavily on the broader field of feminist theory for its insights and methods. It has focused much of its attention on advocating for the full participation of women in a Christian tradition whose history and theology, until recent years, was defined and written almost exclusively by men.

The challenge of Christian feminists to traditional theology, and especially to Mennonites, has been an emphasis on experience, and particularly women's experience, in the theological enterprise. Feminists use women's experience as both "source" and "norm." As "source," women's experience is considered
essential in the process of formulating one’s theology. For example, feminist theologians consider the experiences of women, and increasingly other marginalized and oppressed people, as "source" when they rethink the meaning of traditional theological concepts such as salvation and sin.

When used as "norm," women’s experience is a "criterion by which any given theological sources or formulations are judged to be adequate or inadequate for theology." Using their experiences as norm, Mennonite feminists frequently find themselves needing to point out to theologians in their own tradition that the church’s theology does not speak to women’s experience.

In her reading of the recent scholarship on the Anabaptist vision, Dorothy Yoder Nyce still found important evidence that the experiences and perspectives of Mennonite women have not been included. She cites Gayle Gerber Koontz who observed that the male writers in Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective (published in 1989) failed to mention gender as a category that affects theological and ethical perspectives. Such omissions, when discussing a concept as central to Anabaptism as discipleship, result in the perpetuation of a theology that does not relate to women’s experience.

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58 Pamela Dickey Young, Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 60.

59 Young, Feminist Theology, 49.

Mennonite feminist women keep looking for evidence that their perspectives are being included in discussions of Anabaptist theology.

B. The Challenge to Love Self

Theological concepts such as salvation and sin need to take into account the life experiences of women whose experiences are different than those of men, both of themselves as individuals, and of the relationships and structures to which they belong. Letty Russell, a feminist theologian, reflects women's experiences in her description of salvation as "new joy and wholeness, freedom and hope that is experienced in the lives of individuals and communities as a gift of God." Her description of sin as "oppression" or refusing to "give others room to breathe and live as human beings" reflects concerns many women deal with day to day.61

Women have been socialized to "always put others' needs first," particularly in their families. Feminist family therapists continue to see women who sacrifice their expressions of strength and autonomy in order to preserve significant relationships. Harriet Golder Lerner writes: "Even intellectually liberated women unconsciously feel frightened and guilty about 'hurting' others, especially men, when fully exercising their capacity for independent thinking or action."62 For mothers without partners who carry primary responsibility for the care of their children, self-differentiation is difficult. If asked, they might well describe having

61 Russell, Human Liberation, 112.

room to breathe and live and love themselves as an experience of salvation.

Mennonite theology has added its own burden to women's inability to love self. Betty Hochstetler did a study in which she interviewed Mennonite lay women to find out how the theology of peacemaking affected their differentiation.

In reflecting on Hochstetler's study, Dorothy Yoder Nyce concluded that women understood Anabaptist teachings of self-denial, obedience to external authority, and discipleship focused on serving others quite well. But socialized to self-negation (self as sinful), women also need to possess a healthy self-love as grace from God for 'a person cannot give to God (or others) that which s/he does not have.'

Elizabeth Schmidt portrays one woman's personal struggle with loving self:

**Parable of the self-sacrificial mother**

A mother came to him, saying,  
Teacher, what good deed must I do to inherit the kingdom?  
I have kept the commandments,  
I have sold all my belongings and given to the poor,  
I have served God and family with all of my being - what do I still lack?  
And he said to her,  
Woman, love thyself.

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For this woman, as for many others, loving herself was postponed until after she had spent herself in loving God and giving all she had for her family and the poor. Mennonite women have been taught, not only to love their families and neighbours, but also to love their enemies or those with whom they disagree. For these women, salvation may well mean loving themselves at least as much as they love others.\textsuperscript{65}

Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, a feminist Mennonite scholar, writes of "coming to know one's self as a valued person graced with God's love and created in the image of God." This happens best in a community in which individuals relate in ways that encourage each person to discover and re-discover his or her own authentic voice.\textsuperscript{66} I believe she describes the essence of salvation.

Loving self enough to differentiate oneself is particularly difficult for women who place a high value on relationships. They often fear that relationships will not survive when they give voice to their individual needs, particularly if they are different from others. However, studies of black and white women have shown that it is not acknowledging differences which leads to separation among them. It is the "obliteration of difference" which leads to alienation and misunderstandings...


between women. Overlooking differences may appear to preserve relationships, but it glosses over the integrity and truth to be found in each individual’s experience.

Acknowledging and respecting differences means that no person or group has any prior claim on truth. All who are vulnerable, including women, need to know that their individual and collective experiences of violence take priority over the perceptions of the perpetrators of violence. Women need to be careful not to risk alienating themselves from their own truth and from other victims of injustice by saying that everyone’s experience is equally valid. Those in positions of power and privilege may find it easy to relativize everyone’s experience. However, women and others who have been vulnerable know how much encouragement they needed to "love" themselves. For them it is important to continue to trust and give priority to their experiences of fear and violation while also recognizing that their neighbour’s experience may be very different.

C. The Challenge to Love the Neighbour

One of the important social practices of feminist communities has been women telling their stories and sharing their experiences with each other. These

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groups began as places where women were able to differentiate their experiences from those of men and discovered how many experiences they had in common with each other. Their solidarity was based on similarity, and loving self blended in with loving neighbour.

In this day of segregated men's and women's groups, sometimes gender has been seen as the primary reason why certain settings feel safe or unsafe to participants. It has taken longer for women and men to realize that other differences than gender, such as strength or vulnerability, the ability to reason, or the social relationships and practices of the community may be just as important as gender in making it easier for people to tell their stories and to share their perspectives in some settings than in others.70

With time, women are learning that the way they talk about their experiences in a group is an important factor in determining the safety others feel in speaking out. In fact, the way they tell their stories becomes an important act of "loving their neighbour." When women speak of their oppression and exclusion as women as their only point of reference, they overlook the fact that the majority of women in the world are oppressed, not only by white elite men, but also by white elite women, and also by the men of their own classes, cultures, races, and

religions. In the same way, not all abused children are females who were
abused by fathers or uncles. Some are boys who were violated by mothers, or by
pastors who took control of their souls, or by rigid authoritarian fathers who were
harsh in attempting to exert control.

Ruth Krall, a Mennonite feminist, points out the danger of women
generalizing from their own personal experience and in so doing covering up
differences:

The danger of such universalizing lies in our misguided attempts to create
a woman-based solidarity where there is none. . . . Doing this, I block the
storytelling of other women whose life-contexts and life-experiences are
different from mine.

Abstract generalizations from a narrow slice of human experience, particularly
when they are presented as self-revelations of God, discourage self-differentiation
and in so doing obscure both the many forms of diversity that are present in any
community and the sociopolitical realities that those differences create.

Differences such as ethnicity, sexual identity, age or class need to be recognized
as well as gender because they yield differing and important perspectives on
Christian theology. By disregarding those nuances, women may unknowingly

71 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "A Democratic Feminist Vision for a
Different Society and Church," in Discipleship of Equals: Critical Feminist Ekklesia-
logy of Liberation (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 349.


73 Sheila Davaney, "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience" in
Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture, ed. Clarissa
Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles (Ann Arbor: U. M. I.
perpetuate others' oppression.

Generalizing from personal experience is especially problematic when it is done by those who are in positions of dominance or privilege, particularly those whose culture and community have been experienced as oppressors by others. Those who are part of the dominant group are often unable to see how and where their behaviour is oppressing others. Because there is very little motivation to change a system when one is benefiting from it, the burden of bringing about systemic change often falls on those individuals or groups who are most vulnerable to further domination.74 They are the ones who end up trying to convince others of the meaning and value of their stories, even though they have no assurance that the system is willing to hear or change.

Women from the so-called Third World challenge white North American feminists to open their eyes to their participation in the oppression of other women. They challenge privileged women to "love their neighbour" by actualizing their loyalty to their sisters whose racial, ethnic, and class identity is different. They remind us of the complexity of loving self and loving neighbour and how easy it is to overlook differences and sociopolitical relationships between people and their contexts, and to assume that the same actions will promote both love of self and love of neighbour. A recent newsletter from Welcome Inn contained the following quotation: "People always say, 'Try walking in someone else's shoes,' but for me it's different. I have been walking in someone else's shoes all my life,

74 Thistlethwaite, Sex, 22.
and now I want to try walking in my own shoes."75

D. From "Either-Or" to "Both-And"

In a world where disparity and violence exist, a new tapestry is needed - one which embodies the resurrection hope that God is giving birth to a new creation where both strong and weak, powerful and vulnerable can experience salvation. One source of hope is seen in feminists who seek justice and work for peace, both for themselves and for others. They look at present practices and structures and envision the new. They begin by recognizing differences as well as the need for solidarity. Krall is one feminist with such a vision:

Anabaptist feminists must link hands with other marginalized people to insist that Christendom forsake all current and future holocausts as a way of dealing with human difference. Feminist women must commit themselves to making a difference, for example, in racism and sexism; in class relationships and gender relationships; in acknowledging the full humanity of gay and lesbian individuals.76

The rewards of linking hands between privileged and marginalized flow in both directions. As those who have been at the centre of the community extend the warm hospitality of Christ's presence, those who have been excluded from the good life discover that they are loved and welcomed. At the same time, the privileged have the opportunity to be freed from their need to dominate, and to expand their circle to become more loving, more inclusive, and enriched by a

75 Welcome Inn is a social service ministry and Mennonite Church located in the north end of Hamilton.

greater diversity of people. Such a community

. . . is founded on genuinely shared lives: there is to be no master or
slave, no gender-based exclusion, no excluded race or ethnic background,
but rather a community of those who love one another. In the Christ
community there is to be no hierarchical ordering of worth and value . . .
If anyone is to be honoured in this community, it is to be the least
important one, the weakest one, the one deemed most inferior by the
surrounding world, the one most like the Christ - betrayed by his closest
friends, his religious community, and the political rulers of his time.78

Letty Russell is one of the Christian feminists who emphasizes the necessity
for partnership in the community. She focuses particularly on the task of doing
theology, maintaining that it needs to be a shared enterprise and not the work of
isolated individuals. She promotes an approach in which a wide diversity of
persons cooperate and enrich the whole with their contributions, and where all
participants are subjects rather than some being objects.79 She makes a case for
a method of doing theology that both includes and reflects the differences that
exist in a community.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza takes the discussion one step further by
describing values, structures and practices which enable individuals to define their
own perspectives so that the diversity in the community is visible. She identifies


78 Krall, "Anger and Feminist Hermeneutic," 150. She bases her statements

79 Young, Feminist Theology, 40, 43 citing Letty Russell, "Authority and the
Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in Letty Russell, ed., Feminist Interpretation
four rhetorical strategies\textsuperscript{50} which she suggests need to inform the practices of a church that wants to be such a radical democratic ekklesia:

1) The \textit{rhetoric of liberation}, which encourages people to make visible those structures and common practices and assumptions which may not pose a problem for everyone, but which nonetheless oppress and exclude some;

2) The \textit{rhetoric of differences}, which encourages people to show their differences, including the different places from which they read scripture and experience the Christian community and its traditions;

3) The \textit{rhetoric of equality}, which invites people to analyze and critique the power dynamics in social situations, and regards the concrete desires of "the little ones" who have been oppressed or excluded as a priority when interpreting Christian truth and church practices;

4) The \textit{rhetoric of vision}, which nurtures in people the hope that God's reign, as it is anticipated in the biblical texts and Christian tradition, will become embodied in institutional practices which promote equality, justice, and radical democratic community rather than patriarchal domination.

In any group there are inequalities which are due, not only to gender, but also to such factors as age, class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, history and position in the community. Such differences need to be acknowledged and appreciated, but not allowed to become the basis for defining a person's status within the community. A church which is committed to equality cannot accept

\textsuperscript{50} Fiorenza, "Democratic Feminist Vision", 370.
status divisions as positive diversity. Instead it needs to recognize, confront, and expose those divisions and the practices that perpetuate them. It needs to guard against the tendency to create the appearance of a homogeneous group of equals by excluding those whose experience challenges that of the dominant group.⁸¹

As a pastor whose role often entails speaking in public, I was particularly interested in Foucault's observation that "the control of public discourse is a principle element of maintaining authority and power."⁸² If that is the case, the discourse and discussion practices of the church and its leaders are key elements in reinforcing or rearranging its sociopolitical relationships. Based on my experiences, I would suggest that both dominants and nondominants need to define themselves and hear each other for equality and inclusion to be a reality.

People such as pastors and leaders, who are accustomed to being in the dominant position and speaking for the collective "we," sometimes assume that they do not need to define themselves as individuals because others already know what they think. Those whose consciousness has been sensitized to issues of power want to avoid overpowering or dominating again, and so they remain silent in order to allow the nondominants to define themselves.⁸³ However, there are

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⁸² Fiorenza, "Democratic Feminist Community", 357.

⁸³ Adapted from notes made during a talk by Larry Miller, Executive Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, to the Mennonite students' fellowship at Toronto School of Theology in 1994. Miller drew his observations from the dialogue between North American Mennonites and their brothers and sisters from the Two-thirds World.
more effective ways of providing space for nondominants to differentiate themselves than by simply remaining silent.

I believe that equality is practised best as dominants listen respectfully and carefully while nondominants explain their perspective, but also take the risk of speaking their perspectives in a way that accepts responsibility for their own opinions (using "I" rather than "we" language). Rather than patronizing their dialogue partners by remaining silent and "protecting them", dominants could learn when they speak to use speech which contextualizes their own perspective and experience, and at the same time allows space and invites others to tell theirs, which may be very different.84

Because practices such as the telling of stories and exercising of gifts can both create and reinforce existing power differences among the individual members, a community always needs to be engaged in critical social analysis.85 Social analysis helps a community to see when its practices are creating different classes of members, and whether those with more power and resources are being accountable to the whole community, particularly to its weaker members.

Human difference has the potential to be a "springboard for creative change." When a community fails to acknowledge those differences, its members rob each

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85 Feminists ask such questions as: Who benefits from this telling of the story? From this way of doing things? Who stands to lose? As a Christian church committed to equality, to whom are we accountable?
other of their "energy and creative insight." The church needs to find ways to give special attention to hearing the perspectives of all its members. It will likely need to give up the goal of telling "one true story" and instead commit itself to telling and hearing many stories. People who have been invisible in the community need to be made visible again by illuminating their differences. Those who are particularly resourceful and gifted to give leadership need to be able to contribute their creative and prophetic gifts to the community. This happens best as all people are encouraged to love themselves, in all their uniqueness and difference, and encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and their community.

It is obvious that any community which tries to make decisions for the good of the whole will have to find a way to mediate between competing perspectives and opinions. However, the church makes its best decisions and choices by inviting, not repressing differences. A democratic process encourages people to speak out of their particular struggles and social or political groupings. Such a dialogue will push us into listening harder and speaking more clearly. It will call forth creativity, moral discernment, vulnerability, and a "more robust politics of solidarity than most of [us] have embraced," particularly with those who are oppressed in several aspects of their lives, or whose voices are often not heard or

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respected. Commitment to solidarity does not presuppose that we overlook differences and emphasize our similarities but emphasizes that we need to encourage other people to claim, as we do, the right and the power to interpret their own reality and to define for themselves what are their values and objectives. Only then can real truth-telling and faith-struggle take place.  

In the congregation, it is important to remember that the use of persuasion and argument as the primary mode of decision-making is accessible to confident, articulate people, but not to everyone. Not all are able to differentiate themselves in settings where dialogue is vigorous and confrontational. If equality is important to a community, it needs to employ practices which include and sometimes give priority to "those who have often been deprived of the power to effect creative change in their own lives or on behalf of others," and which encourage them to claim "the right of naming the reality to be studied and of leading the way."  

Giving privilege to certain people or groups does not mean that they are always right, or that their needs and requests will always take priority. It simply means that extra effort is put into insuring that their voices are heard and their differentiated perspectives are considered equal in the community's conversation.

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and decision-making.

As I hold in one hand the intensely coloured and roughly textured threads of my prophetic feminist theology, and in the other the muted tones and softer textures of my Mennonite tradition, I can see that for a long time I have dealt with differences between people in ways that felt familiar and comfortable to me. I have emphasized similarities and minimized or glossed over differences in the congregation. I am also beginning to see that defining myself and listening to those who have been marginalized will make the power relationships and differences among us more visible.

Such a process may well give rise to personal and community anger, resistance, or resignation. Facing the fact that some have been diminished by our behaviours and structures is unsettling. It reminds us of our own blindness and deafness, and of our complicity in their pain and exclusion. However, new ways of seeing and acting will be needed if we are committed to the inclusion of people who have been silent, absent, or defeated in our communities.

Weaving these sets of threads together poses both a challenging and a promising prospect. For guidance I have turned to the wisdom of family systems theory. It is from that body of theory and practice that I have drawn the primary focus for my action in ministry, which is self-differentiation.

IV. Contributions of Family Systems Theory

As I began to explore my interest in self-differentiation, I also became more
acquainted with the broader field of systems thinking. I have been attracted by its potential effectiveness for organizing the amount of data with which one is faced as a leader of a complex system such as the church. Systems theory, I have discovered, does not so much add to the colours of the community as it considers their interrelatedness. It suggests ways for weaving together the threads that are already present and making them into a colourful and flexible but resilient tapestry.

Before focusing on the concept of self-differentiation and the relationship of the differentiated self to the whole or the community, it is important to have some basic background information about systems theory.

A. Background

While the body of theory which has been designated as systems theory is primarily a twentieth century development, people have used systems thinking for centuries. In fact, Aristotle's principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts expresses one of its most basic concepts.90

In his letters to the churches, the apostle Paul frequently used a systemic metaphor for the church when he referred to it as a body. To the Romans, he wrote: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we

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are members one of another.\textsuperscript{91} In his letter to the Corinthian congregation, he wrote: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it."\textsuperscript{92} In both of these passages he emphasized that, like the human body, the body of Christ is both many parts and one body at the same time.

In Paul's metaphor, the Spirit of Christ is a mysterious but integral participant in the congregational system, creating one out of many. Paul emphasizes both the connectedness and distinctiveness among the members, holding the uniqueness of each individual member in a dynamic tension with the unity of all the members. He acknowledges that the need to be separate (differentiation), and the need to be connected (cohesion), while opposites, are always present and in tension in any community or system.

Relational systems may get stuck in either independence or dependence, but a healthy system is characterized by interdependence, which is a dynamic balance between togetherness and differentiation. In such a system, members are able to act autonomously and take responsibility for their own participation, while still remaining connected in meaningful relationships with others.\textsuperscript{93}

The place where a person feels most comfortable on the continuum between needing to be separate and needing to be connected is usually learned in the family of origin. In systems where there is too much separateness

\textsuperscript{91} Rom. 12:4-5.

\textsuperscript{92} I Cor. 12:27.

\textsuperscript{93} Stevens and Collins, Equipping Pastor, 20-22.
(disengagement), individual needs have taken priority over concern for the whole. When there is too much togetherness (enmeshment), individuals are expected to suppress their individual needs for the sake of the whole. Virginia Satir listens to people's language for indications of the health in a system. She proposes that "when everyone in the . . . setting can use the first person 'I' followed by an active verb and ending with a direct object," it is an indication that significant progress has been made in the direction of individual members taking responsibility for their own participation in the system. 94 Similarly, I would add, it is an indication of health when members of a group can agree on some statements about their collective identity, goals and values.

Family systems theorists observe that religious communities which are ethnically based often function like extended families. This suggests that their experiences in their religious community would affect the ability of individuals to be differentiated. Stevens and Collins point out that in high-commitment churches there can be strong pressure for an individual to sacrifice all for the church and to preserve harmony and togetherness rather than address issues that are important to oneself. There can be two very different outcomes to this kind of pressure. Ironically, in those who are determined to "do their own thing," this approach produces "rugged individualism," since this is the only option they can see for dealing with the relentless demands for togetherness. Others will be more

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likely to give up their own sense of self and opt for enmeshment in order to stay in close relationship to significant others.⁹⁵

Whenever people encounter new situations, crises, or go through transitions in their lives, the tendency is to revert to the familiar patterns they learned in their families and church. However, systems theory is based on the premise that it is possible to learn from one’s experience and to become increasingly self-differentiated as an individual in relation to others. It acknowledges that one cannot change others but that there is great potential for health and wholeness for oneself and one’s relationships in changing one’s own behaviour.

The behaviour of individuals and the events that happen in congregational life take on a different significance when observed through the lens of systems thinking and self-differentiation.

B. The Parts and the Whole

*Differentiation* describes the capacity of an individual to define his or her own goals and values and to take responsibility for her or his own decisions and well-being while remaining in contact with and responsive to others.⁹⁶ It involves maintaining one’s integrity without diminishing that of another, and being able to appreciate the enhancement of another without feeling abandoned or inferior.⁹⁷

Self-differentiation does not happen in isolation. In fact, when people try to

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⁹⁶ Friedman, *Generation*, 27.

use physical distance or cut themselves off in order to solve issues of emotional dependence in their significant relationships, the distance is usually temporary, or the intensity gets transferred into another relationship. It is not uncommon for less differentiated people to transfer their emotional intensity to leaders or other relationships in their religious congregation.

Becoming a differentiated person is similar in some ways to the process of conscientization and liberation that Letty Russell describes:

It is important to emphasize that neither the dialectic of liberation nor the process of conscientization is simply linear. . . . Often those who find that the odds against them are too great return to former stages of quietism. . . . Rarely is this a purely individual process, for human beings depend on others to help shape their attitudes and actions, and ultimately Christians trust in a God who cares enough about them to give them a future and a hope.

A strong sense of self is the fruit of a life-long learning process. It requires finding a healthy balance in our lives between having one's own unique goals and values while still contributing to the group. What makes self-differentiation such a challenge is that systems achieve balance or homeostasis by moulding the behaviour of participants into predictable patterns. These patterns are important because they make it possible to work together, to trust, and to feel safe without having to start over every time a group comes back together.

Systems function according to "agreements" that govern the behaviour of their

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98 Friedman, *Generation*, 41.


participants: formal agreements, which are written down (like starting times for church); informal agreements, which can be called into consciousness but are seldom written down (like dress code or gathering rituals for the worship service); and tacit agreements, which are largely unconscious (like which emotions are acceptable to feel and express, and which are not).\(^{101}\)

It is important to recognize that it is quite possible for an organization to have formal and informal agreements which contradict its tacit agreements, and that in such situations the tacit ones usually win out.\(^{102}\) Although the tacit agreements are usually invisible to the established members of the system, they bring pressure to bear on anyone who by their behaviour questions or breaks them. Individuals who begin to self-differentiate often feel pressured to live by the group's agreements as the system attempts to self-correct for their threats to its balance.

In healthy systems, there is a balance between the forces that cause change and the forces that maintain stability. However, sometimes the system gets too stable or fixed and loses its ability to respond creatively to new circumstances in the environment or to tolerate self-differentiation among its members. Other times, a system becomes too unstable and responds to everything that happens in its environment so that it loses its ability to focus its energy and resources


\(^{102}\) Parsons and Leas, *Understanding*, 17.
effectively. A healthy system functions somewhere between the two extremes, and demonstrates resilience as well as flexibility.

When a group of people function together, the effect is described as *synergy*. The effect of synergy is always stronger than if one part functioned alone or separately. Often individual members have needs and goals that are different from each other, so that when one part changes there is enough resilience in the rest of the body to restore the balance. However, when there is enough synergy to push the balance in any relationship system beyond its range of tolerance, the anxiety level rises dramatically.\(^3\)

There are some benefits of anxiety as well, for it has the power to motivate change. It can prod and push us toward innovation, but only to a certain point. Beyond a certain intensity there is increased pressure put on individuals or forces that have threatened the balance to "change back" in order to restore homeostasis. This explains in part why self-differentiation and change are more difficult to achieve and maintain in a highly anxious system.\(^4\)

There is a tendency for people in an anxious system to blame someone else, usually either the most vulnerable or the most responsible person in the relationship network, and to see themselves as innocent. This contradicts an important premise of systems thinking - that events cannot be attributed to a single cause. Most things that happen have multiple causes, and like a hanging

\(^3\) Stevens and Collins, *Equipping Pastor*, 4-6.

\(^4\) Steinke, *Church Family*, 14.
mobile, any movement or change in one element affects all the other elements, often in unpredictable ways. Because feedback from other parts can magnify or minimize the effects of the initial action, the differentiated individual is a key factor in how the system responds.\textsuperscript{105}

Not everyone is agreed that self-differentiation is desirable. The questions people raise are significant and need to be addressed.

C. Self-differentiation: Is It To Be Desired?

Discussions on the topic of self-differentiation often give rise to challenging questions from several sources about the appropriateness and desirability of encouraging self-differentiation. Mennonites ask if it promotes individualism.\textsuperscript{105} Feminists ask if the way it is commonly defined is equally applicable to everyone.\textsuperscript{105} People who work with victims of family violence ask whether the so-called neutrality of systems theory can be rehabilitated enough so that vulnerable people will be protected in those situations where they are at risk of revictimization.\textsuperscript{105}

The first area of concern has to do with promoting individualism. In his report documenting trends among members of Mennonite churches between 1972 and 1989, Leland Harder writes that during their preparations for the study they heard frequently from pastors and denominational leaders that individualism was a growing problem for churches.\textsuperscript{106} Most people agree that our society has


become increasingly individualistic. Individuals have become avid consumers of relationships and commodities, including religion, which promise to give them a sense of self and of fulfilment and meaning.

There are similarities between self-differentiation and individualism. Both involve separation. Often in the process of differentiating, the person creates physical or emotional distance in relationships for a time in order to gain the necessary space to define self without depending on others for approval. What distinguishes self-differentiation from individualism is that differentiation involves remaining connected. The person may move closer or farther away emotionally for a time, but usually within the context of maintaining a meaningful connection to others in the community. With individualism, the self becomes the chief object of a person's interest and takes priority over any others in the community.  

I agree that self-differentiation has the potential for becoming primarily self-serving and for fragmenting the community if the importance of being connected is not emphasized at the same time. When separated from love of neighbour, love of self can easily become self-indulgence, just as love of neighbour without love of self can become self-abasement.

However, there are also risks when individuals are expected to sacrifice all for the community. Ironically, a community which requires that individual gifts, insights and goals always be suppressed for the good of the whole often produces

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107 Harder, *Doors*, 104-107. Drawing on the work of Robert Bellah and associates, Harder describes the differences between wholesome and unwholesome individualism.
individualism or compliance and conformity (sometimes called "deselfing"). A healthy community promotes a balance in emphasis between the individual and the community, between self-differentiation and connectedness, and between love of self and love of neighbour.

The second area of concern has been raised by feminists because male-biased descriptions of self-differentiation have tended to present men in a positive light and women as lacking differentiation. These simplistic descriptions of differentiation do not adequately take into account the fact that many men and women have been socialized differently - women to be responsible for the nurturance and care-taking of others, and men to define and pursue their own goals. In fact, neither women nor men have learned to be responsible for their own feelings or to acknowledge or ask directly for what was important to them. Women have been expected to take primary responsibility for the needs of the family, and to be satisfied with "being-for-others," while many men have depended on women to take care of their emotional needs, and continued to live with the illusion that they were emotionally independent.

Michele Bograd suggests that for women self-differentiation involves:


nuances and needs of others, the flexibility to permit intense closeness or caring distance depending on the context or the needs of self and others, and the ability to rely on both emotion and reason in order to tolerate and respond to a wide variety of situations. As new roles for men and women and an increasing variety of sexual preferences in our society brings to light even more diversity, the descriptions of self-differentiation will likely become more varied.

Recently the Toronto Star carried several articles which broadened the meaning of self-differentiation still further. Yasmin Syed Fatimi and others described how they drew strength from their identities as Muslim women:

'. . . from earliest times under Islam, there were women who expressed their views about public issues,' [Fatimi] says. 'How else can one translate freedom and liberation? If emancipation is gauged only by the way a woman dresses, then no importance is being given to her mind, which goes entirely against the dogma of women's rights everywhere.'

Fifteen-year-old Randa Hammadieh, who was born and raised in Canada, also explained why she chose to adopt the veil in spite of the ridicule she would face:

Respecting yourself. Being different. Following Islamic values. . . . is what being a veiling Canadian Muslim teenager is all about. . . . Veiling shatters the idea that a woman should be judged by appearance. It makes everyone equal in the sense that your net value is determined by your character rather than by how much cleavage you show.'


112 Raheel Raza, "Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: Muslim women try to debunk the myths about their religion, identity and way of life" Toronto Star 30 July 1996, E3.

These women expand the horizons that have limited our usual definitions of self-differentiation.

A third area of concern about self-differentiation and systems theory has been raised by those who work in the area of family violence and are charged with the protection of the most vulnerable members in the system. The ideology of systems theory appears to ignore imbalances of power and differences in vulnerability between members of a system. Proponents of systems theory emphasize that everyone in the system has the potential to bring greater health to the system. But in every system, some are more equal than others. They have more resources, and therefore more responsibility to be aware of how their conduct affects others and to adjust their behaviour accordingly.

People who are accustomed to being in the dominant role are less likely to see power differences which determine who is defining the relationship and what means they have to keep others in their position. Sometimes therapists or leaders expect "little people" to differentiate themselves and try to change the system without realizing that it would meaning risking further victimization. Virginia Goldner points out that holding vulnerable people equally responsible with more powerful ones for defining or differentiating themselves begins to feel like a sophisticated version of "blaming the victim and rationalizing the status quo."\textsuperscript{114}

From a feminist perspective, some systems theorists who use the metaphor of

\textsuperscript{114} Virginia Goldner, "Feminism and Family Therapy" \textit{Family Process} Vol. 24 (March 1985), 33.
the body of Christ as a system do not deal adequately with Paul's concern that the weaker members of the body need to be treated with greater respect because they are equally indispensable and deserving of care. In their discussion of the church, Stevens and Collins warn leaders about the "tyranny of the weak":

Many emotionally and spiritually weak people do dominate the church. They often appear emotionally fragile, and people around them "walk on eggshells."... But systems theory teaches that the seemingly weak member of a family or a church is the most powerful, organizing everyone around his or her needs. ... Paul's concern is not to get the church organized around weakness. His stated concern is unity and fellowship "so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (I Cor. 12:25).

However, they do not warn about a "tyranny" of the powerful. Because systems theory builds on strength rather than focusing on weakness, it emphasizes the importance of deferring to weaker persons in love without becoming bound to them or organized around their needs. However, it also needs to distinguish how strong or weak a person feels from relative power or vulnerability they have in the system. Every system has "big people" (those who are powerful) and "little people" (those who are vulnerable). The power a person has in a system is not the same as spiritual and emotional strength, or whether the person feels strong or weak.

"Big people" may feel weak, but they have more power, resources, and often sophisticated means to keep the system meeting their needs than do the "little

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115 See Stevens and Collins, Equipping Pastor, 33-34.

116 Stevens and Collins, Equipping Pastor, 33.
people," who may be strong or weak as individuals, but have less power and resources, and fewer socially accepted ways of getting their needs met. When "little people" try to get their needs met, often their threads are left to dangle because they do not have the resources to weave themselves into the tapestry as the "big people" do.

It is my contention that these critiques of systems theory and the emphasis on self-differentiation pose important but not insurmountable challenges. They do, however, raise critical questions for leaders and communities that are committed to keeping these three bodies of theory and theology together.

D. Bringing the Theories Together

The Apostle Paul is clear in his descriptions of the body of Christ that both the many and the one are important, and that the more vulnerable members are as important as the powerful. Jesus held love of neighbour and love of self together, along with loving God. However, as this discussion of Anabaptist Mennonite theology, feminist theology, and systems theory illustrates, weaving the threads of these three bodies of theory into one tapestry is not an easy task.

In my study and my practice of ministry I am discovering that each of these theories needs the questions of the others; each without the others is incomplete. Mennonite theology emphasizes that mature individuals are important to the body, and that each person's perspective needs to be included and tested, patiently and without violence, both with the biblical story, and with others in the community. Feminist theology calls the attention of the community to recognize
the personal and political differences that exist, and insists that extra care and attention be given to make sure that the perspectives of the more vulnerable members are heard and considered, and that their safety is protected. Systems theory and the emphasis on self-differentiation challenges each individual member, the "big" and the "little ones," to grow in maturity and the ability to accept responsibility for defining him- or herself within the community.

Feminist theology challenges systems theory to recognize that the process and the characteristics of maturity and self-differentiation differ for individuals, depending on their context and life experiences. It also challenges those who use systems theory to give attention to the effects of power differences between people. Systems theory challenges feminists to recognize the potential for everyone, both powerful and weak, to affect the system and to create change.

Mennonite theology challenges systems theory by insisting that the biblical story is the reference point for those who are seeking to define and live out their vision as God's people, both individually and corporately. This story defines the body of Christ by its inclusion and protection of the seemingly less important members. In turn, systems theory challenges Mennonite theology and practice for its tendency to create boundaries which are too rigid between the community and society, and which are too permeable between members of the community.

To find a research method which could do justice to the complexity I expected to encounter in my study, I turned to the grounded theory method of qualitative research.
Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

I. Introduction

"Grounded theory" was the research method which I chose because of its potential for taking account a variety of effects, both in the group and in the congregation, as research participants were encouraged to be more differentiated. My goal was to encourage participants to explore both past and present experiences of self-differentiation in the various contexts of their lives. My focus was primarily on family and church, but work and neighbourhood contexts also came up in individual and group reflections. I chose to design my action in ministry as a group process because of the fact that self-differentiation does not happen in isolation.

II. Choosing the Research Group

Members of the congregation were informed of the opportunity to participate in the research group first when a member of my Ministry Base Group shared publicly some of her reflections on the experience of helping me to develop the research proposal.

A. Selection Process for Group Members

After informing the congregation through public and written announcements of the nature and purpose of my action in ministry, I selected eight adult participants. Selections were made from a list of possible participants which I developed in consultation with members of the Ministry Base Group and Thesis Committee. As the researcher I made the final choices of whom I would invite.
While I tried to choose a group that would be representative of the population of the larger congregation, the sample was not random. Based on the premise of systems theory that a change in any part of the system will affect other parts, I chose to invite persons who had indicated some interest or whom I assessed as being open to learning from personal experience, and to exploring their formative experiences in families of origin and previous faith communities. One of my goals was to have as much of the diversity in the Warden Woods congregation represented as possible, so that the group would be a microcosm of the adult portion of the congregation. I focused on gender, age, and religious background, although the final group was also diverse in marital status, and class.

It was a delightful surprise to discover how eager people were to give their time and energy to this research. After extending only twelve invitations I already had eight participants which I had decided was the size of group which would ensure that all participants would be able to enter into the activities. I wanted a group that was large enough for differing levels of participation to emerge among the participants, just as one would expect to see in the congregation. One category of people in the church who were not represented were those persons who sometimes express their desire that Warden Woods Church would be more traditional in its theology and life. All the persons in that category whom I invited refused my invitation, saying "it's not my thing."

To potential participants who expressed interest in my request, I issued a
letter of invitation and a participant's consent form. After they had a chance to consider these two pieces of information, I contacted them to see whether they still wanted to participate. All of them agreed to join the study and signed the consent form. There was a high level of commitment to the group. Except for two absences due to illness, no one missed or dropped out of the group during the study. In fact the group members all agreed to attend one extra session to hear the results of my analysis of the data.

The group consisted of five women and three men, ranging from thirty-nine to sixty-four years of age. There were two single women who had been previously married, and the other participants were partnered. All but one of the participants had children. Some had children who were already adults, others were teenagers, and the rest were elementary school aged. The group included people employed in health, paramedical and child care services, teaching, custodial services, home renovation, computer programming, and home-making.

The oldest member of the group was a person who had grown up in Scarborough and had been involved in the congregation for over thirty years. While she only occasionally held formal leadership or committee positions in the congregation, she contributed her skills in many practical ways. She often noticed when people were absent from church for extended periods of time and inquired about their wellbeing.

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117 A copy of the letter of invitation and consent form are included as part of the Thesis Proposal in Appendix A.
Half of the group, two men and two women, had been participants in the congregation for periods of time ranging from ten to twenty years. Two of them had grown up in Toronto, and came from Roman Catholic and Salvation Army backgrounds respectively. Two of them came from places and Mennonite churches in other parts of North America. All four of these individuals had begun attending Warden Woods church in their early adult years, two of them when they began to work as staff at the Community Centre. Over the years, all four of these persons had given generously of their time and gifts to the life of the congregation in a variety of formal and informal leadership positions, had taught children in the Christian Education program, and at some time had volunteered their time in Community Centre programs.

Three of the group members had been attending Warden Woods and involved in congregational life for ten years or less, although two of these had been part of the congregation during an earlier period of time in their young adult lives. They had left, and after a hiatus of a number of years had returned to become quite active in regular attendance and various leadership roles. Two of these were of Mennonite background, and the third had grown up in the Presbyterian Church.

These eight people and I met together monthly for a total of eight sessions.

B. Group Meetings

All but one of the group sessions were held at Warden Woods Community Centre. The first session was held in one of the participants’ homes, as was the follow up reporting session that I held during my process of analyzing the data.
1. Overall Plan and Format

The group began with a day-long introductory session, followed by six monthly sessions, and concluded with a final session of a more evaluative and celebratory nature. The day-long session was held on a Saturday in late September 1994, and other sessions were held monthly during consecutive months from October 1994 to March 1995, with the final wrap-up session in April 1995. After the series of formal sessions came to an end, I realized that my proposed process did not include an instrument for collecting data to document the effect of the research process on the participation of group members in the congregation. I received the approval of my Thesis Committee for the individual interview with participants as well as for the questions I would ask, and scheduled a time to meet with each member of the research group. The questions were given to participants ahead of time, and the actual interviews took place during June 1995.

A cursory analysis of the data was done after each of the sessions. I had projected for the detailed analysis of the data and writing of the thesis to begin in the spring of 1995 and be completed by the end of the year. However, due to the fact that so much of my time and energy was absorbed by demands related to the congregational crisis which surfaced in January 1995, the analysis and writing was delayed until fall of 1995, and completed during the summer and fall of 1996.

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118 The semistandardized questions which I used as the basis for these interviews are found in Appendix D.
2. Descriptions of Sessions

The introductory session lasted for a full day. It had several purposes: to introduce participants to some of the basic principles of systems theory and to the concept of self-differentiation, to have individuals begin to see their own and each others' family patterns in fresh ways, and to provide an opportunity for group members to begin to function as a group.

The monthly sessions were two and one-half hours in length. Although each session had its own theme and goals, they were all structured loosely according to the following format:

- A brief preparatory exercise (10-15 min.)
- Primary activity of the session (45-60 min.)
- Refreshment break (15 min.)
- Individual recording of personal reflections (15-30 min.)
- Group reflection time (30 min.)
- Closing (15 min.)

Each of these steps was included for a particular purpose. I structured opportunities for both individual and group action and reflection into the design. Brief preparatory exercises were planned for each session in order to provide transitions between the rest of their lives and the process and content of the group experience. I varied the main group activities from session to session to

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119 Appendix B has a detailed outline of the individual sessions. See the Introductory Event for a description of "family tableau."
provide different formats for participant interaction.

The individual written reflection questionnaires were designed as a tool for data collection and for assisting individuals in identifying some of their own issues around differentiation which might have surfaced in the group interaction. The group reflection following the completion of the questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to discuss with each other their perceptions of what had transpired in the group. Sometimes these group reflection times also generated suggestions or a direction for future sessions. The brief closing exercise was designed to provide some closure to the session’s activities and to feelings that might have arisen during the group time. In addition to being the researcher and group leader, I was a participant observer in the sessions.

Designing sessions was my responsibility as leader. The task of designing creative processes and finding innovative modalities which would encourage new ways of relating and bring out participants’ issues seemed daunting at first. I wanted to incorporate different forms of creative expression in the hope that they might evoke some responses which would be less accessible if I used only cognitive processes. To augment my own limited experience and resources in this area, I chose to consult regularly with a person who had training and experience as a therapist, and who used expressive arts extensively in her work. Her creativity and insights were invaluable, both in drawing out my own ideas and goals and incorporating them with hers into the design of the sessions, and in debriefing what had happened each time before planning the next session.
Since each session grew out of the previous one, group participants’ feedback and input were also part of the planning for future sessions. During the fall there was a new theme for each session. During the winter sessions my intention had been that the group would choose one major issue which would provide a continuous thread throughout the three sessions. However, due to the interruption of the congregational crisis which surfaced between the January and February sessions, this plan was changed so that each of the sessions, while sometimes related to previous ones, stood essentially on its own.

Except for two sessions in which the activity was role-playing and the themes were related, the group meetings varied widely in content and processes used. The day-long introductory session included the presentation of basic systems concepts by the leader and story-telling, which individual participants shared in the form of "tableaus" of their family of origin. The activity for the first research session, held in October 1994, was hymn-singing. Each participant chose their favourite hymn from the congregation’s songbooks, shared why it was significant to them, and the group sang it together. In November 1994, the second session, after an introductory non-verbal exercise, the group went through a decision-making process designed by the leader to enlist everyone’s input into developing a list of themes for future sessions. In the third session, held in December 1994, group members did two short role plays, using two randomly picked scenarios from a number of situations which individual group members had written on the theme of "why people leave the church." In January 1995, the fourth session, the
group did an extended role-play about teen-aged children who do not attend
close. In the fifth session, in February of 1995, the members of the group used
art as a way of sharing some of their responses to the congregational crisis and
what previous experiences this brought back to mind.\textsuperscript{120} The sixth session, in
March 1995, was a playful nonverbal exercise using rhythm instruments, in which
group participants were encouraged to take turns being "the leader."

C. Collecting the Data

Data was collected in several different ways: from individual reflection
questionnaires, from audiotapes of group reflection times which I later
transcribed, from individual interviews, from art materials and from notes I had
recorded in a journal.

1. Instruments for Data Collection

The questionnaires were filled out by each participant during the session and
collected at the end to be coded later. While I used the audiotapes so that I
would be freer to give my attention to leading the sessions, they also provided me
with data so that, both between sessions and during the data analysis phase, I
would be able to observe my own role and the way I functioned in the group
process at a later time. The transcribed tapes were a rich source of research data,
particularly when used along with the written questionnaires in which individual

\textsuperscript{120} The last two research group sessions, which were held in February and
March, occurred while the investigation of sexual misconduct was being carried
out in the congregation. In discussions with my Thesis Committee, it was decided
that I needed to exercise caution in discussing with the group any details about
what was happening while allegations were still unproven.
participants reflected on their own and the group’s experience. Reading through
the material after each session provided useful information on process and issues
to address in the planning of the next session.

As leader and participant observer, I kept a journal to record my experiences
and to reflect on the effects of my behaviour on the group process. My journal
entries, though sporadic during the second half of the research process, provided
an overview of my experiences and reflections of how I was functioning and
changing throughout the research process. The journal entries were useful
sources of data on my own process of differentiation as a leader, and also helped
me to identify some of my biases as a researcher. Both through the questionnaire
and the group process I solicited feedback from the group members to find out
how they were experiencing my leadership, since I was interested to find out how
my behaviours as the leader affected others.

At the beginning of the process, I gave each participant a personal journal in
which to reflect on their experience and any new insights they had gained. I
specified that the journal contents were for their personal use, and would not be
used by me or the others in the group unless they chose to share insights or
excerpts in their questionnaires or verbally with the group. In order to allow for
individual differentiation, I had decided to give participants the freedom to decide
whether they would use their journals or disclose the contents, and I did not
check to see how many of them actually used them. In retrospect, I think it
would have been useful to ask each participant during their interview whether and
how they processed sessions later, and whether they used the journals or not. It would have provided me with one more source of information about self-differentiation.

The individual interviews which I inserted at the end of the process provided some data about how group members viewed their own participation in the congregation as a result of their exposure to the concept of self-differentiation and the group experience. By the time I conducted the interviews, the ban on talking about the incidents of betrayed trust was no longer in effect, and people were just beginning to feel free to talk about the tremendous impact which the crisis was having on their lives and relationships. This meant that it was almost impossible to know whether the effects noted in the interviews were due to the research process or to the unfolding of events in the congregation.121

2. Confidentiality

Confidentiality was essential in the data gathering for the group process. The identity of individual participants and their responses was protected by using coded numbers rather than names to identify the questionnaires. Only I as the researcher had access to the completed questionnaires and the tapes, which will be destroyed following successful defense of the thesis. Participants were given pseudonyms in the transcripts, in any written reports used in the collaborative process, and in the written thesis. As an extra precaution, I distributed a draft of

121 For further discussion of the "confounding" effect of these events on the interview data, see page 86-87.
the findings chapter to each of the research participants so that they could convey
to me any of their concerns about the way I reported their data. As a result I
made one minor change.

III. Research Methodology and Analysis of Data

For this research process I used "grounded theory", a method of qualitative
research which builds theory from data that is taken from the actual experience of
participants in the study. The process has clear procedures for analyzing
data, but also allows for creativity in the way new theory is formulated from the
data. Kirby and McKenna advocate the use of "grounded theory" for several
reasons: it accounts for the experience of the researcher in the process, it gives
priority to the voices of the participants, it uses a research process that is
egalitarian, and it takes seriously the context of the research and of
participants. As a researcher I wanted to keep these principles central in my
work.

A. Coding

Kirby and McKenna describe in simplified and concrete steps the method
which I used for managing and analyzing the data. Raw data was broken
down into fragments, which were then arranged into codes and named to provide

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an easy way of identifying the distinct but related ideas or phenomena. Individual data fragments were sometimes identified with more than one code.

In order to organize the data bits, I used the database program, $Q \& A$.\textsuperscript{125} The flexibility of this programme allowed me to arrange the data into different configurations, which also gave me the capability of exploring questions and relationships which arose later as I worked with the material.

In my first round of coding, I grouped data bits according to their content. I began to see more subtle nuances as I began to make comparisons between what people said in the various different venues where data was being analyzed - group reflection times, in their questionnaire, or in their interviews. My initial coding reflected my preconceived ideas of what differentiated behaviour would look like, but as my analysis became more sensitive, I started to find data which challenged those beginning assumptions and took me beyond my initial theories. The process of analyzing data became a dynamic interplay between posing tentative theories based on the data and testing those theories by returning to the data and looking for other similar occurrences or exceptions.

B. Finding the Relationships

A complex but essential step in the analysis was what Strauss and Corbin referred to as axial coding. It involved looking more closely at a phenomenon such as "concern for others," and identifying some of the causal and intervening conditions, context, properties, and dimensions, and the interactions between

\textsuperscript{125} $Q \& A$, Text database, Symantec Corporation.
those factors. In order to do that, I began to ask deductive and inductive questions. For example, in the process of analysis I deduced from my personal experience and knowledge that gender differences might be a factor in whether persons expressed "concern for others" in the group. To see what the data indicated, I sorted the data bits in that code according to gender.

Asking inductive questions also helped me to see whether or not all of the data supported the relationships I was beginning to see. I asked questions such as: Who indicated "concern for others" in the data? Who spoke their concerns, and who wrote them in their questionnaires instead of voicing them? Were these responses related to gender, or might they be explained by other factors? How was this individual's behaviour affected by the group's behaviour? What was the effect of voicing "concern for others"? Of being silent about it? Were people more or less silent about their "concern for others" than for other responses?

Another specific example of how an initial code led me back into the data was that over time I began to notice that being invited by the leader to participate in the group was significant for group members. I began to pay closer attention in the transcripts to "invitations": who mentioned being invited, who gave invitations, what form they took, what effect they had on the invited individual and other participants, and what happened to those who were not invited.

This process of returning to the data was repeated many times as my sensitivity increased throughout the coding, analysis, and writing process. I kept

126 Strauss, Basics, 96-115.
discovering new questions and insights about other relevant categories or connections between concepts as I was formulating my theory. At one stage, as I returned to my working definition of differentiation, I realized that I had been looking more intentionally for indicators of participants' separateness than for data which indicated connectedness. Since my definition of self-differentiation suggests that these two factors are interrelated, I went back to the data to look for data bits that had to do with being connected. I was engaged in a process of theoretical sampling\textsuperscript{127} as I asked questions such as: Was it easier or more difficult for individuals to have and express their own thoughts and feelings when they were more connected (closer) to others? More distant? How did participants create or maintain distance? Closeness? How did other participants respond?

At several points during the process of analysis, I became aware of some of my biases and conceptual baggage which were interfering with my initial coding. In order to identify some of those biases, I borrowed a technique from one of my peers in the Collaborative Learning Group and wrote a brief essay identifying some of the things I had expected to find in the data during the research process.\textsuperscript{128} Writing that essay freed me to let the data speak for itself, and to impose fewer of my preconceived ideas on the findings.

When my analysis was no longer generating new codes, I grouped together

\textsuperscript{127} Strauss and Corbin, Basics, 176-193.

\textsuperscript{128} This essay is found in Appendix E.
similar codes, creating twenty-three categories related to participants and sixteen related to the leader.\textsuperscript{129} Three of the leader's codes were ones that were not found in the participants' data. I dropped eight of the codes which had only one or two data bits, since there was not sufficient information in them to add substantially to my theory. Most of those data bits had also been included in other codes. For example, the data bits I had grouped under the code "giving advice" were also coded as "feedback to another."

I used the process of "cross-referencing" and "hurricane thinking," which Kirby and McKenna describe, to decide which categories were more closely related to each other, and which ones were more central or peripheral to my research question.\textsuperscript{130} Several categories became subcategories, and four categories emerged as being closest and most important to the research question. As I formulated some beginning theory, I began to test it by looking at a variety of different situations.\textsuperscript{131}

 Strauss and Corbin have developed the concept of a "conditional matrix" which was useful for analyzing the interconnections between the different levels of action/interaction and for developing an integrated theory about the differentiation of persons in the congregational system. These interactions were especially relevant in this study, since there was so much impact on the smaller

\textsuperscript{129} The codes and categories are listed in Appendix C.
\textsuperscript{130} Kirby and McKenna, \textit{Experience}, 146-8.
\textsuperscript{131} Kirby and McKenna, \textit{Experience}, 137-8.
system of the group which resulted from influences in the broader context. The conditional matrix provided a way to seek out the information that helped to relate some of the findings and related concepts systematically.\textsuperscript{132} The matrix helped to conceptualize connections between what was taking place with the leader and group, and what happened in the congregation.

C. An Unexpected Turn of Events

Kirby and McKenna emphasize that both content and process information are important sources of data. They also suggest that analysis and data collection need to go on at the same time so that adjustments can be made in the process, and the researcher can look for data that is relevant, but which was not included in the original research design.

In this study, the events in the congregation had a significant effect on the research process and had to be acknowledged in the analysis. "Confounding" occurred as the revelations of sexual abuse in the congregation impacted the research group and its context.\textsuperscript{133} As a researcher I needed to account for these effects. Because the incidents had taken place during a particular time in the congregation's history, the news of the disclosures also highlighted the fact that

\textsuperscript{132} Strauss and Corbin, \textit{Basics}, 158-175. Posing circular questions about the data helps the researcher to make connections between specific events and the bigger picture. For a description of circular questions and their use, see Karl Tomm, "Interventive Interviewing: Part III. Intending to Ask Lineal, Circular, Strategic, or Reflexive Questions?" \textit{Family Process} 27 (March 1988), 1-15.

there were groupings of people, who might be referred to as "cohorts," who had lived through the same times and experiences in the congregation. For example, those who had been in the congregation during the time when the incidents of betrayal of trust had occurred reacted to the disclosures differently from more recent arrivals. The data contained indications of the contrasting responses from cohorts of individuals who had come into the congregation during different periods of its history.\textsuperscript{134} These two phenomena account for some of the difficulty in isolating and documenting which behaviours in the congregation could be attributed to the research process and which ones resulted from other events that were occurring in the congregation at the same time.

Another effect which the congregational crisis had on this research process was that it made it difficult for me to begin my formal analysis during the data collection process. Ideally the researcher alternates between these two processes so that the ongoing analysis can give direction to the sampling of data.\textsuperscript{135} However, my analysis during the research process was limited to an informal reading of the questionnaires and transcripts, and incorporating the feedback from participants by using some of their ideas and responses in my planning for later sessions.

While this sequence did not provide as much intentionality or focus to my design of the later sessions as an ongoing analysis of the data would have given, it

\textsuperscript{134} Cozby, \textit{Behavioral Research}, 71.

\textsuperscript{135} Kirby and McKenna, \textit{Experience}, 130.
did enable me to complete the research in what became a highly anxious and chaotic context. In that respect, the research process was sufficiently flexible to allow me to make the adjustments necessary in the last two sessions to accommodate the changed context.

D. Afterthoughts

After all the sessions had been completed I discovered some gaps in the data, particularly with regard to the portion of the research question which had to do with changes in individuals' participation in the life of the congregation. After discussing my concerns with the members of my Thesis Committee, I received their approval for doing a follow-up interview with each individual in the group. Committee members also approved a set of questions which I gave participants in advance and discussed with them during these interviews. The data from those interviews was taken from brief notes which several of the participants had written on the sheet of interview questions and field notes which I had recorded during the interviews. These notes were included in the coding process.

In addition to filling in gaps in the data, by this stage I was also interested in testing some of the theory which I was developing as a result of the research process. I included in the interviews some questions designed to achieve that purpose, which meant that aspects of this later addition to the process provided another opportunity for me to do some further theoretical sampling.

136 See Appendix D for interview questions.
E. Testing the Theory

The final steps in testing my analysis came in a verbal presentation of my findings which I made to the participants of the research group, and later in sharing the final draft of the written findings chapter with them. These experiences gave me the opportunity to test whether I was able to communicate my learnings in a way that was accessible to others. Several of the participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to read a draft of the findings chapter and to respond to the way I used their material in developing my theory.

IV. Summary

The "grounded theory" approach was useful in a number of ways. It allowed the participants to be heard, and the context of the research to be taken seriously. Most importantly, it provided the opportunity for me to be intentional about accounting for my biases and my experience in the process and of differentiating myself as a leader/researcher/participant observer from the participants.
Chapter 5

FINDINGS: ENCOURAGING DIFFERENTIATION

I. Introduction

My perception that individuals in the congregation often did not articulate their widely divergent opinions and feelings publicly led me to formulate the goal of this research study, which was to encourage participants to differentiate themselves in the congregation. It was my hope that individuals in the research group would express their differences openly and remain connected, and that the effects of this experience would be seen in the congregation.

I recognized early in the process that self-differentiation did not mean only being open about differences. However, my concern was that the vitality and creativity in the congregation was being diminished as people withdrew rather than expressing their opinions or feelings openly. My observations were that those who withdrew did so in two different ways: some became distant and a few left the congregation, while others submerged their diverse thoughts and feelings as well as their goals and values in order to fit into the community. I was concerned that this pattern in the congregation was creating more dissatisfaction and distance among members and decreasing the energy of those who remained.

The purpose of this research action was to find out what might encourage new behaviour patterns. I wanted people who had different perspectives to express them while still remaining connected to each other. According to systems theory, change in one part of the system creates shifts in other parts of the system. Therefore I hoped that as the eight participants in the research group
along with me as leader and participant observer practised self-differentiation, there would be ripples of change in the larger congregation.

This chapter reports the rich and varied findings that were generated in the process of exploring the effects of encouraging self-differentiation in the research group. I begin by describing in more detail the process of bringing related codes together into categories and determining which were most central to my interest in self-differentiation.

II. Process of Analysis

Being careful to ensure that it was the participants who spoke from the data was an exercise in differentiation - differentiation among the voices of the individual participants and myself as leader of the research group. For me it was a discipline to distinguish between what I expected to find and the actual events that I observed or words that I heard as participants described their experiences.

The findings for this chapter came from several sources: questionnaires in which participants wrote their reflections on their experiences, transcripts of the group dialogue, field notes of the individual interviews which I conducted with each participant at the end of the process, process notes where I recorded observations after each session in preparation for meeting with a consultant who helped me with the research design, and my journal notes where I recorded my reflections on my own personal process. I also drew on my own observations and the participants' self-reporting on their initiatives to define themselves in new ways as they participated in the congregation and other areas of their lives.
As leader and participant observer, I examined the data for repeated patterns of behaviour. I looked for differences between individuals, and for changes in the behaviours of individuals over the duration of the action in ministry. This involved two approaches to examining the data: comparing participants to each other, and comparing each participant's behaviours in one situation to their responses in other situation. I looked especially for: 1) choices individuals made about expressing their thoughts, feelings and opinions, such as when participants became more open or withdrew physically or emotionally, and 2) specific behaviours or sequences of events which coincided with those choices, such as the responses of others in the group to withdrawal. I also looked for indications of how events in the congregation influenced participation.

I did not seek out deliberately any information from participants regarding changes in their families which might have related to their self-differentiation, but throughout the process I became aware of several such events. Those which came to my attention are included in my descriptions of the findings.

Specific behaviours which I found in the coding process were: voicing a lone opinion, several persons expressing similar responses, participants noting that they had done something difficult or different from others, or responding differently than they usually did. I tried to identify factors in the person or circumstances surrounding those events which made it more or less possible for that participant to choose another behaviour on that occasion. I also examined what happened when the same factors were present or missing in a number of similar sequences.
I observed participants as they reported changes throughout the course of the research process in how often they differentiated themselves within the group, the congregation and other relationships.

A cluster of codes began to emerge, which I grouped into a category and named "putting forward." These codes were: knowing own opinions/feelings, responded when asked, expressed satisfaction with own contribution, voiced disagreement, indicated agreement, disclosed when others agreed or validated, acted decisively, and acted with hesitation.

Data in the category "putting forward" came primarily from exchanges or responses where participants: voiced their feelings, opinions, and hopes openly in the group; expressed something different than they wrote in their questionnaire; and expressed their opinions, feelings, and hopes either verbally or nonverbally with varying degrees of urgency.

Another cluster of codes emerged, which I grouped into a category and named "holding back." These codes were: holding back uncertainty, disagreement, anger, sadness, or fear; remaining silent because of fear of speaking too much, reluctance to expose or hurt others, fear of getting hurt, concern for what others might think, or too many others speaking; and selective sharing because concerned about group process, thought their contribution was "not appropriate," or thought the group might not be able to handle it.

Data described under the category "holding back" was found primarily in those situations when participants: described their responses in their
questionnaires, but chose not to disclose them in the group; reported selective or partial sharing; noted that they were silent about specific thoughts and feelings; and when I observed silence, but there was no reporting of awareness.

As I began to develop some interpretations from my analysis of the data, it became more evident that "holding back" and "putting forward" though opposite ways of participating, were interrelated. Together they made up my core category which I named "expressing self." Initially I interpreted "putting forward" as an indication of defining or differentiating oneself, and "holding back" as not defining or differentiating oneself. However, this simplistic view of differentiation became more refined and nuanced as I observed how participants made choices between these two ways of participating, and began to explore in more depth the relationship between these two seemingly opposite behaviours in the process of self-differentiation and remaining connected.

Because I was interested in observing how and when change occurred, I searched for indications that participants desired change as well as whether or not change occurred and how lasting it was. The codes which emerged were: expressed desire for change in self or others; thinks of alternatives for self or others; reports change in self or others. I also looked for evidence of behaviour changes which coincided with the expressed desire for change. Out of these codes I created two further categories, "change" and "fixed patterns," which distinguished between the opposite responses of participants to the opportunities for change. They could not choose a fixed pattern and change at the same time. I was
especially interested in observing what influenced individuals in their choices. Together these two categories formed a subcategory which I called "flexibility."

Since I wanted to discover those factors in the person or environment that accompanied changes and also those that coincided with fixed patterns remaining intact, observing the "flexibility" of individuals and the group became an essential element in my process of analyzing my core category, "expressing self."

Other codes added depth and texture to the data. "Cut-off," "feeling unheard," "feeling connected," and "feeling disconnected" made up a category which I called "connectedness." "Reminds of church," "reminds of family," and "reminds of other" made up the category, "Comparisons." Other categories were: "feeling confused or inadequate," "concern for others," "taking initiative," "seeking validation," and "knowing self when asked."

During the process of analysis I discovered that most of the codes and categories appeared in data from both participants and leader. However, there were three codes which emerged frequently in my journal entries and very seldom in the participants' data. These were: deciding whose issue, clarifying responsibility, and shifting responsibility. These particular codes recurred most often in my journal as I reflected on my role as leader.

Through the process of analyzing the data, I began to identify a variety of different factors which influenced whether and how participants defined or differentiated themselves. I isolated those factors which seemed to have a significant effect on individuals' self-differentiation and the likelihood of change.
in their behaviour patterns. To organize the material for clearer reporting, I grouped the factors according to the area in which their influence was most pronounced: individual participant factors, group factors, factors in the broader context and factors related to the leader. The data in this chapter is subdivided into these four major areas.

These four areas provide the overall framework for my discussion of the findings which emerged from the data. Within each area I will describe the factors which, in my view, were related to the differentiation of individuals both within the group and in the congregation. My interpretation of this data is found in chapter five.

III. Findings

A. Individual Participant Factors

The first major cluster of factors influencing individual participants in their ability to be self-differentiated were personal. I categorized as "individual participant factors" those characteristics, experiences, goals, relationships or values that individual participants brought to the group process with them. I developed the following format for discussing these factors:

1. Formative life experiences
   a) Family of origin
   b) Church

2. Degree of satisfaction with ability to express self

3. Personal needs and preferences
4. Gender

5. Connectedness
   a) Common activity or experience
   b) Shared feelings
   c) Similar history
   d) Age and stage in life
   e) Ability to contribute
   f) Withdrawal

6. Desire for change

   The influences of these personal factors on individual participation in the group were interwoven and interconnected but also clearly identifiable in the data.

1. Formative Life Experiences

   a) Family of origin

   Experiences from families of origin were referred to frequently by participants as they reflected on how and when they expressed themselves in the group. All of the participants at some point in the group process identified patterns from their families of origin which they continued to play out in their behaviour in the group.

   In the discussion following the group decision-making exercise in the second session, Jen told the others: "I was always taught to put myself last. That's what
was expected of me. . . and I still did it!"

Lil recounted a memorable story about a time when she reported to her father that she had voted for her opponent rather than herself in the school election. She recalled his decisive response to her disclosure: "If you don't have enough confidence in your own abilities to vote for yourself, no one else should vote for you either." However, Lil also remembered other messages she received from her family of origin. She described the three significant female role models in her family as being very different in how they expressed anger. One expressed her anger and differences very openly, but the other two did not. In one of her questionnaires, Lil wrote that she "wanted to be competitive and push my ideas forward and felt badly about it, but did it anyway." She was aware of the tension within herself as she chose between the codes of conduct she saw for many of the women she knew as a child and the encouragement of her father to "vote for herself."

Samantha frequently spoke of her mother as a person who always looked on the bright side of things, who saw the good in people and never said unkind things about others. In fact, in her interview, Samantha mentioned that her mother's favourite song was "The Bluebird of Happiness." Samantha wrote in her questionnaires that "there's still a need to be careful about our differing opinions so we don't step on each other's toes," and "I feel more connected when we share our happiness as well as our concerns over issues."

Tom reported that in his family of origin "for sure you didn't talk about
feelings, but opinions and thoughts too." To assist in overcoming those messages he wanted the leader to remind participants to pay attention to their own feelings and opinions. Ken, on the other hand, recalled growing up in a situation where he was encouraged to act on his own goals and ideas. "I was always encouraged to form and express my own opinions, even if they were radically different," he said in his final interview. "I never had any difficulty disagreeing with a leader," he recalled.

While some participants reported that they continued to repeat patterns of behaviour they learned in their families of origin, others reported that some situations still triggered in them emotional reactions that were rooted in those early experiences. Rob recognized that, perhaps because of some of his early experiences in his family of origin, he "would be more likely to react to a domineering leader."

Lil still reacts to expectations that in order to be a group everyone has to participate:

[This reminds me of] some family ventures where we are all together and participating, and yet I don't really enjoy it or feel part of it. I don't want to be disruptive, and so I wrestle with acquiescence and dignified self-clarity. . . It's that whole way of thinking that, if there's a group, then people need to do things as a group.

In the group discussion about opting out of group activities, Lil reflected on her resistance to the expectation that:

if you are not conforming to what the group is doing, or participating, then it's a signal that you really don't care or don't want to be part of them. And if people are operating on that principle and it's not your principle, it's just a constant source of tension.
For Lil it was important to know that she could withdraw from the group activity for a while, as she did in the rhythm exercise, and "this group would just accept it . . . and people would carry on and do what they wanted to do." Later in the group reflection, Samantha pointed out the positive aspects of Lil's earlier choice: "I thought it was interesting, Lil, how you took your break and then came back and played such lovely music."

However, May brought another perspective from her family of origin where her experience is that "it's hard when there is consistently one person in a group that [goes in and out] more than the others." She acknowledged in the group discussion that "the self-differentiation part of accepting if only part of the group does something is an interesting dynamic for me, . . because I can feel churning inside myself."

May acknowledged that perhaps her behaviour reflects her position in her family of origin: "When I could see the group becoming a little weary, I would feel like I should jump in, and so I'd stop it. And that's a pattern I fight all the time. . . Maybe it's being the oldest or something."

Dee recalled her experiences in her family of origin as well, when in her interview she recalled that "I always felt like the different one. Others in my family of origin would say that too." She attributed her "instant trigger of annoyance when I feel unconsidered and unincluded" to her experiences in her family of origin and other settings:

[This reminded me of] any setting where several people are together, whether it's family, friends, committee meetings or work teams, and how
easily a few can dominate the conversation and not remember to consult others or include them.

There were evidences throughout the research process that participants were changing some of the behaviour and response patterns they had internalized from their families of origin.

During the final months of the research study, Dee began to notice some group dynamics which she believed were excluding the contributions of some members of a church committee of which she was a member. She planned ahead to find the most effective way to raise her concerns with the other committee members. During her interview, Dee described ways in which she was changing:

I'm recognizing what I'm feeling and naming what is bothering me much earlier, before I get storming mad. I'm learning that I can initiate instead of waiting for others, and that just the fact that it comes up for me is enough reason to mention it. I make myself do what is needed, even if it's hard.

Rob said during his final interview that as a result of participating in this group "I'm developing more awareness that differences of opinion should be voiced, not suppressed. It's helped me be more comfortable with having differing views."

During his interview at the end of the research process, Tom said:

Being in this group brought to my mind the whole idea of self-differentiation. I felt encouraged to be who I am and to be aware of how I'm feeling, and that helps me. It all comes back if I just stop for a second and think. . .

I am one who easily gets lost in a group and is easily swayed. I began to pay attention to my own feelings and opinions, and to become aware of how I can be more active. Now I can continue to think about "where am I in all of this?"
Lil, Tom, and Jen reported to me in conversations outside of the group some of the changes they had initiated in their family or other relationships. They recounted their experience with initiating a dialogue with a member of their family of origin. They described their conversations as being the first time they had discussed some significant life experiences with one particular parent. Jen reported "learning to prepare by waiting for the right moment, allowing others to give full voice to their concerns, and also stating my own." For her this was a change from always putting others first. These were indications of changes which occurred in the behaviour of participants outside the group and which they attributed to their participation in the research process.

While it is evident that the experiences of individual participants in their families of origin continued to have a significant effect on their behaviours and responses in the group, other settings were also formative.

b) Church

The effect of individuals' previous church experiences on their participation was particularly evident in the first session when the group activity was for each individual to choose a song from one of the hymn books which the congregation uses regularly in its worship.

Ken, who was of Presbyterian background, and Jenny, who was of Roman Catholic background, both mentioned that the hymn books used regularly by the Warden Woods congregation have very few songs in them which were significant to them. Later in the group dialogue they spoke of the difference this fact made
to their participation, both in the group that evening, and more generally in congregational singing.

In contrast Rob, who had grown up in the Salvation Army, found many of the hymns were familiar to him. With the additional advantage of his musical training and experience, he was able to choose a song quite easily. The difficulty for him was that he had such strong associations with many of the familiar songs:

When I see a song come by at church that I remember from years back, it has all this other baggage with it that I can't ever seem to get over. That shouldn't be because some of the songs are okay. It's what goes along with the song. How do you get rid of that?

Samantha responded to Rob's comments in the group reflection by recalling her own similar experiences in a previous church: "Sometimes I feel guilty because a lot of my experiences at the other church were good too. I have mixed emotions. I just couldn't live up to their expectations as I got older, as a teenager, so I sort of pulled away . . ." In her interview, Samantha mentioned her feelings again about not being able to live up to what was expected of people at the church:

[At Warden Woods], I always thought I could never be a Mennonite because I wasn't born one. I was attracted to the simplicity, but saw only perfection. The people at the church seldom seemed to need anything. They were always giving to others.

The findings verify that church and family experiences from the past continued to colour the participation of these individuals in the present. All of the participants identified some early experiences in their families of origin and
church which continued to be foundational and formative. However, the data also shows that some participants initiated changes in their behaviour and response patterns as they developed new awareness and made conscious choices.

2. Degree of Satisfaction With Ability to Express Self

Four of the participants identified early in the process that they lacked confidence in their ability to articulate their own thoughts and feelings. For some individuals that changed later in the process.

In one of the earlier sessions, Tom said that when people began to ask questions of him and probe a bit to find out what he was trying to express: "I felt as if I didn’t do a very good job of articulating what I wanted to talk about." He said he would like to "be able to be more articulate in expressing myself." However, after the decision-making process during the second session, Tom observed that others had "promoted their topics" while he did not. In his questionnaire he wrote:

I did express my disagreement when the group was considering that topic. My initial reaction was "I don’t want to talk about this." But then I started rationalizing . . . until I was in agreement in my mind with the topic instead of expressing my initial views. There was another topic I personally would have preferred to discuss.

By the final session, Tom wrote in his questionnaire that he was learning that he could "say what I had to say in a way that people would be able to hear, thereby showing clearly that I wanted them to hear."

Dee also spoke initially of her frustration with being unable to express her needs and concerns in the group. She was especially sensitive to what she saw as
a "hierarchy of opinions being weighted," and thought that some were "quicker and more clear and definite in their response" which in her view "weakened someone else's different response."

However, in a later questionnaire she wrote about "making an effort to respond based on what I think and offering it as another possibility." Dee reported trying out new ways of expressing her thoughts and feelings in some of her significant family, friendship and church relationships outside the group. In spite of the lack of confidence which she expressed earlier in the group process, she began in later sessions to address situations that were troubling to her.

During the group discussion Rob compared the time it took him to articulate his thoughts with the speed and confidence of others:

I have trouble forming ideas quickly and need time to digest information. . . I get annoyed when I sit there with an idea rolling around in my head and then hear someone else with more confidence say it. Well, why didn't I?

Other participants expressed their feelings of inadequacy by accepting full responsibility when others did not hear or understand them correctly. Following the second session in which someone misunderstood her, Samantha wrote that she could "be more of a thinker before speaking out (expressing my opinions more clearly)." On another occasion, when someone in the group took offense from a statement she had made, she wrote: "I felt I might not have expressed my feelings properly."

Two participants identified that they felt less confident about their participation when the activity was unfamiliar to them. Jenny wrote in her
questionnaire that she was unsure of what she thought or felt in the hymn singing "when I didn’t know four of the chosen songs," and remained silent "when I didn’t have any memories of some of the songs." She wrote that she felt more distant "because I don’t have a musical background." After participating in the role plays during the fourth session, she wrote that she felt much more sure of what she thought and felt when she "was not in role; when I could be myself and didn’t have to waste time trying to be someone else."

Lil also expressed, both in her questionnaire and in the group, her dislike of role playing as a group activity, and attributed her reaction to feeling uncertain and confused. Following the fourth session, she wrote: "I do not enjoy feeling out of focus or confused. It feels like I don’t have my glasses on, and there’s no point in going anywhere until I get them on."

However, in the hymn singing during the first group session, when she sang songs that were "not from my childhood either," Lil said she was at ease with the activity: "I think part of it is that, living with Mr. Music, I feel like I've had to be exposed to all kinds of stuff regularly."

Ken said in the group discussion following the role plays: "It's a bit scary (which is also part of the enjoyment), not knowing what you are going to do or say." On his questionnaire following the role play in the third session, he wrote: "I was surprised at the sadness I felt while playing the role of someone who was leaving the church." For Ken, the edge of uncertainty contributed to his enjoyment and learning, while for others it hindered their participation.
When I compared earlier sessions with later ones, I discovered that "feeling inadequate" was mentioned more often in the earlier sessions, except for those who reported feeling uncertain and anxious about the congregational crisis. I observed that, of the participants who said they felt inadequate earlier in the process, Tom and Dee spoke out more directly and more often in later sessions, while Rob, Samantha, and Jenny decreased in the frequency with which they spoke out as the process progressed. Ken, May and Lil remained relatively constant in their participation with some fluctuations between sessions.

The fact that, of those who said they wanted to be more articulate, some began to take more initiatives later in the research process, while others returned to speaking up less often, suggests that there were other factors influencing their behaviour than their ability to express themselves adequately.

3. Personal Needs and Preferences

Participants' different personalities or preferences affected how they experienced any given exercise. May said she found it much easier to answer questions about nonverbal exercises than for other types of activities because she is "very sensitive to people's nonverbal cues, such as looks on faces or walking away." She described some of the differences she observed among some of the other individuals in the group during the nonverbal rhythm exercise in the last session:

It was interesting to watch because for you [Jenny] this was noise and you stopped it, and for you [Tom] it was 'ah-ah-ah this is great! I'm just going to get louder and louder here!' I could tell you [Lil] weren't into it... For me this exercise was really interesting.
Tom found the nonverbal rhythm exercise less satisfying. He reported that because the rules did not allow him to speak,

That's when my pattern of withdrawing and not taking any initiative to change things, or to let the group know that I was bored [was most obvious]. . . . I lost interest and just sat back, and didn't make any attempts to even think in my mind that I wanted to change anything.

Rob and Tom responded to the same phenomenon in the rhythm exercise in contrasting ways. Rob pointed out to the group with some delight that he had found out he could be "offbeat" but still be part of the group. However, in his questionnaire Tom sounded as if he experienced the group's response as indifference when he initiated a different beat: "it was easy to be different in this group because nobody really noticed, and it didn't seem to affect anything."

Individuals expressed differences in their learning styles and preferences. On several occasions Lil identified the things that made it easier for her to learn. In one questionnaire she wrote: "I appreciated when the leader wrote things out because I need to see more than hear." On another questionnaire she described her need for more clarity than others: "This reminded me of school where sometimes there is a project or issue, and everyone ploughs into it before I fully understand what it's about or what I'm to do."

Ken reported that, while he was aware of his preferred ways of participating, he had observed the effects of his behaviours in other life situations, and was learning to choose behaviours that were more likely to help him achieve his goals. During his interview he said: "I'm not as reactionary as I used to be. I've learned that if I jump in too soon, I cut off debate or end up in a heated discussion about
something I don’t care about, so I monitor myself more."

Less visible preferences such as one’s tolerance for noise or level of energy affected individuals in their participation. After the rhythm activity, Jenny wrote in her questionnaire that "never having been part of a musical band ever in my life, the noise level was just too much for me," so when she had reached the limits of her tolerance she stopped the group. During the same session, Lil withdrew from the group activity for a while because she "didn’t have the energy for it."

The differences in personal preferences were especially evident when the group participants were using art forms for self expression. Lil, who on other occasions waited for very specific instructions from the leader so that she would know just what to do, wrote on her questionnaire that she knew what she thought and wanted as soon as she had a crayon in her hand and a blank sheet of paper in front of her. May, on the other hand, wrote that she was uncertain "when everyone else knew what to colour and [she] didn’t."

Sometimes participants were especially interested in certain interactions because they related to other parts of their lives. Ken compared how he feels in church with the way he feels in his job where he is responsible for the group’s productivity. He observed:

If the work doesn’t get done that reflects on me personally . . . whereas in church there’s not necessarily a need to deal with the issue. Maybe it’s because nobody really owns an issue, except a lot of it probably comes on your [the pastor’s] shoulders for ownership.

There is ample evidence in the data that personal needs and preferences were significant factors in enhancing or inhibiting the interest and participation of
individuals in the various group activities and processes.

4. Gender

Significant differences between men and women emerged in several of the codes. Responses which were coded as "feedback to another" were all from female participants except one. 80% of the responses which were coded as "concern for others" had come from women and 20% came from men.

The data shows that women also mentioned more often that they felt responsible for others' responses. For example, Samantha wrote: "I still go home and worry when I've said something that might upset others," and "when others are silent I wonder: What are they thinking? Are they hurting?" On another occasion Lil wrote in her questionnaire that she chose not to make a comment because she thought "it would hurt someone else's feelings unnecessarily." May wondered aloud in the group dialogue how it was for those who grew up in other denominations to participate in the hymn-singing activity.

Both women and men expressed their concern for others more often in their questionnaires than voicing them directly to the person during group dialogue. When participants in the group were silent, Lil wrote of her uncertainty in her questionnaire: "What are they thinking or feeling? Are they okay?" In the questionnaire following the group decision making process, Tom "observed that Rob did not contribute to the list of topics" and also noticed Samantha's silence and "wondered how uncomfortable this kind of session was for her." Rob reported in his questionnaire that he remained silent about his disagreement
when he did not want to "hurt someone's feelings."

Only once did someone other than the leader ask someone who was silent what they were thinking or feeling. Lil had observed on her questionnaire in the third session that "I made sure I spoke up when I needed to, but what that seemed to do was not give Dee a turn." Later, during the group dialogue, Lil asked both Samantha and Dee who had been silent up to that point whether they had "anything to say."

Ken expressed his concern for others in his interview, but in the form of a general observation: "I have become more aware of others' opinions and reasons for not saying anything, and I'm curious about how you get it out because it's worth hearing it."

Although men reported awareness and concern about others' participation, the verbal instances of "expressing concern for others" were all from women. Samantha affirmed Lil for her participation after she returned from taking a break during the rhythm activity. Following the group decision-making process in the second session, when the leader invited responses, Lil and May both affirmed Samantha for being "attentive to others," and assured her that "when you talk I love to hear from you because we don't hear from you that much."

During the same dialogue May expressed concern for Jen by acknowledging the importance of her confession to the group: "The thing that surprised me was when you [Jen] said that "I always thought I should pick my own thing last." We don't know all those little messages that we carry with us in battle."
Following the role play on teenagers, Jen acknowledged the intensity of Tom’s reaction when she told him that she understood why he felt strongly about the issue.

Another visible gender difference was that men mentioned trying to get the whole group to change in response to their actions, whereas women who wanted change did not expect to change the rest of the group. This was most evident in the nonverbal rhythm exercise. Ken said in the group reflection that he "wanted to keep it going as long as possible and try and change it as well somehow, sort of evolve it more."

Tom also described to the group what he had wanted to do with them:

It was a nice rhythm, and I wanted us each to stop one at a time and just have you playing at the end and just fade away into the distance. . . But if you’re not allowed to do that, if we’re just dealing with nonverbal stuff here, you can’t do that. So it was frustrating.

Rob observed that he was able to "influence the rhythm if I played loudly." He noted that "to change what you were doing sent everybody into shock, you know . . . to be able to figure out the fitting in." However, he also expressed delight that "rhythmically you could be offbeat but still very much a part of what’s going on."

Several women also initiated changes in what they were doing in the group, but only Jen said anything about trying to change the group. She "wanted to stop the music, but thought someone else should take a turn." Samantha spoke of "choosing to follow her own pattern." Lil withdrew when she needed a break, but rather than expect the group to change to accommodate her she expressed relief.
that the group continued on without her.

A third gender difference was evident in the fact that men used humour twice as often as women. Tom, Ken, and Rob all indicated that they felt closer to others when they "made people laugh," or when "people laughed at my jokes." Men and women used humour in similar ways, such as introducing playfulness into an intense or uncomfortable situation in the group.

It is significant to observe that both women and men reported that when they were focused on the silence or responses of others they had difficulty knowing what they wanted to say. After the group decision making process in the second session, May wrote that she found it difficult to know what she thought or wanted when she noticed that "some of the topics [listed on the board] did not have a number indicating other people's interest." She was concerned for those whose choices had not received anyone's vote. Tom wrote in his questionnaire that he felt more uncertain about his thoughts and feelings "when confronted by Ken about his feelings toward the church." In the group discussion following the nonverbal rhythm, Samantha admitted that she was distracted by Tom's participation: "At one point I noticed that Tom wasn't playing at all, and I waited... I thought, 'Is he trying to tell us something?' and I was preoccupied with what he was doing, and I lost track of what I was doing.

The significance of gender was evident in a few specific areas, mostly related to what participants said and how they expressed themselves in the group. Many of the underlying issues that I was able to observe were similar for men and women.
5. Connectedness

Since remaining connected is central to self-differentiation, it was important to identify data related to connectedness. The major codes which I grouped into this category were: feeling connected or close, feeling disconnected or distant, withdrawing, feeling alone. Connectedness was influenced by several factors which were interrelated but distinct.

a) Common activity or experience

By far the most common reason individual participants cited for feeling connected or close to others in the group was doing something together. Participants felt closer to each other when they were taking part in an activity together. Activities which were attributed in the data with creating a sense of belonging or closeness were diverse and often quite commonplace.

For Samantha singing together was a connecting experience which dissolved other barriers like age differences: "I think it's really great that we can all sit here tonight and sing all these hymns. When you sing together, years melt away and you have a common bond." Lil mentioned such activities as "being quiet" together, "laughing" together, "having a chance to have your own voice and to have everybody else say what they really liked," or "chatting informally" as occasions when she felt connected to others. Rob made the observation that for him having the "freedom to disagree created connections." For Ken being "part of the team that was dealing with a problem" or "having a good rhythm going" in the group helped him feel connected. Dee felt closer when there was a common
goal: "I felt closer when I recognized that we were all trying together to do the role play, even though it was difficult getting started." May felt closer to others when everyone "had a chance to say and hear from each other why we had made certain choices," and when participants "debriefed at the end of the role play." Jenny mentioned that "being part of the research group" was a source of connection for her.

Participants verified that doing things together, particularly when that included some opportunity to hear from each other, was an important factor in creating connectedness.

b) Shared feelings

Having similar feelings emerged as a factor in creating closeness or connectedness, but was mentioned significantly fewer times than shared activities.

Lil wrote in her questionnaire following the hymn singing that shared enjoyment was a source of bonding or connectedness for her. May wrote after the fourth session that she felt closer to others who shared her fear that "the church won’t be relevant to our kids when they get to be teenagers." Ken observed in his interview that in the congregation, "I find I’m more connected with a lot of people, connected by emotion related to the current situation [in the congregation]. . . I’m not feeling distanced because I have similar strong feelings."

The findings also showed that sometimes intense feelings created closeness between some people and distance between others. Jenny wrote after the role play during the fourth session that she felt more connected when "some people
were having the same feelings I was, e.g. frustration, anger, helplessness."

However, her comments in her interview verified that the intense feelings
associated with the congregational crisis created closeness in relationships where
she felt relatively secure, but resulted in caution and superficiality in others:

I've been brought closer together with other people who shared common
information. We needed each other for support, and when we had
differences we were able to talk about that. It has been a juggling act,
but is less so now that there is less secrecy.

I watch a bit what I say depending who I am talking to. That doesn't
always feel good. It's not that there are barriers, but we stay on the
surface.

In the fourth session which followed the revelation of the betrayal of trust
that had occurred in the congregation, Samantha wrote in her questionnaire that
she felt distant from others when she talked "of feelings others couldn't possibly
be feeling due to the closeness of the issue for me."

While shared feelings heightened people's feelings of connectedness with
those who felt the same, it was particularly evident in the heightened anxiety of
the congregational crisis that distance developed between those who disagreed or
had different information. Their ability to be spontaneous and honest also
diminished with those whose feelings and opinions they did not know.

c) Similar history

Feeling connected was closely related to how much history or past experiences
participants had in common.

Both Jenny and Ken grew up in families that were actively involved in
Christian churches, but not in Mennonite congregations. Both of them said
during the group reflection that they felt less connected with the group in the first session, particularly when the hymns had a lot of associations for some of us. Jenny said that she often misses "some of the favourite songs that you all can choose from when you were kids."

Rob, although he had grown up in another denomination, felt at home in the hymn sing because he had similar associations to the Mennonite participants with hymns from the past.

Samantha had been in the congregation longer than any of the others in the group. Yet she occasionally felt disconnected because so many parts of her life experience were different from other participants in the group. She said in her interview that there were times when she felt as if she did not belong in the church "because there were so many professionals," or she thought she "could never really be a Mennonite because she had not grown up one." After the role play about why people leave the church, Samantha wrote in her questionnaire that she acted differently than usual when "I spoke for others who were not present... I feel very strongly for the under dog in today's society."

Sharing similar history created a strong sense of belonging and connectedness for some people, but it also created feelings of distance or disconnectedness for those who had a different history because of their religious background, or their station in life.
d) Age and Stage of Life

Samantha mentioned the age difference between herself and other participants on several occasions, noting that the issues were very different when her teenagers were growing up. In her questionnaire for the fourth session, she wrote that she felt less connected "when the issue of friends of different races and religions arose. That is a very live issue today, not so in the past." Samantha observed that she found it more difficult to know what she thought "when the issue covered was not of a burning concern to me," such as during the role play about youth in the church. She observed that some of the issues which were "live issues for younger people today" had "no relevance to my present situation."

Those who had young or teenage children became more involved than others in the role play about teens and leaving the church, both on an emotional level and in expressing their opinions.

e) Able to contribute

Individual participants reported feeling more connected when: "I could contribute to the conversation," "I expressed my thoughts and feelings," "I participated," "I was able to [admit] I had not prepared a topic," and "I explained my choices."

Dee observed that she felt more connected to others in the congregation when: "I have a higher profile"; "I'm asked to read scripture"; and "I had new invitations that opened the way."

Samantha recalled two experiences when she felt closer to others in the
congregation. She mentioned the Pastoral Search Committee on which she had served and the Bible Study group to which she belonged. In her interview, she identified what made the Bible study group such an important experience of feeling connected:

The Bible study group is important to me because we’re able to discuss and be open about different opinions, and at the same time I feel I have a church family that cares. That’s important to me.

In comparing her experience on the Pastoral Search Committee, Samantha wrote that making decisions with the research group was similar because: "the more we are different on issues, the more we find we have in common."

Samantha remembered those two groups as settings where participants discussed their differences, and in the process also found that they had things which held them together. It sounds as if she also felt connected because in those groups everyone’s contribution was important. Being able to contribute meaningfully was an important factor in participants’ feeling connected.

f) Withdrawal

Withdrawal happened on a number of occasions and in different ways, and most often when the participant felt unable to contribute or influence the group. Sometimes it involved an increase in physical distance from the group, other times it took the form of emotional distance. During the role play in the fourth session, after voicing her concerns about the process to no avail, Lil became silent and contributed very little to the group. During the role playing in the third session, Dee wrote in her questionnaire that she was frustrated because others did
not allow her to get into the conversation, and so she was aware that she sat
"somewhat at a distance" from the rest of the group. Later on, although she was
invited personally by Lil to offer her thoughts, she said she had nothing to add.
Tom wrote that "I just stopped playing" or "made my own noise" when he was
unable to influence others with his own attempts to change the rhythm.

Lil, Dee, and Tom each reported withdrawing emotionally when they realized
that their efforts to influence the group were having no effect. However, distance
did not remove the emotional reactions which came up whenever some of the
same elements were present. On several other occasions, Dee mentioned sitting
at a distance when she was annoyed because her own or someone else’s
contributions were overlooked. Rob still found himself reacting emotionally to
some songs which he remembered from the church which he had left some years
ago:

I have problems with things that bring back memories that are from my
background... I find it so easy to slip into the negative aspects of my first
forty some-odd years. Not that they’re all negative, ... It’s too bad
’cause you miss all of the goodness out of it... It’s what goes along with it.

Physical distance had not erased Rob’s emotional responses to songs that recalled
for him his formative early church experiences. Those reactions still affected his
present participation. In the rhythm exercise, Lil withdrew from the group
activity for a while, and later came back. A brief period of withdrawal and
separation cleared the way for her to participate again. However, there were also
indications that withdrawal was only a temporary way of resolving feelings
associated with those relationships and experiences that had been formative and foundational in one's life.

6. Desire for Change

While all of the individuals at some time expressed a desire for change, there were differences among them. In one of her earlier questionnaires, May expressed a desire to "be more patient with the process." Samantha wrote that she wanted to "be more assertive," "express her feelings in a more accurate way," and "be more of a thinker before speaking out."

On his questionnaires, Ken identified that he wanted "to be quieter and encourage others more," "to listen more and hear others' opinions," and "to be more empathetic." In his final interview Ken reflected on the effect of his experiences in the group: "I have become more aware of others' opinions and reasons for not saying anything, and I'm curious about how you get it out because it's worth hearing. It's important to hear them."

Tom also expressed his desire for change. He wanted to "know what my thoughts and feelings are" and "to be able to articulate them." Tom began to recognize times when he made the choice not to participate in the discussion because he "thought he didn't have anything to contribute that was worthwhile," and to acknowledge that he could make other choices. When he was invited personally, Tom often identified his feelings and thought process clearly. During the debriefing after one of the role plays, Tom said: "I feel a bit vulnerable, and keep telling myself that's okay..."
On another occasion Tom acknowledged that he could choose to "stay with" the group activity rather than withdrawing. On several occasions he took the initiative to respond first in the group rather than waiting until last or remaining silent, which were his more usual patterns. Tom also reported during his interview that he had begun to take more initiative to change his behaviours in some of his relationships outside the group.

In all but one questionnaire, Jenny wrote that she wanted to 'express what I'm really feeling," "express my thoughts more clearly," and "verbalize my opinions." In her questionnaire following the second session, Jen wrote that she would like to "leave some of my old patterns behind and do or say what I want to, not merely what I think is expected of me." Yet as she reflected on her behaviour in the group, Jen realized that "I didn't choose my own topic as my number one choice . . . I didn't change my pattern and choose my own." Although on her questionnaires and in her interview Jen was observant and "felt comfortable in the group" to admit that "she did not have a topic," she still said it was difficult for her to "feel so free to speak up and say what I think" in the group. She often waited to be encouraged or invited into the process by the leader or by another group member, but on one occasion she congratulated herself for interrupting the leader. "I was glad I did it!" she wrote. Jen spoke out less in later sessions than in earlier ones, but spoke in her interview of learning to monitor her own participation to have her say and hear others too.

Dee expressed her desire for change in her questionnaires as well: "I would
like to care less about being a part of things. I would like to try to come up with some possible changes in behaviour." Dee focussed some of her energy on changing the way she dealt with significant relationships outside the group. She approached me on several occasions in order to discuss how she might handle some of her life situations differently than she had in the past.

Lil also expressed her desire for change in her questionnaires. She expressed her desire to be "more comfortable and extroverted." In the third session she wrote: "I would like to be more aware of the necessary process of knowing what I feel first before proceeding with something." After the final session, she wrote in her questionnaire: "I would like to be able to take some simple strategies or steps to enhance self-differentiation back to both my own family and my family of origin." Later Lil reported to me that she had initiated an important conversation with a member of her family of origin about some of his life experiences which they had never discussed before.

Rob expressed a desire for change on a number of occasions and in a number of different ways:

I could be more definite about my responses, not tentative. . . . I get annoyed when I sit there with an idea rolling around in my head, and then hear someone else with more confidence say it. [Then I ask myself,] "well, why didn't I?"

He reported in his interview that the experience of participating in the research group had made him more aware "that differences of opinion should be voiced, not suppressed." Rob's change was one of increased awareness rather than changed behaviour in the group.
Several persons began to express new understandings of the concept of self-differentiation by the end of the process. In her interview, Lil said: "Speaking out is not the same as differentiation." Jenny illustrated this as she described her own changing response pattern during her interview:

I often shut down in order to be less reactive; I tend to become quiet rather than make waves. I am learning to prepare by choosing/waiting for the right moment, and also by giving space for others to voice their concerns, and then stating my own.

In his interview, Tom observed that "self-differentiation does not always mean disagreeing. You could also agree with a person, be aware of it, back it up, give that person your support and say it."

While awareness of issues of self-differentiation was increased in the group, the data showed that participants made the most efforts to change in those relationships and situations where they experienced the most dissatisfaction or discomfort with the way things were. Those relationships were with family for Jen, with other congregants for Dee, and with family and others in the congregation for Tom.

In summary, the findings indicate that there were many different life experiences and personal patterns which individual participants brought with them to the group which in turn influenced their ability to differentiate or define themselves in this particular situation. As one or more of these factors were present, they created varying amounts of urgency and different effects for each person.

The interaction of these varied responses of individual participants in the
group were like the intersecting threads of a complex web - distinct and yet interconnected. As each of these factors affected the ability of one individual to differentiate or define him or herself in a given situation, it also influenced the whole. This complexity became even more evident as we examined the group factors that enhanced or diminished the differentiation of persons.

B. Group Factors

The second major cluster of factors which influenced participants in their ability to differentiate or define themselves in the research process had to do with the group and the nature of its systemic patterns. From the data I identified a number of factors in the group’s functioning which were important for determining whether or not persons would be willing and able to take the risks involved in differentiating themselves. These factors are discussed under the following headings:

1. Structure of the Group
   a) Level of acquaintance between participants
   b) Structure of Physical Space
   c) Pacing
   d) Clarity and congruence of process

2. Patterns of Behaviour in the Group
   a) Invitation
   b) Respect
   c) Validation
d) Rules and expectations

e) Change and stability in group patterns

f) Level of anxiety

Throughout the following pages I have described the data which led me to identify these as important factors, and also the effects each of the factors had on the group participants' participation which I interpreted to be an indication of their ability to define or differentiate themselves. The nature and amount of participation, while not the only indication of differentiation, was still what was most accessible to me as a researcher.

I. Structure of the Group

A significant number of the factors which I have gathered together under group structure were designed into the research process as a result of my planning and decisions about implementation. Others arose out of the group functioning and emerged quite independently of my planning.

a) Level of acquaintance between participants

How well individuals in the group knew each other was identified as one of the factors affecting how freely they participated. Lil expressed what several others also observed: "Generally it takes me a long time to participate in a group. Knowing the individuals in this group to a certain level made it easy to participate."

However, May mentioned that being acquainted with the leader in particular caused her to have second thoughts about what she would disclose. In her first
questionnaire, she wrote:

I think for me part of it is that you, at least, will know what I'm writing, and you're somebody I'm going to be seeing once a week, and so there's also that little bit of hesitation for me - that I need to work through just how much I say there.

May's hesitation was reflected in a different form by some participants when they apologized in their questionnaires for suggestions they made to me as the leader. In the second session, after describing how she responded to the leader's behaviour, Lil wrote: "It bothers me enough to mention it, and I mean no insult by it." After the first session, May wrote that she wished the leader would "sometimes have given a little more time to absorb songs," but then added: "Sorry. Tall order." After the first two sessions participants stopped apologizing for making suggestions to the leader.

Degree of acquaintance sometimes made it easier for individuals to participate freely and express themselves directly. In a few instances it may have modified the amount and nature of the feedback that participants felt free to express that I was both the leader/researcher/participant observer and their pastor.

b) Structure of Physical Space

Three participants identified that the setting for group meetings and the arrangement of space were important to their participation. Lil observed at the end of the first session that she had expressed what she thought and felt often because "the setting and topic . . . felt comfortable for me and I felt at ease with those
At the end of the first session, Lil told the group that she preferred a different seating arrangement for the activity which was being planned. When the group was negotiating place and time of the next session she was able to state her preference to the group: "If we’re going to make choices next time, I have to sit around a table. I don’t think well sitting on a couch like this."

Dee wrote after the fourth session that she appreciated "when you [the leader] moved us out of our role play setting to another part of the room [for debriefing]." In the same session Samantha wrote in her questionnaire that she liked when "you had us break the role play and express our feelings as to what was happening." Jenny wrote in the third session that she appreciated when the group started and ended on time. Dee, Lil and Jenny each wrote on their questionnaires that they appreciated when I provided refreshments or lunch.

Interestingly, it was only the female participants who mentioned aspects of the arrangement of the physical space and structure of the process as significantly affecting their participation significantly.

c) Pacing

There were differences among participants in how quickly they were prepared to move along. Some expressed frustration that things moved too quickly.

Rob observed that sometimes "ideas were expressed quickly and moved from subject to subject faster than I wanted them to." Tom observed that he "felt the constraint of time that forced us to keep moving rather than have things happen
naturally." May spoke of feeling frustrated when she felt the leader was preoccupied with time constraints as a result of having put the wrong closing time on the invitation. She said she "reacts negatively when she feels pressed for time" and when "someone tries to move things along faster than she is comfortable with," but also admitted that she appreciates when the leader is "sensitive to our schedules."

Tom wrote in his questionnaire after the second session that "I felt the constraint of time that forced us to keep moving rather than have things happen naturally." Lil wrote that she remained silent "when I was trying to sort out my thoughts and didn’t have time to articulate them clearly enough in my own mind before speaking them."

Participants identified the importance of setting an appropriate pace which kept things moving but also gave them enough time to sort out and articulate their thoughts and feelings so that they could differentiate themselves from others in the group if they chose.

d) Clarity and congruence of process

Care in planning and clarity in communicating to participants the purpose and various steps of the group process were important factors for their ability to participate and offer their perspectives to the group. In the nonverbal rhythm exercise, Samantha wrote that she found it more difficult to join in when "the rhythm didn’t appear to follow any sort of pattern and was very disjointed." May wrote in her questionnaire about her frustration during one session when "the role
play got mixed up with people's own agendas."

Samantha described how much easier it was for her to participate when she "was given questions ahead of time," and "enough time and props to think about them." Dee wrote in her questionnaire that she appreciated when the leader "helped us to focus on some feelings." She also identified the need for structures in the process that would ensure everyone had the opportunity to participate when she wrote: "Is there a way to structure things so that the same ones do not always speak first? Or is this an inevitable, natural group thing?"

Rob wrote in his questionnaire that he found it easier "to be in situations where things are easy to identify and choosing how to be involved was clearer." He also made an observation that no one else mentioned. He said: "When the leader's beat is unclear it forces me to do more conscious thinking about my involvement." His comment suggested that greater clarity and decisiveness from the leader made it easier to follow, but it also did not require as much conscious thinking on his part.

One factor which was structured consistently into the research process was for participants to write their responses on questionnaires before the group discussion. This gave individuals an opportunity to clarify what they thought and how they might say it in the group. While participants did not identify the written questionnaire as an important factor, they often repeated to the group some of the observations they had made on their questionnaires, suggesting that they used the writing exercise to formulate some of their responses which they later shared
Most of the participants indicated that it was easier to join in the group activity if they were able to make sense of and follow the various steps of the process. Confusion and lack of clarity made it more difficult. However, one person pointed out that when the clarity and decisiveness of the leader decreased, participants had to work harder to decide how they would be involved. It was evident that the clarity of the leader and structure of the group process were significant factors in enhancing or inhibiting the self-differentiation of participants.

2. Patterns of Behaviour in the Group

There were patterns of behaviour in the group which affected the participation of individuals and their self-differentiation.

a) Invitation

The factor which participants cited most often as helpful for encouraging them to speak out in the group was being invited, asked, reminded, or prompted to pay attention to and offer their personal responses.

Tom observed in his interview that without the reminders from the leader to pay attention to his own feelings and thoughts in the process, he "would wonder if you even cared what I think about things." In her interview, Samantha said being invited to be part of the research group "made me feel as if I really did have a right to speak up, that my opinions mattered as much as others'." Dee also said in her interview that "just being chosen and invited to participate [in the research group] told me that you thought I might be able to contribute."
Being invited was mentioned more often by Tom, Samantha and Dee who frequently got the message in their families of origin that "I was to be seen and not heard" (Samantha), that "my opinions were not important" (Dee), or that "feelings were not to be talked about" (Tom).

Lil and Ken, who often did not need a special invitation to speak out, were aware of the effects of their greater boldness on others. Lil wrote: "I made sure I spoke up when I needed to, but what that seemed to do was not give Dee a turn." However, on one occasion when Lil noticed that some of the other participants did not feel as free to speak up as she did, she made a point of inviting them. During the third session, she asked both Dee and Sam who had been silent whether they had something to add to the conversation.

Ken also indicated his awareness of how his behaviour affected others when he wrote in his questionnaire for the third session: "I was a bit domineering during the second role play. I was conscious . . . that I was stepping on other people because I wanted to say something." Later he acknowledged that he could have "said less in the second role play and encouraged others to speak."

The invitations came in different ways: as general reminders to the group, or specifically directed to an individual; from the leader, or from peers; through parts of the process, such as the questionnaire or feedback from another participant. Whatever form it took, being invited was a significant catalyst for more active and open participation of group members, though some waited to be invited more than others did. For a few individuals the invitation raised their
awareness that they had their own perspective, whether or not they chose to share it in the group.

b) Respect

Several participants spoke of watching for cues that others would respect their opinions and feelings if they took the risk of speaking out.

Dee wrote in her questionnaire for the first session: "With all of Jenny's beautiful memories I thought, 'how can I say this?' I thought I just had to, . . . and I did. I'm so glad I did. It's all cleared up now." Interestingly, Jen described her response to the group: "It was sort of a shock at first. . . . How could you think that? But then when you explained why there was no problem." Later Dee reflected back on what enabled her to make the choice to speak out: "It seemed like everyone was being considerate to include each of us and me in the conversation."

Lil wrote in her questionnaire after the second session that she spoke up more easily and more often because "it feels safe." Lil added that for her, "if there's one or two people who come up and 'clout' people regularly with the way that they respond, that's enough to totally silence me."

During one of the group reflections, she observed:

I speak up more in this group than I probably have in any group. . . . Usually I say almost nothing. It's not because I don't have anything to say. There are lots of things, and they're right behind here (pointing to lips), and they're not going to come out. . . . But part of it is that I know [in this group] people are going to be very respectful. . . .

The findings showed that participants watched other interactions in the group
carefully to see whether differing opinions would be respected if they were expressed.

c) Validation

Another factor that emerged early in the data analysis as important for individual participants in deciding if and how they would express themselves in the group was whether or not their own and others' contributions were validated.

Samantha expressed those sentiments when she wrote: "when I participate in a group like this I usually discover that I'm not the only one who feels like I do." Rob also wrote in his questionnaire, "I learn if my responses are shared with another person."

In the group discussion following the hymn singing, May wondered aloud how those from different church backgrounds felt during the hymn-singing, after which Jenny spoke out: "I had exactly the same reaction Ken did. . . . When I looked at the title, if it wasn't a song we sing regularly at church then I did not have any memories of it."

During the first role play in the third group session, Tom described behaviour which he thought was not validating when he observed that some in the group tried to "find solutions before hearing the person out." For him validation was "hearing where the person's coming from, how the person felt, just to give the people involved time to work with the issue and not necessarily come up with
quick fixes." Tom pointed to an important link between self-differentiation and validation when he stated in his interview that "self-differentiation can also mean recognizing that you agree, stating it, and lending another person your support."

Rob felt validated when others verbalized thoughts similar to his. He said to the group: "I'm quite often evaluating things in my head to the point where I wouldn't say them. Then you hear them from somebody else, and it sounds pretty bright. . .

Both Rob and Tom recognized the significant function of those who voiced their agreement, both for those who took the risk of speaking out and for those who were silently wondering if their ideas and feelings made sense to anyone but themselves. When participants gave voice to personal experiences, feelings or opinions which were especially intense or significant to them, they expressed more need to hear from others who either acknowledged their perspective or agreed with them.

Even Ken, who in most situations appeared quite confident of his contribution, hinted in his questionnaire that he would have appreciated some validation when he expressed sadness: "I felt some people who were quiet were agreeing with me, but didn’t want to say so." Tom wrote on his questionnaire that when he did not receive any responses from others after he expressed some intense feelings, he thought: "No one had similar feelings to me. I felt vulnerable. It was scary."

Participants were able to identify clearly those times when they did not
receive validation or felt unheard or misunderstood by others. Tom observed in his questionnaire: "I said something, and no one heard me." Samantha felt misunderstood by others, but blamed herself: "I might not have expressed my feelings properly." Rob wrote about others "showing respect, but not fully understanding."

The details of those occasions when participants felt as if their thoughts were not understood, their feelings were not validated, or their statements were not acknowledged remained clear in their conscious awareness. This suggests that they might remember these experiences when deciding whether to speak out and trust that their perspectives would be respected in future similar situations.

Participants mentioned that they felt validated when others voiced feelings or opinions that were similar to their own or conveyed understanding.

d) Rules and expectations

Sometimes rules for behaviour in the group were explicitly stated in the process. Other times they were implicit or tacit, and therefore not always recognized by participants or observers. Nevertheless there were evidences of both in the group. I was looking for indications of which rules and expectations were operative and determined how and when participants chose to differentiate or define themselves in the group.

Some expectations were articulated as assumptions. Lil voiced some of the assumptions she made of the research group: "I spoke up and didn’t feel it would be a big deal to anyone. The tension demanded by a high degree of conformity
would not be present . . . like it is in my family of origin." Ken assumed that in this group he could try out different behaviours than his usual ones. During the group reflection in the final session he said: "I deliberately sat back and didn’t jump in at all 'cause my tendency would be to jump in, and then start something, and I deliberately didn’t do that."

Several times the rules for participation were explicitly stated, and several participants voiced their resistance or approval. Tom expressed his frustration about the leader’s rule that the rhythm exercise be conducted without words:

"Sometimes I felt like I wanted to direct people to do a certain thing. Instead of having us stop suddenly, I felt like . . . it was such a nice rhythm and I wanted each of us to stop, one at a time, and just have you playing at the end and sort of fade away into the distance. . . But if you’re not allowed to do that, if we’re just dealing with nonverbal stuff here you can’t do that, so it was frustrating."

In contrast, Lil voiced her approval for occasionally changing the rules and restricting verbal communication: "Sometimes our words are like curtains. They stop us from seeing and taking in information from the other senses." Several other specific responses from participants verified Lil’s generalized statement. May told the group that "I find I’m much more tuned to people’s nonverbal cues than verbal, and so I found it bringing all kinds of feelings out throughout the whole time." Jenny told the others she had discovered some new things from the nonverbal game that introduced the second group session: "I usually hate playing games during group discussions, but I found this one interesting to see how we related to one another, and to hear the comments of the person watching us."

There was resistance to an explicit rule in the fourth session when the leader
explicitly stated that participants were not to ask probing questions of each other or press others for more details than they wanted to offer voluntarily. Dee said she was quiet when the leader had cautioned against probing, even though she would have liked to validate someone else's response. May wrote in her questionnaire later that she could have "challenged the leader saying we shouldn't ask too many questions. Perhaps we could have trusted each other to say when we didn't want to answer the questions further."

After the rule restricting questions had been stated, it did not occur to group members to find other ways to validate each other, and the group was silent except for the leader's response as each person finished describing their pictures and words.

When I observed that certain feelings or thoughts were seldom voiced in the group, I wondered whether there might be tacit rules governing their expression. There was one particularly illuminating conversation which the group had about rules which influence the expression of anger in their various life situations:

Ken: At work, sometimes if I know there's an issue, I'll try to get in a room with a person and say, "Let's deal with it. We're not leaving here 'till we do. Scream at me. Go ahead. You take your best shot. I'll take my best shot." We'll get it out right away, and then come to a compromise.

Ldr.\textsuperscript{137} Is that different at church?

Ken: Yeah.

Ldr: How come?

\textsuperscript{137} Ldr. represents "leader."
Ken: You never scream at each other.

Ldr: How come?

Ken: If the work doesn't get done that reflects on me personally, so the longer you leave it, the more it festers, the worse it gets. So I've learned that if there's an issue, why don't you get it out there and deal with it right away, before it gets to the point where people tend to scream and shout. So, quite often the only way you can get it out is to confront. . . Whereas in the church there's no need necessarily to deal with the issue.

Tom: There should be.

Ken: Yes, there should be.

Tom: There should be, but maybe there's no forum.

Rob: But I would think that even at work there are issues that aren't resolved. . . Just dealing with it doesn't always clear it and everything's fine. You know, there's often still some ongoing . . .

Ken: Oh yeah. There are things you can't resolve.

Ldr: But you do air it.

Ken: At least you try. . . But I guess we don't do that (in church). We let things float. Maybe it's because nobody really owns an issue, necessarily. Except a lot of it probably comes on your shoulders (looking at leader) for ownership.

Ldr: Why do the rest of you think we don't do that kind of thing at church? Do you do it in your work? In your other relationships?

Lil: You know, it's easier at work or outside situations than at home, and that's because I think I've seen conflict, dealing with it modelled in a working place and learned it there, and did not see it modelled well at home, and really don't have anything good to go on.

Ldr: So there's a kind of rule about conflict and home.

Lil: Yeah.

Ldr: Is there the same kind of rule about church?
You could say the same thing about church. There's no good way of dealing with conflict that you could observe.

In the church I grew up in? No! Families and churches - those are root places, you know.

And those are the places where we learn our behaviour in conflict. Think of the conflict behaviour we exhibited in this group - you didn't bring your work style into this.

It's not appropriate.

... That's what we've learned.

That's right.

There were several clues which alerted me to the possibility of tacit rules about the expression of anger. Participants seldom expressed anger in the group. When they did, it was in brief interchanges during the role plays. Sometimes they talked about their feelings of anger after the fact, or reported them in their questionnaires.

In her questionnaire, May said she remained silent when "I felt it wasn't an appropriate response at the time, e.g. when my first response was anger when the person leaving the church was saying his speech." After the role play in the third session, Dee expressed anger in her questionnaire, but not in the group:

I found it difficult to break into the conversation which seemed to be between only a few individuals. I felt angry and annoyed that those speaking did not think to allow others a chance to speak, and I did not want to butt in.

After one heated interchange that took place between Tom and May, Tom wrote in his questionnaire that he remained silent after he said some things because "I wished I hadn't said them after I observed the response from another
person." Later in the group he told the others:

I want to just kind of pull back things I've said, and rationalize away the feelings and explain away the feelings. That what I'm doing 'cause I know that when I step on anybody's toes or place blame anywhere . . . I don't mean to blame anybody.

May reflected back on the same incident: "I held back from saying as much as I was feeling because I didn't know if it was the appropriate place. . . . I felt like you could have retorted fairly easily, but probably both of us were holding back a bit." Half of the participants reported in their questionnaires that they chose to remain silent on specific occasions because they did not want to expose or hurt someone. Both men and women reported similar responses.

During his interview, Tom acknowledged that for him "the anger part is the most scary part." Samantha also said during her interview that "there's still a need to be careful about our differing opinions so that we don't step on toes."

"Not wanting to hurt others' feelings" was the reason Rob gave in his questionnaire. Lil wrote in her questionnaire after the first session that she chose not to say what she thought when "I knew it would hurt someone else's feelings unnecessarily. There was no point to it. It's not a crucial issue, (i.e. liking and choosing a song is a matter of personal taste, not a point for debate)."

May chose not to speak up when she thought "it would be delving further into a person's story," or when she "thought it was delving into the issue more than we could handle at the time." Dee hesitated before expressing her honest opinions about Jenny's choice of hymn because she was reluctant to spoil "all of Jenny's beautiful memories."
Another category of responses which participants often held back was "uncertainty," prodding me to look for rules or agreements about what is acceptable when someone is unsure. Sometimes individuals wrote that their uncertainty was because they were not sure of what to say or what was expected. Jenny wrote in her questionnaire after the second session that "I remained silent at first because I didn’t have a topic," an assignment which she and other group members had received ahead of time. Samantha wrote that she remained silent when "I didn’t clearly understand what was expected of me." Tom wrote in his questionnaire for the second session that he was silent when "my third reason [for leaving church] was partly on the board, but it was different. I felt I wouldn’t be able to articulate the differences."

Sometimes participants expressed uncertainty when they did not know what others in the group were thinking or feeling. May wrote that, when others were silent, "I wondered what they were thinking, wondered if they were okay." On another occasion she reported that she had "held back from saying as much as I was feeling because I didn’t know if it was the appropriate place."

When people were uncertain, they seldom told others or asked questions. Instead participants were silent, and a few projected their own thoughts or feelings onto others who also had not said how they felt. After the role play on teenagers in the church, Samantha wrote in her questionnaire that she wondered if "they were feeling as I was, some very powerful inner thoughts. It was the wrong time to address those." After expressing his sadness in a role play about
leaving the church, Ken wrote in his questionnaire: "During the role play I felt some people who were quiet were agreeing with me but didn’t want to say so."

All the participants expressed their uncertainty most often in their questionnaires and seldom in the group. Uncertainty about others’ silence was identified more frequently when participants reported having intense feelings about what was happening or being discussed in the group.

Lil was the only person besides the leader who asked silent participants whether they had anything to add.

The fact that so often anger and uncertainty were reported only in questionnaires or later during the group reflection suggested to me the existence of a tacit rule or agreement. The most frequent reasons given for not expressing these emotions were to avoid hurting someone, or that the group was getting into "more than it could handle." When, for the same reasons, I explicitly requested during the fifth session that participants not ask probing questions, several individuals expressed some resistance to the restriction.

As long as an agreement or rule was tacit, no one questioned it. However, when it was made explicit, participants began to voice their opinions and feelings about its appropriateness and question whether or not they would follow.

f) Change and stability in the group process

Throughout the research process, several participants began to recognize and describe sequences or changes in the patterns of the group’s behaviour.

During the non-verbal rhythm exercise Ken observed that when there was
chaos or confusion, participants adjusted their rhythms readily to create order:

The first while everybody was on their own thing. Everybody seemed to be all over the place with no discernible pattern at all. It wasn't until a little bit later that we actually started to pay attention to each other, and to try and go along together.

In the group discussion after the role play about people leaving the church, May described the evolution of a pattern she had observed and compared it to "real life":

I think in real life that could happen too. I think when you first start talking to someone, you're both sort of back and forthing in your own feelings, and you're not so much hearing [each other]. And then it moves to that next point where you've gotten it all out, and they've gotten it all out, and you [start to] hear each other because you're beginning to say what you needed to say.

Several participants found out that it was hard to change a pattern that was already established in the group. Ken told the rest of the group that he felt their active resistance when he tried to initiate some changes after the group had established a rhythm:

I wanted to keep it going as long as possible and try to change it as well, sort of evolve it somehow. But nobody was picking up on the subtle beat changes. I was trying to see whether, if I did change something, the group would go with it. There was a real tendency to almost try and bring people back in when they wandered, I thought.

In contrast, Tom described the absence of response or recognition or passive resistance from the others in the group when he experimented with changing his input. He wrote: "I tried playing something that went against the grain of the piece that was already being played. I felt I could be different in this group and it didn't really matter or make a difference."
May wrote in her questionnaire that on a particular occasion she had chosen to remain silent rather than express her feelings or opinions because "I felt like they were so self-differentiated that they would just think it was my problem if I didn't like what they did." Both May and Tom experienced the group's resistance as indifference, in contrast to Ken's experience of a more active effort to bring him back into line.

Lil and May had differing perspectives on the coming and going of individuals in the group. May acknowledged that she often responded at the feeling level when individuals made unilateral decisions that changed the group in some way. During the group reflection time at the end of the last session, she acknowledged that she "feels a churning inside herself" when people leave without processing their decision with the rest of the group:

> It is hard when there is consistently one person in a group that does not go along. . . If everybody did it equally, then it wouldn't matter. But when it's consistently one person or two people, then it's much harder to figure out how to go with it. . . There is always that concern about how do we bring this person back . . .

May told the group she was sometimes troubled by the lack of discussion about individuals' coming and going which she felt affected the rest of the group:

> For me the kind of thing I would hope would happen in a group is that everyone would come and go, but that it would not always just be one or two people who would come and go. If it's not equally distributed, the part of the group that is in and out has a real power over the part that is trying to keep the group communicating.

On the other hand Lil, who had withdrawn from the group activity for a while during the rhythm session, experienced such change quite differently. She said
that she felt relieved when she was able to take a break without "a lot of tussing"
like she would have encountered in her family. In the group discussion she
described the events from her perspective:

Well I said, 'do we have to go on?' and you said, 'No, you don't need to,'
which was great because it actually gave me the liberty to say, 'Well I
really don't want to,' and to go and take a break. . . I think I needed to
move out in order to have more of a sense of things before I could move
into it again.

Lil suggested that she thought there were different ways of leaving which had
different effects on the group when she said: "If you're leaving because of your
own personal needs it's different than if you're leaving in reaction to what the
group is doing.

As the group's leader, I also felt some initial hesitation or resistance as I
decided how I would respond to Lil's request to withdraw from the activity.
However, without consulting the group members, I conceded to her request and
assumed the group would continue. Later in the debriefing time, I described to
the group the internal dialogue I had with myself before responding to Lil: "I had
to fight with myself a little to say that. . . I almost felt we should stop. Then I
thought, 'No, we don't all have to stop. Even if Lil doesn't want to go on, it's
okay for the rest of us to do it."

Individuals responded differently when others tried to change either the
group's pattern or their relationship to the group. Each time that leadership was
passed on to another person, initially participants changed readily to follow and
adapt to the new leader and rhythm. However, at other times when a participant
actively tried to change the pattern of the group, others resisted the changes. Often the ones who had initiated the change eventually either began to fit in, or they withdrew (by remaining silent or doing their own thing), and the group rhythm stayed the same. Changes which threatened to disturb established patterns of behaviour and response were met with resistance.

Participants more readily adapted their individual behaviours to fit with the rest of the group when there were higher levels of chaos and instability, such as whenever anyone stopped the group and started a new rhythm. In those situations, participants tried to adjust their rhythms to each other until they found a more predictable and comfortable pattern again.

f) Level of anxiety or intensity

While it was difficult to measure, there were observable indicators in the data that the level of anxiety in the group was a factor in how differentiated individuals were able to be in the group.

Levels of anxiety changed with the process and content of the group activity. Lil described the atmosphere she observed in the group during the hymn singing exercise: "It was really nice to have a little chance to have your own voice, and to have everybody else say what they really liked. To be able to have a chance to speak out and for people to respond . . . made it very enjoyable." In contrast, when the role play focussed on teenagers who were disillusioned with the church the level of anxiety rose for some participants. May spoke in the debriefing time about the "holding back" she herself had exercised and had observed in Tom
during the session. Tom spoke of wanting to "take back" some of the things he had said when he saw the reaction in others.

There were also factors that created anxiety for some of the participants. Lil expressed her dislike of role playing and her discomfort with the tape recorder: "If it's not a real situation it's harder to bring feelings up. It's also really hard for me generally to do that. And it's also hard when that thing is on [pointing to the tape recorder]. I find that a real hindrance."

The most pronounced effects of anxiety were from the events that were happening in the congregation and wider context. Jen was aware of the crisis that was brewing in the congregation already prior to the fourth session. She reported to me after the session that she had difficulty concentrating on the group activity that evening. As leader, I had also written in my journal that at times during that session I had felt as if I was just 'going through the motions,' and had been unable to focus on the group and its interactions because of my anxiety.

In the data for the fifth session, which was held a few weeks after the news of a congregational member's betrayed trust, there were many expressions of intense emotion from participants. They described their feelings with words like "anger," "pain," "confusion," "shock," "fear," "sadness," "suspicion" and "vigilance." Their feelings were expressed visually in the jagged lines and the intense and contrasting colours which individuals used for the art which they created that evening.

The anxiety level was also evident in some of the individual responses to others in the group. In her questionnaire, Dee wrote that she felt awkward with
"not knowing what to say to express appreciation for what each one shared." She interpreted the sporadic laughter as "easing the scary serious sharing." When as leader I requested participants not to ask probing questions, some of them heard me say they were not to respond at all. Dee wrote: "I was quiet when May shared. You'd asked us not to say it was good, but hers was so aptly worded and presented for me. So I was quiet."

There were more prolonged silences in the group that evening than usual. For some the silences felt appropriate. Ken and Lil both wrote in their questionnaires that they felt comfortable with the silence in the fifth session, but Ken compared the conversation to work situations where people "do not tell very deeply." Lil wrote in her questionnaire that she chose to remain silent because she "thought it would take away from what someone had said, perhaps trivialize it." From her perspective, "the silence was not disinterested or disrespectful, so it was fine and comfortable." Dee and Tom wrote that they felt times of connectedness, but mostly when they were talking.

There were several indications of the distance caused by intensity and silence. May wrote in her questionnaire that she felt closer to others "when we shared our stories and pictures," but she chose to remain silent "when I thought I saw some unspoken connections between people's past experiences and the current experience."

Jen wrote in her questionnaire that, although she felt closer to others when "everyone talked about their past experiences," she found it difficult to talk about
her painful experiences from the past, as did Dee. On her questionnaire for that session, Jen requested that for the final session the leader "choose a light hearted topic again, like singing, so we can end on an upbeat," even though she had indicated previously that she felt less competent with music than others did. Her request suggested that she wanted some reprieve from the intensity and anxiety she was feeling in the group.

In her questionnaire, Samantha wrote that she felt more distant from others in the group when she "talked of feelings they couldn't possibly be feeling due to the closeness of the issue" for her.

On occasion participants dispelled some of the anxiety in the group with humour and playfulness. Several group members broke up the intensity of certain conversations by depicting themselves and their habits such as avoiding conflict in humorous ways. Occasionally someone poked fun at another member in the group. It was not surprising that Jenny asked to end the research process with a lighter activity, since it was obvious that the anxiety in the group was lower in those activities and group interactions which were less intense and more playful.

It became evident in the findings that the level of anxiety present during the group activities was intensified by a number of factors, the most pronounced of which was the crisis in the congregation. Humour and playfulness, on the other hand, often helped to reduce the intensity in the group. Higher levels of anxiety and intensity made it more difficult for participants to define or differentiate themselves, particularly during the last two sessions of the group process and in
C. Factors in the Wider Context

What was going on in the congregation, Mennonite Conference and society also influenced the research findings and the self-differentiation of persons in the research group. The list of influences from that wider context could be endless, but I have chosen to describe only the ones which I found from the data to be most significant. They are discussed under the following topics:

1. Changing Demographics of the Congregation
2. The Crisis of Betrayed Trust
3. Influences from the Broader Church and Society

While I had designed no formal process to collect data from the wider context, I identified these three factors from the comments which participants made in their interviews and other parts of the research process.

1. Changing Demographics of the Congregation

During the two years prior to the beginning of this research process, there had already been some major changes in the congregation as approximately fifteen persons stopped attending who had been active participants. Some of these persons left for obvious reasons like retirement or moving out of the community because of a job change. Others left because of dissatisfaction with
the leadership and direction of the congregation, and a few because "things were not the same as they used to be." Very few people had left at the time of the pastoral change.

Most of the people who had left the congregation had explained some of their reasons to one or two trusted friends or to me as the pastor, but did not communicate their farewells or reasons for leaving to the wider congregation, although I had encouraged them to do so. May alluded to those earlier changes when she said in her interview: "It seems people go without saying why." May's concern was not a new one to Warden Woods.¹³⁸

During her interview, May elaborated on her thoughts about how these patterns were related to the freedom people felt to be differentiated in the congregation: "We need the commitment to say what we need to say and also the confidence that we will be heard. That's hard to do if we feel people are going to walk if they're uncomfortable." May also voiced her concern that "self-differentiation should not reinforce individualism," and that it "needs to be paired with accountability." She was of the opinion that in the congregation "something is preventing us from being accountable to each other. We tend to relate pretty much on the surface."

May's comments indicate that she thought the patterns of relating and uncertainty about commitment in the congregation were related to the reticence of people to be accountable to each other. Such accountability could be seen as

¹³⁸ These events are described in more detail in Chapter 1.
another way of actualizing self-differentiation.

2. The Crisis of Betrayed Trust

As has already been documented, the crisis of discovering that a trusted member of the congregation and ordained leader had been accused of betraying the trust that had been placed in him sent shock waves, not only through the entire congregation, but throughout the broader conference as well. In addition to precipitating an investigative and disciplinary process by the conference, the news created high levels of anxiety in all those settings, and especially the congregation.

Initially there appeared to be a 'numbness' in the congregation, as many people struggled to contain their confusion, anger, fear, disbelief and other reactions. However, in time, as more of the facts became known and charges were verified, it became evident that some of the behaviour patterns and friendships which had existed for a significant part of the congregation's history would never be the same again.

The last two group research sessions were held during the time when the Conference was carrying out its formal investigations, so research participants were not free to discuss details of the situation. As a result data about the effects of these events was found primarily in the interviews which were conducted in the final stage of the research process. By this time people were beginning to talk more openly about the effects of this crisis on their relationships to others in the congregation.
In the interviews, several participants said that they felt closer to others in the congregation as a result of the crisis. Samantha commented: "All this has brought me closer to people in the church again. . . . This has brought us all down to the same level." Ken observed: "I find I'm more connected to a lot of people by the emotion related to the current situation. . . . I'm not feeling distanced because I have similar strong feelings."

While some participants said they felt closer to others than they had previously, they also reported that some of their conversations were more cautious and serious, indicating higher levels of anxiety. Rob described his observations:

I've developed more awareness and sensitivity in conversations with others around the congregational issue, and am choosing my words more carefully. I've connected more with some people. There's more intensity in conversations; content is more serious and goes to a deeper level. It draws people together when all are in the same boat.

Jen reported: "I've been brought closer together with other people who shared common information. At the same time, she also observed: "It has been a juggling act. . . . I watch a bit what I say, depending whom I'm talking to. It doesn't always feel good. It's not that there are barriers, but we stay on the surface."

Jen and Rob's descriptions point to the vigilance that crept into their relationships as they began to talk more frequently with those who shared their perspective and to avoid those who saw things differently. Their observations suggest that, as caution and seriousness began to characterize more of their
relationships, self-differentiation was more difficult.

Tom spoke in his interview about being so distracted at times by the intensity of those around him that he could not focus on his own thoughts and feelings. Other times he said he felt as if "I wanted to explode when some people were talking," but instead "I got quiet and didn't participate . . ." He admitted that the fear of disagreeing with close friends kept him silent in some situations: "I'd like to talk to my friends, but I don't know how. . . So I don't tell them what I really feel, because if I pushed them on it we'd find out we disagree. Instead I hold back."

In her interview, May reflected on a congregational meeting that had taken place as the research process was ending. She identified some of the dynamics she observed in that emotionally charged atmosphere: "Sometimes people said things they felt really strongly about, but I don't think we always listened so well to each other because we each had so many strong feelings inside." In fact, May said that at times her own fear for the congregation's ability to survive was so high that "I sometimes just want to withdraw from the church until all this is over. I fear we don't have the skills and strength to come through this. I don't have the confidence that we have what it takes."

Dee saw things from another perspective. She saw that some of the changes which the crisis had created in the congregation could also be opportunities:

In a sense we have all been forced into self-differentiation because of the current situation. We all come from such different experiences and points of view. . . . In the current situation some people have been silent who traditionally speak out. It leaves more space for new people like me.
There is ample evidence that the crisis in the congregation affected the self-differentiation of persons in the research group, but they felt the effects more in congregational life and relationships. The intensity and nature of the effects varied widely from person to person. Particularly those who had been in longstanding close friendship circles mentioned that they became more selective about where and with whom they spoke their minds, while Dee who previously had been less connected began to speak out more often and in more settings. Samantha and Ken, who were less connected to any particular groups and initially said they felt closer, chose not to be involved in the ongoing congregational processing of the sexual misconduct.

3. Influences From the Broader Church and Society

It was evident from the data that some of the values which participants had internalized through their past experiences in the Warden Woods congregation, and in Mennonite and other Christian churches still informed their behaviour in the group.

For example, in her tendency to put herself last, Jenny reflected the values of not only her family, but also the Warden Woods congregation and the broader church - that it was more important to love her neighbour than to love oneself. This pattern of self-denial, that is of always putting others and their needs ahead of self, sometimes interfered with participants’ abilities to know and express their own priorities. During the second session when the group chose their topics for future sessions, Tom wrote in his questionnaire: "I thought maybe I should have
been promoting my topic a bit more, but I didn’t . . . " However, when Tom noticed that Lil had "advocated for her topic several times" in the group decision making process, the possibility occurred to him that he could also have defended his choice.

Gender differences described in the section on Individual Participant Factors were not unique to this research group or even the Warden Woods congregation or the broader Christian church. They reflected patterns in the wider society. They had been shaped by a long legacy of societal expectations for women and men.139

The group's discussion on expectations or rules for the expression of anger in their various life situations140 also reflected the influence of the wider church context of which the research group was a part, a Mennonite church with a strong emphasis on peacemaking. Perhaps Ken’s observations in the closing exercise at the end of the fourth session were a further reflection of similar values:

It seems in our lives we don’t really talk about serious things a lot of the time. We kind of skirt around a lot of issues, and I think it would be really worthwhile to do that occasionally - to be challenged and made to think a little bit. Because I think a lot of times, even at church we don’t push the window all that much.

To "push the window" would bring more of our differences and our strong feelings and priorities to the surface.

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139 The detailed description of these findings is listed under the category, "Gender," among the "Individual Participant Factors."

140 This material is discussed in the section on "Rules and Expectations" under the "Group Factors."
There was one example in the group of such a difference. May voiced her concern that by endorsing self-differentiation we not endorse individualism. In contrast, Lil expressed her eagerness to explore ways for the community to support the self-differentiation of persons:

To have self-differentiation as a value, you need the consistent non-judgmental support of a group of people who also value it. It’s not enough just to create awareness. It needs to be explored and valued, and then we need new ‘dance steps’ that are clear enough to practise and get feedback on. We need ways to move into the new ‘dance steps.’

It seems to me that both Lil and May point to the need for guidance and leadership to ensure that self-differentiation brings health and life to the community rather than more fragmentation. Factors related to the leader made up the final broad category in the research process.

D. Leader Factors

Throughout the research, participants were encouraged to reflect and comment, both in their questionnaires and in group discussions, on the leader’s functioning and how that affected both the group’s process and their own individual attempts to participate and to differentiate themselves.

Much of the data about the impact of the leader on the group came from the final session in which the leadership for a nonverbal rhythm exercise rotated among the group participants. After leading the first round to introduce the activity, I became one of the participants and everyone was free to chose when and if he or she would take the initiative to assume the leadership role. Other data came from people’s comments about the leader, both in their questionnaires
and interviews, and from my analysis of the transcribed group interactions and my journal entries.

The factors which participants identified in the leader as being important to the self-differentiation of participants are discussed under the following categories:

1. Clarity
2. Invitation
3. Level of Caution
4. Gender and style
5. Preparedness
6. Self-disclosure
7. Feedback
8. Leader's Level of Anxiety
9. Leader's Ability to Clarify Ownership

There are two perspectives from which I drew my observations and analysis of the factors that were important in the leader for encouraging the self-differentiation of participants: the perspective of the participants, and my own perspectives as a leader. I have identified the source of the data on which I based my observations.

1. Clarity

The ability of the leader to be clear about the process was noted frequently
by participants to be a significant factor in how fully individuals were able to participate and express themselves.

Rob wrote that he felt more connected to others in the group when "I could understand what the leader was doing." He provided an alternative perspective when he observed that when the leader was unclear, he had to "do more conscious thinking about my involvement." Samantha wrote in her questionnaire that she remained silent when "I didn't clearly understand what was expected of me."

Ken observed in the debriefing after the rhythm exercise that people did not follow him when he made subtle changes. He conjectured later as he wrote in his questionnaire that he might have "picked a louder instrument" so that others could have heard him better. During the group dialogue he and I reflected on one reason why his actions might have failed to bring change in the group:

Ken: I deliberately sat back and didn't jump in at all. . . . And I found I was able to kind of lose myself in the music or go with the beat. Once I decided I wasn't going to jump in, then I wanted to keep it going as long as possible and try and change it as well somehow, sort of evolve it more. But nobody was picking up on the subtle beat changes.

Ldr: I didn't pick them up though, Ken, until you started the last round. Then I realised what you were doing.

Ken: I was doing it all along.

Ldr: But I didn't realize it until the last time, because I tended to focus on the person who started . . . I think if you really want us to hear your subtle changes, you have to create a space in which people can hear you. And by starting and taking charge you did that for me.

Ken: Yes.
Ldr: When you took the lead, I could hear your subtle changes, because I was listening to you, where before you might have been doing the same thing, but I was listening to May or Sam or someone else.

This conversation highlighted the fact that, when participants took the lead, they had the attention of the other participants and were able to give direction to the process. This made it easier for others to participate, each in his or her own way.

Sometimes other factors, such as rules, frustrated the means available to a participant who was not the leader for getting others to follow. After the rhythm exercise, Tom wrote in his questionnaire: "It was difficult to just sit and be nonverbal. Many times I wanted to say something. . . during the playing, i.e. to direct the music and to make specific instructions to individuals." Later on in the group discussion, Tom acknowledged that in order to lead more effectively he would need to "say what I had to say in a way that people could hear, thereby showing that I clearly wanted them to hear."

Several participants made observations about the importance of the leader in creating and following a process which was congruent with the goals of the activity. Tom pointed out a discrepancy between the stated goals which I had stated for the process and my behaviour as the leader:

You said the group was to make the decisions, but I felt that you were trying to influence us or almost make the decision for us. I felt the constraint of time that forced us to keep moving rather than have things happen naturally.

After the second evening of role playing, May suggested: "As you are encouraging us to delve a little deeper, have a different process, because role play
may not be the most effective method anymore." She was pointing out that the process which I had chosen as leader did not fit with what I was trying to accomplish.

The findings point out that the clarity of the leader was important for participants to be able to follow. This clarity included being able to see that the process fit with the stated goals, and providing a beat that was clear enough for others to hear and follow. However, Rob’s observation stands out in relation to the question of self-differentiation. His comment raises the question for me of whether providing a clear beat which people can follow (or choose to be offbeat with) in fact promotes self-differentiation, or is merely an efficient way of structuring and facilitating a group process.

2. Inviting Others to Define Themselves

The importance of being invited by the leader to contribute was mentioned by a number of participants as significant to their confidence in offering their perspectives.

On his questionnaire Rob wrote that he spoke up "when asked by the leader." Tom wrote on his questionnaire for the third session that he appreciated when, as the leader, "you asked us to focus on how we were feeling personally" because "it helped me take the exercise more seriously." He wrote that he wanted me to "remind us that we should be paying attention to our feelings and expressing them."

In her final interview, Samantha described her response to my invitations to
her to participate when she said: "I feel you encourage me to think for myself and express myself, even if it's different from you." Dee affirmed my role as leader in being "conscientious about hearing from each person and helping the group to consider all input." Both Samantha and Dee also mentioned how important it had been to them to be invited to participate in the research group.

Participants were quick to notice any imbalance or any qualification or withdrawal of the leader's invitation. Lil often spoke out quickly and decisively in the group, but when I drew attention to the fact that some participants had been silent, she wrote in her questionnaire:

We were told some people were very quiet. I had spoken just before that and immediately told myself to stop talking. This took quite an effort and wasn't comfortable, but I felt terrible thinking perhaps I had said too much.

In her questionnaire for the fourth session May wrote that she had been more quiet when she "felt it was centring too much on Tom." Tom also observed after that session that he "felt vulnerable" and "as if no one had similar feelings to me," indicating that the leader's focussed attention or invitation had taken both him and May beyond their comfort zones.

Participants felt the effect when I shifted the focus of the group by giving or qualifying my invitation, thus reducing the participation of some, and inviting others to participate more actively. In contrast to general invitations to the whole group, specific invitations from the leader, such as questions or reminders to speak out often directed the focus of attention in the group intentionally in other directions.
3. Level of Caution

Several individuals observed that in the second session my preoccupation with making mistakes as a leader made it more difficult for them to contribute freely and directly. In her questionnaire, Jen stated that she wished I would "not apologize when things are not perfect." In her written response, Lil described more specifically how my excessive carefulness as a leader influenced her:

I wish the leader would not be so overly careful about wording or other people's feelings. It's an uneasiness that I respond to by becoming uneasy myself... When the leader worded things too carefully and too considerately I felt an inner hesitation or blur of thought lest I appear too direct and insensitive.

In response to the same session Dee wrote in her questionnaire that she thought it was important that I was "conscientious about hearing from each person and helped the group to consider all input." In fact she would have liked more structure from the leader. In response to the question about suggestions for the leader, she asked: "Is there any way to structure things so that the same ones do not speak first? Or is this a natural group thing?"

May also responded to what she thought was excessive caution on my part as leader when she wrote after the fifth session that "I could have challenged you saying we shouldn't ask too many questions. Perhaps we could have trusted each other to say when we didn't want to answer the questions further."

Although there were differences in people's responses, there was agreement that, while some care and structure were needed, excessive caution or carefulness from the leader made it more difficult for participants to offer their responses.
4. Gender and Style

Only Lil identified the gender of the leader as an issue for her. She said in her interview that it "makes all the difference in the world" whether the leader is male or female because "I'm sick to death of men telling me what to do." Although she emphasized gender, her remarks suggest that style may have been a significant factor for her as well.

Rob said in his interview that he knew that he tended to react to a leader who was "domineering" because of his past experiences with his mother, and went on to name a male as an example of someone to whose style he would react. He said he thought his reactions had more to do with style than gender.

These comments suggest that authority persons who embodied certain combinations of gender and style triggered emotional reactions and responses from individuals who in the past had experienced leaders with similar characteristics.

5. Careful Planning and Preparedness

Several persons pointed out the importance of my role as leader in structuring the group process to make good use of time. Samantha wrote that she appreciated that "you kept the meeting on schedule," and "put a time limit on the process." While May said she found it disconcerting when I was too preoccupied with time, she also "appreciated you being sensitive to our schedules." Jenny wrote that she was pleased that "you stopped us at various points to keep us on track," and also "asked us all to be on time" because she doesn't like "starting late
and then dragging on later."

Several persons expressed their appreciation for extra touches that indicated creativity and preparedness on the leader's part. Jenny wrote in her questionnaire that she was pleased that "you made lunch for us" and "put so much work into making the group run so smoothly." May and Dee also commented in their questionnaires on my thoughtfulness as a leader in providing a lunch and my creativity in designing the process. Dee noticed especially the amount of care and thought I had given "to what it takes to get us started."

Their responses validated my prior assumption that planning and preparing carefully for each event would communicate to the participants that their contributions were valued, that their schedules were respected, and that their participation was significant and important to the whole process.

6. Self-Disclosure

A number of participants noted their appreciation of the times when as leader I entered into the process and shared some of my own perspectives. Samantha appreciated when "you shared some of your experiences and feelings and emotions." Tom enjoyed the fact that "you laughed as hard as the rest of the group" when singing one of the songs, and that I "joined in the discussion." Lil wrote in her questionnaire that she appreciated when "you moved easily into different roles, even playing the piano a few times." Dee said in her interview that she appreciated that "you were on as much of a journey as we were." She added an interesting perspective in her questionnaire when she wrote: "when you
made yourself approachable, it was easier to disagree with you."

While as leader I maintained some distance in order to keep some objectivity in the research process, participants stated that they appreciated knowing what I was experience, that I was learning too, seeing me laughing and having me participate in their activities. With the exception of Dee, they did not comment specifically on how these behaviours affected their behaviour.

7. Giving and Encouraging Feedback

There were many indications of the importance of feedback to individuals for their ongoing participation, and especially from the leader.

Some asked indirectly for feedback from the leader. After filling in her first questionnaire, Jenny said to the group: "I'm struggling with wanting to give you enough information so that you can do something with it, and not really thinking I'm doing it." Her comments along with several others' alerted me to the needs of participants for feedback to indicate that I was able to use the data which they were providing.

Feedback was appreciated when it provided a corrective as well as when it was affirming. Lil wrote after the third session that she appreciated when as the leader I "made helpful directive comments to get us out of a rut or cause a perspective shift." In the same session, Ken observed on his questionnaire that he found it useful when I "interrupted and provided some guidance" because "it brought out some things in more depth than they might otherwise have been." Rob wrote that he liked "when you summed up people's suggestions." May noted
in her questionnaire that it was important to her to see that "you were patient when people were trying to make sense of what you were doing," and "tried to be sensitive to how we were feeling during and at the end of the exercise."

Sometimes as the leader I structured the activity to provide opportunity for group members to give feedback to each other. Jenny noted in her questionnaire how important this feedback was for her in the warm-up exercise to the second session: "I usually hate playing games during group sessions, but I found this one interesting to see how we related to one another, and to hear the comments of the person watching us."

Following the role play in the third session, Samantha said to the others in the group: "I don't really remain silent, because I have something to say about everything. Maybe you think I've got too much to say." As leader, I encouraged her to ask others for their opinions, and she heard from them that they saw her differently than she saw herself. Lil told her: "I see you as being so quiet and so attentive to others, kind of holding back, and always making sure other people are seen to." May assured her that "when you talk to us, I love to hear from you because we don't hear from you all that much." Feedback from other participants provided Samantha with some assurance that others did not share her perception that she had too much to say, and in fact that they enjoyed hearing from her.

My instructions to limit questions during the fifth session resulted in cutting off other kinds of feedback which a few participants might otherwise have given.
In her questionnaire May indicated that she wished she had challenged my decision. Dee would have liked to respond to someone whose response "was so aptly worded and presented," but because of the leader's instructions she "was quiet."

Sometimes feedback helped participants explore or clarify their thoughts and communicate them more clearly. Jenny wrote that, when she mentioned her topic without having thought it through ahead of time, "other people helped me to phrase it." Feedback also enabled some participants to recognize their familiar patterns of responding. Jenny was the most explicit about this. After a few observations and clarifying questions from others in the group she was able to recognize and describe her pattern of putting others' needs and ideas ahead of her own.

The data documented the importance of the leader's role in providing for feedback, through her own responses and also through providing a process and structures which enabled others to give feedback to each other.

8. Leader's Level of Anxiety

The anxiety of the leader had an important effect on the ability of participants to participate spontaneously and directly.

My anxiety regarding the congregational crisis was evident in the fact that for the fifth and sixth sessions I abandoned the list of topics generated by the group process, as well as some of the processes I had previously planned to use. I chose new topics and processes to accommodate the changes in the context. I did not
tape the group discussion for the fifth session, partly because I had difficulty 
getting the tape recorder to work, but also because I was concerned that the use 
of the tape recorder might raise the anxiety in the group even higher than it 
already was. My decision was made impulsively and without consulting any of the 
group members or the person who had helped me design the sessions. In 
retrospect, I regretted that the verbatim transcript of the fifth group interaction 
was not available.

There were clear indications in the data that my anxiety affected both my own 
ability to remain focussed on my goals for the research study, and the ability of 
the other participants to respond to each other in the ways that were consistent 
with their goals and values.

9. Leader's Ability to Clarify Responsibility

The largest category in the data from my journal as a leader was "sorting out"
to whom the responsibility for particular issues belonged so that I would give my 
attention where I was clearly responsible and not take on what was for others to 
do. This need for "sifting and sorting" was most pronounced in the congregation, 
but it was also present in a few of the reflections following earlier sessions in the 
group. The assessment process often began as I discussed the session with 
outside resource persons, such as the consultant who helped me design the 
sessions, or the spiritual director who assisted me to attend to my own self as I 
tried to keep from being drawn into the anxiety of the congregational system. 
Often it was one question or a comment that started a longer process of
reflection on a particular interaction or on one of the patterns in my way of functioning.

In one of my journal entries I wrote about one of the patterns I had begun to see in the congregation: "Do I also add my part to this dance? What is it?" I reflected further about the part I played in the system:

I become the listening ear for those on the margins, and those at the centre do not need to hear their voices or pleas. I go where I find it easier to relate because the needs and sense of disconnectedness are more obvious, and they welcome me because I am their only link. Meanwhile I become more distant from those at the centre. Do I want to stop this dance?

On another occasion it was clear to me that the responsibility for a particular situation was someone else's: "This time it is not my problem. It's yours. And you'll have to find a way to deal with it . . . More than anything, I want you to be healed, but it's up to you to see to that now."

At a time when I was feeling particularly isolated in the congregation, after discussing a relationship with my spiritual director, I reminded myself that I was responsible to differentiate myself and maintain clear boundaries between myself and a close friend. The entry in my journal was:

I need to attend to myself and be really self-aware and honest about my internal process now. I do not want to cross any lines with him. His admiration, his obvious pleasure at working with me, his need to place me up on a pedestal, and to please me - I notice and enjoy this attention - a signal that alerts me to caution and self-care.

My process of differentiation as a leader included addressing those issues for which I was responsible, and leaving those which belonged to others for them to resolve. In the anxiety of the crisis I quickly learned that when I allowed myself
to take on others' issues, or abdicated my responsibility where it was clear, I and those persons whose agenda I adopted became more enmeshed, and it was more difficult for that person to differentiate him or herself.

10. Leader's Ability to Nurture Self

Two categories that had to do with nurturing myself and seeking validation also had a significant effect on my ability to differentiate myself as a leader, and also to encourage others to differentiate themselves. When I was giving less attention to nurturing myself and my friendships outside the congregation, I was more likely to be drawn toward those relationships and to choose those actions which I thought would bring me the validation of others rather than take the risk of differentiating myself and possibly incurring the disapproval of others.

IV. Summary

The complexity of these findings indicated that there were many different but interrelated factors to do with individual participants, group patterns, the broader context, and the leader which affected individual participants' abilities to differentiate themselves. As I reflected on the relationships between these countless diverse factors, I began to see them as more or less distinct, but always interconnected strands of a complex multidimensional web.

In addition there were factors in each participant's life outside the group and congregation that also exerted an influence on their reactions and responses. Any factor which changed the pressure or pull on one or more of the strands created a corresponding effect on other parts of the web. Interpreting how those
interrelated strands affected the ability of individuals to be differentiated, and how individuals’ ability to be differentiated affected the rest of the group is the focus of chapter five.

My own process of differentiation as a leader progressed on many different levels and in several settings during the course of the research. As I wrote in my journal after each group session, and as I reflected on the responses of individual participants in the transcripts and questionnaires, I became more aware of how I was expressing my self-differentiation or need of it in my behaviour and the processes I had chosen. I also began to see how my own differentiation affected the ability of others to differentiate and define themselves in the group and in the congregation.

My own journal notes of my personal reflections were listed in my research proposal as one of the sources of data which I had planned to use to document my own process of differentiation. As I reread my journal entries in the process of coding the data, I began to realize how much of my personal energy and attention had been usurped by the congregational crisis. Although it was not known publicly in the congregation until mid-January, 1995, it had come to my attention already in November, 1994. Almost all of my journal entries after that point in the process reflected at considerable length on some aspect of the effect which the congregational turmoil was having on me as a leader, and on sorting out what initiatives I should take or how I would respond to events as they occurred.
In retrospect, I can see that it was in the whirlwind of the congregation, which was reeling from the shock of discovering the betrayed trust of someone whom they had admired and trusted, that my own self-differentiation was most apparent. That is where my ability to define myself was most critical, because it was vital to my wellbeing and survival. That is where I felt the most urgency personally, and hence the need to examine and, in some cases, to change how I was functioning as a leader.

The transcripts of the group reflections also provided data which documented my process of self-differentiation as a leader. In reflecting on those transcripts as I did the coding, I began to see when and how my own process converged with my goal of encouraging other participants to differentiate or define themselves.
Chapter 6

FINDING THE PATTERNS IN THE BIG PICTURE

I. Introduction

In sorting through the many coloured and variously textured threads of data, I gained a new appreciation for the vast complexity that exists in any system made up of living organisms as they interact and are influenced by each other and their surroundings. The study has given me a deep awareness of how profound a mystery it is that the Spirit of Christ is able to create out of so many diverse parts one body that functions well much of the time.

The volume and variety of data which I collected in this research process represents only a fraction of the variables at play among the individuals in the group which I studied. The research group constitutes only a portion of the larger system of the congregation. Such complexity can be overwhelming and confusing when one begins to see it. However, on the basis of the findings which I described and began to interpret in chapter five, I have gleaned a number of learnings. I will propose a theory which I believe grows out of this research, and suggest some implications which this study has for my ministry in the congregation at Warden Woods, and for the broader Mennonite church.

II. Learnings About Others' Differentiation

As I sorted through the material generated in this study, it became increasingly clear to me that it was not usually self-evident whether or not a person's visible behaviour or response on any particular occasion was an indication of differentiation or not. In every situation, there were countless
variables which were not available to me as a researcher, but which nevertheless affected people's responses. Given so many unknown factors, it was almost impossible to know with any degree of certainty, for example, whether an individual's choice to opt out of a particular group activity or another's decision to do something "offbeat" were expressions of differentiation, or whether these were instinctive reactions to the style or gender of the leader.

Similarly, a person's silence could not be interpreted as an indication of differentiation or lack of it without knowing what lay behind the silence. For example, during her interview Jen gave a succinct description of a pattern of response which she was learning, which involved waiting for the right moment to speak rather than reacting impulsively. She spoke of carefully considering how she would respond so that she could achieve her goal of being able to state her views as well as to hear the other person's perspectives. As she described it, remaining silent was an important step in the process of her self-differentiation.

However, when participants said that on particular occasions they had remained silent so that they would not "step on someone's toes," often I did not have enough information to suggest whether their behaviour was an indication of differentiation or not. Sometimes in the context of the bigger picture, it was possible to suggest that their choice reflected a personal pattern, such as a tendency toward denying self ("Others always come first"), or individualism ("It should not concern others if I leave without saying why"), or instinctive acquiescence to the tacit expectations and norms of the group ("We always need
to be careful not to say things here that might "step on someone else's toes").

When the responses of the various individuals were viewed as part of the larger constellation of their personal stories and the patterns of response in the group, I felt more confident in making some observations about which actions in the group indicated differentiation and which ones did not. For example, when one individual chose to remain silent rather than voicing his or her disagreement over an issue like a favourite hymn because it "really wasn't a matter for debate," I thought it indicated self-differentiation. It was those observations of individuals' behaviours in the larger context which gave me some confidence in making some generalized statements of what I discovered from my process of encouraging differentiation in others.

A. Generalized Observations

The following insights came out of my process of reflection and analysis and of integrating the data with some of the theoretical frameworks which I brought to the study.

1. Certain patterns of behaviour in the group were more significant than others in facilitating self-differentiation or discouraging it.

   Individuals were more likely to define and differentiate themselves and to take the risk of doing that openly to each other in the group when there were patterns of behaviour and structures in the group which supported them. Of those patterns or structures which emerged as significant, some were structured into the group process as part of my planning, while others emerged out of the
Being invited specifically was mentioned more frequently than any other factor as being important for encouraging individuals to offer their perspective to a process. Those who mentioned the importance of being invited heard it as an indication to them that others wanted to hear their perspectives and thought they would add a significant contribution. Being invited specifically was especially important for those who, from past experiences, were not sure whether their opinions and feelings mattered to others. Those who had grown up in settings where they knew their ideas and feelings were welcome and valued often depended less on being invited personally in a group. However, even their confidence also eroded quickly in those situations where they heard a response as someone's implied or direct criticism and when there was no other form of validation.

Validation was important for everyone, confident and less self-assured alike. Validation took many forms: hearing another person say something that was similar to one's own views or experience; having someone "hear out" your feelings without jumping to hasty conclusions or solutions; receiving feedback that indicated people were trying to hear and understand, such as questions that help to clarify what one was trying to articulate when it was not quite clear; or simple observations which indicated that someone had noticed a comment or action. While some participants depended more than others on being validated, for similar reasons to those who needed more specific invitations, it was evident that
everyone needed validation at least some of the time.

Closely related to validation was respect for participants' contributions. When group members could see that the contributions of others were respected, they were more likely to take the risk of speaking out too. As several participants indicated, whenever they saw even one person who regularly devalued others, they immediately became silent and stopped taking the risk of speaking out. However, when they saw that others' responses were treated with respect, they were more likely to offer their thoughts and responses as well.

There was ample data to confirm that the structuring of time and space also had a significant effect on whether participants were able to differentiate or define themselves in the group. From the data I identified the importance of the following: having enough time and emotional space in the meeting to think through what they would contribute; having structures which ensured that everyone had an equal opportunity to participate, and not just the ones who tend to speak out more often; having specific structures and instructions to facilitate participants giving each other feedback; having a setting that is conducive to everyone's participation; and having enough advance information to be prepared to participate effectively. For the most part, these structural issues need to be addressed in the leader's planning and implementation. However, it is also important for the leader to see and address patterns of behaviour and inequalities in participation as they emerge in the group.
2. When no specific structures or directions were built into the process, familiar patterns emerged and participants followed them without being aware of them. However, when a few of those patterns were made explicit, some of the group members resisted and suggested other alternatives.

Several patterns emerged which were not intentionally structured into the process, but which nevertheless influenced the freedom of group participants to differentiate or define themselves. Of particular importance in this research group were the implicit or tacit rules governing which emotions and feelings should be expressed and which ones should be held back. The implicit expectation which came up the most consistently from participants as they articulated their reasons for not asking questions or expressing anger or uncertainty was that they did not want to "step on someone's toes."

The frequency with which this concern was voiced or implied suggested to me that in this group there was a tacit agreement that participants must be careful not to say, ask, or do anything that might hurt or offend another. With very few exceptions, participants adhered to that agreement, even when someone's silences or actions were making it more difficult or uncomfortable for the rest of the group.

However, when I explicitly requested that participants respect people's privacy and vulnerability by not ask probing questions, participants felt restricted. In response, one person offered another suggestion - that perhaps the group could have given each person the responsibility and freedom to define for themselves
what was hurtful to them. When the tacit agreement was made explicit, someone thought of an alternative which I think would have facilitated better participation in the group. Her suggestion also challenged the assumption that anyone can know and anticipate another's needs and vulnerabilities accurately. By her suggestion she was stating that, rather than trying to anticipate, it was better to let others define which actions were hurtful or disrespectful to them. She articulated the essence of self-differentiation.

It is important to recognize from the data that the agreement about being careful not to step on other's toes also served some important functions as well. Several persons expressed appreciation for the consideration and respect they experienced in this group. Considering the effect one's comments might have on others is consistent with the importance of "loving the neighbour." It reflects the necessity for all of us, especially those who are more powerful or outspoken, to be careful not to hurt others unnecessarily, especially those who are already vulnerable.

The important insight that this data adds, however, is that when individuals are given opportunity, as they were in the questionnaires, and invited to define what is important for themselves, they are able to do so with far greater accuracy than others who try to anticipate on their behalf. The data also showed that, when participants in the group focussed primarily on others, they were less able to know or define themselves. Furthermore, no one person can be alert to or aware of all the variables affecting everyone in the group. When participants got stuck
trying to anticipate what others needed and trying to avoid stepping on other's toes, paralysis began to characterize group interactions. Participants became so preoccupied with wondering or guessing what others needed, and with trying to avoid what might hurt them, that they stopped speaking about what they themselves were thinking or feeling. When they were focused on others, individuals took less responsibility for stating what they themselves considered to be important. Reminders and encouragement from the leader and others for participants to define and speak for themselves were important factors in ensuring that everyone's perspectives were represented.

Sometimes a few individuals were so intent on saying what they had to say that they filled up all the available time, so that those who were more hesitant or needed more time and encouragement to formulate their responses did not get in their perspectives. These patterns became established very quickly in the group unless there were clear alternative structures created which ensured equal participation.

3. Individuals were willing to take more risks at differentiating and expressing themselves when they were assured that others were committed to the group.

Several participants expressed reluctance to differentiate themselves when they were uncertain about how committed others were to the group or to them as individuals. This became most evident when on several occasions a participant withdrew or distanced temporarily from the group. From the questionnaires and interviews it was evident that others noticed and were distracted when someone
else withdrew, although they did not speak openly about it. In the research, mention was made of several forms of withdrawal: doing one's own thing because of boredom or lack of response from others, ignoring what others were doing or saying, superficiality in conversations, dropping out of the group activity, and avoiding discussing certain things with particular people.

Generally speaking, as long as the incidents of withdrawing were temporary and involved different people moving in and out, they did not pose a large threat for others in the group. However, there were differences between individuals' responses. Some individuals reported that they reacted emotionally to situations when the group tried to insist on everyone doing things together, while others voiced their discomfort when some participants showed too little evidence of being accountable or committed to the rest of the group when making decisions that affected others. It is interesting to note that both extremes, enmeshment and diffusion, made it more difficult for other individuals to differentiate themselves, the one because there was not enough flexibility in the group to tolerate differences or people's coming and going, and the other because there was so little cohesiveness that when someone stated something of importance or defined themselves, others either ignored or paid little attention to them.

These observations suggested that in order for a community to nurture the diversity which gives it colour, creativity and vitality, there needs to be sufficient flexibility and encouragement for people to express their differences openly, and also enough resiliency and commitment within the group that individuals do not
need to be afraid that if they disagree they might simply be ignored or actively excluded. Those factors which were mentioned as fostering cohesiveness in groups or committees were individuals being committed to each other and to a common goal while being able to express their differences and to have their perspective respected.

4. **People seldom initiated change unless they experienced discontent or distress with the status quo.** In fact, those who were satisfied with the status quo often resisted the changes which others initiated.

The findings indicate that change came from one of the following three sources: from those who were bored and wanted to be creative by trying something different, from those who indicated they were discontented or distressed about the way things were, from those who felt personal ownership or involvement in an issue or situation, or from a person taking charge and initiating a change. Some individuals focussed their efforts on initiating change in their families, while others tried to create changes in their relationships in the congregation or their social network. The choice of venue in which individuals tried to initiate change depended on where they felt the most urgency.

Particularly in the nonverbal exercise it was obvious that when there was stability in the system and anyone tried to change things, the rest of the group often resisted, either by actively trying to bring the person back into line, or by ignoring the person's efforts so that they could continue in their familiar patterns. However, at those times in the group when the behaviour patterns were more
erratic or chaotic, participants seemed more flexible and willing to change in order to create a new group pattern which in time became predictable and stable again.

Often there were opposing forces pushing for and resisting change at the same time. This happened when one person tried to change the group pattern and others resisted. When two or more forces pushed in opposing directions, the stronger one (the synergy of the group’s resistance) diminished or cancelled out the impact of the other (one individual’s subtle efforts to change the rest of the group). Had the individual persisted, there might have been an impasse, but more commonly the person withdrew, either by becoming silent or by doing their own thing.

Sometimes the effects of two individual forces were complementary, such as when one person spoke their thoughts and someone else gained the confidence to voice theirs, or when someone validated and highlighted another’s contribution. In such situations the one occurrence reinforced or augmented the impact of another, resulting in a synergy which was greater than the sum of the two individual forces. As the synergy of such reinforcing activities accelerated the movement of the group in a certain direction, one of two things happened to differences: either those with differing views withdrew, or eventually the group crossed someone’s level of tolerance and they reacted by stopping the group.

The most efficient way in which change happened in the group was when one person assumed a leadership role by first getting people’s attention, then taking
charge and proceeding with a direction and pattern, and allowing others to choose whether and how they would follow. Most of the participants followed and found ways to express themselves within the new framework, but occasionally a person withdrew, either physically or emotionally, as they began to realize they were unable to have little or no influence on matters that were important to them.

There are times and situations when it seems that this more efficient way of leading would be effective and appropriate, such as when there are essential tasks to be accomplished and clearly stated group policies or agreements are already in place, or in times of crisis when quick response is essential. This style of leading encourages people to define themselves in relation to the leader's goals and values. However, when used exclusively over a long period of time, it tends to create either followers or reactionaries rather than encourage deeper levels of self-differentiation in which people take ownership for their community and their own priorities and values.

5. Diversity and differentiation flourished more in those settings where persons were committed to at least some common goals and values which were also embodied in the group's practices.

One of the goals or values which was articulated several times by different persons was implied in the fact that they identified as memorable those times when they experienced that the community was receptive to their opinions and perspectives as well as those of its other members. The significance of hearing and respecting everyone's opinions and perspectives was mentioned at some time
by most of the group members.

However, the data also verified the rather obvious but sometimes overlooked fact that the values and goals of wanting to hear and include everyone's perspective are not experienced in a community unless they are embodied in its structures and practices. If the commitment was to have everyone participate equally, someone needed to put extra effort into creating structures that included the perspectives of those persons who were more reserved in the group or held minority views as well as those who held the dominant view. When only selected individuals were encouraged to differentiate themselves, there was resistance from others.

These structures would include incorporating some of the behaviours described earlier to encourage and support a broader diversity of individuals in articulating their needs and opinions (defining themselves) and suggesting whether and how the group might address them. It would also include finding ways to recognize when there was resistance in specific individuals and within the group, and inviting those individuals to define themselves more clearly in order to make their assumptions and concerns more explicit rather than tacit. It was interesting to note that participants were often able to think of ways to adjust their ways of functioning when tacit information or agreements were made explicit.

6. When the intensity and anxiety rose in the group, it was more difficult for both participants and leader to be and remain differentiated.
The anxiety and intensity of feelings in the research group rose when the group discussed the problem of teens leaving the congregation and after the crisis in the congregation erupted. Overall it was in the congregation that the difficulty associated with participants differentiating themselves was most obvious because it was those relationships that were most stressed by the competing loyalties caused by the congregational crisis. The data showed that in the initial stages of responding to the crisis in the congregation, some of the group members felt more disconnected and distant from others in the congregation than previously. More than one person spoke of being afraid in some situations to speak honestly about their thoughts and feelings because it might create so much distance between friends that friendships would be lost. Those who said they experienced more caution and distance tended to be the ones who had been most intimately connected to principal parties and their social circles.

Other participants reported that initially they felt much closer and more connected with others than usual because "we're all in the same boat," speaking as if the crisis had suddenly collapsed some of the differences between them. One person reported drawing encouragement and support from those who thought and felt like she did. However, some of those connections were tentative and superficial, and depended on whether they found out that they agreed on major issues or not. It seemed that in some situations people resolved their anxiety by moving farther apart (cut-off), and in others by merging their perspectives with others (fusion). It took varying lengths of time (weeks to months) for people to
self-differentiate again and to regain their own perspectives on the issue.

Because of the heightened anxiety in the group, the crisis created unique pressures on me as the leader and on my differentiation. It was obvious from the data in my journal that during this time I was constantly being seen as aligning myself with various people or with certain positions in the group. More than at any other time during my ministry, I struggled to regain and maintain my differentiation.

Related to anxiety were the cautions about expressing anger and stepping on others' toes. It would be very informative to explore further what experiences or rules inform these deep notes of caution that were so prevalent among members of the group. For the members of this congregation, such an exploration might uncover some of the sources of the tacit agreement that seems to govern so many of their interactions, and give them the opportunity to suggest other alternatives.

7. Group participants occasionally used humour to reduce the intensity and anxiety in the group.

The humour of participants frequently helped to dissipate the intensity and seriousness of the group activity. Sometimes a humorous comment or poking fun at one's own personal foibles or recurring behaviour patterns became a participant's way of differentiating him or herself in the group.

There was a noticeable increase in the amount of spontaneity and the freedom of participants to be differentiated in the more playful and relaxing activities in the group. The richness of the data from the nonverbal exercises
proved the effectiveness of individuals learning to be more differentiated in their behaviours as they are engaged in playful activities. When the intensity in the group was higher, individuals were more restrained and cautious in expressing and defining themselves.

8. Certain behaviours of the leader played a significant role in enabling and encouraging individual members to participate and differentiate themselves.

Some of my behaviours as a leader encouraged the self-differentiation of participants, and others restricted them. For example, my excessive caution as a leader and my explicit restrictive instructions in certain parts of the process limited the freedom of other participants to respond and express themselves openly and directly to each other. When I did not give positive suggestions of structures for inviting, validating, and respecting each others' contributions, others started to wonder or guess what those who were silent might be thinking and feeling rather than asking. In some of those anxious situations, I was the only one who offered responses to those who spoke. The result was that there were more and longer silences, and there was less understanding between individuals in the group of what was actually happening behind the silences of others.

The data underlined the necessity for any community to have people who are willing to be leaders. This requires an ability to take some initiative and accept the responsibility to see that structures and practices are in place which will make it possible for everyone to participate equally in the community’s decision-making and discernment processes. The task of these leaders is to draw the varied and
self-differentiated contributions of members into the community's creative process.

The data showed that participants looked for consistency between the leader's behaviours and the goals and values to which she claimed to be committed. The dialogue on ownership was a reminder that leaders who are committed to including everyone need to find ways to tap into a sense of urgency and ownership among the members, both the powerful and the marginal, so that everyone would be able to contribute their diverse gifts and benefit from the community, i.e. find in it a place of wholeness and salvation for themselves.

It was obvious from the data that the leader's behaviour had a significant influence on others' participation in the group. When in my role as leader I invited specifically those persons who were inclined to speak out less than others, they began to participate more actively. When I focussed on inviting and encouraging some participants more than others, they responded by contributing more, while those who were predisposed to being more quiet in the group but not given such specific invitations began to participate less actively. I also observed that when I picked up more often on the insights of those who were most outspoken or responsive to my invitations to speak out, they set the tone and direction for the group, while others whom I invited less often settled back into their patterns of listening more and contributing less.

Participants frequently pointed out the importance of my clarity of purpose as a leader and my ability to communicate that purpose to the others, while also
remaining responsive to their contributions and perspectives. This clarity of purpose on my part as a leader both indicated my own capacity for self-differentiation, and also made it easier for others to respond. When that clarity and sense of direction was missing in the leader, participants found it more difficult to know what to do.

At the same time there was a fine balance between being clear about my own purposes as a leader and hearing and responding to others’ perspectives. As one participant noted, it was a challenge to work harder at defining one’s own priorities and choices when the leader’s sense of direction was less clear and decisive. Initially participants tended to hesitate or apologize for stating a perspective or suggesting a process different from mine. Choosing to differentiate from the leader seemed to create more of an emotional struggle or dilemma than differentiating from others.

I found as the leader that I frequently needed to stop and assess whose responsibility it was to deal with certain issues, and when it was up to others. Many of my journal entries had to do with trying to discern which response in my position and role as leader would take me toward my desired goals. When I decided that the responsibility belonged to someone else, my role changed to helping the other through questioning and discussion to discern his or her hopes and what was most important to them.

9. Self-differentiation in the congregation emerged slowly, and not as predictably as I had anticipated.
The research question indicated that one of the purposes of the action in ministry was to see what effect encouraging self-differentiation would have on the way participants functioned in the congregation. Some of these changes did not become evident in the congregation until somewhat later, after the completion of the formal research process. I attributed that delay to several factors. First, it takes more time to begin to incorporate the understandings of self-differentiation into one’s way of functioning in established relationships than in an artificial group designed for the purpose of a research project.

Second, the high level of anxiety in the congregation at the time when the formal research process was ending made it more difficult for some participants to differentiate themselves in the congregation, even though the sense of urgency was greater there than it had been in the group. This was evident in the fact that they reported exercising caution in expressing their feelings with others when they were unsure of the response they would get. As the anxiety in the congregation began to decrease slightly, gradually more participants began to take the risk of differentiating themselves and expressing their opinions and feelings to a few of those persons with whom they knew they differed, but it took months before this kind of trust was present again. For a few of the participants it is still too risky, almost two years later, to differentiate themselves except in very selected settings where they feel confident that they will be heard.

Third, some of the differentiation in the congregation happened during the months after the research was ended. Since I had developed no formal process to
collect data and document these changes, my comments are based on my own and a Thesis Committee member's informal observations of congregational dynamics. One change was that I and several other leaders began to introduce practices into group processes which encouraged more open expression of differences as well as similarities. For example, on several occasions when congregational members were gathering to share personal responses to particular issues in a public setting, they were asked to write out their thoughts before the meeting, thus making it easier for introverts and more timid individuals to formulate their perspectives ahead of time and be prepared to share them in the group.

The changes were not confined to members of the research group. A few individuals who had been in my Ministry Base Group or on my Thesis Committee had also been exposed to the concept of self-differentiation, and persisted in encouraging, inviting and supporting individuals to take more risks and to become clearer in stating their questions or needs and opinions. Speaking for oneself (using "I" statements) instead of the collective "we" and addressing directly those with whom one has a differing view were two other practices which were emphasized more than they had been previously. Individuals took more risks as they felt enough urgency and assurance that their perspectives would be heard and accepted, even if not fully understood.

Several of the research participants chose not to be actively involved in the congregational process which was put in place to deal with the crisis of betrayed trust. Their reasons varied, depending on their personal experiences, their history
in the congregation, and their relationships to the parties most affected - the survivors or the offender.

What I had expected as a result of their participation in the research group was for them to acknowledge to others in the congregation why they made the choices they did. Instead for a long time the veil of silence became thicker and heavier, and very few people tried to penetrate it and make contact with those who withdrew. While there was a commitment to respecting the choices of people to withdraw by distancing themselves or remaining silent, at first I found it hard to see those decisions as acts of self-differentiation. However, it became evident that some of those people were staying connected in other ways, and that they had made their decisions with a lot of thought and care. At least one of the research participants began to notice that certain patterns of behaviour, such as the silences, the unprocessed leavings, and the uncertainty about who was committed to working things through were having strong negative effects on the congregation.

These later developments in the congregation are significant to the formulation of my theory, and need to be considered along with the findings of the research process. However, I cannot attribute these developments solely to my work on self-differentiation because the other events in the congregation had a profound effect on the behaviour of members.

What I know with some certainty is that the action in ministry prepared me to be more effective in my leadership of some aspects of the congregational process
during this chaotic time in its history. I was more able to listen to others' challenges of my actions and respond by defining myself rather than becoming defensive. I invited others to articulate their hopes and goals. When others disagreed with me, the insights from the research also provided me with the analytical tools to be able to step back and reassess my own behaviour, and decide whether it was taking me in the direction I wanted to go. My own way of functioning opened the way for other changes in the congregation.

B. A Grounded Theory

This research encouraged self-differentiation in members of a research group and observed the effects in the congregation. The findings suggest that when pastors and leaders practise encouraging differentiation in others it also enhances the leader's own process of self-differentiation. As pastors and leaders create space for loving all parts of themselves, they are more likely and better equipped to encourage and invite others to do the same. This research suggests that these two movements, which I compared to "loving neighbour" and "loving self," become richer and deeper as leaders and others remain connected but also draw out and respect each other's differences. This affects the bigger picture, as leaders and community members discover that differentiation is not so much to be feared as to be welcomed for the vibrant life and creativity it brings to individuals and the community as a whole.

This realization has profoundly influenced my approach to pastoral ministry. I realize now that my friend was right when she said, "We don't change until it
hurts more to stay the same than to change." During the two years since I began the research and since the crisis of betrayed trust has rocked our congregation, I have had to find new ways to function in my role as a person and as a pastor in order to survive. Those ways are gradually becoming part of my behaviour repertoire.

III. Implications of this Study

My focus on encouraging others to define what is most important to them has grown out of years of experiences as a woman with inner longings to use my gifts within a theological tradition where self-denial and self-sacrifice were considered more important than stating my preferences or goals.141 As a pastor, I knew I wanted to encourage in others what I have needed so much encouragement to do for myself - to define myself and my own goals. This research study focussing on others' differentiation, illuminated by my experiences of leadership in the congregation, has given me a much clearer sense, not only of my goals and values as a leader, but also of those behaviours which will take me toward those goals in my ministry at Warden Woods. The research has also caused me to reflect on the implications this study has for the discussions in the broader Mennonite Church about leaders and their response to the diversity of voices within the Mennonite Church.

A. Bringing Self and Pastor Together

In my role as pastor, I have always made ministry to individual members of the congregation a priority. With my background in nursing and my years of experience as primary caregiver in the family, it is not surprising that one-to-one caring pastoral relationships have been where I felt the most satisfaction and thought I was most effective. However, as I have focused on encouraging others' differentiation in this research, I have become more aware of my tendency to over-function as a leader. I have seen more clearly how my behaviour fits into the larger system, as well as how it affects my own wellbeing. The process has helped me to see how much I was trying to fit into others' scripts for me and how afraid and unsure I was of writing my own.

The study and research experience has helped me to give others the space and encouragement to define themselves and to be responsible for their own choices. Learning to be responsible for my own differentiation and actions rather than others has meant that in my ministry I feel less burdened and less need to take care of all that happens in the congregation and in the lives of individual members. This continues to be the most transformative aspect and ongoing challenge of this study for me.

As a result of this study I have also become more aware of how important it is that I know what are my values and priorities and occasionally share them. When I have been able to achieve that clarity in appropriate situations and ways, it has sometimes helped others clarify their own values, both those similar to and
those different from mine. I have seen that, as I and other leaders have been clearer about sharing our questions and defining our priorities, not as the only or authoritative ones, but as options which can help to call forth others, sometimes individuals in the congregation have been able to ask their questions and begin to define their own hopes for themselves and their community.

However, I have also become much more aware that, if I want to respect the integrity of others in the congregation, I need to be responsible for the times and places and ways in which I choose to share my perspectives. I may feel weak and powerless sometimes, but as a pastor I have power associated with my office, and as a woman I am sometimes associated with the "Mother's power" when I am unaware.¹⁴² I may think I am "speaking the truth in love"¹⁴³ by differentiating myself clearly and directly, but others may hear me through the filter of their own previous personal experiences of being in a subordinate position.

I am learning that if I want to love myself and love others, as a leader I need to be aware of my compassion and anger when I feel threatened or convinced that a moral issue is at stake, and to allow those emotions to inform and teach me. But I cannot allow them to dictate my actions, or my compassion will have an intensity that feels like bright stage lights from which others cannot escape, and my speech and actions will feel like a "silk glove covering an iron fist."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Moessner, "New Pastoral Paradigm", 199.
¹⁴³ Paul uses this phrase in Eph. 4: 15.
As I listen to myself and to my neighbour, I am learning to recognize when my expression of anger or compassion violates a more vulnerable person's space and places unfair demands on them. I am learning to discern differences between my behaviours when I feel powerful or weak, and differences between how others experience me and how I feel inside.

The ability to become engaged in such direct struggle and to respect each other's differences, especially when we disagree on matters that are important to us, depends on knowing that others are committed to the process too. Individuals need encouragement to be able to keep on seeking life for themselves in the community and creating structures and practices which will extend that life to others. And it takes times of playfulness and prayerfulness away from the intensity of ministry in order to be recreated and energized.

As a pastor, I find that I return often to both my Mennonite tradition and my prophetic feminist community. Both of them continue to inform my reading of the biblical text and the values and priorities I try to live by as I function in my present role.

Together they inform my conviction that the church as the body of Christ draws on the gifts, insights and strengths of all its members - the strong and weak, the powerful and vulnerable ones, those at the centre and those at the margins. If some are excluded systematically from the good life while others enjoy its benefits, or if some grow weary from carrying too much responsibility while others are not encouraged to grow in maturity and share in the tasks of building
community, then the body of Christ will not be a place where all people can experience wholeness of life and salvation.

For that to happen, I believe the body needs to commit itself to encouraging all of its members to define themselves: the "little ones" so that the rest of the body begins to see and call forth their gifts, and to recognize those practices which prevent their full participation; and the "big people" so that others can affirm their gifts and recognize their vulnerabilities, and they can be freed to share both resources and the responsibility of leading the way, not only in the community but in the world. To use the Apostle Paul's words, "creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God."145

In my rereading of the stories of Jesus' ministry, I see how clear he was about his commitments to individuals, and that he "stepped on toes," if necessary, to try to create space for everyone's full humanity. Jesus did not hesitate to challenge the political rulers and religious leaders when they put their cherished practices ahead of the wellbeing of people, especially the vulnerable ones in their society. Nor did he turn a blind eye to those who were not living up to their full potential. His anger and compassion informed his actions without controlling him.

The story in John 8 of Jesus' encounter with the woman and the men caught in adultery brings together some of the values which are becoming more a part of my approach to ministry. Instead of blaming the woman for what had happened,
Jesus took his place beside her and challenged the men not to punish her as the Law prescribed, but to accept responsibility for their own complicity. After the men fled, Jesus turned to the woman and reassured her that he did not condemn her either. But he urged her to "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." Jesus gave to both the men and the woman the responsibility to choose those actions which were available to them to change their participation in the larger picture.

I know from personal experience that I have achieved a more defined and healthier sense of self as I have had relationships and experiences in which I was valued and respected as a person of worth, was accepted and loved when I did my best and failed to be all that I hoped, and was invited to try again. This sense of self has developed in relationship with people who shared similar perspectives to mine, as well as with people who challenged me with their differing viewpoints but respected mine and chose to remain connected to me. For me the essence of the pastoral task is to invite others to that journey - the weak and the strong, the powerful and the vulnerable.

The process may begin when an individual has the courage to say "I hurt," "I want," or "I need," and comes to know that others believe him or her. For the "big person" it may begin with learning to say "I fear" or "I need" rather than "we must." Rather than warning against those "poorly differentiated" people who

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146 John 8: 1-11.

are courageous enough to be honest about their feelings and needs, I prefer to listen carefully, and invite them to take responsibility for "loving themselves" by stating their needs and defining what is important to them so that the rest of the church can engage them and seek for ways to respond that are life-giving for all.

As a woman who is now a pastor, I know that our salvation, i.e. my wholeness and that of the congregation, does not lie in one person going back to sacrificing all and denying self in order to love and care for others, nor does it lie in loving self at the expense of others. For me personally, salvation has come through acknowledging "the depths of [my] own personal woundedness," and confronting and accepting "my own wounds as teachers" so that I could better hear and "gain wisdom about the wounds of others," and not add to their hurts by my actions. Salvation has come in loving God and loving myself while loving the neighbour, whether by inviting individuals to self-love and self-differentiation, or by leading the community in its attempts to embody its beliefs about the Christian story in powerful practices which create space for all to experience salvation.

B. Implications for Leaders

My research indicates that the implications of such a stance for pastors and leaders are significant, because in encouraging the differentiation of many people we invite a measure of chaos to take up residence in our communities. If we encourage all individuals to grow "to maturity, to the measure of the full stature

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of Christ, and not to the maturity that we or the church define for them, we who are leaders will need to be committed to hearing the perspectives of others, weak and strong, and to be prepared for them to nudge us along the same path "to maturity."

While we cannot abdicate our calling to tell and teach our convictions and understandings about the meaning and importance of the biblical story for life-giving and joyous Christian living, we can do so in ways that invite others' differing perspectives and questions. As the poet has recognized, truth has many dimensions:

**Depth Perception**

I

There is something to be said for the experience of seeing things differently from each eye.

One, once blind now sees in the vibrant colour of youth.

The other, aged and yellowed in its perception knows wisdom from years of seeing what is.

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149 Eph. 4: 13.
Both are in search of truth
yet cannot agree on
what is
real.

II

Perhaps in the end
these eyes will know
only that truth
does not exist
in one dimension . . .

that wisdom
is in the knowledge
that truth
from a single perspective
lacks depth. 150

I look forward to a time when all of us, Mennonites, feminists and others, will
give up the goal of telling "one true story" and instead commit ourselves to telling
and hearing many stories. 151 I look forward to a time when our communities'
colours will become brighter as all members are encouraged to define themselves
in all their difference, and to value and respect each other's integrity and
uniqueness. For it is not our similarities, but the presence of Christ's spirit
among us, moving in mysterious ways and reflected in our concrete actions, that
makes us one. I want to enjoy the subtle nuances and sharp contrasts of our
differences as we clarify and state our own positions without diminishing the

150 Rose Barg, "Depth Perception," *MCC Women's Concerns Report*, No. 121
(July-August 1995), 11.

151 Sandra Harding, *The science question in feminism* (Ithaca, New York:
thoughts and feelings of others because we are all children of one God who longs to see each one of us come into our own.

That time will come as the resilient strength and grounded colours of the tradition are receptive to the interruptions of the vibrant prophetic strands. That day will come as the variously textured threads of the prophetic community offer their unique qualities to give depth and character to the whole. It will come as we come to know the sources of truth in our own perspective and to receive truth from others’ perspectives. It will come as we find life-giving ways to bring our individual colours to our common task of being the body of Christ in the world.
APPENDIX A: THESIS PROPOSAL

SHOWING OUR COLOURS:
SELF-DIFFERENTIATION IN A
CONTEMPORARY URBAN MENNONITE CONGREGATION

A Doctor of Ministry Thesis Proposal

Submitted to the Doctor of Ministry Programme Committee

Toronto School of Theology

Submitted By: Muriel Bechtel

Warden Woods Mennonite Church

August 1994

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS COMMITTEE:

Gary Redcliffe: Thesis Director, Emmanuel College

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Grace Brubacher: Ministry Base Group Representative

Ray Harris: Collaborative Learning Group Representative
I. Background and Context of Applied Research Thesis

My journey into pastoral ministry evolved through a lifetime of gradual steps, each one preparing me for the next. Like many women I learned to make family needs the primary determinants for many of my choices. I have struggled to value my own dreams and aspirations and to distinguish between others' expectations and my preferences. However, after a family move to Toronto I enrolled in one course at the Toronto School of Theology, just out of my own personal interest. That turned out to be a significant step, and eventually led me to the point where I was able to declare my sense of call to pastoral ministry. After completing seminary studies in 1988, that call was affirmed when I accepted an invitation to be the pastor at Warden Woods Mennonite Church in Scarborough. The congregation's previous pastors had been a visionary male leader who stayed for thirty-one years, and a gifted female co-pastor with whom he worked and for whom he was a mentor during the last seven years. Just as my desire to study theology had begun with my need to find answers to some of my perplexing faith questions, so my doctoral studies began with my need to explore some pressing ministry questions.

Currently I am in my sixth year in the congregation, which began in the late forties as Warden Park Mennonite Church. In the early years, the area surrounding the church was populated predominantly by Anglo-Saxon poor working class people who were struggling to get re-established after the war. Because many in the congregation had come through their own life experiences of poverty, it is not surprising that members of the congregation began to reach out to people in a nearby subsidized housing development called Warden Woods. In 1971 the Warden Woods Church and Community Centre was built, and the congregation moved so that Community Centre and Church could share space and work together.

Founding members identified the heart of the original vision for this cooperative venture as the desire to keep "word and deed" together. While the Church and the Community Centre were separate institutions from the beginning, for more than a decade the distinction between them was blurred. They tried to "serve the community together." Staff from the Centre attended the church,

152 This outreach is described in Like a Grain of Mustard Seed: A History of the Warden Park Mennonite Church written by Mary Groh on the twenty-fifth anniversary in 1977.

153 "Community" here refers to the local neighbourhood. The vision was that people from the church, community centre, and neighbourhood would all work together in this cooperative venture, like a large patriarchal family enterprise.
church members volunteered countless hours to Centre programs, and the pastor gave as much time to the Community Centre and neighbourhood residents as to the congregation. In those earlier years there was a desire to avoid distinguishing between Church and Community Centre. Today that has changed, but some neighbourhood people still confuse the two institutions.

New persons became attracted to the ideals and increasingly visible profile of the mission at Warden Woods. Many of the current members came to the city as young adults from other parts of the Mennonite Church. Here in this congregation they found acceptance and validation for their perplexing questions and developing faith. Individual differences were everywhere present then as they are now, but the leader's vision for creating a diverse and accepting community in Warden Woods was a strong unifying force. A significant number of people stayed because they shared that vision, though over the years some have left because they wanted more clarity about beliefs and boundaries.

People continue to be attracted to Warden Woods for a number of reasons: its vision, friendships, informal worship, and interest in issues of peace and social justice. While on the surface it sometimes appears as if the original vision has been lost, I believe it still influences the congregation. However throughout the last decade that vision has no longer had the same unifying effect, as several groups of persons who were feeling marginalized in the church such as feminist women, homosexual persons, and those who wanted more "traditional Mennonite beliefs" began to challenge the congregation to address their concerns more fully in its life and worship. As pastoral leadership changed, it was evident that several groups were vying for pastoral attention to the areas which were important to them.

Over the years a number of decisions associated with the ambiguous Church-Centre relationship and with issues raised by some of these groups have resulted in hurt and bitterness. The struggles are seldom mentioned publicly anymore, but occasionally in pastoral conversations the painful memories are still recounted. Some potentially explosive issues as ownership of the original church building remain dormant but unresolved.

The makeup of the congregation has changed over the years. It still includes working class persons, as well as significant numbers of people who are well-educated and a growing proportion who are employed in professions or small businesses of their own. There are fewer seniors and young adults, and more families with young children. Levels of income vary, as do religious and cultural backgrounds. A recent "Renewal Process" carried out in the congregation confirmed that people's expectations are indeed diverse and sometimes
Currently the congregation has 120 adult members. Twenty-eight preschool and school-age children attend regularly. There are ten to fifteen teens and young adults, some of whom attend only occasionally. Many of the current participants have come from other Mennonite churches, but this congregation continues to be enriched by the participation of persons from a variety of Christian, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Today the Church and the Community Centre still share the same building, but many other things have changed. The two organizations work together less closely than they did in earlier times. The surrounding neighbourhood is more racially mixed, and the Community Centre's staff and clientele include people from a variety of faiths. Few people other than a handful of seniors attend the church from the adjacent neighbourhood. As a result of these internal and societal changes some people experience deep feelings of loss in the Warden Woods congregation - a loss of their sense of unique mission and identity.

My action in ministry will be carried out in the congregation where I am responsible for pastoral and administrative leadership. Currently three part-time persons (Pastoral Assistant, Administrative Assistant and myself) share the tasks and function together as a pastoral team. A small proportion of our pastoral time is still spent with staff and other persons from the Community Centre.

II. Statement of the Research Problem

Warden Woods congregation was formed with the expectation that its participants would be committed to a common vision and calling: to express the radical life and teachings of Jesus Christ in their simple lifestyle, their relationships with their neighbours in Warden Woods, and their worship. According to some persons who were involved in both the Church and Community Centre at that time, the hope was that Church and Community

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154 During 1992-93 the congregation worked with a consultant through a year-long process of documenting the current perceptions, needs, and priorities of participants. Members of the Steering Committee wrote up the results in *Warden Woods Mennonite Church Renewal Process: Report of Findings, June, 1993.*

155 Of these 72 are active and 48 are inactive. In addition 37 nonmembers from a variety of backgrounds are actively involved in the life of the congregation. Because membership is by adult baptism, these figures include only those adults and older children who have been baptized and become members.
Centre would be partners in embodying that vision. For a variety of reasons, both internal and external, in recent years the Church and Community Centre have needed to work at differentiating from each other. However to a more limited degree, both bodies still work at cooperation.

As differentiation has been taking place, the Warden Woods congregation has had to struggle to redefine its purpose and identity. Many of the leaders in the congregation are now middle class persons whose energy is spent in their families, their jobs, and their own scattered neighbourhoods and interests. There is a consensus that "many people no longer see Warden Woods as a community-based church."156 A few long-time and also more recent members feel the original vision has been lost. However, current vision statements continue to express the hope that a wide diversity of people will feel they belong in this congregation.157

Many of the current participants have come to Warden Woods from more traditional ethnically-based church communities. If questioned, I expect many would say that as children they felt affirmed and included in their congregations. A few persons have said they grew up trusting their community's leaders and authority figures implicitly.158 But at some point, often as youth or young adults, they no longer accepted the expectations of family, community and leaders and began to distance. While this was an expected part of the process of growing up, some also experienced it as "cutoff,"159 both from the community, and from its authority figures. This distancing looks like differentiation. However, according to systems theory, differentiation happens when persons learn to choose their own life goals and values while at the same time remaining connected to their

156 Renewal, 11.

157 Congregational committees developed "vision statements" for the coming year. Insuring that a variety of different groups of people feel they belong was identified as a high priority.

158 The observations in this section are based on interviews which I described in an essay entitled "Being Separate Together: Self-Differentiation in the Congregation" for a course directed by William Lord and Gary Redcliffe.

159 Family systems theory describes as "cutoff" the pattern of withdrawing from significant relationships, either physically or emotionally, when the demands or tensions get too high. Ronald W. Richardson develops this idea further in Family Ties That Bind, (Vancouver, B.C.: Self-Counsel Press, 1984), 32-34.
community. As we learn to act and speak for ourselves and still maintain "comfortable contact with emotionally significant others," we more easily adapt when differences raise the anxiety level in our families and communities. We are freer to be ourselves without expecting everyone else to see things our way.

In applying family systems theory to congregations, Edwin Friedman connects the emotional processes at work in families to those in congregations. He says that "supporting the strengths in the family can bring more healing to the entire family than can focusing on the family weaknesses." Furthermore, he maintains that "the key to successful spiritual leadership. . . has more to do with the leader's capacity for self-definition than with the ability to motivate others." He maintains that for leaders encouraging self-definition "unifies our healing power with that which promotes our own wholeness." As a leader, I am finding that working at my own self-differentiation has been empowering for me. I see it as important to encourage people to be more differentiated in their relationships within the congregation. Thus I have chosen self-differentiation as the focus of my action in ministry.

People who were accustomed to high levels of reactivity and anxiety in their family and church as they tried to differentiate I expect will find it more difficult to be at ease with differences in another community of faith, particularly differences with leaders. While they often give intellectual assent to valuing diversity, painful memories of conflicts and abrupt endings make it difficult for them to be themselves and disagree, but still remain connected to people for whom they care deeply or whom they respect. Some people in the congregation have taken the risk of sharing their perspective through personal stories, but have been hurt and disappointed by the responses of others to them. I suspect that many of us find it difficult to distinguish between respect for and agreement with those who differ.

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161 Ibid, 47.
163 Ibid, 29.
164 Ibid, 221.
165 Ibid, 3.
Perhaps it is not surprising that throughout the Renewal Process people expressed dissatisfaction with the way we make decisions in the Warden Woods congregation.\textsuperscript{166} While feelings of dissatisfaction have been associated with the way the congregation has made decisions in the recent past, it is also possible that these more recent experiences have evoked feelings and reactions that are associated with similar (isomorphic) experiences much earlier in people's lives?\textsuperscript{167}

I believe that if more of us were freer to be and speak for ourselves while remaining connected to those with whom we differ, we could be more creative and spontaneous in our decision-making processes at Warden Woods Mennonite Church. As increasingly self-defined leaders and people, together we would generate more creative energy. When we avoid difficult issues because we fear the intensity of feelings and differences of opinion might cut us off from each other, then our creative energy becomes drained by the effort to repress our intense feelings of anger and fear.\textsuperscript{168}

I would like to test my theory that if we encouraged each other more in the expression of our individual differences, new creativity and energy would be released in the congregation. Hopefully encouraging persons to express their own opinions and to hear and respect others' unique perspectives would result in creative energy replacing the anxious energy that has come with our emphasis on political correctness and on correct language. I believe that our anxiety stifles spontaneity, and that this anxiety is isomorphic to what happened sometimes in our previous communities when everyone was expected to agree to a common standard of correct belief and acceptable behaviour.

\textit{In my action in ministry I will explore how encouraging self-differentiation of participants in a group process affects their participation in a contemporary urban Mennonite congregation.}

\textsuperscript{166} Only 40% of the respondents felt we had good processes in place for shared decision-making, and 25% thought they were given adequate information prior to making important decisions.

\textsuperscript{167} "Isomorphic" transactions appear different on the surface, but on a deeper level they are alike. Salvador Minuchin and H. Charles Fishman, \textit{Family Therapy Techniques} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 123-129.

III. Theoretical Framework and Assumptions Involved in the Study

A. Theory at Work in the Study

Biblical and Theological

This study is based on a reading of the biblical text and a theology that values both the individual and the community. It is my belief that each person’s story is a deeply personal text which must be respected, but which finds meaning in its fullest sense as it is connected to the larger story - the communal story and the faith story. Likewise, the communal story has integrity as it values individual stories. However, as expression of differences is encouraged within congregations, our diversity will become more visible, and Christian communities will need to find more effective ways to respect and deal with it.

Christian churches often emphasize the biblical call for unity, and Mennonites especially have often given priority to unity in the community. However I believe that the biblical message values individual "members" as much as it values "the body." We see this in the familiar passages depicting the church as the body of Christ, where there is a plea for correcting the imbalance which places "weaker" members at a disadvantage in the community, along with a concern that the gifts which the Spirit has given to individuals will be used for the common good. According to these texts, personal aggrandizement, control, and power imbalances have no place in the Christian church, but each individual person ought to be valued with their gifts.

The biblical and faith story is concerned not only about the needs and contributions of individual persons, but also about the unique needs and contributions of distinct population groups. For example, Luke describes a

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169 This was the focus of an unpublished essay I wrote for Professor Ron Fabbro's course on "Cooperation, Compromise, and Tolerance." My essay was entitled "Faithful Living - A Never Ending Story: A Narrative Process for Ethical Reflection in the Mennonite Church."

170 In a recent workshop at TST, Edwin Friedman stated that churches often emphasize unity and give too little attention to self-differentiation.

171 I Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:4-8.

172 I Corinthians 12:22-25.

conference of the early Christian church which brought together representatives from the whole Christian world to make some decisions regarding the practice of circumcision which was threatening to cause a division between two parts, the Jewish and Gentile Christians. In order for the conference body to be able to respect the differing perspectives and backgrounds, some of the Jewish Christian itinerant leaders had to use their gifts of political strategy and empowerment, of rhetoric and persuasion to balance the power and to insure that the views of Gentile Christians would be heard, i.e. they used their gifts "for the common good." Furthermore, the dominant Jewish Christian community had to give up some of their control so that Gentile Christians could have some say in the outcome of the deliberations.

From the beginning people have come to the Christian church because they expected to be received with compassion and respect. They came hoping for healing and empowerment. But it is also a well-known fact that sometimes Christian communities have been places of much pain and brokenness, as new people came into the community, differences were multiplied, and people had to learn new ways to make decisions and live together.

Struggles with internal differences have long plagued Mennonite communities. Harold S. Bender, well-known for his recovery of the Anabaptist vision, emphasized the homogeneity of the movement in its early days. In the 1960's when the Mennonite church in North America was being influenced by the individualism of the modern spirit and of fundamentalist piety, Bender's vision of a community separated from the world whose members were committed to each other and to following Christ according to the pattern of the New Testament church provided a much needed corrective. Critical of the strong hierarchical leadership in the Mennonite Church, Bender espoused equality and insisted that "the personality of the individual member or group (should not be) absorbed, overridden, or lost." Yet at the same time he observed that in the early church "the particularity of the individual was broken through in every respect,

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175 I Corinthians 12:7 NRSV. For further development of these ideas see my unpublished essay, "Becoming What We Are: A Church of Many Voices."


177 Harold S. Bender, These Are My People (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962), 45.

178 Ibid, 38.
so that (the person) now participated... in a common life which swept every aspect of life along into it. The internal tension is evident.

It seems that in reaction to the growing individualism of the sixties and seventies, church leaders and scholars drew on Bender’s vision to emphasize the need for agreement within the church, particularly on issues of ethical living. Although equality of all members was affirmed, differentiation was not encouraged. Whereas Bender synthesized his knowledge of early Anabaptism in order to distil the essence of the movement, more recent Mennonite scholars have documented its diversity, even in the early beginnings. Mennonites have not lived easily with diversity in our communities. We have preached peace and practiced pacifism in times of war, but we have preached unity and practiced division as a way of dealing with individual differences within our communities.

In a recent revision of an earlier book, C. Norman Kraus has tried to affirm the importance of the individual-in-community: "We become self-conscious individuals only in community relationships... Thus community is integrally involved in the individuals’ self-identity... The sin of humankind is not the assertion of individuality in community," he says, "but the assertion of individual self-sufficiency and independence from God and fellow humans." Kraus attempts to restore the importance of valuing the individual within the community, but does not critique the ways in which religious communities have often disregarded the perspectives of the less powerful or "little ones."

While claiming that Mennonites espoused equality, the language and behaviour of leaders often betrayed another reality. Bender’s concern was evident: "The church is a brotherhood in which there are no ranks or levels of distinction in honour or superiority... There are distinctions of gifts and duties, but... there is not a class of clergy and a class of laity."

179 Ibid, 46.
182 Ibid, 43.
183 The term "little ones" was used frequently in the gospels to refer to the marginal people in the society. E.g. Mark 9:42.
184 Bender, 52.
who grew up in the Mennonite Church where pastors and theologians were all powerful men, I would contend that the ideal may have been a church with egalitarian relationships, but the reality was often experienced as hierarchical and patriarchal. The "little ones" learned to be silent and let others speak for them.

In my view it is important to observe how women's and men's experiences in the church differ, and to observe whether other factors such as ethnicity, race or class had a significant effect. For some Mennonites the issue has been not only whether the individual was valued, but which individuals were valued and respected, and whether all the members were encouraged equally to speak for themselves and offer their perspectives. Most women struggled to be heard, even in faith communities which claimed mutuality and equality. Such factors as ethnicity, race, class and sexual orientation may well have made it even more difficult for people to speak and act for themselves. Some powerful leaders also find it hard to be differentiated, but for different reasons. Some may have become so accustomed to feeling responsible to speak and act for the community that they find it hard to know and be themselves apart from their roles. These differences in our struggle to be self-differentiated are often a result of our socialization and experience.\(^\text{185}\)

**Systems Theory:**

Systems theory sees all human beings as parts of a structure of interlocking elements which influence each other. It looks at the whole and at the relationships of the parts. The theory is useful for understanding the dynamics of relationships within the congregation.

A central concept in certain approaches to systems theory is *differentiation of the self.* We develop our basic ability to be differentiated in our families of origin, but it is a life-long process.\(^\text{186}\) Friedman bases his theory about congregations on the work of Murray Bowen whose primary work was in the area of

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differentiation and its relationship to the health of individuals and families.  
Most feminists would agree that Bowen’s differentiated person looks like the quintessential white male in western society. While I agree that Bowen’s criteria are gender-biased, I concur with those feminists who believe differentiation can be redefined in more inclusive terms, making the concept more useful for understanding people and relationships in religious communities or congregations. It is important to note that self-differentiation of the individual is quite different from individualism.

Feminism’s influence on systems theory is important because it has made us aware that other factors such as age, gender, position in the hierarchy, socialization, and the flexibility of the system all affect the individual person’s ability to create change in the system. People of colour and advocates of children have also begun to challenge the predominantly white middle-class North American feminists and the proponents of systems theory to see that there is a difference between the perspective of the "big people" and "little people" in any group. The usefulness of a systems perspective, I believe, is that it encourages us to look beyond an individual’s personality to see the effect of structures as well as role and power differences.

As the incidence of interpersonal violence has become more known in society, there has been growing critique of systems theory’s emphasis on the part everyone plays in perpetuating the dysfunction in a family or group. Critics point out that those parts in the system which have less power and less opportunity to effect change need advocacy, and that a leader’s neutrality only serves to reinforce the status quo. I agree that abuses of power need to be exposed and challenged. Persons who have more power need to be challenged to accept the responsibility to act for the greater good. However systems theory emphasizes the importance of


189 I have developed this further in an essay for a reading and research course supervised by Professors John Theis and Gary Redcliffe on Family Systems Theory. My essay was entitled, "Differentiating the Self: Different Paths".

190 Mediation Training Institute, "Conflict Transformation" (Akron, PA: Mennonite Conciliation Service, 1989), B-11.
of encouraging and empowering the "little ones" as well to learn ways to use their power to work for the changes they desire.\textsuperscript{191} In that way "little people" become "big people," contributing to, and not only receiving from, the systems in which they participate.

Friedman also emphasizes that leaders are more effective in creating change when they reduce anxiety in the system through appropriate use of playfulness rather than being drawn into seriousness, which tends to escalate the level of anxiety that is already present in the system.\textsuperscript{192} Playfulness or a nonanxious presence create an atmosphere that makes it easier for people to risk experimenting with new behaviours and ideas.

B. Assumptions Operative in the Study

Systems Assumptions

1. Self-differentiation of the leader is essential for his or her own well-being and for the well-being of the community as well.

2. People who have difficulty being separate while remaining connected will often feel they need to distance from the group in order to be themselves.

3. When we are faced with issues that cause anxiety or tension we tend to revert to patterns of relating that we learned in our formative communities and families of origin.

4. Everyone struggles with issues of self-differentiation and power, but gender, class and race differences in socialization often mean we experience the struggle differently.

5. Power imbalances often reflect the way systems are structured and function rather than the personal characteristics or motives of individuals.

6. Playfulness and a nonanxious presence make it easier for persons to risk being themselves, even if it means differing with each other.

\textsuperscript{191} Virginia Goldner, "Making Room for Both/And" Family Therapy Networker 16 (March/April 1992), 55-61.

\textsuperscript{192} Friedman, 50-52.
Theological Assumptions

1. The church has the potential to be a community of healing, as it was envisioned in the tradition of Jesus Christ and the early church. However, the realization of that ideal depends on both "big" and "little" people being committed to actions and attitudes which promote respect and equality between all members.

2. The good of the individual needs to be kept in balance with the good of the community in any theology and in the way it is lived out in a local congregation.

3. The struggle to find a balance between diversity and unity has been with the church from its beginnings.

4. When using a particular theory as the basis for one's work it is important to acknowledge the context in which any theory or theology has developed, and to be aware of how it is being used and whose interests it is serving.

IV. The Action in Ministry

A. Action

The action portion of my research will consist of a group process which will be designed to encourage participants to identify connections between their past experiences and their present ability to be self-differentiated in the different contexts of their lives. The group will begin with one day-long introductory session, followed by six shorter sessions, and concluded with a final session of a more evaluative and celebratory nature. The group will consist of eight participants from Warden Woods Mennonite Church.

B. Selection of Participants

Participants will be selected after I have informed the congregation of the nature and purpose of my action in ministry. Selections will be made in consultation with members of my Ministry Base Group. I will invite persons who have indicated some interest or who might be open to exploring questions of self-differentiation. Based on exploratory conversations with potential participants I will make the final selections for the group.

I will choose people whom I have experienced as being open to learning from personal experience and the process of the group as a whole. Participants will need to be open to exploring their past experiences, both in their families of origin and previous faith communities. The group will include men and women
from different religious backgrounds so that gender and denominational differences can be observed. Because each session will build on the previous one, it will be important to have participants who are able to commit themselves to the entire process.

Each participant will be given a letter of invitation (Appendix II) explaining the study, and asked to sign a consent form (Appendix III) indicating their willingness to participate and to observe the requirements of confidentiality in the group.

C. Time Line

The group process will take place between September, 1994 and April, 1995. The day-long session will be held on a Saturday in late September, and other sessions will be held monthly during consecutive months. Detailed analysis of the data and the writing of the thesis will begin in April, 1995 and be completed by spring, 1996.

D. Session Format

The focus of the day-long introductory session will be personal storytelling. Following a reflective opening meditation and basic introductory information on systems theory from the leader, each participant will prepare a presentation to introduce his or her family of origin to other group members, emphasizing the way people in the family dealt with their differences.

In the sessions the group will be introduced to different modes of expression including art forms, and a variety of formats, e.g. Samoan Circle,193 to structure group interaction. Different forms of expression often evoke things that are less accessible when only cognitive processes are used. Sessions will include time for group interaction to evoke issues of differentiation, and for individual reflection to discover and record personal reactions.

The monthly sessions will be two and one-half hours in length. They will have the following format:

- A brief preparatory exercise (10-15 min.)
- Major activity of the session (45-60 min.)
- Refreshment break (15 min.)
- Individual recording of personal reflections (15-30 min.)
- Group reflection time (30 min.)
- Closing exercise (15 min.)

193 The Samoan Circle is a process designed for a large group to use in processing difficult issues on which there are differing opinions.
The first group activity will be as follows:

**Group Goal:** to choose collaboratively several hymns for a Sunday morning worship service.

**Preparatory Exercise:** group listen to or sing together a song from their past, e.g. "Just As I Am" or "Jesus Loves Me;"
- each person recollects events, memories, feelings, images, settings associated with the song.

**Main Group Activity:** participants will be given a theme and select independently several hymns for Sunday's service;
- they will be guided to reflect silently on the reasons for and significance of their personal choices;
- participants will then be asked to share their selections and articulate their reasons to the other group members;
- the group will be asked to make a group decision from all the selections about which hymns to use in the worship service.

**Individual Reflection:** participants will be given a questionnaire to guide their reflection on the process (See Appendix I).

**Group Reflection:** participants will process their reflections on their experience as a group;
- participants will be given opportunity to make suggestions for the next session.

**Closing Exercise:** the group will choose and sing together one of the songs they discussed.

Each step in the process has a purpose. By beginning with the individual, participants are encouraged to focus on the self and on factors that motivate their personal choices. The group interaction requires that individuals deal with interpersonal differences while trying to make a group decision. Their written reflections will help them identify what makes differentiation easier or more difficult for them personally in the group. The reflection questionnaire will be an important instrument for data collection. The group reflection provides an opportunity for them to hear how similarly or differently they reacted to the same event, and also to make suggestions for the next session. The closing exercise is to honour their collaborative efforts and bring closure to the task.

Designing sessions will be my responsibility. I will be a participant observer and may choose other persons who from time to time will meet and process a session with me and provide input into the design of the next session. Since each session will grow out of the previous one, group participants' feedback and input will be part of the planning for future sessions.

Depending on group interest, other major activities might include one or more of the following: exploring the practice of including children in communion;
studying a passage of scripture together; deciding what should be on a sign in front of the church; processing questions of sexual morality for people in the church; preparing financial data to present to the annual meeting of the congregation; or processing what it means to be a member of Warden Woods Mennonite Church.

During the fall there will be a new theme for each session, a thread that runs through the entire evening. During the winter sessions the group may choose one major issue which would provide a continuous thread throughout the three sessions.

E. Recording of Data

- Some creations of the group process will be recorded, using audiotape and/or photographs. With permission, some of these photographs might be included to illustrate the written thesis. Tapes will be for my use as a leader, freeing me to participate in the sessions and providing me with data to evaluate my role in the group process at a later time.
- Individuals' reflections on their own and the group experience will be recorded on a questionnaire and collected at the end of each session for analysis later.
- Group reflections will be taped and used by the leader as a source of hard data.
- As leader and participant observer, I will use journalling to process what is happening to me and how I see my behaviour affecting group process. This is one way to correct for researcher bias. Both through the data gathering instrument and the group process I will solicit feedback from the group to find out how they are experiencing my leadership, since differentiation of the leader is also an important factor.

Participants will be encouraged to keep a personal journal of their experience and any new insights. The journal contents will be primarily for their personal use, although they may choose to share significant insights or excerpts from their journal on the questionnaire or verbally with the group. It is my conviction that for differentiation of the self to happen, people need to be free to be honest with themselves and to choose their own level of self-disclosure. They also need to feel safe that the contributions they choose to share will be respected and valued by other participants and the leader.

Confidentiality will be emphasized in the group process. Anonymity of individual participants and their responses will be assured by coding the questionnaires. Only the researcher will have access to the completed questionnaires. Identifying information will be changed in written reports. Tapes will be for the researcher's use only, and will be erased after analysis is complete.
V. Research Methodology Operative in the Study

This research process will use the "grounded theory" approach, a method of qualitative research which builds theory from data that reflects the reality of the experience of participants in the study. The process has clear procedures for analyzing data, but also allows for creativity in the way new theory is formulated from the data. Kirby and McKenna use "grounded theory" for their "research from the margins" because: it accounts for the experience of the researcher in the process, it gives priority to the voices of the participants, it develops a research process that is egalitarian, and it takes seriously the context of the research and of participants. These principles are central to this project.

Kirby and McKenna describe a concrete and clearly laid out method which I will use for managing and analyzing the data. Raw data is broken down into concepts which are coded for easy identification. Then through a process of comparative analysis, concepts are grouped together with other concepts that have common properties to form categories. From these categories, "substantive theories" that remain close to the data are developed. These are steps toward formulating the more formal and abstract theory which has been tested in many different types of situations. The authors emphasize that both content and process information are important sources of data, and that analysis and data collection go on at the same time. This allows for adjustments to be made as the ongoing analysis and emerging theory lead the researcher to look for data that seems particularly relevant but was not included in the original research design.

Strauss and Corbin have developed what they have called a "conditional matrix," which I will use to analyze the interconnections between the different levels of action/interaction that relate to the phenomenon of differentiation. The conditional matrix will be a useful tool in this particular study, since systems thinking is based on the premise that the smaller picture is related to the broader picture. Since the purpose of grounded theory is to develop theory, there needs

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196 Kirby, 128-154.

197 Ibid, 137-8.

198 Strauss and Corbin, 158-175.
to be a way to seek out the information that will help to relate concepts systematically. With that information the matrix will help to conceptualize connections between what happens in the group and what happens in the congregation. Since systems thinking looks for indications that changes in one part have a helpful impact on the whole system, the matrix will be useful in analysis.

VI. Risks and Limitations of the Study

Difficult personal memories from the past may surface which cannot be dealt with adequately in the group process. I will need to be prepared to offer additional support such as referral to appropriate community resources.

Differences which are difficult to manage in the group process could spill over into the congregation. It will be important to consider and respect both my own (as leader) and the group’s tolerance for differences in choosing group activities. In addition, there needs to be sufficient flexibility in the group process to allow for extra time to be spent on issues that require it.

The group process will be affected by changes that happen in the congregation or the family systems of participants while they are involved in the study. Where these impact the group process, every effort will be made to document the effects of such changes on the individuals and the group. Wherever they are visible, it will be important to document the effects of the group process on the congregation as well.

VII. Contributions of the Study

It is my hope that the contributions of this study will develop an important facet of the original vision of the Warden Woods Mennonite Church, which was to be a congregation which included persons from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. I believe the vision is a biblical one, and especially urgent for urban congregations. But just as new wine needs to be stored in new wine skins while it matures, so a new vision needs to be embodied in new patterns of relating which can withstand the ferment of our differences.

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It is my hope that this study will empower participants to participate more directly and creatively in the life and decision-making processes of the Warden Woods congregation, as they begin to be more assured of their own perspectives and to trust that these will be valued and respected by others. Hopefully the group experience will have a ripple effect in the congregation, since a basic assumption of systems theory is that change in one part usually results in changes in other parts of the system.

It is my hope that the study will yield some clues about how churches can respect people as individuals without promoting individualism and while still cherishing the values of community. Many people come to churches with wounds from experiences when they were disregarded or abused as "little people" in previous communities or families of origin. It is my hope that this study will provide some possibilities for ways urban Mennonite churches can develop their potential for being healing communities which nurture people’s strengths rather than perpetuate or thrive on others’ weaknesses.
APPENDIX I

Reflection Questionnaire

Session: _______  Participant: _______

Complete the following sentences with reference to the group process. It might help you to focus your reflections if you choose just one or two "slices" of the group process that were significant for you.

When describing your own or others' responses, include verbal and nonverbal, feelings, thoughts, or actions. List as many as come to mind.

1. a) I knew what I thought or wanted when...
   b) I found it more difficult to know what I thought or wanted when...

2. a) I chose to tell others what I thought or wanted when...
   b) My observations were that others responded to my contribution(s) by...
   c) I chose to remain silent about what I thought or wanted when...

3. a) During the group process I expressed my agreement (similarity) with others when...
   b) During the group process I expressed my disagreement (differences) with others when...
   c) During the group process I remained silent about my agreement or disagreement with others when...

4. My responses (feelings, actions, wishes) when others were silent were...

5. I felt more connected (closer) to this group when...
   I felt more disconnected (distant) from this group when...
   If I were to do it over again, I could choose to be more a part of this group by...
6. Sometimes what happens in group settings reminds us of previous experiences in family, school, or the congregation. What happened in this group reminded me of...

   The similarities are...
   The differences are...

7. a) I am aware that in this group I behaved differently than usual when I...

   b) I am aware that I used familiar patterns of behaviour and response from my past when I...

   c) I would like to...

8. I appreciated when the leader...

   I wished the leader would...
APPENDIX II

Letter of Invitation

Date

Dear ________

As part of my requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Programme I will be leading a group process with eight persons from the congregation. My purpose is to create a setting where participants are encouraged to know and to be themselves, whether others approve or disapprove, and to find out how that encouragement affects participation in the life of the congregation. I am inviting you to be part of the group process.

The group will meet eight times between September, 1994 and April, 1995. The sessions will be as follows: one full day (likely morning and afternoon) at the beginning, six monthly sessions of two and one-half hours each, and a final closing event which the group will plan together. It will be important that participants are committed to being part of the entire process.

The group process will include personal reflection and different forms of expression and group interaction. While the leader is responsible to plan for the group, participants will have some input into the content of sessions. On occasion there may be reading material between sessions, but time required outside the group will be minimal.

Data will be gathered in several ways: each participant will complete a written questionnaire during each session, and some group discussions will be audio taped. Participants will be encouraged to keep a journal for their own personal reflection outside the group. With special permission, some artifacts we create may be photographed. The materials collected in this research process will provide the basis for a Doctor of Ministry Thesis at the Toronto School of Theology.

Confidentiality will be important throughout the process. The findings and ongoing process of this study will be discussed from time to time with the Ministry Base Group or with members of my Thesis Committee, but without using participants' names. In the written thesis or other materials, such as articles or reports to the congregation, identifying information will be altered.

If you are interested in participating in this group, I would like to talk with you about questions or concerns you might have. I hope that this will be an enjoyable growth opportunity for all of us. I expect that our experience together will also enrich the life and creativity of our congregation.

Sincerely,
Appendix III

SHOWING OUR COLOURS: SELF-DIFFERENTIATION IN A CONTEMPORARY URBAN MENNONITE CONGREGATION

Muriel Bechtel - Doctor of Ministry Project

Participants' Consent Form

Guarantees to Participants

The material gathered in this research process will be confidential. Participants will not be named in the Thesis, and remarks or artifacts will not be included with any identifying information. The written material, tapes, and transcripts of the meetings will be used only for the purposes of this research project, and will be destroyed following the successful oral defense of the Thesis.

Commitment of the Participants

I have read this letter and agree to the terms of the research as they are described. I agree to keep the group’s proceedings confidential. I agree to the recording of personal responses and artifacts by the leader through questionnaires, audio tape or photograph, with the understanding that they will not be quoted or published with any identifying information.

To the best of my knowledge, I will be available for the duration of the group process.

I agree to participate in the group process under the above conditions.

Name of Participant: __________________________

Signature of Participant: _______________________

Signature of Leader: __________________________

Date: _______________________


Selected Bibliography


APPENDIX B: SESSION OUTLINES

Introductory Event: "All in the Family"

DATE: September 24, 1994, 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Since the group members all knew each other by name, I asked them to choose a member of their family of origin and introduce themselves to the group as that person would. They were encouraged to choose someone they felt safe with telling us about them.

Note: Confidentiality - Confidentiality means that I am free to tell others outside the group what is happening to me in the group and beyond, but not what is happening or told by others in the group. That is their story to tell and not anyone else's.

2. Introduction to basic systems theory and concepts

I described some of the basic characteristics of systems thinking by comparing them to our usual way of seeing and interpreting behaviour and events. This section also included a definition of self-differentiation along with a description of behaviours that would characterize a differentiated person.

Using coloured play dough I created a "family" where the different pieces and colours were squeezed and stuck together so that they could not be separated. Then we compared it with a circle of balls of various shapes, sizes, and colours created by the members of the group. In this "family" people were able to be far apart or closer together, even touching, but not necessarily stuck together.

3. Break

4. Create Your Family Tableau

Each person in the group created a "family tableau" assigning other members of the group to be specific members of their family of origin in the tableau. They were encouraged to be aware of the following factors in creating their tableau:

- closeness and distance between the various members
- who were the "big people" and who the "little people"
- was your family flexible or rigid? What about individual members?
- would you describe your family as serious or playful?
- was your family more "head" or "heart" oriented? What about individual members?
5. Lunch

6. It Happened on the Way to...

Group members spent 20 minutes alone, with paper and pencil, to do this part of the exercise. They were asked to choose an incident or issue that changed the arrangement of their family tableau for a time. They were encouraged to choose one that felt safe to talk about, which might not necessarily be the one that they thought was most difficult or most significant. They reflected on the following questions:

- Where did it happen? (e.g. what was the setting; what happened around, before, and after it?)
- What did you see? (e.g. describe the event and how it changed your family.)
- How did you experience it? (e.g. what were your reactions?)

After 20 minutes, group members were asked to turn over their papers and take 5 minutes to note on the other side those things they felt free to tell the rest of the group. This was to encourage them to choose which parts of their story they would disclose to the others.

I tried to be explicit with the group about trusting them to deal with the personal issues that arise for them in the group, i.e. to know and to ask when they need help in processing them, and to choose where they need to ask for that help. I was aware of the possibility that I might get drawn out of the researcher role and into the pastoral.

7. Closure

My intention was to have group members introduce themselves again, this time speaking in their own voice and reflecting on the following: what one new discovery have you made about yourself and/or your family today?

We ran out of time and so spent the final part of the day deciding about meeting times, getting signatures on Consent Forms, talking about journals and other housekeeping details.

I chose not to use the tape recorder for any part of this day, and felt that had been a good choice, given the nature of the information and sharing that day.
First Group Session: "Let's Sing!"

Date: October 23, 1994, 8:00 - 10:30 p.m.
Location: May's house

Group Goal: to have participants recognize how they are influenced in their ability to be differentiated when they encounter differences in the group.

Preparatory Exercise: (10-15 minutes)
1) Sing together "Just As I Am."
   a) Use the small piece of paper, and a number or a colour to record your response to this song.
   b) What memories, images, sensory messages does this song recall for you?
   c) How have your responses to this song changed during the course of your life? What happened to change your response?

Main Activity: One hour of singing songs chosen by group members


Each person in turn chooses a song that he or she especially likes from one of the books. Each has the opportunity to ask the group to sing the song they chose. They may also ask the group to sing it in a certain way and are encouraged to tell the group why they chose their song.

Others record responses to each song on small pieces of paper, giving a score between 1 and 10. After hearing each person's reasons for choosing their song and after singing it in the group, each person scores it again. Then they share with the group how they responded to the song and how or if their responses changed.

Break and Written Responses to Questionnaire: (30 minutes)

Group Reflection Time: (30 minutes)

What was the group exercise like for you? What was easiest? Most difficult? Do you have any reflections or observations you want to share with the others after filling out your questionnaire?

Closure: Sing Benediction - "May the blessing of God" by Medical Mission Sisters
Second Group Session: "Choosing Topics"

Date: November 13, 1994
Place: Warden Woods Church and Community Centre

Group Goals: 1. To decide, using a modified consensus model, what topics we will address during our group meetings.

2. To raise our awareness of the choices we make in deciding to offer or withhold our opinions in the group’s decision making process, the effect, and where we learned that behaviour.

Materials: flip chart, markers, questionnaires, tape recorder

Preparatory Activity:

A. Leader’s reflections on first session  1:10-1:15 p.m.

It seemed important to convey to group members some appreciation and suggestions about the information they generated on the questionnaires since a number of them questioned their ability to meet my expectations.

B. Group Goals Explain goals and rationale  1:15-1:20 p.m.

We bring to any group process our own deeply ingrained habits and strongly held beliefs about how group decisions ought to be made. Often we learn these from our families, and also through our experiences in school, church or work settings.

C. Co-operative Game  1:20 - 1:30 p.m.

Number off the participants to create two groups of four.

Players - Set up three chairs in a triangle with one person on each and a fourth person in the centre.

The second group of four are Observers - each choose one of the others to observe.

Instructions to entire group: Goal - to change chairs as many times as you can;
- the key is that you need to cooperate if you want to improve your own score;
- no talking;
- Observers will count the number of times their player sits on another chair;
Special instructions given only to Observers: In addition to counting, I want you to observe how they get their moves, i.e. what tactics and strategies they use.

Feedback instructions: Observers give feedback to the persons they were observing. When giving feedback, use "I" statements.

Groups switch roles and repeat the process.

Main Group Activity: Until 2:30 p.m.

Brainstorming - give group members opportunity to contribute their ideas and record them on a flip chart. As the leader I was prepared to add some ideas as well, but they generated enough of their own.

Using coloured markers, ask everyone to indicate their top three choices, and explain your reasons to the group.

After hearing others' ideas, people were given a chance to change their choices. People were then asked to give their response using the "high five" signal to their preferred combination, or given the chance to suggest we needed more discussion, information, or time to decide.

Code for "high five" on flip chart:

5. I can give an unqualified yes to the decision. I’m excited and enthusiastic about it.

4. I can live with the decision. It’s OK with me.

3. I have concerns about this decision but will not block the group.

2. I think there are major problems with the decision and choose to block the group’s action at this point.

1. It’s too soon to make any decision. More work needs to be done before the question can be asked.

Break and Questionnaires: 2:30 - 3:15

Group Reflection Time and Closure: 3:15 - 3:45

Focusing question: How was this process for you? Did this process make it easier or harder for you to participate actively in the decision-making process? How?
Third Group Session: "How We Disagree"

Date: December 13, 1994, 8:00 - 10:30 p.m.
Place: Warden Woods Church and Community Centre

Group Goals: 1. To discover some of our differences and encourage their expression through focussing on the question chosen by the group at the last session.

2. To learn to identify some of our ways of dealing with conflict and where we learned them.

Materials Needed: white board, markers, small pieces of blank paper, basket, tape recorder, tapes, refreshments.

Process:

1. Brainstorming (8:00 - 8:30 p.m.)

- hand out 2 or 3 small pieces of white paper to each person.
- ask them to write on top of each paper one of the reasons they think might be cause to leave the church or have heard directly from someone else that left.
- do not use any names because we will be listing the reasons for everyone to see.
- no discussion at this point, only questions of clarification.

- Each person gives one reason to place on list. Persons can add second and third reasons after everyone has had an opportunity to add one.

- Write a scenario (maximum two sentences) of what might have happened to cause a person to leave for this particular reason.

- Fold and place scenarios in basket.

2. Role Playing (8:30 - 9:30 p.m.) Approximately 20 minutes per role play

Preparations:

a) Volunteer chooses one of these scenarios to act out with the rest of us. If choose one you cannot do you may put it back and take another. (Affirm person for taking the risk of being first).

b) Volunteer identifies the role he or she wants other persons in the group to take in order to hear and respond to his/her concerns, e.g. Care Team,
Coordinating Council, pastor, Finance Committee, group of friends, etc.

c) Volunteer may also choose a "shadow" who will sit next to him or her - can take a break to talk to "shadow" when not sure what to say next. The rest of the group will not address the "shadow" unless directed to do so by the leader.

d) Others - be aware of your own feelings and opinions in the role you have been assigned, but express them through your role.

(Affirm! Affirm! Affirm! for taking risks)

Role Play - 5-10 min.

Debriefing Stand up, take (shake) off your role, move to another area of the room.

How did it feel being in your role?

What were some of the different ways you saw people respond in this situation of conflict? How was that like your own response? How different?

To volunteer and shadow: Are you are out of your roles?

3. Questionnaires: 9:30 - 10:00 p.m.

4. Discussion 10:00 - 10:20 p.m.

What did you discover about yourself and conflict?

Do you see conflict as a danger (to be afraid of) or an opportunity (to be excited about)? Where did you learn that?

5. Closure 10:20 - 10:30 p.m.
Fourth Group Process:

DATE: January 5, 1994
PLACE: Warden Woods Church and Community Centre

GROUP GOALS: 1. To encourage the expression of differences through a role play focussing on people leaving the church because of concern for their youth.

2. To explore further some of our ways of dealing with conflict and how they influence our interactions.

MATERIALS: scenario, tape recorder, refreshments, questionnaires.

PROCESS: 8-8:15 Introducing the evening.

We will spend the whole evening on one scenario to give us more time to get into the dynamics of the role play.

One end of the room will be the stage for the role play. Occasionally - "cut" the role play and take a short break. Move to the chairs in the other end of the room, and then move back "on stage" to continue the role play.

First we will decide together what will be the setting of this role play - e.g. backyard barbecue ** (This was chosen)
  church potluck
  family birthday party, etc.

What group/mix of people do you want this to be? church people who are concerned? **(This one was chosen.) primarily family? mixture of neighbours and work colleagues who are friends of your family?

8:20-8:30 Owning the Concern

Each person in the group, beginning with the one whose suggestion it was, reads the scenario as written, and identifies what past or present experiences they bring to this issue. Each one then passes on the paper with the scenario written on it. In this way the group begins to identify how the issue is also their own.

8:30-8:45 Choosing Roles

Who are some of the people who might be interested, have stakes or vested interests in this question? e.g. teens, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters,
other adults with younger children, yourself.

Choose a role, and introduce yourself to the group
- e.g. male or female, age, who is part of your circle (though they may be absent). Why did you come to this meeting?

8:45-9:15 Role Play

Watch for: When the process seems stuck, take a break. Encourage players try to be aware of what’s happening for them? What’s coming up for you? Try to play that out, exaggerate it. This is a safe place to overreact.

When I see participants holding back - cut - ask them to replay that scene, exaggerate the anger, practice what that would be like.

If people seem to be backing down - do a time change - pick it up three months or two hours later - builds intensity.

If intensity gets too scary for leader - consciously take a mental step back, reminding myself I’m directing a drama so that I can be relaxed enough to let it play itself out.

Watch the process - i.e. how people express themselves, how they experience the role, voice their concerns, frame their comments, put across their information.

If someone is being the "placator" or "pleaser" - freeze everyone else - ask them what they would really like to say.

9:15-9:30 Debriefing - Move off stage. Debrief whole group, going around circle. What do you need to be able to move out of role? If someone got angry, debrief both the recipient and the angry person. If someone expressed intense emotion, debrief not only the one who cried, but also the one who caused the tears.

9:30-10:00 p.m. Questionnaires

10:00-10:20 p.m. Focussing Questions
Who would you like to get together with for a discussion next time? What would you like to talk with them about? What might be some of the differences in rules for behaviour from this setting to that kind of gathering?

10:20-10:30 p.m. Closure, setting dates for next meeting.
Fifth Group Process: "Our Many Selves"

DATE: February 16, 1995

PLACE: Warden Woods Church and Community Centre

GROUP GOALS: 1. To recognize and give voice to the different parts within themselves in relation to the crisis created by the investigation in our congregation.

2. To connect between our present feelings and reactions and other times and events in our lives.

MATERIALS: crayons, pastels, paper, tape and recorder, refreshments, questionnaires.

PROCESS:

8:00-8:15 Welcome, Introduce the evening.

We will use art media, so to "warm up" take a large piece of paper. As I name a feeling or response, choose a crayon and draw it. Use different parts of the page, or draw feelings on top of each other.

8:15 - 9:00 Art Media

During this current situation there are many very different reactions happening in the congregation, often conflicting with each other. I think that there is always a danger that we become locked into seeing things from only one perspective.

Often we experience divisions or conflicts or opposites "inside" as well as "outside" ourselves. We will use our group time to "differentiate" between the conflicting feelings we have inside ourselves.

1. At the top of art paper, on the left half of the page, write down three feelings or reactions that you have most often about the present situation in our congregation.

2. Choose three that are quite different - perhaps the first two that you felt, and then your most intense feeling right now.

3. Choose one colour for each feeling, draw on the page one simple geometric or symbolic shape to represent each feeling or reaction.
4. On the opposite half of the page, write what you consider to be the mirror opposite of those feelings or reactions.

5. Draw those three mirror feelings on your page, either around the edges or incorporated into the drawing.

6. Take 2-3 minutes and reflect on your picture quietly. What other situation or experience in your life does it remind you of?

7. As you look at the picture, think about each feeling or reaction and how it relates to that other experience. What is familiar? What is different? Do the same with the mirror reactions.

8. Before you tell the group about the other situation, think about what you feel able to tell about and how. Make some notes on the back to guide your sharing.

   What did you learn in that other situation that might be of help to you now?

9:00 - 9:30 Tell about pictures from the past.

   Pass around a "talking stone." This is not a time to ask each other for a lot of details or make evaluative comments, but to listen and recognize the very many different parts of each of us that are triggered or brought back into focus for us through this kind of crisis.

   At the end of each person's picture: "Is there anything you need from the group or from me before you pass the 'talking stone' on to the next person?"

9:30 - 10:00 Questionnaires

10:00 - 10:25 Group Picture

   Take one piece of paper and draw a group picture - each of you draw yourselves on this picture, indicating by your drawing how you see yourself in relation to the rest of the group after this evening's experience. Sign your name, using artistic license if you wish.

10:25 - 10:30 Closure

   Set dates for Meeting #6, and suggest they come with ideas about what group might do for a wrap-up session.
Sixth Group Process:

DATE:    March 23, 1995 (1:00 - 3:30 p.m.)

PLACE:   Warden Woods Church and Community Centre

GROUP GOALS:  1) To explore at non-verbally the dynamics of self-differentiation.
              2) To have an enjoyable time rather than dealing with heavy, impossible-to-resolve issues.

MATERIALS: questionnaires, musical rhythm instruments, a set of Tibetan or other unique bells, refreshments, tape recorder.

PROCESS:  1:00 - 1:15 p.m.  Housekeeping Discussion

Leader expresses hopes for the wrap-up session: to celebrate, to hear from members of the group whether this experience in exploring self-differentiation has been useful.

  e.g. What, if any, effect has your experience in this group had on the way you interact in the congregation? In your family? In other settings? What would have made this experience more useful for you?

Group sets date and suggests activity.

Reminder: DON'T REOPEN THIS AGAIN! IF RELATED ISSUES COME UP, DEAL WITH THEM NEXT TIME!

Present goals for today’s session to the group.

1:15 - 1:25 p.m.  Preparatory Activity

   Give a noisemaker to each member of the group and ask them to start making a noise with it. Interrupt the group noise by ringing the Tibetan bells.

Stop the group noise.  Ring the bells again.

Leader makes following statement: "Sometimes we need to create silence so that we can be heard."

1:25 - 2:15 p.m.  Rhythm Exercise
1. Everyone choose an instrument. Leader starts a rhythm, and going around the circle consecutively, I will invite one person at a time to start their own rhythm with their instrument, until we are all part of the "music".

2. Anyone who wants to break into the sound and start a new round may do so by sweeping their hands across the middle of the circle, and then starting with their own new rhythm and/or a new instrument. Others join in with the new rhythm as they are ready.

3. Do this several times, so everyone has a chance to cut in.

4. At least once stop the group and have them all change instruments.

2:15 - 2:45 p.m. Questionnaires

2:45 - 3:15 p.m. Reflection on the Experience

1. How was this experience for you? You may want to use an instrument to describe your experience instead of words.

2. What was the most uncomfortable or difficult for you?

3. What was the most exhilarating, exciting or interesting?

3:15 - 3:30 p.m. Ritual of Closure for Research Process

Tear a questionnaire up into shreds and put it into the centre of the room. Group participants each choose one of the rhythm instruments and gather around the shredded questionnaire. Each one creates a rhythm and joins the group’s circle dance to express how they are now at the end of this process.

What if people get really resistant and don’t want to make music?

Turn the process back to them and let them decide how they want to shape this closure.

If they begin to really shake stuff back at leader to get rid of it - shake it back to them, responding to their level of intensity.

The leader may do her own closure with the process after others leave.
Final Session: Wrap-Up for Action in Ministry

DATE: May 7, 1995

PURPOSE:

1) To acknowledge what has been of value to each of us from this group experience by identifying some ways in which it has affected the way we are in our relationships with others;

2) To identify what has been useful and what has been less useful;

3) To bring closure to our time together and acknowledge each person's participation.

PROCESS:

I reviewed with the group the characteristics of a differentiated person which I had presented in the introductory session.

We discussed how relevant the concept of differentiation is with the current events and level of anxiety in the congregation, and how much difficulty people are having being both connected and differentiated.

So, while it may be more difficult now, it is also more important to be differentiated and connected, to accept responsibility for ourselves and our own needs, our own thoughts and actions.

Personal (45 minutes)  1:30 - 1:45 - 2:15 p.m.

1) Think back to the family you sculpted on the first day in the group. Using the material here, create a card that you could take home to one member of that family as a "show and tell" from your experience in this group. What is different for you now than it was eight months ago, or what happened for you here?

With crayons and markers create a personalized "signature" on the front of your card. Who would you show or tell it to?

SHOW AND TELL the group about your signature, who you will show it to, and why.

2) Is there anything you wish you were "taking home?" What keeps you from that? i.e. what is the cost? Put a logo on the back to represent what you would like to be able to take home, but have not been able to. Put the cost in small print or symbols underneath the logo.
Group Closure (2:15 - 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.)

1) Using the flip chart, list what were the useful parts of the group experience for you. What were the least useful.

2) What would you like from me in terms of sharing my analysis of this "action in ministry" process with all of you?

3) Thank you from the leader.
APPENDIX C: CODE LISTS

September 28/95

Listing of Codes

a  Knew when asked - knew own opinions or feelings when asked
b  Unsure in new or unfamiliar territory
c  Disclosure with agreement
d  Choose to hold back
   i  anger/irritation
   ii disagreement
   iii sadness or hurt
   iv uncertainty or curiosity
   v  fear
   vi no indication why

e  Desire for change
   i  In self
   ii In others

f  Choose to remain silent
   i  fear of saying too much (taking too much time)
   ii fear of exposing/hurting others
   iii not important
   iv concern about what others might think
   v  fear of getting 'clouted'/hurt
   vi so many others speaking already

g  Voiced disagreement/criticism
h  Unaware of disagreement (this category ended up empty)
i  Aware of others' response
   i  Respect
   ii positive and negative
   iii negative only
   iv positive only
   v  probing/clarifying
   vi silence - observed others' silence

j  Comfortable with silence

k  Feeling connected
   i  By shared activity
   ii By feelings
   iii by humour
   iv because of others' participation
   v  because of own participation
   vi by common history or experience

l  Feeling disconnected
   i  different history or experience
   ii by feelings
   iii not contributing
   iv because of others' participation
v because of own participation
vi not enough time
m Thinks of alternatives
i for self
ii for others
n Compares with church/groups
i what happened
ii feelings
iii makeup of participants
iv own behaviour
v others’ behaviour
vi setting
o Compares with family
i what happened
ii feelings
iii makeup of family
iv own behaviour
v others’ behaviour
p Selective sharing
i expresses feelings
ii shares past experiences
iii agreement
iv concern about what others think
v concern for group process
vi concern for talking too much
q Appreciation for leader
i as leader
ii as participant
r Requests of leader
i more of same
ii other behaviour
s Feels trust in group
t Confidence when expressing self
i when responding to someone who agrees
ii responding to someone who disagrees or is quite certain
iii when given permission or invited
u Feeling unheard/misunderstood
v Confident of own contribution/participation
w Aware of nonverbal
i own stuff
ii others’ stuff
x Knowing own opinions/feelings
y Aware of change in self
z n/a or blank
aa Uncertain expressing self
   i initial
   ii when probed further
   iii quickly
   iv when focussed on others
bb Wanting to please
cc Minimizing difference/disagreement
dd Concern for others
ee Cut-off
ff Tried to reach understanding (with another person)
gg Difficulty with task
hh Looking for positive
   ii Indicated agreement
jj Uneasy with silence
kk Used humour
ll Reactive
mm Familiar patterns
nn Competition/comparison with others
oo 'Self-talk'
pp Feedback to another
   i encouraging
   ii critical
qq Clarifying statement/question
rr Intimidated by research
ss
   Critical of self
   i accepting responsibility for own behaviour
   ii self-blame
uu Felt prepared
   i advance information
   ii prior thought
   iii clarity
vv Felt confused
ww Inviting another to talk
xx Giving advice/offering solutions
yy Effects of anxiety
zz Need for resolution
aaa Taking initiative/charge/risk
bbb System observation
ccc
ddd Looking for approval
ee Looking for approval
fff Blaming others
ggg Taking in nurture
Unaware of being silent
Unaware of responses to others' silence
Apologetic
Unsolicited disclosure
Expressed regrets
Wanting feedback
Disinterested
Changing focus of conversation
Soliciting support
Appreciation for process
Suggestions
Feeling responsible
Relocating responsibility

List of Categories
November 6/95 (for participants)

Nonverbal
  Aware of nonverbal
  Aware of responses

Comparisons with other settings
  Church
  Family

Putting Forward
  Knowing own opinions/feelings
  Knew when asked
  Confident of own contribution
  Voiced disagreement
  Disclosure with agreement (or validation)
  Confidence expressing
  Indicated agreement

Change
  Desire for change - self/others
  Change in self/others
  Thinks of alternatives - for self/others
  Self-talk

Systems observations
Connected - Disconnected
   Feeling connected
   Feeling disconnected
   Cut-off

Holding Back
   Hold back
   Choose to remain silent
   Selective sharing

Uneasy with disagreement
   Uncertain with disagreement
   Uncertain expressing self
   Critical of self

Familiar patterns

Reactive

Wanting feedback
   Looking for approval
   Soliciting support
   Wanting feedback

Preparation
   Felt confused
   Feeling prepared
   Unsure in unfamiliar
   Intimidated by research

Thinking of others
   Feedback to another
   Inviting another to talk
   Concern for others

Taking initiative

Comments re Leader
   Requests of Leader
   Appreciation for Leader
   Wanting to please

No response
Comments re group and process
   Appreciation for process
   Need for resolution
   Feels trust in group
   Suggestions
   Effects of anxiety

Clarifying statements/question

Regrets
   Apologetic

Blaming

Reactive

Used humour

Competition/comparison

List of Categories (For leader)

Sorting Out
   Whose issue?
   Clarifying responsibility
   Feeling responsible
   Relocating responsibility

Reactions
   Reactive
   Blaming
   Apologetic

Nurture
   Taking in nurture
   Positive encouragement

Looking for validation
   Wanting feedback
   Looking for approval

Holding back
   Hold back
Voiced disagreement
Desire for change
Selective sharing

Knowing self
Knowing own opinions/feelings
Feeling disconnected

Change
Change in self
Uncertain expressing self
Thinks of alternatives

Church-family comparisons

Concern for others
Concern for others
Looking for positive
Minimizing difference
Feedback to another

Agreement - disagreement
Uncertain with disagreement
Disclosure with agreement

Confidence
Confidence expressing
Confident of contribution
Unsure in unfamiliar

Self-criticism
Critical of self
Regrets
Aware of nonverbal

Familiar patterns

Taking initiative

System observations

Clarifying statements/questions
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Guide for Research Participants

Because we ran out of time in the last meeting of our research group, I would like to schedule a final interview with each of you who participated. I want to find out more about if and how you see this group process affecting your participation in the Warden Woods congregation.

For your information, my Problem Statement in my Research Proposal was:

_In my action in ministry I will explore how encouraging self-differentiation of participants in a group process affects their participation in a contemporary urban Mennonite congregation._

So that you can give this some thought ahead of time, the following are questions I would like to discuss with you:

1. Now that you have been through this group process, how has your ability to know and function according to your feelings and opinions in the congregation changed? Give examples.

2. What have you discovered that you can do enhance your freedom and be less reactive to others’ responses? How much does this matter to you?

3. Have there been any changes over the past 8-9 months in how connected you are with others in the congregation? Did the changes coincide with emerging or resolving differences? How important is this to you?

4. Does your ability to be different yet connected with people in the congregation in any way reflect the way you are different and connected in your family of origin? Give examples. How would you change this, if you could?

5. Were you free to have or express differences with the leader throughout the process? What makes that easier? more difficult? Is that how it is for you in the congregation?

6. Based on your observations, what suggestions do you have regarding encouraging persons in this congregation to explore their own self-differentiation?
APPENDIX E: ESSAY ON RESEARCHER BIAS

Essay on Conceptual Baggage

In order to try to identify some of my conceptual baggage or biases, I've decided to write this brief essay identifying some of the things I looked for and expected to find in the research process. These observations are drawn from transcripts of the group discussions as well as from my recall of what I was hoping to accomplish which is also reflected somewhat in my group goals.

I know I intentionally looked for differences - those occasions when people openly disagreed with each other or challenged each other, and other times when they held back the expression of differences. Though I gave lip service to the fact that self-differentiation and connectedness belong together, I realize that I looked less for times when participants felt connected or included (which could include being affirmed or encouraged for their contribution). I think I tended to look more for expressions of disagreement than agreement as evidence of self-differentiation. I also tended to separate the evidences of self-differentiation from the evidences of connection rather than looking for how they relate to each other.

As I went through the transcripts this last time, however, I became aware that it was often only with encouragement or a direct invitation that certain people volunteered their opinions. Even people who volunteered their perspectives often needed encouragement or an invitation to probe a little deeper or to define more clearly their perspectives. That meant that differences sometimes became sharper, and both the ones giving and the ones receiving might need affirmation for their response to the other. On a few occasions I found ways to encourage others to give that feedback and affirmation, but often it was me. I also noticed that as the research process progressed, I began to encourage some more than others.

I began with a notion that self-differentiated leadership meant knowing what I wanted to accomplish and giving enough direction to the process to insure that it would happen. As I look back now I realize that at some earlier points I controlled the process quite rigidly and disclosed very little of myself in the group. In those sessions, people noticed and made mention of the few times when I disclosed any opinions/feelings. I was so determined to direct the process without letting my own agenda dominate that they seemed to be left wondering where I was in all this.

As I look back now, I think I became more effective as a leader in later sessions when I controlled less and entered into the conversation more. I found that after describing the process with clear guidelines and goals, I was able to let it flow more naturally and spontaneously. With occasional comments I was still able at times to encourage others to speak out or go deeper or explore other directions and at other times to express my own viewpoints. I noticed that in the
first group session, when I failed to tell the others what my purpose was for the exercise we did, one of the group members asked me at the end of the evening what I was trying to accomplish (i.e. she invited me to define myself).

I realize that I went into the research process assuming that there would be rules, insider-outsider dynamics, and power issues that would keep some people from participating as freely as others. I wanted to discover what some of those were. Although I wanted to encourage the ones who are often quiet to be more courageous and to speak out more, I still began with some assumptions (from my liberation theology background) that the first and most important step was to get the ones who are often seen as leaders or more powerful ones (those who are often thought to benefit most from the status quo) to be willing to give up some of their benefits or advantages.

However, as I have continued to reflect on my own experience as a person who is often quite outspoken and a leader, I have observed that it's not quite that straightforward. The benefits derived from the status quo are not all one-sided. Those who avoid taking risks and accepting responsibility by remaining silent also derive some benefits that they may be just as unwilling to give up. Therefore, in true systems fashion, I realized that it is a shared responsibility to change those patterns. I realized that as I read the questionnaires and realized how oblivious most of us are to the effects of our behaviours and how others are reacting and responding to them. As a leader I have to take more risks than some others do. I need occasional affirmation for those risks, and at the same time I need to hear from others what changes I might make so that it would be easier for them to participate. Those who express themselves freely often need to be encouraged to listen more, and those who express themselves with more difficulty need to be encouraged to value their own perspectives. They need to be encouraged to leave behind some of the safety that comes with remaining silent and to risk speaking out of their experience.

Another part of my conceptual baggage that I bring to all this is that I often operate almost instinctively with the assumption that feelings are of paramount importance (consistent with my Myers-Briggs personality profile). However I have been learning that there is some wisdom in the fact that systems theory is less interested in feelings than in behaviours and patterns of action and response. I have had to work hard at trying to observe people's actions and behaviours and what responses they elicit rather than focussing on trying to interpret feelings so much of the time. I even got into an argument in one of the group discussions as to whether a person was expressing an opinion or a feeling, when the other person's issue was really whether people were listening or not. She was actually asking more of a systems question than I was. I'm still working at "dethroning" feelings as primary motivators. I continue to maintain that feelings are important clues to the health of a system, but they are not the only and often not even the
most reliable indicators of what needs to change to make the system more life-giving for all.

Another piece of conceptual baggage that I carry is the belief that is important to be concerned about others’ stuff, even if you end up losing touch with your own. In fact, being willing to sacrifice self is virtuous. I guess that is based partially on my own experience. This struggle has many roots, including my experience as a woman and mother and my Mennonite church background. All of these taught me to be "for God and others" first, and that to be "for self" was selfish and somehow in opposition to the others. They were not all equally good. I grew up feeling I had to choose, and the better choice was obvious. I was not encouraged to value both equally so that I could move between them as the situation required. One was good and the other was sinful.

I think, sometimes in my efforts to learn to value self I tend to do the reverse - to see self-differentiation as good, and concern for others as distracting me from that good. And so I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the qualities and behaviours associated with "love of God and others" and "love of self" often appeared in the same person, and that they seemed to go together rather than to cancel each other out. It seems so obvious, but it challenged a piece of baggage that clings like dust to my feet.

Another piece of baggage I carried is that I expected to see certain rules for interactions at church, and that they would be similar to those many of us learned at home and at work. I expected that each of us carries inside us a list of unspoken rules about what we may argue and differ about at church and how and with whom, rules which are formed through our early childhood experiences, both in church and in family. I expected the rules at church to include:

1) We talk nicely and hide our real feelings if we disagree, (because direct honesty hurts others too much and might result in someone leaving or withdrawing from the relationship);
2) We avoid openly questioning someone else’s behaviour even if it hurts us, because loving someone means accepting him/her just the way he/she is: "Well, that’s just the way he/she is, you know."
3) We avoid defining ourselves because that might pose a threat to the tolerance of our diversity and differences.
4) 'Big' people should take care of 'little' people because they are unable to take care of themselves. (When carried to its ultimate conclusion, this means that some 'little' people are never encouraged to become 'big' people, and some 'big' people lose the ability to recognize or let others know when they feel 'little'.)

I began with the rather simplistic assumption that self-differentiation meant
encouraging everyone to just "be themselves." But our journey as a congregation has brought into stark relief the fact that one person's decision to "be who I am" may encroach on others' freedom to "be who they are." Among some peers, the phrase, "colouring outside the lines" had been a familiar image to describe the freedom to risk going into new territory and trying out new ways of thinking and behaving rather than being bound by old ways of doing things. However the phrase has taken on new meaning for me as I've seen what can happen when one person "colours outside the lines" and damages the space that belonged to someone else. That has been the experience that has forced me to bring "connection" back into the balance with self-differentiation.

I began this study thinking that the opposite of community was individualism. However, more and more I have begun to realize that where community is seen as the highest good and the individual is always secondary, individualism often flourishes.
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