



Chapter 13

The missional congregation in the local context

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Abstract

In this chapter, I reflect on the question: how can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? It suggests that theological students must get practical experience in: learning to know themselves; seeing their community and context, and letting it touch them deeply; understanding the existential questions that hang over their culture and the reasons why things are as they are; reflecting on what they have seen in the light of the Bible and theological tradition, and finding a meaningful response to what they have seen. Lastly, inspiration and dedication are needed. These steps are firstly taken by the students, as preparation for leading a congregation through the same procedure.

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the question: How can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? The focus will be on the local congregation and the community in which it finds itself. It links up with the previous chapter, specifically regarding aspects such as 'context'. ('The content of mission is always

contextually determined since it is God's engagement with people living in a specific context and in a specific time in history.) and 'salvation wholeness'. ('Salvation 'wholeness' comes through confession of sin and repentance, but it has physical, emotional, social, and spiritual implications.') Salvation has comprehensiveness ... It relates to all of a person (Ps 32).

This chapter does not reflect on the questions if or why the church should be involved in such issues. These questions have been dealt with in the previous chapter. Neither do we look at ways in which a congregation can be mobilised to take ownership of the vision of being a missional church – that is dealt with in courses such as a Missional Leadership. The question that is dealt with here is how a congregation, once it has taken ownership of the vision and begins thinking about engaging with a specific issue, can approach it, given the identity and capacity of the given congregation and the nature of the given issue.

Attention will be given to a few key factors that are pertinent to the question of how to engage with complex problems in your community:

- The nature of theology – how we think.
- The lifestyle of the church and its members – how we live.
- The role of the church member in his or her community – what we do.
- What is needed for a church member to play a role in the community – what we need.

The nature of theology

The tradition of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria is to see the study of theology as the study of theological theories that can be found in books and libraries. In this tradition, the study of theology is based on the study of social sciences in general, and the biblical languages in particular, in order to learn basic principles that are supposed to be applied in different contexts afterwards. The

theological studies must be accompanied by the spiritual care of the students, to ensure their maturity as believers. For this, some periods are set aside every week. The students are also supposed to take an active part in their local congregations.

In the 1970s, when I studied theology at this faculty, this view of theology was expressed in the following structure: We first had to attain a BA degree, with Greek 2 and Hebrew 2 as compulsory subjects while Latin 1 was recommended. For the rest, we were free to choose. Philosophy, psychology and sociology were the most popular subjects. The BA degree was followed by three years of theological study, rounded off with one year of working part-time in a congregation, while still studying. This last year was meant as a transition, a bridge, from the study of theology to the application of theological theories and principles in practice.

In this approach, theology is a first-order activity. You first learn theology and then you go out to apply it in practice.

Years later, when I was lecturing part-time at the faculty, I realised how strong this idea still was in the minds of many. An event was organised for the lecturers of the church and the ministers of one of the synods to meet each other. The meeting took place in a nearby church hall. We were asked to sit on the stage; the ministers sat down in the hall. One of the ministers stood up and said that he was very glad for this opportunity, because he is in a rural congregation, far away from what is going on, but the lecturers are in the centre of things, they know what is going on, and he was there to learn from us. The whole event made me very uncomfortable.

Dirkie Smit (2002:99) defends an approach that involves both theology and practice. He maintains that theology is the reflection of faith that wants to understand. It is therefore not mere talk, not mere repetition, but thinking, free, critical thinking, but still afterthought. He also believes that theology is a second-order activity. The primary, first-order activity is the life of the community and tradition, but because the community self-critically wonders if they believe right, speak right, and live right, theological thinking is born.

If the traditional order at the faculty can be described as think- do, Smit proposes the opposite order: do-think.

In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis follows the methodical practice of seeing, judging, and acting. In No. 15 of his encyclical letter, he explains the steps he follows (I have inserted the words 'see', 'judge' and 'act'):

I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows [see]. I will then consider some principles drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which can render our commitment to the environment more coherent. I will then attempt to get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes. This will help to provide an approach to ecology which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings [judge]. In light of this reflection, I will advance some broader proposals for dialogue and action which would involve each of us as individuals, and also affect international policy [act]. (*Laudato si'*, 15)

Francis closes off with 'some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience', which can be seen as part of the activity of Christian life. Without such sincere conviction, we should not expect much activity.

How can this be implemented in a theological course?

Andrew Kirk, a theologian who devoted a lifetime to theological training in South America and England, proposes a model that contains four learning stages that are implemented in a circular process so that one could begin with any one of them. The second, third and fourth stages are more or less the same as Pope Francis' three steps.

Kirk calls the first stage pilgrimage:

The first consists of an initial analysis of what the participants believe, know, understand, and have experienced – that is, their pilgrimage up to the point of embarking on formal theological education ... They will be encouraged to recall and reflect upon their own family life, both past and present, their experience of education, the formation of their values and convictions, likes and dislikes, their attitude toward and involvement in paid work, the process by which they came to Christian faith, and their experience of the church. In this way, they will spend time looking at their individual journeys as human beings and as Christian disciples. The rationale for this first stage is quite simple: it is based on the educational principle that learning best takes place within a consciously recognized process of growth, development, change, and new horizons. (Kirk, 1997:53–56)

This stage could be part of the formal curriculum, but it should be a normal part of every Christian's way of living, to understand yourself and what has made you what you are. And it is of special value for a theological student.

Kirk's second stage is a broadening of the scope of the first stage. He calls it 'cultural and social analysis.' It coincides with Pope Francis' first phase, namely 'drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today'. Formal science is certainly an important resource for the church. But for a local congregation's involvement with its community, an informal type of qualitative research is as important: to see, to be aware, to engage with what is going on, to be present. The congregation and its members are part of the local community, it is also *their* community. They must also interpret their own experience of and relationship with their community.

To get into the habit, theological students can analyse the student culture that prevails at the university and how it influences them, such as focusing on passing the examination rather than on preparing themselves for their calling.

We can call it participatory research, where church leaders and members participate in the life of their local civil society or community, sharing their experiences and reflecting on what it means.

In the traditional theological curriculum of the faculty, there was an element of Kirk's 'cultural and social analysis' in the subjects we took for the BA degree, such as anthropology and philosophy. However, most students did not attach much meaning to these courses. We said we were still in the desert, on our way to the 'Promised Land' of theological study. And when we arrived there, many students also did not see the value of theological studies itself, because they did not see its relevance for the great existential questions that hung over our cultures at the time: maybe because they did not make the effort to penetrate as deeply as possible into these questions. Our theological studies did not expect us to do that: we were there to study theology so that we would be able to apply it to any given context. However, we were not made fluent in interpreting any given context. The result was that many did not see the relevance of theology. What remained was to study to pass the exam, get the degree and be admitted to the ministry. For many, theology did not become an existential journey.

Kirk correctly observes that 'authentic cultural and social analysis is quite a sophisticated procedure', but for everybody, it is part of the art of living to understand what is going on in your own life and context. The theological student, even more than others, must become proficient in interpreting the context, not only the deep existential questions that people struggle with, but also how they try to answer those questions, where all of this comes from, and what that means in the light of the Word of God. This is a life-long journey.

Kirk's third stage is reflection, based on the study of the sources of Christian faith. It is similar to Pope Francis' second step, which we call 'judge'. Francis begins with a survey of the sources of Christian faith and, also, attempts 'to get to

the roots of the present situation, to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes’.

That reminds us of Wilbert R Shenk (1995:71), who maintains that the theological task is always to penetrate as deeply as possible into the great existential question that hangs over a culture. At the same time, a parallel movement must be made into God’s Word.

The fourth and final stage is action. The students should, based on their reflection on the prevailing student culture, ask themselves what they can and should do about it.

The whole process of missional engagement, in which the stages discussed above become one process, has been formulated well in liberation theology, which originated in Latin America in the 1970s. This theology stated that, at least since the time of Constantine, knowledge was seen as the mind’s conformity to a given object, something that is fixed and can be obtained by studying the already acquired knowledge. Liberation theologians, on the other hand, saw knowledge as dialectic: the mind’s immersion in the process of transforming and constructing a world that is still an unfinished project. In this approach, the theologian can no longer, as Barth said in 1933, be a ‘lonely bird on the rooftop’ who surveys its world and its agony from some detached position – the theologian must be involved with people in their daily affairs. At the same time, the main source of theology, apart from Scripture and tradition, was not philosophy anymore but the social sciences, and its main interlocutor was not the educated non-believer but the poor and the culturally marginalised (Bosch, 1994:423–424).

We will have to go one step further than the liberation theologians. With serious threats to the future of life on the planet, it is not enough to have an informed understanding of the social sciences, we also need to understand the role of the natural sciences and the impact of technology on our world. In *Laudato si’*, for example, Francis focuses on the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of human beings and human action in the world (*LS*, 101). In No. 112 he says:

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We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production, and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation and community. Or when technology is directed primarily to resolving people's concrete problems, truly helping them live with more dignity and less suffering. (LS, 112)

Not only philosophers and sociologists, but engineers, agricultural scientists and economists have become important for the mission of the church, together with those who live in a given context and know it from the inside.

The lifestyle of the church and its members

Over the past few centuries, modern missions have believed that modern culture is the fruit of the gospel, it is the way a Christian should live. It was seen as a better lifestyle than that of other cultures.

The mood was:

It was the gospel which had made the Western nations strong and great; it would do the same for other nations In the period following the First World War, one of the most popular missionary texts were the words of Jesus in John 10:10, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' and, says Newbigin ... 'abundant life' was interpreted as the abundance of good things that modern education, healing, and agriculture would provide for the deprived peoples of the world. (Bosch, 1994:293)

One of the important figures in the history of this faculty, Professor Johan Heyns, developed such an optimistic view of technology. He said that in technology (and other activities, such as art), a human person is not only a creature

but a co-creator with God. In technology, the person confirms his calling to rule over God's creation and rises above nature. In technology, nature is carried into the future, as processed, refined nature. The future form of the kingdom of God is a city, the eternal city of God. The city of God lies somewhere in the extension of the cities in which we live. Our cities are built through technology. Through technology, something of the eternal City of God can already become manifest. Heyns said civilization is a culture that responds to its God-ordained vocation, to rule over nature. In a primitive culture, on the other hand, interaction with nature is still flawed (Heyns, 1972:55; 1974:112, 114, 118, 119–120, 123; 1977:16, 17).

This belief in modernity has lost its power, despite all the good things that modern culture provides. Modernism has also brought fear and alienation. Pope Francis talks of ways in which we can be liberated from the dominant modern technocratic paradigm. There are different reasons for this, such as growing concern about the unsustainable rate at which modern development is using up natural resources and polluting the ecology, to the extent that it becomes a threat to life on the planet. Brian McLaren argues that the United States model of modern society and of development that has developed into the corporate global economy, is not the ideal society but the biggest problem in the world – a global suicide machine (McLaren, 2007:5, 11–12, 52–53).

The second reason is that mental health in the modern world is declining, despite economic growth. In the Introduction to their book (*Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream*, Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kavic 2019) argue that while real income per capita tripled in the US between 1946 and 2014, the self-reported happiness of the average American stayed the same, while measures of physical, social, and psychological health are on the decline. From the late 1930s to the present, a period of sustained economic growth, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems among America's youth have markedly increased. The suicide rate for Americans under age 24 increased by 137 percent from 1950 to 1999 and by an

additional 24 percent from 1999 to 2014 for all age groups combined. The authors conclude:

Research tells us that modern life is not good for mental health,' and yet Americans implicitly believe that they have exactly what the poor need. That is a mistake, warn Fikkert and Kopic: 'The American Dream' is the wrong story, for both poor people and ourselves. (Fikkert & LS, 15 Kopic, 2019)

The mood of the past, as described by Newbigin (see the previous quotation from Bosch above), that the biblical 'fulness of life' can be reached through all the benefits of the modern world, cannot be maintained any longer. Besides, the fullness of life is something more than a good quality of life that is measured by the extent to which fundamental needs are satisfied. The theologian Christopher Wright (2010:93–94) adds the ethical aspect, specifically the Christian ethical aspect. He talks of an ethical quality of life. This addition changes the meaning of the term. Quality of life is not measured only in terms of human needs anymore, even if these needs remain very important. Quality of life is now measured in terms of certain values that cannot be derived only from what we need or want but from what is expected from us – most of all, from what God expects from us.

That was how God intended to reach the nations in the Old Testament, namely for Israel to be a community where all affairs are marked by righteousness and justice in a world of oppression and injustice, and so attract the nations to God. This now applies to the church as the people of God. Wright emphasises:

[T]he ethical quality of life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission. God's intention to bless the nations is inseparable from God's ethical demand on the people he has created to be the agent of that blessing. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics. (Wright, 2010:93, 94)

The Christian's own lifestyle has become a key issue in the church's mission. And we do not uncritically believe that modernity provides the required lifestyle of the Christian anymore.

The calling of the Christian includes the calling of all people to take responsibility for all living creatures and the world as a whole. The biblical message is that humans were made in the image of God: 'In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27) and they were given the task of ruling over creation and caring for it, following God's way of ruling: with justice, kindness and wisdom. It is a calling focused on the natural or secular world. Science and technology can play a role in obeying this call, depending on how it is used and for what purpose.

We conclude this section with the statement in the World Council of Churches document, *Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*:

Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God's mission begins with the act of creation ... We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all of life. (Keum, 2013:9)

We need practices and lifestyles that do not destroy God's creation and harm other people, but that 'express our reconciled relationship with all of life'. Finding a lifestyle that expresses our reconciled relationships has become a key issue in the church's mission. Christians should actively participate in efforts to develop such practices in and around our own homes, our communities and our work.

The role of the church member in his or her own context

In a given community, also our working community, people of all backgrounds and religions have certain common concerns, and in crucial respects, we share a common destiny. We are all

affected by issues such as crime, pollution, climate change, war, pandemics, service delivery, driving behaviour, noise, domestic violence and social unrest. We depend on each other to effectively deal with these issues. That, and not our deepest convictions or values, is what we have in common. (see also Van Niekerk, 2022)

In communities and workplaces where people of different backgrounds are present, co-existence requires some level of interaction between groups. Bevans and Schroeder (2009:353, 383) give useful guidelines for Christians' conduct in such contexts: 'First of all, and perhaps most basic, witness is about individuals of faith living their lives in the light of that faith'. And where that includes being involved in your local community and meeting people of other faiths in the process, one could think of the 'dialogue of life' as a fundamental kind of dialogue.

The dialogue of life means that common solutions must be discovered, and developed, pragmatically in an ad hoc way, case by case, where we work together to solve a given common problem or learn to live with it. In such a context, the Christian believer can find a meaningful role as a member of society like anyone else.

In the missionary era, the church did pure church work: it sent missionaries to preach the gospel, win souls and plant churches. The present missional era is based on the insight that the local church itself is sent, not necessarily to go somewhere else, but definitely to its community, its context and networks to work for the reconciliation and reparation of all relationships in and around the local context. The message of the Kingdom of Christ must, like salt and yeast, become an active ingredient in the specific combination of things and thoughts that make each context what it is.

The Christians cannot work for the renewal of all relations on their own; it is not pure church work in the same way in which the formal preaching of the gospel is pure church work. When working for the renewal of all relations, the Christian must work with non-church and non-Christian

people and institutions to engage with the fundamental issues and existential questions of a given context. We will need insights, resources and skills that are not available in the church. We often have to work with people who have different values and aims.

We must learn to do so in a way that is effective and true to our own identity and calling as a church. Working with people of other orientations makes things more complicated, but on the other hand, it allows us to bridge the gap between faith and life. It enables us to meet people who do not know or understand Christianity or the message of the church and provide them with the opportunity to gain such understanding within a relationship of trust, by demonstrating our ethical quality of life – in which we often fail, as Israel did and Christianity has done repeatedly. In the process, we also get an opportunity to talk about Christ.

An interesting feature of our present context is that it is not only Christianity that is changing its understanding of the way it should function in the broader social context. The same is happening in many businesses and industries.

This is an example of an approach where Christianity may find significant common ground with a large business:

In about 2013 the South African insurance giant Santam Group and partners, with partners such as the WWF, proposed a way to deal with the unprecedented and dramatic increases in global environmental risk ‘caused by the interaction of a number of systemic factors, including climate change which was identified as the top risk by likelihood and impact combined’ (Shearing, 2011:5).

The Eden District Municipality in the Southern Cape was taken as a case study. It was found that the number of extreme events such as wildfires and flooding had increased in recent years, possibly caused by higher winter and spring temperatures in this area. This has led to huge costs for residents and the insurance industry. The second major finding was that local human-induced changes, such as the density of invasive alien trees and ‘changes to land cover and

the buffering capacity of ecosystems were of equal or greater importance in driving increasing risks, when compared to climate change' (Shearing, 2011:5).

The assessment of future risk has been the industry's main way of managing risk, but that has become more and more impossible to do due to the instability of the global system, including the impact of climate change. The study concludes that the insurance industry should complement its assessment of future risk with effective proactive risk management, targeted at the drivers of risk. To do proactive risk management effectively, the industry would have to convince the authorities, businesses and civil society to acknowledge the existence of shared risk and to move towards shared response or creating 'shared value' (Shearing, 2011:12). Reducing risk would benefit all parties involved, be it clients, communities, the insurance industry or governments.

This policy document has not been implemented so far, but in June 2017, bushfires destroyed huge areas of land and large parts of the scenic town Knysna, one of the towns in the municipal area that the Santam document dealt with; 600 families lost their homes, seven people were killed. Some 28 fires were reported in the area on 8 June alone. One resident remarked that it was like a war zone. The resident reported that there was no life left there, just death – no butterflies, no birds, no nothing. The fire took many people's livelihoods away – people who were once employed by the big hotels in the area that had burned down. Such events have become more frequent in this part of the world.

It would be instructive to make a calculation of what the implementation of the Santam policy would have cost, and what all stakeholders could have saved in this fire and several others in the area. A paper that was published in *Science*, 'How to Pay for Saving Biodiversity', states that globally, coastal wetland protection could lower annual flood damage, saving the insurance industry up to US\$52bn (Barbier et al., 2018).

Taking part in partnerships with a business like Santam, if they should implement the guidelines in their document,

to promote the common good or shared value can be a way in which the church can execute its missional calling. And it will make our involvement much more effective than trying to achieve something on our own, with our limited capacity.

This restored life, the life of the Kingdom, is only possible if the destruction brought about by sin is healed.

The congregation, with each church member, are called to find ways to express our reconciled relationship with all of life: good relationships with God, other people and creation, within the congregation and its surroundings.

How can a congregation play a role in the community?

Theological students must be equipped to guide their particular congregations through the same stages: see, judge, and act. It is good, like Kirk, to add another stage at the beginning: Getting to know yourself. And to end, like Pope Francis, with finding inspiration in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience and the Bible.

Kirk's first stage, pilgrimage, is very relevant for a congregation. A congregation, like an individual believer, must recall and reflect upon their past and present, how they have become what they are, the formation of their values and convictions, likes and dislikes, their attitude toward and involvement in the life and work of the congregation and their community, in their homes and at work. The members, individually and together, must reflect on their journeys as human beings and as Christian disciples. In this way, they will be better able to discern what choices have to be made for the way forward.

Are they caught up in the dominant technocratic paradigm of modern culture? Do they cherish elements of an African culture that are not reconcilable with their Christian faith? Have they submitted to the consumer culture, or perhaps to a culture of chronic poverty? Or are they just withdrawing into themselves, out of fear or out of an unhealthy

individualism, just pursuing their dreams, expecting God to provide them with what they want? Or perhaps allowed some or other collective to determine their identity?

Have they pinned their hopes on fickle powers?

Do they see their faith as something that is exercised in church on Sunday, or are they immersed in the process of transforming and constructing a local community that is still an unfinished project?

Kirk's second stage is to see. Francis started with the best insights of scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply. Using science is vital. As important is being alert to our local context, to see, not merely those things that fit into our frame of thinking, and that confirm our existing opinions, wishes and insights, as happens with confirmation bias, a tendency that has been described as 'fooling ourselves and others' (McSweeney, 2021). It would be characteristic of a missional congregation to be interested in her context, in those who are not involved in the church, who are not interested, or maybe are angry at the church. This congregation would be eager to develop new insights into how its community functions, what is important for them, what they fear, what problems they struggle with, what answers they give, and what keeps them going. Does the congregation have different solutions for the same problems?

In the area where I live, some residents have no idea who their neighbours are, after they have lived next to them for twenty or thirty years. For active church members who have succumbed to this culture, the church is the community they belong to, not their local civil community. This culture must be changed before a congregation can have any value for its civil community.

In the process of penetrating as deeply as possible into the great existential question that hangs over the culture of their community and wider context, a congregation can, over time, develop the habit of discussing and interpreting the affairs of everyday life as they play out in their community, in

the news and the broader church family, and to reflect on it in the light of God's Word – to become a learning community.

A missional congregation will also be interested in other nearby communities. There is hardly a congregation in South Africa that does not have poor communities nearby. We must also see those communities, letting them touch us deeply.

By 2011, 2.01 million children were orphaned as a result of AIDS-related deaths (Breckenridge et al., 2017:503). Things have improved due to anti-retroviral treatment, but the Covid pandemic, and measures to curb it, have added an extra burden. And that isn't all. The Healthy Active Kids South Africa 2018 Report Card reports that 9.1% of 3 to 5-year-old children in South Africa are overweight (this percentage rises sharply in later age groups), while the prevalence of stunting in this age group was particularly high (21.5% stunted, 5.3% severely stunted). Both under and over-nutrition hamper healthy activity and learning (Draper, 2019:134).

Given that the plight of widows and orphans is repeatedly emphasised in the Bible as an issue that must be attended to, for example, in James 1:27. Considering what the future impact would be of large numbers of children who grow up lacking proper care, one would have expected that the churches and Christians in the country would have responded very diligently to the plight of millions of vulnerable children in the country. There is, however, a frightening lack of concern in large sectors of the church and society as a whole.

We only see what we want to see, what fits into our wishes and our framework, while we avoid information that makes us uncomfortable.

The same applies to other issues such as climate change and the growing gap between rich and poor.

The aim of seeing is not to overload our minds with dark and heavy information, which leaves us despondent. The aim is to identify an issue that the congregation can do something about, something that is important and meaningful. Pope Francis formulated it well, to repeat:

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I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, *letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.* (LS, 15, author's emphasis)

Pope Francis drew some principles from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and he attempted to get to the roots of the present situation, to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes.

Shenk proposes a parallel movement: to penetrate as deeply as possible into the great existential questions that hang over a culture, with, at the same time, a parallel movement into God's Word. The congregation should reflect on what they have seen in and of their community, in the light of the Word of God – in their Bible study groups, and the church service on Sunday. In this way, the Bible will help them to see their community in a new light, and their involvement with the community will help them to see the relevance of their faith in a new light.

The last stage is 'doing'. The World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Keum, 2013:9) formulated it well: We are called 'to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all of life.'

That means that we have to search for practices and patterns of culture that express healthy relations with God, with other people and with the ecology.

Such practices are needed on all levels: globally, regionally and in local communities and households. It needs the involvement of all people: politicians, businesses and industries, NGOs and churches, schools and universities, corporations, households and individuals.

The local church and the community can identify and support initiatives in their own context that are trying to

break free of the dominant technocratic paradigm of our times, or of any similar force that keeps people away from a meaningful life: materialism, the consumer culture, ways of living and doing that contribute to climate change and ecological degradation, and a culture of chronic poverty and hopelessness. Christians can support fair trade organisations that promote products that do not abuse child labour, other workers or nature. Or Christians can take the initiative themselves by developing a culture of producing fruit in your garden and so reducing hunger and malnutrition, and/or the need to transport food over long distances, which further increases the emission of greenhouse gasses. There are many possibilities: finding ways to reduce and reuse waste, finding joy and fulfilment in good relations, simplicity rather than luxury, and engaging in constructive activity rather than curling into yourself like a hedgehog.

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