"A CHURCH IS LOTS OF WOMEN AND A PREACHER": WOMEN IN AN AUSTRALIAN ANGLICAN PARISH

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ABSTRACT

Despite a prohibition against ordaining women into the priesthood of the Anglican Church of Australia, some Anglican women claim that they are not marginalised by the Church. In order to understand the social processes behind this seemingly contradictory claim, I conducted, in 1988 and 1989, participant observation at an Anglican parish which I call St. Hale’s. As a result of its location, the parish was undergoing rapid growth at the time of the fieldwork, and this compelled the parishioners to devise mechanisms for “building community” through the creation of social relationships among the parishioners. The community constructed reflected the parishioners’ belief in the essentialist nature of men and women, and was, consequently, gendered. The resulting social organisation had a symbolic permeable boundary between the male domain – associated with parish administration – and the female domain – associated with caring, serving, and nurturing work.

St. Hale’s women themselves emphasised different facets of their caring role, of which the two most important and distinctive aspects were encompassed in what I call the “Martha and Mary” parish discourse. This discourse opposes the institutional discourse of the traditional Christian Church, which represents Woman, the Other, as virgin:whore and Mary:Eve. However, the women accept the institutional discourse which privileges the symbolic role of Mary, the prayer, over Martha, the server, and this creates boundaries among them. The women exert power and influence by their role as builders of community; yet this is limited by the subordination of the female domain to the male domain and, in particular, to the goodwill of the parish priest.

Just prior to, and during, the period of my fieldwork, the women of St. Hale’s had intensified the perceived differences among themselves so as to create four women’s fellowship groups. This creation of boundaries among the women reflected the contested identity of the women themselves and of the women’s fellowship groups, which accords with the new paradigm of the sociology of religion holding that identity is contested among and within religious organisations.
Increasing the number of small groups was one strategy adopted by the parish to create social relationships among parishioners, but these small groups were also organised by gender, and, to a lesser extent, by age. The sole men’s fellowship group met outside the parish worship centre. Its primary purpose was to provide men with Christian fellowship, a secondary goal being to provide service to others in the parish. The activities of the women’s groups, by contrast, were located in the parish worship centre, and concentrated on praying, serving and caring for others as well as on developing women’s mothering and homemaking skills.

As a framework for the analysis of these parish discourses and practices, I use Acker’s theory of gendered organisations. This involves the specification of four interacting sets of social processes, with which I am able to categorise the various elements of the gendered processes operating in St. Hale’s parish. This analysis allows me to place the women’s parish discourses within a social context. St. Hale’s is a church in the sociological sense, and is therefore in low tension with the wider Australian society. Hence women were able to access a network of generalised reciprocity through instrumental church friendships and to create social networks in the suburb without losing their autonomy and privacy.

I define a typology of parish social organisations based on two ideal types, the “Household of God”, which idealises parish life as an extension of the nuclear family, and the “Community of God”, which conceptualises parish life as “individual persons united by mutual consent given in love”. These two ideal types have implications for the influence and empowerment of women. In a Household of God congregation, a woman is under the authority of the male head of the family, whereas women in a Community of God congregation are recognised as autonomous individuals. I classify St. Hale’s as a Community of God parish because the women are able to construct a “church within a church”, which they consider to embody female Christian conduct in the world, free from the male disciplinary gaze.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Women involved in the Anglican Church of Australia have multiple views of the relationship between the church and women. Some believe that women are oppressed by the institutional patriarchal Church. Other women members of the Anglican Church, by contrast, deny that the Church marginalises them because of gender. Representatives drawn from all dioceses in Western Australia of the Mothers’ Union, an international Anglican women’s organisation, held a Provincial Conference in Perth in 1989. Part of the conference featured a local “playback theatre” group, called “Moving Images”, whose function was to use theatrical techniques to start discussions among the audience on the conference theme, “Under a Bushel: Are Women Hiding Their Light?”. One question asked by the group was, “What is a church?”. The staunch churchwomen attending the conference responded with: “A church is lots of women and a preacher.” One “called out” that, “A church is a preacher and women serving endless cups of tea.” This was immediately rejected by several women who claimed, “We do more than make cups of tea.”

A report on this conference by the Mothers’ Union Diocesan Vice President, given in her column in the monthly diocesan newspaper, stated that the women attending the conference had defined the church as being “… an organisation run almost entirely by women, apart from the preacher!” (Harford 1989:12). Thus, the vice-president of the Mothers’ Union in her newspaper article emphasises women as the major actors in the church, rather than as being people marginal to its existence.

The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW)\(^1\) came into existence in Australia in 1983 as a response to the refusal of the Anglican Church to ordain women, despite the fact that the General Synod of the Anglican Church of

\(^1\) The formation of the Australian MOW was influenced by the Movement for the Ordination of Women in England, which was founded in 1979 (Uhr 1992:3).
Australia had in 1977 formally resolved that there were no theological objections to the ordination of women. MOW consisted of men and women from Christian denominations who worked and lobbied for the equal participation of women in all levels of Christian religious hierarchies, and specifically for the ordination of women into the Anglican Church. Female members of the movement perceived themselves as marginalised, or even outside the patriarchal Anglican Church of Australia. Their slogan, “If you won’t ordain us, don’t baptise us” (Porter 1989:2) reflected their sense of not fully belonging to the Anglican Church.

The first Australian women were ordained into the priesthood in Perth, on March 7, 1992. Immediately after the first ordination service, I was invited to a celebratory lunch with some members of MOW, who knew that, although I was not a member of MOW, I was doing fieldwork in the Anglican Church. At the lunch they expressed their belief that the presence of a few “token” woman priests would not lessen the dominance of the patriarchy of the Church. They thus agreed with many feminist scholars that Christianity portrays and constructs Woman as the inferior Other (Fiorenza 1983; Trible 1984; Franklin 1986; Uhr 1992).2

Reconciling these two diametrically opposing views of the Church as a patriarchal organisation that marginalises women and also as “an organisation run almost entirely by women, apart from the preacher” is the fundamental goal of my research. In attempting to achieve this, I explore the social processes involved in constructing an organisation in which these two views can be held by women, and the benefits and rewards of women’s involvement in an institution that denies them full participation in the hierarchy. My analysis of these questions is based on data yielded by eighteen months of participant observation conducted in an Anglican parish, which I will call “St. Hale’s”, after the first Anglican bishop of Perth. St. Hale’s is a middle-class parish located in an outer suburb of Perth, Western Australia. A more complete description of the parish can be

2 Not all dioceses within the Anglican Church of Australia ordain women to the priesthood, at the time of writing.
found in Chapter Two.

1.1 Locating the Research in the Literature

This section describes some of my reasons for deciding to undertake fieldwork in an Anglican parish.

Recent surveys of church attendance, together with statistics from several Australian Censuses, provide quantitative evidence that women are over-represented in all major Australian religious denominations, except for the extremely small denominations of the Orthodox, the Islamic, and the Buddhist faiths (Kaldor et al. 1992; Hughes & Blombery 1990; de Vaun & McAllister 1987; Kaldor 1987; Bouma & Dixon 1986; Mol 1985; de Vaun 1985). De Vaus and McAllister (1987) investigated the proposition that the location of women in the social structure explains this over-representation, with the help of data from an "Australian Values Survey" carried out by the Australian National University in 1983. They considered three factors: the child-rearing role of women, the involvement of women in the paid labour force, and women's attitudes toward family values and work. They found that women's caring for children and attitudes toward work had no explanatory value for their over-representation, whereas the position of women in the paid work-force was significant in explaining women's greater church attendance. Women who "work full-time actually attend church less than comparable males" while part-time work has a "marginal" effect on church attendance (De Vaus and McAllister 1987:478).

De Vaus and McAllister infer that church attendance would be lessened if the proportion of women in full-time paid employment resembled the corresponding proportion for males and they offer two possible explanations for this. Firstly,

---3 Mol (1985:69-70) explains this disparity with reference to Australian migration patterns: a majority of single migrants are men, and married men migrate without their wives, at first. The Orthodox, Islamic, and Buddhist denominations in Australia are predominantly composed of first-generation migrants.
they propose that participation in the work force by either sex replaces religion as a provider of desired social relationships, values and identity. Secondly, they suggest, a woman, as a member of a subordinate group, may adopt the non-religious world view of the dominant group, the men, in the work force, thereby reducing women's need for or desire to attend a church. Hughes and Blombery's (1990) analysis of data from the annual National Social Science Survey (published by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University) leads them to support de Vaus and McAllister's hypothesis that lower levels of female employment explain women's greater participation in churches.

In Chapters Four and Five I point out that women in paid employment have great difficulty in feeling that they “belong” to a parish, because parishes do not take account of their needs: despite the fact that a parish is a gendered social organisation, its emphasis is on women in the home. Women in paid employment are not able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by fellowship groups to gain social relationships. This difficulty does not stem from overt expressions of disapproval of individual women’s decisions to enter the paid workforce; I never heard any comments to that effect. Some middle-aged or elderly women did comment to me and others, generally, that it is “too bad that women have to go out to work”. The rector never commented negatively about a woman with children being in the workforce, to my knowledge.4

My research supports the first proposition of de Vaus and McAllister, that benefits such as social relationships are less available for parish women who are in the paid work force, and this consequently lessens their church attendance. However, the social processes operating in the parish are much more complex than can be explained by just this proposition. Many women in the paid work force still attend church, and while some of these women fit into the parish construction of women as “carers and nurturers”, others do not. I believe it is important to identify the rewards and benefits that women of all kinds may

4 It was very common for the wives of Anglican priests in the Perth Diocese to be engaged in fulltime employment.
obtain from church attendance and also the associated costs.

I decided that in-depth fieldwork in a mainstream Protestant denomination would provide information unobtainable from surveys such as that provided by de Vaus and McAllister's. One quarter of the Australian population identifies itself as Anglican, but there is a scarcity of research on Anglicanism as practised by women. Franklin's paper (1986b) is one exception, but her work is a case study on the practice of licensing Anglican women as lay readers in a New South Wales parish. That parish had a history of establishing women as lay readers, but a new minister's fear of "divid[ing] the parish" (p.78) and the consequent reluctance of women to serve, meant that when the current female lay readers left the parish, they were not replaced for several years. The only other study specific to Anglican laywomen was conducted by Diesendorf (1987). She interviewed seven Sydney laywomen who had left the Anglican Church after years of active involvement because they believed that their developing spiritual faith and identities were not accepted by the Church. However, her work deals with women who left the church, rather than with those currently practising Anglicanism.

There are works on women and history in the Anglican church, such as those of Sturmey (1989), Willis (1977), Teale (1977), and Porter (1989, 1994), but there seems to be no up-to-date general historical overview of the Anglican church in Australia. An adequate substitution is provided by several works which have as their subject the relationship between the Christian churches and the wider Australian society (Engle 1984; Hogan 1987; Breward 1993; and Thompson 1994). Western Australian histories of the Anglican church such as Hawtrey (1949), Alexander (1957) and Williams (1989) briefly mention individual women or the founder of a women's group, for example, but they concentrate for the most part on the clergy, the bishops, and the expansion of the diocese. Bignell (1992) wrote a non-critical history of the Anglican Sisters of the English Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, who were located in the South-West of Western Australia. Historians who have written on Catholic lay women include Kennedy (1985) on extra-parochial laywomen's groups, and Massam (1994) discusses devotional practices of pre-Vatican II Perth women.
Outside Australia, there are historical books on Episcopalian women, such as Donovan’s (1986) study of the crucial role which lay women have played in developing the social gospel movement, and Rankin’s (1993) study of the evangelical revival of Episcopalian women in North Carolina. Gillespie (1992) conducted a survey and interview study on four American Episcopalian churches to examine generational attitudes of women toward the changes in women’s roles and participation during the last 50 years. Farmer (1992) has written on the role of black women in the Episcopalian church in the USA.

My second major reason for choosing the Anglican Church as the subject of my study was the prominence in the mass media, in the 1980’s, and still at the time of writing, of the debate concerning the ordination of women into the priesthood in Australia. I assumed that this debate would also be occurring within the parishes, so it would be easy to elicit lay attitudes on gender ideologies. As it turned out, this was not the case – a most surprising finding – because, as I found, gender ideologies are not part of the parish discourse (see Chapter Four, in particular). Although the ordination issue is not the focus of this work, and was not intended to be, the ordination debate provided a vivid backdrop to my fieldwork studies. As the primary structural crisis of the Anglican Church during the time of the fieldwork, it is not possible to write an ethnography of women in the Anglican Church without addressing the major facets of the debate and their implications for parish life. The literature published in the last ten years on the ordination of women is enormous, and I do not survey it here, but I do mention the following books which were widely distributed and available for sale in secular bookshops.

As a response to great lay and clergy interest in the ordination issue, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia published in 1977 a Report on the Ministry of Women. It includes theological arguments for and against the ordination of women, written by a Standing Committee of the Synod. A subsequent Australian publication was Willis’s edited volume Women, Faith and Fetes (1977), which gives the history of Christian women in Australia and includes an article by Bellamy (1977) on the extension of rights to deaconesses. Franklin (1986) edited a volume on relationships between men and women and
the feminisation of Christian orders in the Australian Anglican Church, from a
Christian feminist point of view. Wetherell (1987) contains nine articles outlining
the response of anti-ordination writers (men, women, and clergy), to Franklin’s
discussions. Field (1989) provides an account of women deacons, their ministries,
and their future hopes for the priesthood. Nelson and Walter (1989), in one sec­
tion, give a general feminist perspective on ordination of women. Porter (1989 &
offers a critical view of feminist arguments used in the debate. The contribution
of White and Tulip (1991) is an introduction to feminist theology with a section
on ordination. Field (1991) outlines the competing discourses on the ordination
of women. Lehman (1994) discusses a national survey of the views of the laity
on the ordination of women and women in ministry.

In addition to the Australian studies cited above, the following British books
were widely available. Maitland’s (1983) book (A Map of the New Country:
Women and Christianity) is a general introduction to women in Christianity,
and includes a section on ordination in the Anglican communion. Oddie (1984)
mounts a spirited attack on Christian feminism and the ordination of women.
The General Synod of the Church of England published its Second Report on the
feminism, includes an article by Storkey which suggests that the opposition to
the ordination of women arises from the dualism of the body and the spirit in
Christian thought. Peberdy, in the same volume, discusses the danger posed by
women’s sexuality, and thus the possible pollution they may introduce, in respect
to men’s fears of women priests.

1.2 Theoretical Perspective

As mentioned above, gender ideologies are not part of the parish discourse
at St. Hale’s Anglican Church. However, there were gendered discourses in the
parish, and this thesis describes two sets of discourses which were uncovered
during my fieldwork. These two sets of discourses – institutional and parish –
are invoked within the Anglican Church of Australia, but present apparently
opposing views. I am here using “discourses” in the same manner as Foucault
to include not only the language of the subject, but also the subject's behaviour. Academics and feminist activists, both outside and within the Church, who have written about the Anglican Church, have understandably focused on institutional discourses, because these are the discourses that occur outside the parish, especially in published texts and synod debates. Parish discourses, on the other hand, primarily occur in face-to-face social interactions between parishioners, and are not located in a text. Because of the dominant academic gaze, parish discourses are rarely represented in the academic literature; they are muted by the institutional discourses. Furthermore, these discourses are silenced by their subordinate position within the institutional Church.

Yet women construct social interactions and social relationships through parish discourses, and conversely, they construct parish discourses from social interactions and relationships. Women use parish discourses not only in opposition to patriarchal power but also as an adaptive strategy to construct their self-identity within the parish. Finally, women create their own groups, networks, or community within the patriarchal institution of the Church through parish discourses and social relationships in the parish.

Is it the case that the identity of women in the parish is "taken for granted", (Warner 1993:1052), with women defined as "Woman", a unitary representation, or do parishioners entertain competing definitions of women? My thesis reveals that there are indeed competing definitions of women and that the "contested identity" (Warner 1993:1052) of women within the parish is manifested in the discourses that the women construct. While some parish discourses are the property of men and women, others belong to women alone. Women use parish discourses to resist power (the patriarchy). Their discourses are strategies to "live with" power. As Foucault wrote:

Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can
come into play in various strategies. ... Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. ... There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy (1976:100-102).

Feminism forms one of the theoretical bases of this thesis. There are various strands of feminist theory in current use. “Cultural feminism”, defines women as innately different from men and possessing inherently superior qualities (Daly 1978). The feminism of post-modernism emphasises the social construction of Women as the “Other” and does not recognise the experience of the biological difference between men and women (Marcus 1992). I use the term in the same way as Alcoff (1988) and others, who understand that while women are socially constructed as the subordinate Other by a male dominated society, nevertheless individual women’s experience cannot be submerged into the collective Other. Alcoff (1988:421) states:

In order to avoid the serious disadvantages of cultural feminism and post-structuralism, feminism needs to transcend the dilemma by developing a third course, an alternative theory of the subject that avoids both essentialism and nominalism. This new alternative might share the post-structuralist insight that the category “woman” needs to be theorized through an exploration of the experience of subjectivity, as opposed to a description of current attributes, but it need not concede that such an exploration will necessarily result in a nominalist position on gender, or an erasure of it.

Alcoff then suggests that feminists should “construe a gendered subjectivity in relation to concrete habits, practices, and discourses” (p.431). In this thesis
I combine a Foucaultian perspective of power and a feminist viewpoint (Levine 1984; Strathern 1985 & 1987; Gross 1986; Alcoff 1988; Moore 1988, 1994; Davis et al. 1991), using discourse as an intellectual tool to provide an analysis which, unlike the work of many post-structuralist and post-modernist researchers, does not deny either the hierarchical organisation of the Anglican Church of Australia or women's oppression within the patriarchy. This allows me to convey the ambiguities of St. Hale's women’s representations and experiences of themselves and of other women within the parish.

**INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES**

My research revealed two sets of gendered discourses within the Anglican Church of Australia: an institutional set and a parish set. The institutional set consists of two discourses: gender ideologies and the participation of women in the formal organisational structure, and parish discourses, which are my primary focus. These subjects are discussed briefly below, and in detail in Chapters Four, Six and Seven. In Chapter Four, I also discuss at length the five gender ideologies held by Perth Anglicans, which I term: Anglo-Catholicism, Moderates, Evangelicals, Feminists, and Post-Christian feminists. The remaining discourses, the institutional set, will be briefly surveyed now, and only mentioned in passing hereafter.

Institutional discourses in the Anglican Church are primarily formed and conducted by men. Anglican statements on the ministry of women within the church have been written by male clergy for the last hundred years. Men comprise the majority of speakers at synods during debates on the ordination of women to the priesthood and on other “women’s issues” such as the use of inclusive language in the church liturgy and texts. The sole exception to this, during Diocesan synod proceedings, occurs when the proposers of a canon are sympathetic to Christian feminists’ aims. In these cases concerning canons about “women’s issues”, a woman is always either a proposer or a seconder. I was told by an MOW leader that this occurred in order to have the “feminine represented”. Besides being heard during Synod debates, institutional discourses generated by church elites, and occasionally feminists responding to them, can
be found in Anglican books, magazines, policy documents, and church reports. Scholars dependent on written texts readily find those institutional discourses that define women as the subordinate Other.

The Report of the General Synod Commission on Doctrine regarding The Ministry of Women provides an example of an institutional discourse that portrays women as the subordinate Other. A minority report written by Knox (1977) stated:

The reason for coming to church and forming a congregation is to give expression to the present reality of spiritual fellowship with Christ and with one another in Christ's presence. This reality should be expressed in the home and in the locality where Christians and particularly Christian families will congregate to seek God's face together and to exhort one another and build one another up. The leadership which God gives in the congregation will not contradict the leadership which he has ordained in the family, so that woman who is subordinant (sic) to her husband in the family will not be over him in the things of God in the congregation. The principle of headship and subordination expressed in the theological statement “the head of the woman is the man” will be true in the congregation of Christ as it is particularly true in the family. Family and congregation are closely linked, being both expressions of Christ's relationship to his people (Eph. 5). Moreover, this principle of headship is not limited to the family though it finds its clearest expression there. It is a general statement of relationship. In the congregation it includes unmarried women as well as those who are married. The unmarried will not be found by God's ordinance to differ from their married sisters with regard to relationship to this principle of order within the congregation of the people of God (1977:32-33).

Knox associates the leadership of the male in the home and the church, and the subordination of women, with social order in all segments of society.

When Christian feminist thought and ideas are incorporated into institutional discourses, woman is not defined as the subordinate Other. However, the category of Other still remains. This is illustrated in the following section from the same report (above).
A further change has occurred in the attempts to type what is intrinsically "feminine" and what is "masculine". Gone are the days when the essence of each seemed clear and the respective roles well defined as a result. It used to be accepted that men are objective, rational, independent, unemotional, tough, aggressive and active, while women are the opposite — subjective, intuitive, dependent, emotional, tender, receptive and passive. Scientific study has suggested that every person possesses these qualities to a greater or lesser degree of development, depending often on deliberate choice or social and cultural conditioning. Further, not all societies characterise male and female in the same way. From such studies and from our own self-understanding we should be wary of any rigid stereotyping of the sexes and also we should begin to see the fullness of being human as a combination of the qualities listed earlier rather than the exalting of one (particularly the masculine) over the other. The world needs feminine qualities and so does the church in its ministry (The Majority Report of the General Synod Commission on Doctrine, the Ministry of Women, 1977:25).

PARISH DISCOURSES

Institutional discourses are rarely expressed in the parish by either the clergy or laity. Instead, a second set comprising five parish discourses concerning gender was revealed during the fieldwork. I will denote these as: “building community”; “Household of God” versus “Community of God”; “church friends aren’t friends”; “Martha and Mary”; and lastly, “caring and sharing” versus “fellowship and support” identities among the women’s groups. These types of parish or lay discourses intertwine but are clearly distinguishable. Three of them: building community; community of God and family of God; and church friends aren’t friends; are not overtly concerned with gender. Nevertheless, they are gendered discourses, because, as I demonstrate, men and women experience or construct them in different ways (Bynum 1986:2-3).

Equally importantly, discourses have to be located in a social context to understand how they can constitute strategies to "live with" power. Anglican women construct discourses such as the Martha and Mary discourse, which allows them to represent themselves positively within the organisation of the Anglican Church of Australia, rather than according to the institutional discourse of
woman as Eve:Mary or virgin:whore. Organisations such as the Anglican Church are not gender-neutral sites in which these discourses are generated. The gendered nature of the organisation combines with parish discourses to construct the reality of female parishioners’ experience.

I utilise Acker’s (1990, 1992) theory of gendered organisations to locate the women’s discourses within a social context. Acker (1992) posits four elements in her theory: the division of the social structure into gendered components; the production of gendered symbols; interaction among men and women, which enacts a dominant and subordinate group; and the ideologies which underpin the organisation. This model proves to be of great value heuristically in my attribution of agency to the women of St. Hale’s.

The parish discourses will emerge from the social processes described in the ethnography, which is presented in Chapters Two and Three. I now briefly describe and summarise the main features of the discourses which are the subjects of Chapters Three to Eight.

**Building Community**

The members and the priest of St. Hale’s parish repeatedly proclaim “we are ‘building a community’” and “we need to ‘build a community’”. These people stress the building of community because they seek to create a community out of dispersed individuals who have recently moved to the relatively new outer suburbs of the city of Perth. The parishioners understand that a community is formed and defined through interconnecting social relationships, and that the boundaries which define this community are symbolic rather than geographical.

As Cohen (1985) points out, the existence of a community is not necessarily dependant on individuals being located within certain geographical boundaries and sharing economic relationships with each other. He argues that people use symbolic boundaries to create and maintain communities. Individuals, especially in complex societies, belong to a variety of these symbolic communities. One such community is the Anglican parish; it is a symbolic community with symbolic
boundaries, which, in the words of Cohen (1985:13), is "largely constituted by people in interaction". While people in a symbolic community share symbols, they may not attribute the same meanings to these symbols (Turner 1979:146 refers to this as "multivocality"). For example, Anglican men and women share the symbols of their parish church, such as the providing of food, but these symbols may have different meanings for men and women. More relevant to the present study is, for example, the symbolic value of the prayer-book; a majority of the women involved in the women's groups have a personal copy (bound in white covers, rather than in the uniform green Church issue, with a cover tattered from much use). The personal prayer book is carried with pride as a symbol of their personal devotions with God, whereas I saw no men with a personal copy of the book. A second layer of meaning attributed to the prayer book is as a source of commonality among the Anglican Communion. Attempts to change the language of the liturgy in the prayer book, whether to a contemporary language or to inclusive language, result in controversy because of a consequent loss of unity and history perceived by some Anglicans (Martin & Mullen 1981).

In Chapter Three I argue that in the parishioners' quest for community they create a gendered parish social organisation and, as a consequence, they have created a permeable boundary between the male and female domains of the parish. The "building community" discourse, while posing community as a unifying or inclusive social organisation, actually masks the gender division in the parish, as I demonstrate. St. Hale's women are the primary creators, implementers, and maintainers of the parish community.

Chapter Four identifies the five gender ideologies of Perth Anglicans and gives examples of parishioners' gender ideologies. These demonstrate the ambiguities and inadequacies in the parishioners' religious language, for their expression and understanding of these ideologies. I suggest that each ideology still sees women as the Other and essentially different from men, and as being created as an opposing gender. Therefore, in practice, this difference is revealed in the social process and in the idea held by all sectors of the community, of women as being nurturers and carers. The role of women as builders of community is also explored in Chapter Four. The women use the builders of community discourse
as a way to oppose the dominant leadership of men – to subvert their dominant image, which is that of maintaining only a nurturing role in the church. The women’s overt argument is that, even if they are to be seen as subordinate, they are nonetheless essential for the church’s survival; they are the mothers of the church (Gilkes 1986).

Church Friends aren’t Friends

Chapter Five explores the tension between women wanting to “belong” to the community of St. Hale’s, and a prevalent norm in middle-class suburban communities such as Hale, which requires one to maintain a physical and emotional boundary between one’s self and neighbours (Perin 1988). As Richards (1990) reports in her study of a new suburb of Melbourne, peoples’ feelings towards neighbours are ambiguous, since they expect both social support, when required, from neighbours, yet require neighbours to maintain a social distance. The women in my study, besides their spiritual reasons, join the Anglican parish of St. Hale’s so as to widen their local social support and networks without risking their individual privacy or autonomy. The members of St. Hale’s women’s groups consciously employ social mechanisms which hinder the rapid development of intimate friendships, since intimate relationships threaten both the cohesion of the women’s domain of the parish organisation and the members’ privacy by increasing the likelihood of clique formation. Women who, for whatever reason, are unable to “belong” in the female domain of the parish and who are unable or unwilling to cross into the male domain feel displaced. The distribution of parishioners between the male and female domains causes problems of belonging for those who are not members of either symbolic domain (see Chapters Three and Five).

Martha, Mary, and the Mother’s Union

Women in the institutional discourse of the Christian Church are portrayed as Virgin:Whore or Mary:Eve (O’Faolain & Martines 1973). A secondary institutional discourse addressing women’s roles is the Martha and Mary discourse, which the women of St. Hale’s and some other Anglican women have adopted for purposes of self-identification. The story of the Biblical sisters, Martha and
Mary, is told in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus comes with his friends to the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, and Mary attends to Jesus. When Martha requests Mary’s help in preparing the evening meal, she is told by Jesus that her sister Mary has “chosen the good portion” (Luke 10:42 RSV). In Chapter Six I explore the significance of the Martha-Mary discourse in relation to the gender ideologies constructed by the women in the parish. Being a prayerful woman is accorded higher prestige than being a server; but married women find it difficult to lead prayerful lives while meeting family and home responsibilities. Most women are therefore considered by themselves and by others to be Marthas.

The Mothers’ Union is one of the most important Anglican women’s groups and one of its main aims is to help mothers to develop aspects of Mary. Foucault (1978:102) suggests that discourses may “circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another”. Thus a discourse in one situation may be used to buttress power, while the same discourse in another situation may join with another discourse to thwart power. Some feminist Anglicans point out the patriarchal message embedded in the Martha and Mary discourse as it is understood by many lay women: but the possible apostleship of Martha is neglected in both the institutional and the parish discourses.

“Sharing and Caring” and “Fellowship and Support”

In the first decade or so of the existence of the parish, all women automatically belonged to the Ladies’ Guild, the sole women’s organisation in the parish. Then the women proceeded to “find differences among themselves”, and, accordingly, they had “a need” for more particular and distinctive groups. In the space of several years the women of the parish organised themselves into four different women’s groups. The Ladies’ Guild became identified as the “Marthas”, or servers and helpers, after the Mothers’ Union was formed in order to give women a more spiritual focus in the parish. Members of the Mothers’ Union are the “Marys”. Later, the younger members of the Mothers’ Union started a group called “Caritas” (see Chapters Three and Seven) and soon afterwards the younger women in the Ladies’ Guild began to meet in a “Craft Group”, which, as its name implies, is concerned with home crafts, and the making of craft goods for sale to aid in the church’s mission.
The division of women into groups strongly accords with age cohorts, and also reflects the major changes in female gender roles in the last twenty, and especially the last ten, years in Australia. Furthermore, the groups also reflect the different roles associated with different age groups of women in the parish. The older women expect to be “sharing and caring” with one another in the parish for years. The younger women desire “fellowship and support” during the limited time they are at home with small children before returning to the paid workforce. These social groupings are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Cohen (1985:50) believes that, in a period of extreme social change, rituals are important because they symbolise the differences between groups. The rituals of the various women’s organisations in St. Hale’s differ in ways that make each group distinctive, and women may choose which group best fits their preferences. Thus women construct and intensify the differences between themselves in a time of changing gender roles both within and outside the institutional church.

Household of God versus Community of God

Chapter Eight presents an explanation, which is based on an interpretation of their primary religious experiences, for the lack of overtly religious language used by St. Hale’s women. The women’s roles as servers and builders provide them with social influence in the parish. The ambivalence of women towards these roles is shown by means of three poems which they circulated among themselves.

Chapter Eight also contains a consideration of the kinds of parish life open to religious denominations in a modern city. Some parishes and individuals, in a response to the pressures of modernity, turn to what I call a “Household of God” type of parish, in which the basic model and unit of parish life is the nuclear family. According to this model, parish life should resemble the patriarchal family with close, loving and emotionally intimate relationships. The Household of God is a rejection of modernity. Included in this rejection is an accompanying decrease of women’s personal identities and autonomy. An alternative is the “Community of God” type of parish, which, in direct contrast to the Household of God, represents an accommodation with modernity. The Community of God
ideal type posits as the basic unit of parish life the individual in a community of believers, and calls only for low levels of personal intimacy. A Community of God, unlike a Household of God type of church, provides women with opportunities for empowerment and autonomy in their parish activities. As I show in Chapter Eight, St. Hale’s Anglican Church has the characteristics of a Community of God parish, but some members would prefer to belong to a Household of God parish. The members of the parish correspondingly continually construct their parish type; the fact that St. Hale’s is a Community of God parish has caused some families to leave the parish and some individuals to join.

The new and emerging sociology of religion paradigm sees identity between and within religious organisations as constantly shifting in relation to other religious organisations and to the wider society (Warner 1993:1062). The above discourses, besides revealing how men and women construct gender in an Anglican parish, demonstrate contested identities within religious organisations. This further aspect of those discourses is also analysed in Chapter Eight.

The focus of the thesis moves on to consider the lack of a universal gender ideology on which to base the practice of parish life, the belonging of individuals in the parish, the self-identification of the women into two roles, and their further division into four groups because of differences in generational needs. This provides insights into the mechanisms of the maintenance of gendered organisations and the construction of gender categories. The boundaries among women hinder the recognition of the gendered organisational structure of the parish, while those women who do recognise the genderedness of the organisation still choose to be part of the parish because they enjoy social benefits and rewards which offset the negative effects of male domination. The existence of the female domain with its responsibilities for nurturing the parish means that some women do not recognise the domination of men in the parish, yet women influence the priest and have power in the parish through their role as builders and maintainers of the parish community. These ambiguities help understand and explain the coexistence of opposing discourses on the position of women in the parish.
2.1 Entry into the Field

The Right Reverend Michael Challen, then the Assistant Bishop of Perth, agreed to meet with me as a result of an introductory visit by Dr Charles Waddell, a member of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. Early in 1988, the Bishop and I discussed the possibility of my conducting fieldwork in the Diocese, and Bishop Challen subsequently secured the approval of the Archbishop of Perth, Dr Peter Carnley, for my work to begin. On the basis of my selection criteria, listed below, Bishop Challen advised me of possible parishes for my fieldwork. However, neither Archbishop Carnley nor Bishop Challen directed or limited me in my choice of parish. Neither did they ask nor were they told what my final choice of parish was. I was free to choose for myself, provided only that the parish itself agreed to host me. My selection criteria for choosing a parish included its "churchmanship", its demographics and its history. I discussed these with Bishop Challen also. I now outline in some detail those criteria and my reasons for deciding on them.

I wanted to study a parish which was Moderate in its churchmanship, because the majority of Anglicans consider themselves moderates, according to Neill (1977), and I wished to conduct research in a representative parish. A parish where a majority of the women were younger than forty-five years of age was an essential requirement, because it is those women who, as a result of relatively recent legislative and social changes, have the ability to make choices about their lives in ways that previous generations of women could not. These choices include the type of employment undertaken by a woman and whether or not a woman needed to seek paid (part-time or full-time) employment, and also

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1 The term "churchmanship" is used to distinguish one among the various theological schools in Anglicanism which are associated with different liturgical practices.
the reproductive control she exercises over her fertility. The level of education attained by women of this age cohort was also to a large extent within their control, as had not previously been the case. Also relevant was the choice of religious affiliation available to a woman. The growth and widespread acceptance of the ecumenical movement in the Australian Christian community now allows an Anglican woman, if she is unhappy with a denomination that does not ordain women, to change her denominational affiliation and worship with a church such as the Uniting Church, which has had female clergy since its inception in 1977, or with the Churches of Christ, which have had female clergy since 1973 (Porter 1989:32–34).

In an effort to control for the effects of class and ethnicity, I thought it necessary to select a parish whose parishioners were characterised by relatively homogeneous demographics. The socio-economic position of the majority of the parishioners in the social structure was not in itself a criterion for selection. Nevertheless, the parishioners of St. Hale’s turned out to be clearly perceived by others and themselves as middle-class. This criterion essentially restricted me to a parish where the overwhelming majority of parishioners were from an English-speaking background because, “Less than one in sixty Anglicans are (sic) from non-English speaking backgrounds, compared with one in eight in the general population” (Hughes 1993:10).

In addition to the primary criteria listed above, another aspect of selection was my wish to avoid duplication of Dempsey’s (1977, 1983) studies of conflict within a Methodist congregation in a New South Wales country parish. I was looking for a parish with a history of cohesive relationships among laity and clergy, which also had a good reputation among other Anglicans for relative harmony among its laity. Another criterion was that the parish be free of excessive historical awareness, in the sense that people would not tend to explain certain current behaviours in terms of longstanding tradition. This pointed to a church of relatively recent establishment.

Another desirable though not essential criterion was continuity of pastoral leadership for the duration of the fieldwork. There is anecdotal evidence that a
change of priest or a vacancy can cause a dwindling congregation and a significant change in the harmonious conduct of parish community life. Had such a change occurred, it would probably have detracted from the focus of my work. Bishop Challen’s advice was extremely helpful in this regard.

The last essential criterion was the avoidance of parishes where the priest or a member of the laity was prominent in either supporting or opposing the ordination of women. I assumed that members of such a parish would have a bias and thus the study would not be representative of the wider Anglican Church.

Discussions with the Bishop, as well as research among people active in the Anglican Church, led to a short list of potential fieldwork sites. I visited those parishes for about two months before identifying St. Hale's as a possible research site. St. Hale’s met all the criteria, and the Bishop informed me that the Rector of that parish, Father Stephen, was likely to continue in that position for at least two years. I made an appointment with Father Stephen to discuss conducting participant observation in his parish. He very generously offered to raise the matter at the parish vestry meeting and to inform me of their decision. A couple of weeks later he called me with the news that the parish was willing to allow me to join them for the eighteen months that I thought would be necessary for the fieldwork. The following Sunday I was introduced to the congregation at the close of each worship service, and spoke briefly on the aims of the research project, at Father Stephen’s request.

Each parishioner wears a name-tag to the Sunday service, so that people can learn one another's names. In the first couple of months or so of my attending meetings of the various women’s groups, the women wore their name-tags for my benefit, but stopped once they realised I had learnt all their names. Father Stephen acquiesced to my request that, after introducing me to the parish, he would treat me no differently from any other woman who was new to the parish; it was important to my research that my experience of entering the parish replicate, as closely as possible, the experience of other women. In keeping with this agreement throughout the duration of the fieldwork, Father Stephen thus con-
tributed positively to the fulfilment of my research aims. Only on one occasion did he make an exception to this rule: he supplied me one day with an official St. Hale’s name-tag, whereas normal practice is to add one’s name to a list in the foyer of the church building, which is sent to a printer every month or so.

2.2 First Impressions of St. Hale’s

Rather than recording my own first impressions of St. Hale’s, I offer the point of view of a new parishioner, Eleanor, who I interviewed in her second month of worshipping at the parish. She previously worshipped at an Evangelical church. (Eleanor’s husband was also intermittently present during our interview, which was conducted in the couple’s home). She expresses well her observations, which were similar to my own.

In response to the question: Why do you attend St. Hale’s? Eleanor replied:

Very much [at] first was the visual, because the place is really beautiful. And I think I mentioned to you that in our church tradition we have very few symbols and our church buildings are very plain. None of them have the beauty that is part of St. Hale’s. So the immediate thing was walking into the building and feeling that this was a beautiful place. That it had a very calm atmosphere and we responded very much to the warmth [and] the drama of the symbolism of the place, everything from the cross window at the back through to that lovely white semi-circle up front with the white cross of it . . . it just glows sometimes in the morning light. It is just a feast for us, it really is beautiful. I love being able to look out while you are in church and to see that garden at the side, that gives me a very peaceful feeling in the church. I like being able to look straight ahead almost and see the banksia trees in flower. So while it’s being able to see the outside world, the beautiful world, while I am still in church, and its quite a new experience because it hasn’t really been part of our worshipping experience. It is very much an architectural thing that this was a very beautiful place.

Built in the early 1980’s, St. Hale’s is a red-brick church with a red tile roof. It conforms well with the suburban dwellings surrounding it, and appears spacious inside by virtue of the abundant use of glass walls. As Eleanor says, it is set in a peaceful surrounding, with natural bushland on one side. The shopping centre
located across the road on the other side is not visible from the interior; through any window one sees only the lawn, and bushland with white gum (eucalypt) trees and resident birds; occasionally kookaburras laugh and crows call.

Eleanor now describes the high points of the service:

Also, we were struck very much by the liturgy and how beautiful it was. And in particular the way it is done at St. Hale's, say, for example is different from a couple of other Anglican churches we have been to. Here there is a lot more reverence during the service and I guess it is [a] slightly high[er] church than some we have been to. For example, when we first started going [with] all the kissing everything, the kids used to start laughing, "Oh, no they are kissing something again." They would kiss the Bible or they would kiss the altar or they would bow or you know all that sort of thing but it does at least say to you that is a very special thing, something quite out of the ordinary and not to be handled lightly.

Father Stephen, before the Gospel reading, always bowed and kissed the Bible, and, before blessing the bread and wine of the Eucharist, bowed down and kissed the altar. These practises are more usually associated with Anglo-Catholic churchmanship, but are not uncommon in the Perth Diocese which has many priests who have "high-church" tendencies. At the Perth Diocesan Synod, an overwhelming majority of priests attend wearing a "dog-collar", which is again associated with a tendency toward Anglo-Catholicism since it proclaims their priestly status.

Eleanor next describes her impressions of the congregation’s response to the service.

And the whole congregation takes it in the same way. They may be chatting before the service but when the service begins the whole place is different. You get the feeling that people really do feel that they are participating in something that is special . . . it struck us very much. And then, joy of all joys, the children go out half-way through to their Sunday School so they aren’t bored. And, that means we can actually participate in the worship which is a great honour especially with Rory and Jan (her two children, aged about 3 and 7 years respectively).
Eleanor's husband at this stage added that, "he loves the symbolism", and his wife continues,

Oh, yeah, look there is so much about the symbolism that just moves you completely. The first time my kids went off to Sunday School and we thought they would just come and sit with us afterwards and instead they took them up [during the Eucharist] and they got blessed [by the priest], our little three year old is sitting there like this, [she demonstrates a beaming smile] this was wonderful and it moved us very much. In fact the whole symbolism was beyond comparison. [They participated] in every service and they cried when they stripped the altar and it was just great when they had the lighting of the fires. [This refers to the Good Friday service, where the priest removes everything from the altar.] This is very dramatic like a theatre but is a real feast for us who have been in a tradition that has almost lost the magic and got so rational and so familiar with God and the handling of [holy] things.

[The] symbols [of the service] help us do that so that when we go to St. Hale's we feel as though we have worshipped God much more than we do when we have been to our own church.

Eleanor summed up her feelings as follows:

I think it means a lot to us because it's fresh and new and I'm quite sure that there would be Anglicans who would be so used to their services as we have become used to our service, and find it just as hard as we did to get in touch with God, and I guess there are people who have been at St. Hale's for a long time who don't see things that way any more. You have to be an outsider I think to really get the full force of these things.

2.3 Description of the parish

Despite Eleanor's description of the priest's exuberant kissing of the Bible and altar during the liturgy, the churchmanship of St. Hale's is, according to the rector, "Moderate with Anglo-Catholic tendencies".\footnote{Neill (1977) states that “the majority of Anglicans firmly resist classification [of churchmanship] and refuse to identify themselves with any party cry” (p.398).} The Anglo-Catholic
heritage of St. Hale’s is further illustrated by its emphasis on the priestly ministry, the parishioners’ genuflection and crossing of themselves before entering their pews, and the singing of the Eucharist. On the other hand, the Report of the Parish Development Working Party (see Chapter Three), suggests that St. Hale’s adopt some elements of evangelistic churchmanship by focusing on “… spreading the Word throughout the community, and significant participation by the laity in leadership and pastoral care” (1988:3). Most parishioners, however, emphasise the moderate churchmanship of St. Hale’s.

St. Hale’s is an “ordinary Anglican church”, according to Patricia, since the parishioners were not “happy clappers” and the service was not a “smells and bells” liturgy. She was referring to differences in liturgical practice between the two opposing schools of churchmanship. Evangelical parishioners frequently clap in accompaniment to the singing of contemporary hymns. These are referred to by other Anglicans in a slightly derogatory way as “happy clappers”. A more polite but still slang term is to refer to a parish as being “low church”. For Anglo-Catholics the corresponding term is “high church”. In the Anglo-Catholic celebration of the Eucharist, a censer is swung and bells are rung during the consecration of bread and wine. This explains the “smells and bells” description. The music for St. Hale’s services included both traditional and contemporary hymns, but the modern hymns were not repeated many times in succession in one service, as they are in the Charismatic Evangelical parishes, nor were they accompanied by the clapping of the parishioners. There was no censer swinging or ringing of bells at St. Hale’s. There is no overt presence of the Charismatic movement at St. Hale’s, although I know of nine people in the parish who are Charismatics and attend a midweek Charismatic service at a nearby home church, in addition to worshipping at St. Hale’s. Patricia’s explanation of the differences among three styles of churchmanship is embedded in practise, not theological difference, and is an example of the lack of theological knowledge among parishioners.

St. Hale’s is a large congregation by Australian standards. According to the parish records, the number of communicants on the first Sunday of Septem-
ber 1988 was 211, and a determination of the average congregation size in this way tends to underestimate the total number of people attending because it does not count those children or adults attending but not participating in communion. By comparison, the 1991 National Church Life Survey Congregational database, which counted attendance on two consecutive Sundays for 3,338 Anglican congregations, reports that the average size of an Anglican congregation Australia-wide, based on numbers attending, is 57 (Kaldor et al. 1994:303). The average size of a congregation over all Australia for denominations which participated in Kaldor’s survey was 71. The National Church Life Survey places a congregational size of 200-299 attenders within the top tenth percentile of congregational size (p.302). However, many of the small Anglican parishes in Kaldor’s survey were in rural or older urban areas, with an age profile skewed toward older parishioners, and St. Hale’s is not atypical among Anglican parishes located in outer suburban growth areas, in respect to the size of its congregation. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter Three, the size and growth of St. Hale’s parish (discussed in the next paragraph), are such that the gendered social organisation constructed by the parishioners is clearly visible. Consequently, the size of St. Hale’s worked to my advantage.

One reason for the present large size of St. Hale’s is the dramatic growth it has experienced in the last decade. The number of parishioners more than trebled between 1981 – 1988. In fact, the number of parishioners attending church each Sunday was so large that two services had to be held- one at 7.30 am, the second at 9 am. The former was termed the “early service”, and the latter was the “family service”. Table 2.1 shows the growth in the numbers of communicants attending in the Christmas, Easter, and Lent periods, and for a typical Sunday in September.
<table>
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<th>1985</th>
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<tr>
<td>PARISH ROLL</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Compiled from St. Hale’s Parish records.

Demographically, St. Hale’s parishioners belong to the middle-class. The occupations of parishioners included schoolteachers, public servants, high-school principals, lawyers, middle managers in private companies, and self-employed business people. There were few trades people or blue-collar workers among the congregation. I often heard St. Hale’s parishioners, both women and men, refer to themselves as “middle-class”, especially in discussions concerning the changing tax laws in Australia, for example. In the course of the fieldwork, as a result of the downturn in the Australian economy in 1987, several men became unemployed for more than a year, and two families went bankrupt in that time.

Most adults were married or widowed at the time of the fieldwork, and the majority were in their thirties and early forties. In common with many Anglican parishes, about seventy-five percent of worshippers were women. This was ascertained by counting the numbers of male and female communicants at six of the worship services chosen at random. I could not count accurately the number of attenders at these services, because the layout of the building made it impossible to do so unobtrusively – there are three entrances to the worship centre, and some people arrive late to service, while others leave services to attend to children. However I was able to count communicants as they went up
to the altar and knelt at the rail. My counts of the numbers of communicants gave percentages of women ranging from 72% to 78%. Almost all the children in the parish who attended worship services were under 13 years of age. Only five teenagers regularly attended services. I was able to identify only seven parishioners as coming from a non-English speaking background.

2.4 My Activities in the Field

Participant-observation was the dominant research technique used in the research. I participated in an average of 29 gatherings and meetings per month that were open to a St. Hale's laywoman (Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.2: MY MONTHLY SCHEDULE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Worship Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday morning service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers' Union meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish Mothers' Union activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies' Guild meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies' Guild activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Alive (Sunday night service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Life Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish fellowship gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers' Union or Caritas extra-parish event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish educational seminar or meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diocesan activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This schedule includes regularly scheduled events, but not special events.

Patricia and Tina, members of a women’s group, teased me by saying, “You’re here more than Father Stephen is”, and Father Stephen agreed with this! In addition to my schedule, I sometimes visited women in their homes for “cups of tea”, and was occasionally invited to the homes of parishioners for
dinner parties and barbecues. Outside the parish, I attended events such as the annual Diocese Synod (twice), the Provincial Conference of the Mothers’ Union (once, for one working week), two weekend conferences and four meetings organised by the Movement of the Ordination of Women, and two educational meetings organised by the Woman Against the Ordination of Women.

My acceptance into the women’s groups was facilitated by my willingness to participate in their activities. I learnt the art of making patchwork quilt cushions as an entrance to the craft group, and I “cooked my way into” the Mothers’ Union and the Ladies’ Guild, where the “taking of a plate” of food to their meetings was obligatory (see Chapter Four). Since I did not know how to cook Australian-style cakes and sweets, I brought along American dishes, and these proved to be a good “conversation starter”. My cooking skills, such as they are, were sufficient to demonstrate to the women that I was a “good wife to my husband” and not a “rabid feminist”. I learned how to make a “decent pot of tea”, not in that “American way”, and I did my share of kitchen duties, such as washing up, etc., so as to become “one of them”.

In the course of my fieldwork it would have been desirable for me to jot down notes as events unfolded, but I found that writing in a notebook in public was too conspicuous. On a couple of informal occasions (such as after the Sunday service) on which I tried to take notes, my notebook was commandeered with a friendly but impossible to ignore request to “let’s see what you’re writing”. Twice, when I excused myself and went to my car to write notes, I was asked, “What have you been writing down?” Consequently I abandoned the attempt to take notes on informal occasions, and relied on writing detailed notes after I left the parish. However, I was able to take notes of the priest’s sermons and of formal meetings at which parishioners themselves were taking notes or keeping minutes. Despite this, I was unable to write down anything controversial or of a personal nature, because people quite frequently leant over and read what I was writing.

In this thesis, informants are never identified by their real names. The names I give them have been selected completely at random and their circumstances
have been altered at random, consistent with the types of circumstances common in the community. However, the status of being married or widowed, the person's employment (full-time, part-time or home duties), and the group in which the person is active, have not been changed in this way. This of course is common practice in ethnographic studies of this kind, and in addition was necessary to comply with my agreement with the parish on my entry into the field.

A potential problem developed in the course of fieldwork. Since I attended almost every possible meeting and event in the parish, I was often asked by people who had not attended a meeting, for example, to describe and interpret the events. However to have done so would have been, possibly, to have exerted an influence in the parish by intervening in the established communications networks. I had to be careful, for example, not to convey personal information concerning one parishioner to another. My policy in cases where I was asked for such information (and this did sometimes occur, as for example, when I was once asked, "Is Jenny depressed?"), because she had not attended church for some months), or indeed any information, was to relate no more than factual information about future events and dates, etc. Parishioners soon realised that this was my policy, and after beginning to ask me some question, would stop themselves with, "Oh, but you can't tell me that, can you?".

As I mentioned above, much of my time was spent in meetings of the women's groups. All gatherings of the parish, not only the formally arranged groups, have a closely scripted agenda, so there was very little time for me to socialise with parishioners and, consequently, to conduct one-to-one interactions with them. I felt that it was essential for me to broaden my view of the women in the parish, and since I had become friendly with a number of women who were not actively involved in the women's groups, I was able to arrange to meet them in their homes. In this way I managed to conduct 14 formal interviews. The interview schedule, which is reproduced in Appendix 2.1 below, concentrated on the events leading up to these women worshipping at St. Hales, their religious backgrounds, and their gender ideologies. The interviews lasted from one and a half to three hours and were recorded on tape for later transcription. I am not following the customary anthropological practice of giving details of the
interviewees' circumstances, because they would be easily identified from such descriptions and their manner of speaking, and the parishioners of St. Hale's have asked to see a copy of this thesis. (Indeed, I have already read to them, at their request, from drafts of some earlier papers I had written from my fieldwork material).

My experiences in fieldwork were similar in some respects to Patricia Black's work on the Universal Brotherhood, a religious cult operating in the SouthWest of Western Australia (Black 1984). Just as Black (1984:50), I found that direct questions to parishioners received only answers like "I don't know", "I couldn't say", or "Why do you ask?" or "Why do you want to know?" or "Why are you asking me?" or "I wouldn't know" or "Go ask someone else who knows more than I do." A tactic by which I obtained useful data was to share my personal experiences with the informants, and to phrase questions in a form such as "I feel that" or "I have a feeling that ...". This method was also used by Black. The people in the parish were aware that I could be requested to leave the parish at any time were I to make myself unwelcome. In common with Black, I had lowly membership status in the parish (because I was relatively young, childless, and had few skills such as the ability to embroider, knit, sew, etc.), so certain meetings and decisions were closed to me – I had only a lay person's knowledge of many events.

2.5 Social Context of Hale

In Chapter Five I discuss how the socio-economic location of Hale affects the social interactions of female parishioners who use the parish as a means of networking with other women in the area. St. Hale's location in a fairly new, outer urban, growing suburb of Perth profoundly affected the ethnography. How the parish has reacted to this growth is an underlying theme of this thesis, and I now explore ways in which the population size and makeup of Hale have changed in the last years.

St. Hale's can expect continuing growth fuelled by demographic, economic and migration trends in Western Australia. St. Hale's is located in one of the fastest growing new areas of the state, growth which was completely unexpected.
by Western Australian planners and politicians alike. The Western Australian
government estimates that the Hale area will have an additional ten thousand
people by the end of the century (Report of the Parish Development Working
Party 1988:4). The parish first became aware of this when the mayor of Hale at­
tended an ecumenical service and gave some statistics such as this in his speech.
The proportion of Anglicans in the Australian population was roughly one quar­
ter at the time of the fieldwork (Hughes 1993:3). St. Hale’s Anglican Church
thus expects to have pastoral responsibility for an additional 2500 nominal An­
glicans by the year 2000. In the Perth Diocese, between 2% and 5% of nominal
Anglicans appearing on the census are believed to be church attenders (Report of
the Parish Development Working Party 1988:4). Therefore, St. Hale’s may have
an additional 50 to 125 people, giving a total of around 250 to 300 communicants
as regular church attenders, by the turn of the century. As mentioned above, this
would constitute an exceptionally large parish by Australian standards. How can
St. Hale’s Anglican Church meet the demands of discipleship and the gospel,
so as to fulfill the needs of so many people? The parishioners’ answers to this
question are considered in Chapter Three.

The social and economic context of Hale intensifies the parishioners’ aware­
ness of “needing to build a community”. Living in a new suburb is perceived by
some leaders of the parish to risk family break-down and social isolation, and
consequently the need for community is perceived by them to be greater in the
new suburbs, where women, especially, use the church to develop social ties. The
rector and the leaders of the laity of St. Hale’s, when discussing how the parish
should respond to this growth, talk about their perception that people moving
house (or setting up a new house) experience higher rates of marriage break­
downs, and that the incidence of post-partum depression among new mothers in
these circumstances is also higher. Part of the church’s mission is to help alleviate
these problems, and one way in which it accomplishes this is to develop commu­
nity among parishioners. A member of the vestry, for example, gave a 10 minute
speech to an agenda item at the 1989 annual meeting of the parishioners on the
need for the parish to support families and help prevent marriage breakdowns,
since only 45% of families were traditional two-parent families. In Chapter Three
I describe the efforts of the parish in this direction, and the resulting gendered
Most people in Perth live in single family housing; a minority of the population lives in flats or townhouses, and so the geographical area for the suburbs expands to meet the high demand for land for new houses. The number of "outer suburbs", such as Hale, greatly increased in Perth during the 1980's as a result of both a growing population and changing social-economic conditions (Hugo 1990:7-8). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993) reports that the population of the Perth metropolitan area increased from 898,918 in 1981 to 1,143,378 in 1991. There was a 10.6% increase in population from 1981 to 1986 and a 15% increase from 1986 to 1991. The population increase over the period 1981–1991 resulted from migration to Perth from other states of Australia (4.7%, or 47,855 people), and from people moving to Perth from Western Australian rural areas, where the traditional employment opportunities of agricultural and mining have seriously declined, particularly in the last decade or so. In this way, 22.3% or 227,551 people moved to Perth from rural Western Australia. Finally, migration from overseas accounted for an increase of 7.5% (76,492 people) in Perth's population over the same period (p.78). Table 2.3 shows the disparity between the three neighbourhoods contained within Hale, in the movement of people into the area. In “Wandoo” (I will use the names of West Australian tree species to designate the three neighbourhoods which comprise Hale), the newest neighbourhood of Hale, only 23% of people had not moved in the last five years, whereas in “Banksia” the oldest neighbourhood of Hale, 60.9% had not moved. In Wandoo, 34.4% had moved locality but stayed in the same statistical area (which approximately corresponds to Hale and some surrounding suburbs). The neighbourhood of “Karri” is intermediate between the other two neighbourhoods, and this reflects the fact that it was developed after Banksia but before Wandoo.

Apart from the population increase, the search for affordable family housing by people in their twenties and thirties put further pressure on available land in the outer suburbs of Perth. These people could not afford to buy houses in the inner suburbs in which they were raised, because of their high cost. For example, a house on a quarter acre block of land in Hale cost between $119,000 and $195,000 in 1988, while in an inner city middle-class suburb, a similar house
cost from $230,000 to $500,000 at that time. (Figures based on a Real Estate Institute of WA survey of median house prices in Perth, published by The West Australian, 1994). The price of housing increased by approximately 20% during my fieldwork period (1988–1989).

### TABLE 2.3: HALE RESIDENTS' RESIDENCE 5 YEARS AGO*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAME ADDRESS 5 YEARS AGO</th>
<th>DIFFERENT ADDRESS, OTHER SAME AREA</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BANKSIA 6673 (60.9)</td>
<td>1065 (9.7)</td>
<td>3225 (29.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARRI 5541 (44.5)</td>
<td>2612 (21.0)</td>
<td>4309 (35.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WANDOO 1221 (23.0)</td>
<td>1832 (34.4)</td>
<td>2265 (43.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL 13435 (46.7)</td>
<td>5509 (19.2)</td>
<td>9799 (34.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages are given in brackets.

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, about 48% (for the older section) and 67% (for the newer section) of Hale households were paying off mortgages at the time I was there. Only 11% or so of households were renting. The median annual family income, obtained from the 1991 census, was in the $40-50,000 bracket, while monthly housing loan repayments were in the $630-700 range. Hale is in a “mortgage belt” area where home mortgage loan interest rates climbed from levels of around 13.5% just a couple of years before to the height of 17% while I was doing fieldwork. (Almost all home loans at that time were “variable-rate” loans, in which the rate of interest fluctuates). When interest rates climb to this extent in a short period of time, while wages increase by only a few percent, as occurred in Western Australia at that time, much financial hardship ensues, and some parish people were seriously concerned that their houses might be repossessed. This illustrates how tightly those households were
budgetted. As a way of saving on expenses, I know of older women who baby-sat their grandchildren so that the young mother could work to help meet the mortgage payment.

2.6 Social Isolation

Life in a rapidly expanding suburb such as Hale can be a socially isolating experience, especially for women. People commonly decide whether to live in areas north or south of the Swan River, which divides the Perth metropolitan area in half, by the proximity of jobs, relatives and friends. But people told me that they had moved to Hale, rather, for affordable middle-class housing within a reasonable commuting distance of Perth. Except for retired individuals moving closer to their children, the decision to move specifically to Hale is thus economic, and new home owners often know no-one in Hale other than their own family members. The saga of buying a new house (in Hale), and moving in, was a common conversation topic among parishioners. Jones (1981), in her study of friendship patterns among women in Kwinana, a relatively new working-class suburb on the outskirts of Perth, found that women who were “social joiners” had a “spatially expanded” neighbourhood compared to other housewives.

Hale, like the new outer suburbs described in Richards’ study (Richards 1990), provides limited organizational opportunities for developing new interpersonal relationships. The government concentrates its resources on providing basic essential services like water, electricity, sewage, and schools, but, at the time of the fieldwork, sections of Hale lacked neighborhood libraries, community swimming pools, and community halls. Citizen’s groups were just beginning to organize social and sporting clubs such as golf, tennis, bowls and cricket clubs. Many people work outside the Hale area. The rise of regional shopping centers has led to the decline of the corner neighbourhood shopping area and consequently to a decline in people walking to do their daily shopping.

Besides providing few social organizations at which people can meet others, Hale had a large concentration of women “at home with small children”, as I often heard from both male and female parishioners. In the newer section of Hale, around fifty percent (48%) of households had children under the age of
12 years, and about one third (28%) of those households had women not in the paid work force. Census data available for some sections of Hale show that the percentage of mothers who were in the work force in Hale was approximately 65%. The above figures are based on information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Information Consultancy, Basic Community Profile, and refer to the 1991 census of population and housing.

The parish of Hale had a baby boom, with a higher than usual number of babies baptized, while I was there. Maternal leave provisions for some mothers (those in the public service and in some private industries) at the time of the fieldwork provided for two years’ unpaid leave.

Table 2.4, in Appendix 2.2, shows the age distribution of residents from the Hale area, by the three neighbourhoods contained in Hale, and reveals that, in Banksia, the older neighbourhood, the population is slightly older, whereas in the newest suburb, Wandoo, there is a comparative preponderance of small children, under the age of ten years. This occurs as young couples with small children buy houses and move into the new neighbourhoods.

Other causes of social isolation, I suggest, are developers’ practices and the particular architectural design of Hale houses. At that time, before beginning to sell housing blocks, developers of new housing estates in the Perth metropolitan area cleared all the coastal scrub from the land until nothing remained but yellow sand. Among Australians, the nickname for West Australians is “sandgropers”, and one can see why this is so in the new coastal suburbs such as Hale, which are built on what are essentially sand dunes. In one nearby suburb, I noticed that different developers sold their vacant blocks at “staged” times, so that one side of a street could be at Stage 2 (to be built on in two years), while the other side of the same street could be at Stage 3 (houses to be built in three years). As a result, people move into new houses which are located in the midst of acres of blowing yellow sand. After Chicago and Wellington, Perth is said to be the third windiest city in the world, and it is impossible to keep the sand out of the new house. Thus the first thing people do when they move into a new house is plant lawns and install fences to act as wind breaks. A second very important function
of the fence is to provide privacy, since a popular form of entertainment is a barbecue held on the back veranda or patio. Commonly fences are constructed of grey concrete-fibre and are often almost six feet high.

The new house must be decorated and furnished. Housing designs in Hale favour the entry hall with a formal lounge on the right (these details seldom vary), the master bedroom and “ensuite” (parents’ bathroom), and perhaps an office, on the left, and, through the lounge, the dining room. Walking straight ahead brings one to the kitchen and meals area, the “family room”, and perhaps the “games room”, which overlook the back veranda. The children’s wing is located in the back. As a consequence of this setup, the whole house looks toward the back yard so women, in particular, lose the advantage of propinquity in meeting new neighbours.

Travelling along a typical Hale street by day, one sees few or no signs of people, either inside or outside the houses. People “value their privacy”, and neighbors “don’t want to live in each others’ pockets”. I heard these sentiments expressed at a Bible study group meeting where the members, in order to evangelise, were asked to evaluate their relationships with their neighbours. In Chapter Five an analysis of this and related topics will be given at length.

2.7 Discussion

The social costs of the pattern of growth outlined above, coupled with the hardship associated with the general Australian financial downturn, greatly influenced the lives of individual parishioners and parish social organization during my fieldwork period. This chapter has provided a backdrop to the parishioners’ lives outside the parish, and described the socio-economic context of the suburb of Hale. The introductory data will be used in later chapters as a basis for understanding the way St. Hale’s women build the parish community.
APPENDIX 2.1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Most or all of the following questions were asked at each of the 14 formal interviews carried out during the course of the fieldwork.

Introductory Questions

A. Where did you grow up?

B. What did you want to be when you were a child?

C. When did you leave school?

D. What kinds of jobs in the paid workforce have you had?

Anglican Identity, Relation to the Church

A. Have you always been Anglican?

B. How often did you attend church when you were growing up?

C. Would you say that religion was important in your childhood family?

D. Did you go to Anglican schools?

E. Were your parents practising Anglicans?

F. How long have you been at St. Hale’s?

G. Why did you come to St. Hale’s?

H. How often do you attend the Sunday services?

I. How often do you read the Bible?

J. Do you at the present time regularly participate in any parish groups? Have you in the past? If so, which groups?

K. Do you regularly participate in any Christian or Anglican groups that are not parish based?
L. Do you have any relations in full-time ministry?

M. Are your friends members of St. Hales? Did you meet friends through St. Hale's?

N. What does it mean to you to be an Anglican?

O. Have you had any sign or confirmation from God?

P. What is the "Family of God"?

Q. When do you go to the clergy for practical or spiritual advice?

R. Please think over the people you know at St. Hale's.

Who do you feel closest to?

Who do you respect?

Who do you see socially, as an individual? As a couple? as a family?

S. Are you on the parish roll? Why, or why not?

T. Are you a member of vestry or a parish committee? If so, what does the vestry or committee do? What is your role in the vestry or committee?

U. Have you been a member of a vestry or a parish committee in the past? If so, when? If so, what did the committee do?

Image of God

A. Without using the words "Father", "Son", or "Spirit", describe your concept of God.

Gender Roles

A. What are your opinions on changes in society such as equal opportunity legislation for women, or women working outside the home?

B. Should deacons, priests, and bishops be male? Should lay leadership positions be held by males?
C. Are there special places in the Church or ministries for men and women?

D. Do you prefer single-sex groups, always, in the church or only for some activities?

E. Should women read the lessons, prayers, and help serve the communion?

F. Why do you think there are more women than men in the Church?

G. What should be the attitude of people whose spouses are not Christian?

H. In marriage, what is the ideal, headship of the man or mutual submission? What is the actuality in your marriage?

I. Do you help in the care of elderly relatives?

J. What are your attitudes to the disciplining of children?

K. Should the Church employ gender-neutral language?

L. Was there ever a time when you felt discriminated against, in the Church?

M. How do you feel about people using “She” in reference to God?

N. What does the Church give to women?

O. What does God give to women?
## APPENDIX 2.2

**TABLE 2.4: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HALE BY NEIGHBOURHOODS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE (YEARS)</th>
<th>BANKSIA</th>
<th>KARRI</th>
<th>WANDOO</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>763 (6.4)</td>
<td>1395 (9.8)</td>
<td>745 (12.1)</td>
<td>2903 (8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>1049 (8.7)</td>
<td>1669 (11.8)</td>
<td>789 (12.9)</td>
<td>3507 (10.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>1458 (12.2)</td>
<td>1465 (10.3)</td>
<td>588 (9.6)</td>
<td>3511 (10.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>1364 (11.4)</td>
<td>1063 (7.5)</td>
<td>437 (7.1)</td>
<td>2864 (8.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>748 (6.2)</td>
<td>643 (4.5)</td>
<td>219 (3.6)</td>
<td>1610 (5.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>638 (5.3)</td>
<td>773 (5.5)</td>
<td>494 (8.1)</td>
<td>1905 (5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–34</td>
<td>806 (6.7)</td>
<td>1457 (10.3)</td>
<td>742 (12.1)</td>
<td>3005 (9.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>1169 (9.7)</td>
<td>1726 (12.2)</td>
<td>739 (12.0)</td>
<td>3634 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–44</td>
<td>1531 (12.8)</td>
<td>1474 (10.4)</td>
<td>589 (9.6)</td>
<td>3594 (11.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>904 (7.5)</td>
<td>759 (5.4)</td>
<td>254 (4.1)</td>
<td>1917 (5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–54</td>
<td>489 (4.1)</td>
<td>407 (2.9)</td>
<td>180 (2.9)</td>
<td>1076 (3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>1073 (8.9)</td>
<td>1336 (9.4)</td>
<td>360 (5.0)</td>
<td>2769 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 11192 (100)  14167 (100)  6136 (100)  32295

* Percentages are given in brackets.
CHAPTER THREE

Building Community: the Parish as a Gendered Organisation

3.0 Introduction

Acker (1990), in her theory of gendered organisations, argues that the differential structural location of women and men is one element of a gendered organisation. The institutional discourse on the position of women in the Anglican Church reflects a clear structural division of male and female. This is demonstrated by the prohibition against women being ordained as priests which is maintained in some Australian dioceses; the past banning of women as vestry members, church wardens or diocesan synod representatives; and the gender exclusive language of the liturgy.\(^1\) In this chapter I discuss the theological importance of the parish discourse “building community”. An examination of the parish administration and the small groups reveals the gendered nature and the separation into male and female domains, of St. Hale’s social organisation.

3.1 The Theological Importance of Building a Community

Below are two sections of a sermon given by Father Stephen, St. Hale’s rector, at a Sunday morning service that introduces four sub-themes of this chapter; the theological need for community, the division of humankind into two genders, the creation of a community through social interactions, and the role and identification of women as the care-givers in the community.

... Most peoples’ personal philosophy does not have the power to change lives. Encountering Christ can change lives.

\(^1\) When an earlier draft of this chapter was given to St. Hale’s without this last point included, the rector added that he was becoming more aware of the gender exclusive nature of the liturgy and that the Anglican Church of Australia was considering a non-sexist liturgy.
Christians find God by scripture and by worshipping with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is to be a community. Brothers and sisters come together in unity in the body of the church. . . .

Your attendance here shows your commitment to community. People here are to be important to you. It is vital that we get away from the tradition that faith is to be a private matter. Faith is to be between you and Christ with fellowship among the saints on earth and in heaven. Community life is to be convivial since we exist together in joy.

Do we greet visitors? Do we greet them with joy? At St. Hale’s we shouldn’t exist on the myth that we are a friendly congregation.

Christ wants us to live in the world for Him. To do this we need the support of a community to show faith. Don’t try to be by yourself. We have done this for too long and it doesn’t work. The Lord wants us to be a community. Spread yourself out and meet other people. Change your Discipline and go to the 7:30 am service for a real change.

The allegory of the church as a community is similar to a baby in the womb. The baby grows in a warm and secure place, but when the woman emotionally or psychologically doesn’t want the baby, it gives the child problems dealing with this. Don’t let the church congregation be an unfriendly, unloving place for Christians. (#131)

3.1.1 Corporate Worship

Father Stephen begins the second paragraph with the seminal statement that “Christians find God by scripture and by worshipping...” (my emphasis). Since Anglicans do not have the confessions of the Protestant churches or the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, Noone in Aussie Anglicans: A Study on Anglican Identity explains that “Anglicans express doctrine, or what [they]

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2 The Rev. Dr. Noone, Director of the Anglican Department of Education in Perth, wrote Aussie Anglicans: A Study on Anglican Identity. Aussie Anglicans was the study booklet used by St. Hale’s six parish Lenten study groups during the fieldwork.
believe, through worship” (Noone 1988:7). The second half of Father Stephen’s statement on finding God” ... by worshipping with their brothers and sisters in Christ” (my emphasis) is explained by Noone as follows:

Our worship is first and foremost a corporate act which expresses a corporate faith. As individuals, we join with others in congregations both local and international, and together with those who have gone before us, to express our faith corporately (Noone 1988:10).

The Anglican Church teaches that, rather than being a collection of diverse individuals merely sitting or standing next to each other at worship services, Christians should worship God collectively. As Father Stephen immediately declares in the next sentence, “The church is to be a community. Brothers and sisters come together in unity in the body of the church.” And later in the sermon, “The Lord wants us to be a community”. Collective worship, as “brothers and sisters in Christ”, implies a social relationship among the Christians present at worship.

3.1.2 Community arises out of Social Relationships

The community is characterised as “brothers and sisters together in unity coming together in the body of the church.” Members of a community do not merely worship together; one’s fellow worshippers “are to be important to you.” Men and women should have “fellowship with the saints on earth”. In addition, individuals “need the support of a community to show faith” since “Christ wants us to live in the world for Him.” Parishioners can help in forming and maintaining a community by “[Not] trying to be by yourself. ... Spread yourself out and meet other people.” Be friendly and loving to others. Parishioners should aim for St. Hale’s to be a community and not a collectivity of diverse individuals. Communities are created by individuals interacting and thus developing social relationships with one another.

3 Father Stephen quoted this statement in the annual report to the parish of the Liturgy Committee.
3.1.3 The Implicit Recognition of Gender in Social Relationships

Father Stephen’s repeated use of the phrase “brothers and sisters” underlines the historical nature of social relationships among Christians. A religious community is composed of gendered individuals. An individual’s gender places him or her in the church organisation and determines the range of social roles he or she performs.

3.1.4 Women as Carers

The above extract from Father Stephen’s sermon highlights the inherent gender symbolism in Christianity: God and Christ are male and the church, the body of Christ, is female. It also is a prime example of the female’s role as the builder and the maintainer of community. “... The baby grows in a warm and secure place ... Don’t let the church congregation be an unfriendly, unloving place for Christians”.

By suggesting that his listeners should treat parish newcomers as mothers love their babies in the womb, Father Stephen uses a potent feminine metaphor for the self-sacrificial nature of caring for others. This linking of the feminine with nurturing and care-giving will be developed further in the next chapter. Yet, when he preaches in sermons on the responsibility of parishioners to minister to newcomers and to invite them personally to a small group or parish social event, he is urging men as well as women to care for others. The process of caring for others, as seen by the priest, is a feminine action even when it is carried out by men.

3.2 The Development of Community via Social Organisation

Besides the theological imperative for a parish to be a community, an urgent reason for the parish’s attention to “building community” was the influx of new parishioners. As discussed in Chapter 2, a result of the rapid growth of Perth’s outer suburbs during the 1980’s was the trebling of the membership of St. Hale’s in less than a decade. St. Hale’s was intended originally to be a small intimate neighborhood-based parish of about fifty families where “everyone knew everyone else”, but it had outgrown this original “vision of the Parish”
with its population (at the time of the fieldwork) of approximately two hundred families. The sanctuary was too small for the congregation and every Sunday morning twenty-five to fifty people were forced to sit in the church hall during the “family” service. Apart from the physical overcrowding, such rapid growth impedes the development of social ties necessary to “build community” among parishioners.

3.2.1 Reasons for Attending St. Hale’s

As Father Stephen asserted, community demands social relationships among the members of a community; however, St. Hale’s parishioners reported that friendship and kin networks had little influence on their decision to attend St. Hale’s. Reasons for attending St. Hale’s included:

“When I moved to Perth I naturally went to St. Hale’s because it was close to home.”

“Well, because it’s convenient, it’s Church of England, Anglican.”

“It was a change in ministry ... so [my husband] and I were very uncomfortable with it [the other parish’s ministry, and found it] impossible to adapt to, and over a period of time testing out that St. Hale’s was the right place to go.”

A widow who had moved from out-of-state to be closer to her only child, a parish council member, chose to attend St. Hale’s, and not the parish a couple of suburbs away, because “I am living in this parish.” People often began attending St. Hale’s because it was the neighborhood parish church.

Approximately thirty percent (29.5%) of individuals on the parish roll did not live in Hale. They crossed parish boundaries because, in some cases, St. 4

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4 This differs from the experience of those joining new religious movements who often have personal ties with group members before joining (Lofland & Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1985).
Hale’s was closer than their designated parish worship centre, or they continued worshipping at St. Hale’s after moving house from Hale to a nearby suburb. Some were unhappy with their former parish’s churchmanship or, more rarely, with the priest. I know of no case where someone crossed parish boundaries for the sole reason of worshipping with friends or family. Parishioners, as a consequence of this, lacked social relationships with other parishioners when they first started participating in the parish. Since St. Hale’s parishioners and priest could not rely on pre-existing social relationships to integrate new-comers into the parish, they were searching for ways to facilitate the development of community.

Parish and diocesan leaders recognised the potential in the outer suburbs for loneliness and social isolation. They believed, as part of the church’s mission, that they had a duty to help alleviate these social problems by providing opportunities for people “to have a sense of belonging”. In addition, they recognised the potential for an individual to feel unwanted since “no one knows me”, especially in a large expanding parish. Also, as a practical matter, the physical labour and finance for a worship centre, manse, and clergy stipend required a committed community. With these objects in mind, religious leaders had a strong desire and commitment to provide opportunities for the emergence of community through interactions and relationships in the organisation of parishes.

3.2.2 Parish Responses to Rapid Growth

During my first few months at St. Hale’s Anglican Church, it was apparent that the parishioners and priest were consciously responding to the rapid growth in two ways. One tactic adopted was to modify the social organisation of St. Hale’s to meet the “needs” of the parish. In a teaching sermon, Father Stephen explained that as a church increases in size, such as is happening at St. Hale’s, it is no longer possible for him, or any other priest, to have a personal relationship with each parishioner, and for him to participate in all parish activities. The increase in population necessitates a parish social organisation with many smaller units that allow the development of personal relationships. As a consequence, lay leaders must be encouraged to undertake more responsibility in administration and in the building of personal relationships within the parish.
Father Stephen placed on the whiteboard the following statement: “We become an Orchestra making Harmony with many different instruments”. The priest, of course, remains as a “figure of unity and fellowship”.

The parish organisation flow chart in Table 3.1 displays the changes that occurred during the fieldwork. These included measures such as introducing new small groups, improving administration, changing from a clergy-focused pattern of ministry to a model of mutual ministry (this point will be discussed in Chapter Eight), and encouraging people to be more friendly to visitors and new members. Three gender specific groups – a young mother’s group, a women’s craft group, and a men’s group – were added to the parish in response to the perceived needs of the parishioners and the continuing development of the parish. Christian Life groups, that is, cell groups which meet in members’ homes, were established to “provide both fellowship and support and to give a further richness to our parish family” (Annual Report of the Rector 1988:2). Changes to parish administration included the division of the building and maintenance parish committee into two committees; the addition of a stewardship committee; an increase from one people’s church warden to two peoples’ wardens; and a part-time paid parish secretary. The system of separate rosters for all the tasks essential for Sunday worship services was replaced by the more efficient team ministries.
### TABLE 3.1: PARISH ORGANISATION*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vestry</th>
<th>Parish Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rector-Chair</td>
<td>Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 members elected by the parish</td>
<td>Liturgy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 members appointed by the rector</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Synod Representatives</td>
<td>Children &amp; Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Rector’s warden</td>
<td>Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parishioners’ warden</td>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parishioners’ warden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parish Development**

**RECTOR**

- Paid part-time secretary

**Team Ministry**

- Christian Life Groups

---

**Sunday School**

**Fellowship Groups**

- C of E Girls’ Society (WA)
- C of E Boys’ Society (Aus)
- Ladies’ Guild
- Mothers’ Union (Int.)
- Caritas (Int.)
- Craft Group
- Parish Men’s Group
- Youth

* Groups and committees formed during the fieldwork are in italics.
The second tactic adopted by the vestry was to appoint a parish development working party to examine "future options of the parish"—such as whether or not to divide into two parishes, to build a larger worship centre, to modify the organisation of the parish, or to purchase property for a larger parish hall and a second manse for an additional priest. Every parish group and committee sent a report to this working party concerning the present and future requirements necessary to fulfill their activities and functions, assuming an increase in population. The first two sentences of the Report of the Parish Development Working Party reveal an awareness of the problems associated with this growth:

The number of active members of the Parish, and its total present population, have grown well beyond the capability of one priest, one building, and the present organization to adequately serve the needs of parishioners or to reach out to the community.

The shortfall is so great that minor tinkering cannot solve it and so a complete planning study has been undertaken (Report of the Parish Development Working Party 1988:1).

No one attending a parish meeting called to present the report of the working party denied the diagnosis of "a shortfall... so great that minor tinkering cannot solve it...". In fact, some of the changes mentioned in the previous paragraph to the parish organisation were made before the working party reported its results to the parish.

The vestry (parish council) wrote, based on the parish development working party's hundred page report, a four page list of recommendations on "practices and organizational structures within the Parish". Father Stephen, instead of delivering his usual Sunday morning sermons, read the "Vestry Recommendations for Parish Development" (below is an extract) to the congregation the week it was released. The fact that the report and its recommendations were generally known within St. Hale's is indicated by Father Stephen's action, and also by a parish meeting where the working party's report was presented. In addition to this, the vestry presented their recommendations to a well-attended parish meeting of approximately fifty people.
The following four recommendations from the Vestry report have a bearing on this chapter.

**Service as leaders** is to be encouraged and seen to be a normal activity for many people, and training of leaders should be arranged as appropriate (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988:1).

We all need to develop further a spirit and culture of always **reaching out** with warmth to newcomers and visitors, genuinely accepting them into our fellowship, and our organization structure should be chosen to assist this (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988: 1).

The concept of **cell groups** should be tried as a basis of parish organization independent of parish size. This not only emulates the way of the earliest Christians (small groups of nearby friends meeting in homes) but also appears to be a sound basis for allowing each member to feel that membership is desirable and the best strategy for breaking through the self-limiting parish barrier. This will create an environment where each person will be able to know a realistic proportion of the people of the parish (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988:2).

Our organization (sic) structure, based on Vestry, Committees, and Groups is a successful structure and should continue. It capitalizes on the many and varied available talents, provides opportunities for leadership and participation, and spreads the workload. It is sufficiently flexible to expand or contract the number and composition of Committees and Groups to meet changing needs (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988: 2).

During eight months of intense evaluation of the report on “future directions of the parish”, when radical suggestions such as selling or demolishing the worship centre were considered, at no point did anyone mention the gendered nature of the parish social organisation. The vestry stated that “Our organization (sic) structure based on Vestry, Committees, and Groups is a successful structure and should continue” (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988: 2).
3.3 Parish Administration: Vestry and Committees

I begin this section by describing the parish administration (refer back to Table 3.1 “Parish Organisation”). I then examine the selection of leaders and suggest that one indication of the gendered nature of the parish is that the formal leaders are more likely to be men than women. I conclude with two examples that suggest the existence of a male and a female domain in the parish.

3.3.1. Vestry

The Diocese of Perth requires that every parish have a vestry (parish council), formed under diocesan regulations, to administer parish finances and maintain church property. (Some vestries undertake additional responsibilities in the parish.) The Diocese does not impose a model of social organisation on parishes; rather, parishes organise themselves in response to the perceived needs of present and potential parishioners. Consequently, every parish has a distinctive social organisation reflecting its specific history and demographic characteristics. Nevertheless, the unique nature of each parish should not be over-stressed, since there is a continuity between parishes throughout the Anglican Communion that permits Anglicans new to a particular parish to “feel at home”.

The vestry is the “authoritative and administrative body” of every parish.\footnote{5 This is based on the rector’s sermon on the working of the parish and diocese a few weeks before an annual meeting of the parishioners.} It administers parish finances, maintains properties (the diocesan trustees “hold all property”), pays clergy’s salaries, and assists the rector and church wardens. Parishioners on the parish roll who attend the parish annual meeting elect three-quarters of the vestry, while the rector appoints one quarter of the vestry. (An individual must apply to be listed on the parish roll. He or she must be baptised, be over sixteen years old, and have worshipped at St. Hale’s for the last year). The members of the parish elect six members of vestry and the rector appoints two vestry members. The members elect two people’s church wardens and the rector appoints a rector’s warden. Church wardens provide “leadership in the
church”, are responsible for the care of church property, and “care for and stand with the rector”. St. Hale’s has two members of the diocesan synod. They “are not parish representatives to the diocesan synod”, but rather “members of synod that reflect synod back to us”. Members of synod are elected by their parishes for a three year term. Church wardens, synod representatives, and the rector are ex-officio members of the vestry. The rector chairs vestry meetings and the annual meeting of the parishioners. For each parish committee, the members of vestry appoint a convener and a vestry liaison officer who are responsible for committee actions.

The vestry recommends, as mentioned above, that “Service as leaders is to be encouraged and seen to be a normal activity for many people...” (Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development 1988:1). Yet, it is ambiguous as to whether or not it is a “normal activity” for women to have a formal leadership position in parish and diocesan government. Do parishioners perceive leadership as a “normal activity” for women, in light of the historical institutional discourse among Anglicans that defined men as leaders and women as parish carers and workers (Rankin 1993; Sturmey 1989; Porter 1989; Franklin 1986; Kingston 1977; Teale 1977; Bliss 1952; Heeney 1986 & 1988)? Among the Australian dioceses, there has been a wide variation in timing the removal of formal rules against women’s leadership and decision-making in church affairs. For example, the barriers against women being elected as synod representatives were lifted in 1924 for the Diocese of Perth (Dalziell 1990:7), in 1946 for the Diocese of Adelaide, in 1924 for the Diocese of Melbourne, and in 1972 for the Diocese of Sydney (Sturmey 1989:172). The Synod of Adelaide, as early as 1897,

passed legislation to enable women to vote at parish meetings, to elect synodsmen and wardens. It seems women were also permitted by the same legislation to become wardens, and did so in a few parishes in the early 1900’s (Sturmey 1989:96).

In contrast, in the Sydney diocese, women could not be members of vestry until 1956 (Sturmey 1989:173) and they could not be selected as church wardens until 1978! Porter attributes this to the fact that “churchmen feared that women given such a high degree of authority in the parish would quickly take over all
power" (Porter 1989:63). By 1978, women had been ordained as priests in Hong Kong, the United States, Canada and New Zealand (Porter 1989:22-24). I have not been able to discover, through church histories or standard references, when women could first be selected as members of vestry or church wardens in Perth.

3.3.2 Parish Leaders

The selection of St. Hale's vestry and committee leaders, except for one exception discussed below, is done in a gender-neutral manner. The parish, and for that matter the diocese, have no formal rules or practices to the effect that either a certain proportion of vestry positions or committee conveners should be reserved for a specific gender. The only gender-explicit suggestion I heard occurred when the rector suggested at a parish annual meeting that, since the parish was entitled to have two people's wardens as a result of growth, the parish should consider nominating and electing a woman and a man.

Although the process of selecting leaders is perceived as gender-neutral by the parishioners, I observed that there was nonetheless a tendency for leadership and decision-making to be defined as a masculine attribute. This attribution of men as decision-making leaders and of women as carers results in a division in the organisation between male and female domains (Acker 1992). These domains should be thought of as a pattern of symbolic location in contrast to strict segregation or rigid gender roles. While some women were allowed into the male domain if they had male "characteristics", the following evidence suggests that parish administration is constructed as a male domain.

Firstly, leadership and decision-making positions were a province of males, despite the fact that women were church wardens, committee conveners, members of vestry and diocese synod representatives. Men were more likely to be leaders than women, when one considers the gender imbalance of the parish roll:

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6 Unlike the Uniting Church from 1977-1983, which had a quota system of at least a third women of the lay membership in church government committees (Tulip 1986).
sixty-three percent of these were women and thirty-eight percent were men. In statistical terms, this difference is significant, having a chi-square value of 6.81 with 1 degree of freedom. See Table 3.2, which compiles all statistics on vestry and committee leaders by gender for three years. Parish committees started in 1987.

**TABLE 3.2: PARISH LEADERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (All Full Time)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (Full Time)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (Home Duties)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (Retired)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Women</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, of the twelve women having a formal leadership position for the parish, nine were in paid employment, two were “home with children”, and one was of retirement age. This is a larger number of women than expected to be employed outside the home, which can be demonstrated as follows. De Vaus and McAllister’s (1987) study showed that Australian women employed full-time outside the home attend church less than comparable men. The Australian Bureau of Census 1991 Basic Community Profile, for the Hale area, shows that 43% of all women were employed outside the home. Thus we would expect only five of the twelve female leaders mentioned above to have been in full-time employment, whereas nine of twelve were. Performing a statistical test of significance would be inappropriate given the small size of the sample but it seems reasonable to conclude that women in paid employment were over-represented in St. Hale’s leadership positions. I never heard any parishioner, male or female, question this imbalance.
Thirdly, men were exclusively the conveners for the maintenance, children and youth, liturgy, stewardship, and building committees, whereas women alone were the conveners for the fellowship and pastoral care committees. The education committee had had both male and female conveners. This pattern continued the traditional role of women as carers and men as administrators.

Fourthly, when I entered the parish the possibility of my attending vestry was discussed by the priest but in fact I never attended any of these parish management meetings; they were not open to the public and I was never specifically invited. When I asked three vestry members about my attending either vestry or a committee meeting, their response was to query my interest in attending since my study concerned the women in the parish. I decided not to press for admission to vestry and committee meetings because people saw me as being interested in women rather than in parish management groups, and I did not want to challenge their image of me as someone who “fitted into the parish”. I was concerned that if I campaigned in such a way I would be breaking the norms of “not creating a fuss” and consequently lose access to the women’s groups.

The following conversation provides further evidence for my assertion that there was a difference in the parishioners’ perception of the leadership abilities of women who are in full-time paid employment as compared with those who remain home with children. More importantly, it demonstrates the existence of a gendered division in the social organisation. This conversation occurred at an educational evening event with both men and women present. Alan White, a vestry member who previously had described himself to me as a supporter of “women’s lib”, began to introduce me to Susan Powell, the convener of the education committee. (Mrs. Powell holds a prominent position in the wider community).

Susan stopped his introduction and said, “We [myself and she] met at the young mothers’ tea”.

He replied with amusement/in a joking manner, “What were YOU doing there?”

She replied “I am the mother of a young child. I like talking with other mothers”.

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Shaking his head, Alan replied “I can’t imagine you at something like that”.

Further conversation about the evening event occurred. Alan remarked to Susan at the close of the conversation, “I still can’t see you at a young mothers’ tea”. When I repeated this conversation (without names) at a post-fieldwork presentation to the parish, one woman spoke about “women being a man like Susan Powell” because they are perceived by others as using a male model of behaviour.

Another revealing incident concerns a meeting called for the parish committees and vestry to discuss “the general subject of communication between the committees and vestry”. These difficulties arose from the forming of six parish committees in the previous year, which were to lighten the rector’s and vestry’s load in this time of parish growth and to encourage an ideology of mutual ministry among parishioners.7 The leaders of the three women’s groups were not invited (at this time there were only three women’s groups). When I inquired of a vestry member about my attending the meeting, he asked why I was interested in doing so, arguing that the meeting had nothing to do with women. In fact, two of the women’s leaders told me that they were upset about having been overlooked, because many of their activities overlapped with the committees’ activities and responsibilities. The women felt that there had been problems, especially for the Ladies’ Guild and the Mothers’ Union, as to which group or committee was responsible for visiting the sick, the parents of babies to be baptised, and potential new members; for purchasing items such as refrigerators, drapes and fans; and for planning for parish events. The women felt that the vestry was not recognising the contribution they made to the “life of the parish”. I believe that the failure to invite the women’s representatives to the meeting occurred because the women’s groups were regarded by the vestry and the rector as constituting a domain separate from that of the parish administration.

7 See Chapter Eight “Household of God” and “Community of God” for a discussion on mutual ministry.
I conclude this section with an extract from an interview with Irene:

But I think a lot of women don’t want to be up front [near the altar, also, a public leader]. Mind a lot of men don’t want to be up front either . . . but as far as I am concerned there always has been the men to do the things. And you know, you saw the men up there and the women down here, and the men always did the leading and the men always took the leading role. But I guess I feel some men aren’t leaders and some are and that’s the way it is.

3.4 Small Groups

People went to St. Hale’s in search of support and fellowship, but in fact simply “going to church” provided few opportunities to meet people. The parish management committees and the vestry were not avenues for meeting people, since they were only open to those already in the social network of St. Hale’s. St. Hale’s attempted to remedy this and to “build a community” by encouraging people to join small groups, which provide better opportunities for meeting people and for making friends. Existing parish groups were changed and new groups were formed in an attempt to meet the perceived needs of potential, new and existing parishioners. For example the rector, the vestry, and the pastoral care committee proposed the formation of the Christian Life groups to enhance the spiritual understandings of parishioners. As another example, a committee of young mothers approached the rector, requesting a group to be formed to meet their own needs. The seriousness with which the idea that groups are required to give individuals “a sense of belonging” is seen in the act of the rector dismantling the choir for not “welcoming” new people.

There were ten categories of small groups in the parish whose aims were related to the enhancing of a person’s “sense of belonging” and to “building the community”. The number of people in each section of a group was limited to no

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8 I am using the term category instead of small groups because there are six separate Christian Life Groups, four age levels of the Church of England Boys’ Society, and three age levels of the Church of England Girls’ Society.
more than twenty for the children’s groups and a dozen for the adult Christian Life Groups. The eight fellowship groups, which were organised by gender and, to a lesser extent, by age, provided the most opportunities for social integration.

Individuals joined a group either by direct individual invitation, or else by perusing the Sunday pew sheet, which listed future parish meetings and events from which they could select a group of interest. Additionally, after the benediction, the priest announced the time and place of meetings and activities open to the parish; he also invited people to join new groups such as the Men’s Group or the Christian Life Groups. The composition of each fellowship group was fluid.

These fellowship groups included the weekly meetings for the Church of England Boys’ Society (C.E.B.S) and the Church of England Girls’ Society (C.E.G.S) for children. The Men’s Group started during the course of my fieldwork. The women had the Ladies’ Guild (most of whose members were in their fifties and sixties), the Craft Group (most women were in their thirties and forties), the Mothers’ Union (most women were over forty-five) and Caritas (most women were in their late twenties and thirties). The Mothers’ Union and Caritas allowed male members, in principle, according to their international rules, but in practice St. Hale’s groups were exclusively female. When I asked why this was so, I was told that it was because no man had ever requested admission to these groups. (In another Perth diocesan parish, there was a Caritas playgroup with male members.) The sole exception to this pattern of gender exclusivity among fellowship small groups was the “Youth” group, which was composed of young women and young men between fifteen and twenty years of age. Anyone could attend the adult fellowship meetings or activities; the C.E.B.S and C.E.G.S had a waiting list for new members.

By contrast, the remaining two categories of groups – the Christian Life Groups (home cell groups) and the team ministry groups – while being open to both sexes, provided fewer opportunities for personal interaction. Eight team ministry groups were responsible for performing the tasks necessary for the Sunday service that once were rostered. Christian Life Groups met fortnightly in a member’s home and were similar to a bible study group, except for an emphasis
on self-disclosure, and acting upon one’s Christianity in daily life. Half of these
groups met during the day and were mainly composed of women. A slight ma­
ajority of individuals meeting in the evening Christian Life Groups attended as
couples. Individuals were not encouraged to visit Christian Life Groups. Once
having joined, individuals were expected to have a commitment to the group and
not just to visit casually.

The membership composition and activities of these small groups often re­
inforced traditional roles. This was not a deliberate policy, but rather, a series of
independent decisions made as a result of perceived needs and desires of current
and potential members. As mentioned above, the hierarchical church has no for­
mal rules to the effect that parishes will have specific types of groups which will
have specific activities; the parish laity and clergy jointly decide group formation
and then the group plans its own activities. As a young parish, St. Hale’s had no
long-standing practice of separate male and female fellowship groups; none of the
groups listed above, except for the Ladies’ Guild, had had a continual presence
in the parish for more than three years. Hence the parishioners, in choosing to
practise gender separation in forming fellowship groups, were reproducing the
essential difference between male and female.

The use of physical space was gendered at St. Hale’s (Spain 1992). Many
male activities occurred outside the parish worship centre, whereas female groups’
activities were located inside, in parish worship centres. The primary function
of the male groups was to provide opportunities for males to have “Christian
fellowship”; a secondary function was to provide service to others. On the other
hand, the overt institutional and parish discourse for female groups centred on
sacrificial service for others and improving their mothering and homemaking
skills. A secondary parish discourse for women, by contrast, concentrated on
‘sharing and caring’ or social integration.

3.4.1 Children’s Fellowship Groups

The contrast between the Church of England Boys’ Society (C.E.B.S.) and
the Church of England Girls’ Society (C.E.G.S.) provides the same pattern of
gendered differences found in adult men and women’s fellowship groups. Two
sisters, while telling me about C.E.G.S. in an interview held in their home after school, said that they wished they could do "fun things" like the boys, whereas they in fact had to learn "girl things" such as hair-care. I suspected that this was an example of "tease the anthropologist" until I read the annual report to the parish written by their leader.

The girls have taken part in a number of activities, learning and improving their skills in bed making, making Palm Crosses, cooking, care of animals, sewing, first aid, hair care and taking care of their body through regular exercise. ... The C.E.G.S. also took part and organized a very successful Fashion Parade to help with their contribution to missions. A great deal of enjoyment this year has come from dressing up for various special days such as Pioneer Day, Book Week and a special Mini Olympics to celebrate Australia's participation in the Olympics at Seoul (Parish Reports 1989:9).

This continuing emphasis on "girl things" such as clothing can also be seen in the C.E.G.S. program, posted in the parish hall, which listed the appropriate uniform for each week's function. The girls, in addition to the above "feminine" activities, participated in sports days, visited the city council chambers and the Perth fire Station Museum, took a day bus trip to York, and attended a Junior Camp at Bickley. C.E.G.S social events such as fund-raisers, visiting Daisy House (an Anglican community centre in a low socio-economic area which provides emergency aid, self-help groups, and financial counselling) and "play(ing) indoor carpet bowls with the Senior Citizens at their centre in (Hale)" (Parish Reports 1989: 9) ensured that the girls learned the skills necessary for future involvement in parish life.

The boys' program featured camps (on the Serpentine trail), overnight hikes, the grooming of horses, leather-working, and wood-working. Teamwork and self-reliance were stressed. Needless to say, the C.E.B.S program posted beside the C.E.G.S program did not list the appropriate uniform to wear at the weekly meetings.

3.4.2 Adult Fellowship Groups

The parish had one men's group and four women's groups. All five groups,
besides providing fellowship, had different purposes and target audiences. The following is a very brief description of them. The same pattern seen in the children’s groups can be seen in the adult groups. The major purpose of the Men’s Group was fellowship and the bringing of men into the parish, whereas the women’s groups emphasised service to others.

3.4.2.1 The Parish Men’s Group

As part of the parish’s response to growth, a member of the vestry, Bob Daniels, organised a games night in the parish hall for men interested in re-establishing a Parish Men’s Group. The fourteen men present decided that:

There was a definite need for a group of this type as it would help in fostering a better rapport between the men of the parish and that this in turn would lead to closer ties between families as well. ... (It would) be a possible source of outreach contact for families involved in the preparation of baptism through the involvement of the husband or father (Parish Reports 1989:14).

A primary concern of the church leaders and the organiser of the Men’s Group was to provide a non-threatening environment for non-practising and practising Anglicans to fellowship with Christian men, since they believed that men are uncomfortable with “churchly things”.

The Men’s Group organised activities such as tours of the Aussat Earth Station and the new international airport, and activities such as golf, bowling, and dinners. The dinners, held in restaurants and featuring speakers, were popular, with attendances ranging between twenty-five and forty-six men. The men drank wine and beer at these events (I have heard some men teasing others about the quantity of alcohol drunk at a dinner) and the report of the Men’s Group refers to “wining and dining”. It would defeat the purpose of showing that Christian men are men (O’Brien 1993) and gathering together as “mates” if drinking did not occur at these dinners (Hamilton 1990; Mewett 1988). Their meetings, except for the first one, were held in venues away from the St. Hale’s worship centre. “Busy-bees” at the homes of elderly parishioners and Daisy House were their
only service activities. The men did not fund-raise for missions. The majority of the men in this group were aged around thirty or forty. There had been a previous Men’s Group in 1987, but it was in recess during 1988.

3.4.2.2 The Ladies’ Guild

The primary function of the Ladies’ Guild was to support the work of the parish, and to raise money for the parish and for charitable organisations. A secondary function was to provide fellowship for the ladies of the parish. The members’ modal age was sixty. This group organised and ran jumble sales, street stalls, fashion shows, raffles, microwave demonstrations, and new product demonstrations as fund-raisers for church and secular charities. (A new product demonstration is an advertising event at which a demonstrator attends a meeting for about one and a half hours and gives details of new household consumer products. There is a fee for admission). The Guild, of about twenty-five women, earned several thousand dollars a year for missions by these means. Every Guild meeting had precise objectives to fulfill in planning future fund-raising activities.

The same gender patterns observed with the Church of England Girls’ Society – of being confined to the parish worship centre, the reinforcement of traditional roles, and the primary goal of serving others – are seen with the Ladies’ Guild and Craft. The only Guild activity not held in the parish hall (or in a nearby rented hall belonging to a Christian organisation, since St. Hale’s hall is too small) was a jumble sale, which took place at a near-by shopping centre in an economically depressed area of Perth. The reason given for this was that “our parishioners aren’t interested in buying jumble anymore”. The Ladies’ Guild held a yearly Christmas luncheon, either in the parish hall or, more rarely, at the Chinese restaurant across the street from the parish hall. This purely social occasion was a “thank-you” present given to all the ladies of the parish who had helped the Guild during the year.

3.4.2.3 The Craft Group

The Craft Group was a semi-autonomous section of the Ladies’ Guild. The story of the founding of this group is given in Chapter Seven. The Craft women made hand-crafted items such as quilted cushion covers, dolls, embroidered
clothes and Christmas decorations, covered clothes hangers, and “promenades” (a kind of silverfish and moth repellent made by covering an orange with cloves and drying on a wood stove). These items were then sold, either at a craft stall after the Sunday morning services or at a local craft fair, with the profits being donated to church and secular charities. The age range of the approximately ten women in the group was thirty to fifty. They met weekly, either at a member’s home or at the parish hall, after attending a mid-week morning eucharist service.

3.4.2.4 The Mothers’ Union

The official aim of the Mothers’ Union is to be “concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life” (The Mothers’ Union In Australia Service Book:4). The most visible presence of the Mothers’ Union at St. Hale’s was at the monthly baptism services. Mothers’ Union members took part in baptism services, visited the parents of the children to be baptised, and several times a year conducted pram services for parents and young children (see Chapter Six for more on pram services). Other members were involved in the Australia-wide Message Home Program, a community service program in which people, especially teenaged runaways, by calling the Message Home telephone number, could have a message for their families relayed by the Mothers’ Union member. The Mothers’ Union had guest speakers on family and religious subjects: for example, a Catholic priest recounted his visit to the Roman Catholic Monastery at Taize, France, where thousands of young people gather on retreats. Another guest speaker told of changes to the laws on child support payments from non-custodial parents to custodial parents. Two spiritual highlights of the Mothers’ Union calendar were one day retreats at the Anglican college for “Lady Day” and “The Day of Prayer”. Since most of the twenty participants had grown up or teenage children, they joked that the “Mothers’ Union is really the Grandmothers’ Union”. While anyone could attend the Mothers’ Union, to become a member one had to go through a formal membership process.

3.4.2.5 Caritas

Caritas was a separate part of the Mothers’ Union for young mothers. The emphasis was more on caring and sharing among themselves than service to others, because “they are busy with young children”. Nevertheless, they organised
the parish gift of twenty Christmas lunch hampers (to the value of $1600) for Daisy House clients. Caritas had speakers on topics such as first aid, family law, and child-rearing. The leaders considered Caritas an outreach to young mothers in the neighborhood so "we don’t want to push religion down people's throats". Picnics during school holidays with their children were the only occasions on which they met outside the parish worship centre.

When I asked a woman informant what they did at Guild, or Caritas, or Mothers' Union, a common response was first to tell me, "it's not about drinking cups of tea and gossiping". The concern of the members of the women's groups to present themselves as serving others, and not being just a "cup of tea and a chat" group, reflects the gendered nature of the parish. Many parishioners not in these groups, including women, told me that the women's groups were "just an excuse for a good gossip". Alvesson and Billing (1992) suggest that nicknames such as the Ladies' Guild being a "cup of tea and a chat" group or the Mothers' Union being the "Grandmothers' Onion" are "a way of marginalizing and degrading" (p.89) these groups and locating them in the parish structure.

There was little time for personal interaction at either the meetings or at the special events of these groups. It is possible that the women's groups felt the need for dual purposes – service to the community and Christian fellowship – so as to avoid the stigma of being a "group of gossiping women". I never heard the Men's Group referred to by either a man or a woman as a bunch of gossiping men. As a brief summary, we could say that men went outside the church building to have fun with their mates, while the women worked for others in the church building.

3.4.3 Christian Life Groups (Cell Groups)

The Vestry Recommendation for Parish Development advocated the development of cell groups as "... a sound basis for allowing each member to feel that membership is desirable ..." (1988:2). Christian Life Groups were the third type of small group employed by St. Hale's as an additional way of "building community". Below are sections of a sermon on community in which Father Stephen introduced to the parish the cell group program, Christian Life Groups. (Note
Father Stephen’s mention of the Catholic Church’s offer of “manpower”).

... In liturgy the ritual focuses our hearts and minds onto God. This is difficult to maintain. It is bred into Anglicans that they can survive with worshipping only once a week. Worship is done communally, yet, many people do not recognise community.

We need to focus on the lack of people focusing on community. The early church shared possessions. We need to recognise our greater dependence on others. Christ called us to be a community; we need to be together more to grow. Life is not plodding along. One way this parish will try to encourage community will be to establish cell groups.

Anglicans are not like the Protestants who know the value of community. We will use the Roman Catholic program of Christian Life Groups. The Roman Catholic Church has offered us their resources, including manpower.

A community must have resources. Cell groups will enable people to learn the gospel better and integrate Christianity into their lives and become whole people. Let me assure you these groups are not therapy groups. ... (#123)

The six Christian Life Groups met in members’ homes and followed a program sponsored by The Catholic Social Apostolate in the Archdiocese of Perth. The groups were composed of both men and women, but mainly women attended the day groups. Each meeting opened with a prayer, a summary of the previous meeting, the Review of Life, then either a scripture sharing section or a social enquiry section. It concluded with a prayer. A Belgian priest, Father Joseph Cardijn, originated for Young Catholic Workers, in 1925, what has come to be known in Perth as “The Review of Life” (Massam 1994). This is the “See, Judge, Act” model of sharing and reflecting on one’s life from a Christian perspective. A lay person in The Review of Life first evaluates a situation in his or her life (See), then decides what should be happening in light of Christ (Judge), and finally makes a decision about changing the situation (Act).

The Christian Life Groups’ information handout stated that:
The successful group is the one in which members try and live out the See, Judge, Act method in their daily lives. This will help us grow as authentic Christians. This will help us show by our actions and attitudes that Christianity is worthwhile and meaningful to life – e.g. if we normally act or react to certain situations without thinking of what we are doing to ourselves and others, then we will find a tremendous difference if we pause and ask ourselves, “How would Christ want me to act in this situation.” We will surprise ourselves and others as we will show our spouses, children and friends real Christianity (sic) which is a much more powerful educator than just talking about it. (Handout to members of Christian Life Groups 1988:2).

Since individuals in Christian Life Groups shared their lives with the others in their group, unlike the more familiar bible study group, some were anxious that the groups might be a disguised group therapy session or part of the New Age Human Potential Movement. When urging parishioners to sign up for a Christian Life Group, Father Stephen repeatedly assured them that “people only had to share what they wished to share” in a Christian Life Group. At the heart of this anxiety was the Review of Life; they were being asked to “... share together in reflection of one’s life from a Christian perspective” (Report of the Pastoral Committee 1989). No other parish group exhibits this level of public self-disclosure. As will be discussed later, the idea of revealing one’s life to others is threatening to most St. Hale’s parishioners.

In a historical study of pre-Vatican II Catholicism in Perth and Adelaide, Massam (1994) describes the See, Judge, Act method as having both masculine and feminine aspects. The interconnections among the members of the group, and the revealing of one’s feelings to others, are the feminine aspect. The masculine aspect is that concerned with the analytical study of a situation, followed by the suggestion to “take action and change things” in the public arena (Massam 1994:143). The Christian Life Groups program of St. Hale’s Anglican Church differs from the one in Massam’s study in the downgrading of the Jungian concept of the archetypal masculine.9 No one sought change in the public arena. The symbolism of having five female discussion leaders out of the six, and the

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9 The Jungian concept of the archetypal masculine and the archetypal feminine were well-known and taught in the diocese.
emphasis on learning, listening and group skills, reinforced the archetypal feminine. The sharing of “what you believe and feel” (Handout to members Christian Life Groups 1988:3) is not an Australian style of masculinity.

3.4.4 Team Ministries

A community worshipping God together must ensure that there are individuals available to accomplish the forty separate tasks listed in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. These tables list only the necessary weekly tasks for the Sunday morning services; they do not enumerate all jobs done in the parish in a year. When I began fieldwork there were rosters on the hall bulletin board for jobs such as cleaning the church building, tending the gardens, leading the prayers and intercessions, preparing the altar flowers, and making morning tea. The rector and the pastoral care committee believed that this roster system was growing cumbersome, so, as part of the parish’s response to growth, they established team ministries. There were eight team ministries, each composed of ten to twenty individuals. Three women and five men were designated as team leaders. Each week one team ministry was responsible for organising and performing each of the items listed in Table 3.4. The teams were not responsible for tasks that were the duty of either a parish committee or the vestry, required a weekly commitment such as the Sunday School and the book stall, or required a specialised skill such as playing the organ.

Teams constituted in this way were thought by the convener of the pastoral care committee to be advantageous for three reasons. Firstly, the spreading of responsibilities throughout the parish reinforces the practice of “mutual ministry”: “going to church” for the laity implies taking an active part in conducting worship, rather than, as under the old model of ministry, a reliance on the clergy, clergywives, and only a few select parishioners. Secondly, individuals have weeks when they can concentrate on worship, rather than on the jobs they have to do that morning. Thirdly, teams provide yet another opportunity for individuals to gain a “sense of belonging”, of group identity, in a large parish.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Gender Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write notices for pew sheets</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit pew sheets</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print pew sheets</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fold pew sheets</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Hymns</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearse music</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Sunday School lessons</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Sunday School</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creche</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altar linen</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestments</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acolytes</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help distribute communion</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacristan</td>
<td>Men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play music</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring the elements to the altar</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count and bank money</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply fresh milk for morning tea</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure tea, coffee, biscuits, cordial, and sugar in kitchen</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank money for the “cuppa” donation</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide transport for members who do not drive</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish bookstall</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3.4: TEAM MINISTRY DUTIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean Church building</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mow lawn and tidy garden</td>
<td>Mainly men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place chairs in hall before service</td>
<td>Mainly men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greet people entering church building</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand out prayer books, hymnals, &amp; pew sheets before service</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare the prayers</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare the intercessions</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the lessons</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead the prayers</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead the intercessions</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass offering baskets round</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect prayer books, hymnals, &amp; pew sheets after service</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove chairs from hall after service</td>
<td>Both men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare and serve the “cuppa”</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare and serve children’s cordial and biscuits</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash-up morning tea</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put out the garbage</td>
<td>Mainly women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tasks in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 have been listed according to whether they were assigned to women, mainly, to men, mainly, or to both genders. I verified Tables 3.3 and 3.4 with twelve parishioners who attended a seminar, based on an earlier version of this chapter, which I presented at St. Hale’s in 1991.\(^\text{10}\)

Their unwillingness to state that any particular task was limited to either men or women

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\(^\text{10}\) The directions were: Could we please go through the list and mark those tasks you think are done only by men or women, those done mostly by men or...
or women demonstrates the fluid boundaries between male and female roles. Every “female” task including arranging the altar flowers and creche duty at one time or another had been done by a man. During the seminar, the participants recalled the occasions, admittedly rare, when the altar flowers were arranged by a man, substituting for his wife, and the helping of an adolescent boy in the creche. A similar pattern occurred with “male” tasks. The division between male and female work was not rigid; in exceptional circumstances individuals crossed the permeable gender boundary in performing labour for the parish.

Women predominated in the care of children in the creche, in teaching Sunday school, in the secretarial work of compiling the pew sheets, and in the provision of flowers, vestments, and altar linen in the sanctuary. For the “housekeeping” chores of cleaning the church and taking care of the garden, usually men mowed the lawn whereas usually women dusted, vacuumed and cleaned the toilets. This mimics the most common division of household labor in Australia, and repeats the opposition of women being physically located within the church building and men being physically located outside the church building. While men and women made, served, and cleaned-up morning tea, I observed that the men “doing morning tea” were working alongside their wives. Two women might make the teas but I never witnessed a man making the teas without his wife present. The women of the Ladies’ Guild supplied the staples of morning tea: fresh milk, tea, instant coffee, biscuits and cordial.

Those parishioners who helped compile the Sunday task list claimed, and my observations concur, that there was no bias against women reading the lessons and leading the prayers and intercessions. There was no differentiation between laywomen and laymen participating in the public performance of worship. However, the gendered division of labor occurs in the “backstage” (Goffman 1959) areas of “putting on of church”, which reflects the traditional Australian gender roles.
3.5 Discussion

An examination of St. Hale’s Anglican Church’s social organisation reveals that the parishioners, by meeting a theological imperative of Christianity to “build a community”, have in fact constructed a gendered parish. This gendering of the parish, and of the wider church, concurs with Acker’s concept of gendered organisations (1990) and institutions (1992), which locates women and men differently in the social structure, social organisation, and social processes.

There are various aspects operating in the discourse that I am terming “building community”. The institutional church, via the rector, teaches that, in order to fulfill the gospel, parishes should be a “community”. Consequently, the parishioners consciously attempt to develop a community which is a fellowship of believers. An unintended consequence of the form of community the parishioners construct is the creation of a gendered community. The institutional church and the rector do not dictate this form of parish social organisation; constructing a gendered parish is the parish’s interpretation of building community. Women in the parish have the role of, or are the agents of, building community through their caring and serving behaviour. This role of women as builders of community is a conscious motive and a recognised role of women in the parish.

Franklin’s case study (1986) of women lay readers in a New South Wales Anglican country parish, which is the only fieldwork study on an Anglican church in Australia that I have found, supports the concept of a gendered parish such as I observed in St. Hale’s. The National Church Life Survey of nineteen Christian denominations, in a recent report, states that 57% of church attenders having teaching, lay leadership or ministry roles are female (62% of respondents are female) whereas 54% of administrators are male and three-quarters of these men are over forty years old (Kaldor et al. 1994:121-122).

This chapter has described the theological reasons which compel the building of community. By examining the vestry and parish committees, the fellowship groups, the cell groups, and the team ministries, I have demonstrated that the parishioners, in their quest for community, constructed a gendered social or-
ganisation. They organised the parish along what they perceived as inherent differences between men and women. I suggest that, despite some crossing of the boundary between male and female domains, the tradition of "reserving leadership, scholarship and decision-making for men and casting women into serving and caring roles" (Franklin 1986:69) remains. The women's section of the parish was differentiated from the rest of the parish; women's space within the parish and men's space outside the parish paralleled traditional gender roles.
CHAPTER FOUR

“It’s Different When Men are Around”: gendered social processes

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the permeable boundary between the male and the female domains of St. Hale’s; however, the structure implied by this division is only one of the “four sets of processes” involved in the production of a gendered organisation as theorised by Acker (1992:252). The other three sets of processes, according to Acker, include firstly, the “… symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that explicate, justify, … gender divisions” (p.253); secondly, the interactions among individuals; and thirdly, “the internal mental work of individuals as they consciously construct their understandings of the organization’s gendered structure” (p.253). In a divergent but not greatly dissimilar approach, Gherardi defines the two aspects of a gendered organisational culture as: “the gender we do” (1994:595), in which the “fluid” boundary between male and female domains may be negotiated, and “the gender we think” (p.595) consisting of stable and universal symbols.

This chapter follows Gherardi’s division of organisational culture into two sections. The first section explores “the gender we think” by describing five distinct gender ideologies which occur in the wider Anglican Community, discovered in the course of my fieldwork. Then the role of the religious and secular media in exposing and teaching these gender ideologies is briefly discussed. Also included in this section are lay responses concerning gender, and images of God in the parish. While there is no universal gender ideology for gender relationships among Anglicans, they have an essentialist view of male and female. Anglicans, regardless of their ideological and theological basis, construct women and men as opposing Others.

The second half of this chapter explores “the gender we do” by examining the gendered processes of social behaviour in St. Hale’s parish. This includes the role of women as builders of parish community, and interactions between men
and women in the parish. The chapter concludes with examples that I observed, or was told of, concerning some of the most extreme cases of male and female interactions that can be found: the sexual harassment and abuse of women.

4.1 Gender Ideologies

The Anglican Church has been intermittently debating, and reluctantly changing, the roles of men and women for about one hundred and fifty years. As societal and church attitudes have continually altered toward more public roles for women, the context of the debates has shifted. The issue in the mid and late nineteenth century was whether women were entitled to be Sunday School teachers, sisters, or deaconesses, for example; the current debate is whether they should be ordained into the priesthood. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century debates mirror the contemporary debates on Christian women’s role in the family and in the church, in that the same theological arguments concerning the proper behaviour and place of Christian women were evoked.

At every stage in the development of women’s public ministry, three types of Anglican churchmanship - Anglo-Catholic, Moderate, and Evangelical - have been and are associated with divergent ideas of the proper relationship between men and women. An example of this divergence can be found in the institutional response to those women who, in the nineteenth century, sought to be set apart by the laying-on of hands as either a sister or a deaconess. The Anglo-Catholic section of the institutional church accepted sisterhoods in which women governed their own religious communities and could enter them without parental consent. The gender ideology associated with Anglo-Catholics is of separate and complementary roles - women involved in a life of prayer were not intruding on the liturgical practice of the male priesthood. The Evangelicals, by contrast, believed that they were re-establishing the female diaconate whereby a deaconess worked under the authority of a parish priest and had little contact with other deaconesses. A woman, according to the evangelical ideology of headship, could not have authority over any other woman, much less a man, and could have a formal ministry in the church only when placed under the direct authority of a male priest. Evangelicals also disapproved of a woman entering a sisterhood
without her father's approval, since a woman should be obedient to her father and husband. The Moderates (those who followed the "via media" or the middle way) did not allow women to be set apart by the laying-on of hands; however, they could serve throughout the Anglican Church as volunteer district visitors, Sunday school teachers, biblewomen, and Church Army mission workers. In all sections of the Anglican Church - the moderates, the Anglo-Catholics and the evangelicals - women were subordinate to men (Heeney 1988; Aldridge 1987; MacHaffie 1986; Prelinger 1986; Rendall 1985; Burman 1979; Hill 1973).

A characteristic of the Anglican Church of Australia today is the extreme variation in churchmanship among the dioceses when compared to the more centrally controlled churches such as the Anglican Church in England.¹ The members of the Anglican Communion do not have a universally accepted ideology of gender relationships which applies to marriage, the family, the church, or the wider community. In Australia, two of the three types of churchmanship are still associated with distinct gender ideologies such as headship and subordination (for the Evangelicals) and complementary roles (for the Anglo-Catholics (Sturmey 1989)). Moderate Anglicans, however, now believe in egalitarianism between male and female, and that women are as capable as men of functioning in any role in the church.

The variation just mentioned is one reason for the inability of the Anglican Church of Australia to reach a consensus on gender roles. The Diocese of Sydney, for example, is the most radically evangelical diocese in the Anglican Communion, whereas rural Queensland, for example, follows mainly a very "high-church" form of Anglo-Catholic Anglicanism (Hilliard 1988). Since Australian priests tend to serve in the same diocese as they were trained in, there is a strong tendency for the priests of a given diocese to adhere to a similar churchmanship. Yet some clergy and parishioners in every diocese dissent from the prevailing churchmanship of their diocese, and each diocese has a different

¹ The constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia was adopted in 1962 and each autonomous diocese trains its own priests.
mix of types of churchmanship among the parishes. A consequence of this variation is that a parishioner moving from one diocese to another (which happens frequently in Australia), can usually find a parish which is acceptable to his or her style of churchmanship.

Perth Anglicans adhere to five identifiable ideologies of gender relationships within the family and parish, of which three are associated with the above three types of churchmanship. Anglo-Catholics now believe that while men and women are equal before God, nevertheless a priest must be male since he represents Christ, who selected only male apostles. The Moderates (the majority centre) hold a pragmatic egalitarian view based on the equality of all before God. For Evangelicals, women are subordinate to men, and men have headship over women. The Christian feminists argue that a reform movement within the institutional church will remove the patriarchal component so as to result in a church closer to the church of Jesus Christ. Post-Christian feminists, influenced by the theologian Mary Daly (1968, 1978, 1986), believe that the Anglican Church is so embedded in patriarchy that the only safe spiritual space for women is outside the institutional Church. I will not discuss post-Christian feminism further in this thesis because no St. Hale’s parishioner identified herself as a post-Christian feminist (although this category does exist among Anglican women; two women outside St. Hale’s parish identified themselves to me as Anglican and also as post-Christian feminists).

In fieldwork, some of the people I spoke to described themselves to me either as Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic, using precisely those terms. However, as we will see later in this chapter, only a few St. Hale’s parishioners could even partially enunciate a theological position on the issue of gender relations in the church. Furthermore, some Anglicans did not have the attitude typical to their section of the church in regard to gender relationships. For example, there were men and women who described themselves as Evangelicals yet believed that a woman “called by God” to be a priest should be ordained. The occurrence of such atypical attitudes is not surprising, in the light of research by Nason-Clark (1987a, 1987b) and Lehman (1994). Their work highlights the influence of such social factors as age, class, and education in over-riding one’s churchmanship in
regard to the formation of sexism, and St. Hale's parishioners vary greatly in age and education.

These varieties of gender ideologies co-exist in a Church in which the members have historically prided themselves on having "unity in diversity" in regard to the theological understandings of a wide variety of worship practices, such as communion, confession, and glossolalia. The practice of worship, instead of theology or ideology, has historically been the unifying factor within the Anglican Church (Noone 1988). Accordingly, a member of the parish clergy, unless he or she has extremely strong views on the subject, rarely speaks in the parish on the subject of gender ideologies.2

A priest, Father James, from another parish, told me that he did not speak about this subject in his parish because "it would not help parishioners along their journey with the Lord". Father James stated that he was concerned that a sermon on sex roles, and especially on the debate over the ordination of women, would lead to disharmony between the parishioners and himself, and among the parishioners. His parishioners ranged from some who believed that a woman should always be subject to the authority of a man, to a post-Christian feminist.

The rector of St. Hale's, Father Stephen, mentioned the issue of gender in sermons on only two occasions: once during "marriage and family week", in which he said that "husbands and wives should mutually submit to each other"; and in one other sermon, he suggested to the parish that any person asserting that God "could not be seen in a female image, is heretical". Only once, at a Bible Study group, did an evangelical couple begin to teach about the submission of women to men. Discussions of gender ideology did not occur among groups of parishioners, even in casual or informal gatherings. On a couple of occasions on which I tried to introduce the issue into conversation, the subject was quickly changed, and the topic was never pursued. I believe that this was a strategy adopted by the parishioners to avoid conflict among themselves, just as they

2 There were female deacons in charge of several parishes in the Perth diocese during the fieldwork.
never discuss their understandings of communion. On the other hand, I was able to have conversations on controversial issues such as the sexism of the church with those female parishioners who attended seminars on women’s ministries outside the parish. For example, one or two different St. Hale’s women were present at each of four seminars I attended on women and the church, which were sponsored by supporters of women’s ministry such as the Movement for the Ordination of Women. In this way I found out that one of the parishioners was thinking of offering herself for ordination as a deacon.

4.1.1 Exposure to Gender Ideologies

Despite the rarity of teachings and discussions within the parish, individuals are exposed to competing theological viewpoints from the religious media, from Anglican and other Christian extra-parish seminars and workshops, and from the secular media. Nason-Clark (1989), in an analysis of the role of the media in the ordination debate, suggests that the Church Times has “actively contributed to polarise” the issue. The procedural saga of the attempts to ordain women made for prominent stories in Australian media outlets, including television, radio, magazines and newspapers, during my fieldwork.³

The headline of The Australian, a newspaper with a national distribution, read: “Perth Anglicans support women priests”, on the day after the Perth Synod voted to admit women into the priesthood (October 17, 1988:1). An informant made a point of ensuring that I watched a video on the deliberations of the Special Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia on the ordination of women, entitled, “The Fully Ordained Meat Pie”, which presents leading opponents and proponents of women’s ordination explaining their theological views. This documentary was televised nationally by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) in 1988. The ABC also broadcast the British series on the same subject.

³ Porter (1994 & 1989) describes the history of the decisions which led the 1992 General Synod to permit individual Dioceses to ordain women into the priesthood.
“Through the Devil’s Gateway”, which I watched at the home of a member of the Mothers’ Union Diocesan Council.

The use of the secular media by the anti-ordination and pro-ordination movements, and the ensuing political and theological debate held in the mass media, along with the fascination of the general public with the “troubles” within the Anglican Church, are worthy of another study. Here I can give only a brief survey of this debate. Dr. Patricia Brennan, the Australian founder of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, along with other members of MOW, utilised the secular media in putting forth their arguments. She stated in a 1988 newspaper article that “… the media was the means by which we could struggle; it made the difference between our silence and repression [and being] hidden in the Church and being disconnected from each other” (Lewis March 22, 1988:11).

An example of Brennan’s tactic occurred when the Perth newspaper, The West Australian, devoted the front page of its weekend feature section to an article entitled, “Is God a woman?”. It presented feminist interpretations of the image of God, based primarily on the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and explicated by Australian Christian feminists such as Dr. Brennan, Pam Albany, the convenor for the Western Australian branch of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, and Sister Veronica Brady, a prominent local academic (The West Australian “Big Weekend”, March 25, 1989:1). These speakers advocated that God should be thought of in female and maternal images as well as in male images. Brady argued that, “A feminine concept can be much more appropriate to express the real basis for the authority of God, which is love and mercy.”

In the week following, three letters were printed in The West Australian in response to that feature. Joseph Raffa of Hamilton Hill provided an egalitarian perspective when he asked, “Why is it that women have to fight against a brick wall of male opposition to gain the social equality they seek and deserve?” (The West Australian, Thursday, March 30, 1989:10). A more feminist theologically based response was, “What infinite gall we earthlings have! We categorise everyone, including the Creator, in terms of sexuality and status. God is neither male nor female. God is pure spirit. … “ (The West Australian, Wednesday, March
29, 1989:10). In the third letter, the following example of the subordination of women argument was supplied by Mark Boyd of Osborne Park:

The push by feminists to enter the power structures of the Church finds no support in the Bible.

Your article “Is God a woman?” (Big Weekend, 25/3) gives us a taste of the errors that would enter the Church if the feminists had their way.

As far as Church leadership is concerned, the scripture says that women are not permitted to teach or to have authority over men (1 Timothy 1:8-15).

It is not God’s intention to snub women, but He would have us recognise and accept that men and women have different strengths and weaknesses and therefore they must have different roles in the church.

The feminists may well claim that the Church is sexist and is in need of change. But their argument is not with the Church or with men, but is with God Himself!

An article entitled “Feminism and the Churches”, subtitled “The issue is no longer equality but the thorough transformation of our religious institutions”, printed next to a picture of Sandys’s (sic) Christa (a Christ-like figure of a nude, crucified female), discusses the current trends in Christian feminism in the United States (Woodward 1989). Later in the year, The Bulletin published an interview with a convenor of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, Kate Englebrecht. Englebrecht states in the interview that the reason for General Synod not passing legislation approving the ordination of women is not theology but sexism, since the Australian Anglican Synod had previously accepted a report to the effect that there were no theological objections to the ordination of women. The article is entitled, “The fire of righteous anger” since, in response to a question, “Should women be tying themselves to the altar rails if ordination is again rejected?”, Englebrecht said:

... We haven’t got very far being rational and sensible and polite. We’ve been branded as a very extreme movement. In fact we’re a very moderate group of women who have put up with centuries of nonsense. I think we’re being very calm about the way we’re responding. We’ve wept silently in the
public gallery in synod and we've stood in silence with candles outside the synod – and we've been ignored and ignored and ignored.

Perhaps it's getting closer to the time that more direct action has got to be taken. If we're going to be noticed because we're a little bit more vocal, a little bit more obnoxious in our behaviour, that's the way that perhaps we'll make a bit of a difference. We've resisted it determinedly because it's been seen as bad behaviour and will give us a bad image. But we're not getting far being conventionally submissive. It's all been very orderly and within that polite, conventional questioning we have been ignored. Any of the times they've had an opportunity to say yes they've said no and it's becoming more and more apparent they've said no purely because of an emotional response. (Williams August 15, 1989:176)

Constance (1988), in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, surveyed the Australian churches as to what church leaders considered their most pressing issues were. Questions such as women in ministry, declining numbers of worshippers, and growth, were raised. Readers were reminded that the Anglican Church at the 1989 General Synod was unlikely to approve the ordination of women since a majority was required in each house of synod.

Under the headline, “UK bishop wages war on women priests”, The Bishop of Kensington, Dr. John Hughes, states that, “If Jesus Christ had wanted women priests he would have chosen women apostles. Christ was a man, not a woman, and priests are there to represent Christ (Stone April 7,1989:6).”

The following letter to the *West Australian* (November 27, 1989:10) shows how strongly it is felt by some Anglicans that a valid communion must be presided over by a male priest:

I feel there is a tremendous role for women to play in the Church – but on my side of the altar rail, not behind it. 

I feel so strongly that I no longer attend Church because I find it very distressing to take the Host from the rector but have to refuse the wine because it is offered by a woman – quite often a friend with whom I served in the vestry in the past. ... Mrs. Maxime Green, Mt. Lawley
With only one exception during 1988 and 1989, every issue of the Perth monthly diocesan newspaper, *The Anglican Messenger*, had at least one article on the ordination of women (About twenty St. Hale’s parishioners regularly received the Western Australian diocesan newspaper, and a parish copy was available in the foyer of the church). These articles ranged from a human interest story, such as students addressing their newly appointed female school chaplain as Deacon Kay (since “she couldn’t be called ‘Father Kay’ and ‘Mother Kay’ is presently out of the question” (March 1988:14), to the correspondence between Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Runcie, on the effect of the Anglican Church ordaining women on the potential unification of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches (June 1989:3). The Anglican Messenger reprinted a 1979 article which summarised the main points for and against women priests. (See the Appendix to this chapter). The accompanying art work features a beautiful young woman with her head tilted to one side, but lacking in clerical dignity or reverence (October 1988:12).

Equally importantly, people learn about the various Christian gender ideologies from video tapes and from the literally hundreds of books published by religious presses on the relationship between the sexes. Many Anglican parishes, such as St. Hale’s, have a book stall supplied from the Anglican Cathedral Bookstore with books that include what may be termed “how-to-do” Christian marriage-and-family books. The psychologist James Dobson was popular among St. Hale’s Anglicans, as was revealed by the playing of his 1979 video entitled, “What wives wish their husbands knew about women: the lonely housewife”, when the St. Hale’s Mothers’ Union members visited another branch, St. Andrew’s. On another occasion, as a St. Hale’s Caritas activity, the women watched a 1979 Dobson video entitled, “Shaping the Will without Breaking the Spirit”, on the disciplining of children. In the discussions following these videos, no mention was made of Dobson’s beliefs in the submission of women in the God-given order of the family.

The two Anglican bookstores in the Perth metropolitan area typically have a section on marriage and the family, and sections on mission, devotions, and so forth. The books in the women’s section deal with the proper role of women
in marriage, or retell stories of women in the Bible. The family and marriage section displays books on child-rearing and “how to keep the romance going in a marriage”. Some of these books talk of mutual submission in marriage but still promote the attitude that a woman’s first responsibility is to her husband and family. These books are always paperbacks, usually written at about the level of popular women’s magazines; see for example LaHaye and LaHaye (1983) and Dobson (1987).

In another section at one of these bookstores, books on the ordination debate and Christian feminist theology are held, but not prominently displayed. These books are usually published as trade paperbacks costing about 50% more than the “how-to-do” paperbacks, and they assume what I judge to be a university-level standard of knowledge and vocabulary. This availability of information, or lack of it, helps explain the survey findings of Nason-Clark (1987a, 1987b) for British Anglicans, and Barrish and Welch (1980) for American students, that a person’s education and class are stronger predictors of sexism than religious behaviour or attitudes among Christians.

4.1.2 Christian Feminism

Christian feminists, while working to have women ordained as priests, also seek to reform the patriarchal institution. As a founder of the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) in Australia, Margaret Franklin, writes:

The whole direction of Christian feminism is not just to ensure that women have the status in the Church that they see as rightly theirs, but to explore the subtle and complicated business of femininity and masculinity and to bring about a union of the best parts of these in each person; to heal and not to divide; to make whole and not to put asunder. The division into two mutually antagonistic poles of being, masculine and feminine, Christian feminists see as one of the results of the Fall, perhaps the chief result (Franklin 1986:xiii).

... The ultimate goal would be to restore the ‘feminine’ in our image of God and to convert Christians to the ‘feminine’, so that men may love the ‘feminine’ in themselves and women rejoice in the ‘masculine’ aspects of their character (Franklin 1986:xvi-xvii).
While this emphasis on Jungian archetypes is certainly not the only strand of Christian feminism, it is the prevalent one among Perth Anglicans.

4.1.3 Anglo-Catholicism

A contrasting view is expressed in a Women Against the Ordination of Women (WAOW) pamphlet by Margaret Hood entitled “What are Little Girls Made Of?”:

Sugar and spice and all that’s nice
That’s what little girls are made of.

This nursery rhyme infuriates the secular feminists. I wonder why? It states something profound about women. Sugar is never bitter; spice is a Biblical image associated with acts of love, homage and worship and adoration; the word nice means proper, appropriate and fitting. (Mark 16:1,2 and the Song of Solomon).

By singing this ditty we teach young children that being a woman is not merely the opposite of being a man. From our earliest years we learn that womanhood is endowed with special qualities and that it is a metaphysical and mystical concept. An unfortunate outcome of this learning is the adulation of motherhood and the denigration of all other roles that women undertake, an attitude the secular feminists, quite rightly, have criticized fiercely. Any sentimentalizing or romanticizing of womanhood falsifies it, so the secular feminists are right to have stripped women of many silly trappings. Today motherhood is being accepted as one of women’s many roles and a modern woman can combine a number of roles without being censured, or she may choose to remain unmarried also without censure. The secular feminists have done a great deal.

Among Anglicans opposed to women’s ordination, the Anglo-Catholics are always very careful to state that, while it is true that in the past women suffered discrimination, this no longer occurs. These Anglicans accept secular norms.

Hood, in her discussion of the priesthood as being reserved for men, states:
So whilst women are left free to exercise service with imagination, tenderness and wisdom - the Greek work for wisdom is Sophia, and is feminine - men are constrained to carry out specific duties. Women have the freedom “TO BE”, priests are commanded “TO DO”.

Hood’s characterisation of men in the priesthood as “to do”, whereas women are “to be”, is the quintessential example of the “separate but complementary” roles of the gender ideology of Anglo-Catholics. The male priest is restrained in his liturgical role, while women have the freedom to be creative in serving the Lord.

4.1.4 Moderates and Evangelicals

The Ministry of Women: A Report of the General Synod Commission on Doctrine presented to the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia (1977), states that: “there [were] no theological objections to the admission of women” to the diaconate, the priesthood, or the episcopate (p. 27). The report points out that, at the present time, there is “a more equal partnership of husband and wife in all areas of family life - emotional, economic, recreational, religious” (p.21) and the church “[is] beginning to recognise women as true fellow labourers in the gospel” (p.22). The majority report is an example of the Moderates’ egalitarian stance. At the same time, there is no hint of reforming the church to remove the patriarchal bias in structure and language as advocated by feminist theologians.

Nevertheless, this report includes an addendum by the Reverend Canon D. B. Knox in which he lists his theological reasons for his stance against the ordination of women to the priesthood. Knox believes that “the question of the ordination of women hinges on the relationship of men and women (p.29)”.

Women cannot be ordained because of the evangelical principles of headship and subordination: a woman can never have authority over men. Knox had no objection to women being ordained into the diaconate because the diaconate is a serving role. Appendix Two details his views which are representative of some Evangelicals.
4.1.5 Difference as an Essential Feature of Constructing Gender

The Anglo-Catholics and the Evangelicals portray men and women as opposites, while the Moderates reject the stereotyping of men and women into extremes. However, as is shown in the 1977 Majority Report of the General Synod Commission on Doctrine entitled, “The Ministry of Women” (a fuller extract from this report is reproduced in the Institutional Discourses section of Chapter One), Moderates still think of certain attributes as characterising masculinity or femininity:

...we should be wary of any rigid stereotyping of the sexes and also we should begin to see the fullness of being human as a combination of the qualities listed earlier rather than the exalting of one (particularly the masculine) over the other. The world needs feminine qualities and so does the church in its ministry (p.25).

Each one of the three separate sets of ideologies held by Anglican Church members emphasises the difference between male and female; male and female are each seen as a single separate construction. The belief in the essential difference between men and women is part of the foundation for justifying the subordination of women. Phyllis Boyd, writing for the WAOW, states:

Gender differences do matter and by pretending that they do not we accept another form of oppression as bad as being denied economic rewards and legal standing. From conception to maturity men and women are subjected to different hormonal influences that shape their bodies, brains and temperaments in different ways. Every cell in their bodies differs. Because some bogus biological arguments have been invoked against women in the past it does not follow that there are no real biological arguments that explain the differing choices men and women have made throughout history. Both men and women have gifts to offer but they are different. This does not make them unequal (c. 1989:3).

Men and women in the Anglican Church have equality before God and complementary roles in the church. Hutchinson, in a Women Against the Ordination of Women (WAOW) pamphlet entitled, Man and Woman in Christ: Salvation
and Service in the Family of the Church, states:

**DIVERSITY OF FUNCTION**

Man/Woman; Father/Mother; 
Protecting, providing/ Bearing/nurturing.

Women share in the creativity of God, a creativity in spheres both natural and supernatural. Life is given to be nurtured both physically and spiritually; a work which needs space, recollection and the enabling Grace of God; a work of supreme worth in itself.

... What of the daily round and the common task? So denigrated that women apologise: “I’m only a mother, only a housewife”; or seen for their value and natural rhythm (sic) as well suited to the Practise (sic) of the Presence of God? ‘Everyday tasks of restoring order and cleanliness, have their place in the Lord’s work of redemption.’

... The journey is tough at times, but the locus of it is provided to be secure. *In the Church family*, transparent to His life, His Spirit, hurt sustained can be touched and restored. If we run from what hurts us, protecting ourselves, remaining unhealed, we are less free to relate to God and to others. Healing of our knowing of father (sic), of mother, of brother and sister, of the Lord: all is provided for under that natural headship of the Priest, in the context of the Church family.

The quote continues with a “call to service” of women using their God-given creativity:

**MINISTRY - A CALL TO SERVICE**

Doing God’s work — led by him (sic) — Christ centred.

Confusion is compounded where ministry is assessed for secular standards as to status; they don’t apply. The hidden roles of service to which many are called are of infinite value. Around the relaxation of shared work:
Feminists, like the Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals, perceive an essential difference between the genders. Sister Angela of Stroud, in the quote reproduced below, represents the feminist interpretation of this difference as positive.

... What I'm saying is that, as far as the Church is concerned, when you get women involved in parishes, having to feel their way in the system, the system is already changing. A woman, if she's given a job looking after the children and the old people in the parish, straightway says: "Well, the children really need the old people because they've got wisdom, and the old people need the young people because they give them new life." She links them together, doesn't she? But the system doesn't do that; it keeps them totally separate in their separate boxes.

Women don't think that way, women aren't hierarchical thinkers, women cross the board the whole time, they're planners. I think they're fantastic because they're using their creativity from the moment they wake up in the morning and even during the night, in their dreams. It's not to say that men haven't got this creativity too.

We've got to show the men that, ok, they're stronger physically, but, my God, that's the only thing they're stronger at (Lindsay 1992:148).

Both Lindsay and Hutchinson construct women as creative beings who, they claim, do not think hierarchically, as men do, though Hutchinson believes that men have less need and fewer opportunities to be creative. Lindsay and Hutchinson depict women as creative and serving God, but this response to the denial of the office of priesthood is not limited to Anglican women. Cherry (1970), an American black man, in his testimony of his conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, learning of the then ban on black males entering the priesthood, said, "Knowing I couldn't have the priesthood immediately offered what I accepted as a challenge to my creativity. Since the priesthood probably
allowed a man responsibility and opportunity for service, I figured that all I had to do was look for opportunities and accept responsibility in some other way. ... It wouldn't be important who led, who occupied positions of responsibility and who didn't". (43-44). Just as Cherry dealt with his subordinate position as a black by creating other avenues of service and responsibility among the Mormons, so the Anglican women of St. Hale's dealt with their position as women by directing their energies to the serving of God and the community.

4.2 Parishioners' Gender Ideologies

This section of the chapter first examines parishioners' images of God, then the relationship between men and women in their families. A discussion of their opinions of the ministry of women concludes the section. Unless otherwise stated, the comments reported below were obtained through formal interviews, since gender ideologies were not part of the normal parish discourse.

There was wide variation among parishioners as to their image of God; some saw God as male, some as neither male nor female, and some held feminine images of God. The week following the rector's comment in a sermon, pointing out that to address God as "she" was appropriate, I asked the various women's groups during the "cuppa" what they thought about this issue. A few said it was "silly", and they could not "understand what the fuss was about", and some said, "it didn't matter". One woman later told me privately that she disapproved of Father Stephen's statement, because "God is male", but she was not prepared to criticise the priest in front of others. In a formal interview, one woman said: "I have got no qualms about that. Either he or she or whatever its called I still have got the same feelings". She refused to expand further on the subject.

Interviewer: Close your eyes and think about God. What do you see? An elderly widow, Genevieve, responded:

This is the most interesting question you have asked so far.

You might find this rather strange, but I have always wondered what God looks like. He looks [to me] like a mixture of a hazy blown-up version of
my father plus pictures of Jesus that I have seen in some old religious book, but He is fair. It's a definite (pause) its a definite picture that you can reach out and touch, but it's always far away - but warm, loving, safe.

Interviewer: You say it's hazy and includes your father. Is he old?

No, no, my father died at forty. But not clear, if you know what I mean, not a hundred percent clear, [so] that you could say, oh yes that is Dad. Because really my father never even had a beard or long hair, but He's got a beard and long hair and the eyes, the eyes are the picture that I see in my childhood books of Jesus. It's strange, but - you must think no one else will ever say the same thing - But, uh, to me God is unreal. It's, no that's wrong. He is real in that I believe in Him but I couldn't go up to Him and touch Him.

Interviewer: Some people refer to God as a friend and some refer to God as a father figure, how do you?

How do I? He is all those things. When I feel very vulnerable, not that there is anything really worrying me at the moment, he is a father. When I am happy he is a friend. When I am lonely then I am loved. But he is still so great that its overwhelming. I suppose it's a mixture of all those things.

Interviewer: What do you think the relationship should be between husbands and wives?

My marriage was a mutual submission to each other. It was a complete internetwork. We never had a cross word, but we did have differences of opinion, especially about the disciplining of our children. But we always communicated, and there was always compromise and there was never any problem. You know, he liked different things from me in music and clothes, but it was strange - most anything else was very similar, so we were rarely in discord, and I always think that he was chosen for me. He had to be. I couldn't have picked him. (chuckle)

Later this same interview continued: What do you think about people who say that Christian women should submit to their husbands?
I do feel that, to be quite honest, that the husband is the head of the house. I mean he is primarily responsible for your debts and your behaviour and all the rest. But I do think that if you have got a heavy-handed husband you need a little bit of evenness there, and so I think that a marriage like my own is the ideal. There was complete cooperation between us. The communication door was always open, and, however, I think in all those really important issues the man is the boss, that's my feeling.

What would you consider an important issue?

Well, for instance, say you have a thousand dollars in the bank and he wants to ah, ah, spend it on a trip to Fiji or something and I knew there were debts to be paid. Although he is known as the head of the house I would fight that strongly because of the debts. Because its my money, too. Likewise the other way, if I wanted to go out and splurge on a beautiful ball gown when I don't go to balls I would expect him to put his foot down, or in what you allow the children to do, I would expect him to be the boss, because I think the children need to know their father is boss.

Have you ever felt discriminated against by society?

You know I didn't have a partner setting me off. Some times I would get in a separate group with husbands and wives and you know they are looking around for a partner for me, you know. (Chuckle) Not so much this parish, but in other parishes. No, I wouldn't say that it's being discriminated against, just feeling a bit uncomfortable, you know, this was a case like that. I can't pick out the reality there.

Do you think there is anything special that God has given you as a woman?

That's a funny one. I think we are more patient. I think we are lot stronger than people take us for. No, I think we are more patient, whereas a man will get up and rant and rave. And I suppose we have a little cry instead and keep quiet and hope it will go away. I think patience and I think we ask for it more.

Diana, the next respondent, was a young mother at home who was a teacher
before the birth of her children. She was not planning on returning to work, because her husband worked 60 hours per week, and she had to stay at home to mind the children.

Interviewer: Why do you think there are more women than men in the Anglican Church?

I think it’s not only the Anglican Church. I’ve had previous experience with the Methodist or Uniting Church and I worshipped for a while with (my husband) Tom at a Presbyterian Church, when we first got married, before they became Uniting, and I just think its the same in most churches. I don’t know why . . . (pause) I always remember Father Bob’s sermon a couple of years back, and I think that probably has a lot to do with it; but um (pause) kids, when they’re grown-up, for generations have seen Dad staying in bed and then get up and mow the lawn, whereas Mum takes the kids to school. So when the boy gets older he thinks that that’s his job, staying home and mowing the lawn, and Mum takes the kids. Maybe its just a role that we have fallen into. But men feel that their job is to stay home and a woman’s job is to take the kids to Sunday school. I don’t know. (unclear few words, pause) I can’t really explain it.

My next interview reports a conversation with Ruth, who was a middle-aged woman in paid employment. In addition to her work duties, she led a Bible class at St. Hale’s.

Interviewer: Close your eyes and think about God. What do you see? Ruth’s response was:

The word that comes to mind is, or the words that come to mind are, an omnipotent being, all powerful. And I am aware again of having gone through a stage in my life where I wasn’t quite sure whether God was the person I believed in but I did believe in a greater power than mankind. . . .

Why do you think there are more women than men in church?

They say, the common assumption is, that women are emotional and have a greater awareness of their spirituality than men.
Do you believe that?

I think that the emotional experience . . . is that women are more emotionally free. I mean it's okay for women to cry sort of thing, and with men its the stiff upper lip, I don't need anyone else sort of approach, and the pride in the self-made man, that sort of (thing). That's a barrier to men admitting their need of women and I think its just the reality of it. I think it's, if it makes sense, it's a false reality (laughter). But you know, when you observe men who are dedicated Christian people, and see their lives and the way their lives are affected by their Christianity, then it makes the other alive.

Interviewer: How do you feel when Father Stephen refers to God as she?

I can't say I have particularly witnessed this with [Father] Stephen, but yes I have been aware of it. (Pause) I, how do I feel about it? (Pause) I have my understanding of God, it is of him having a balance of masculine and feminine. And it doesn't worry me whether they nominate God as he or she, masculine or feminine. I am not offended by either. What offends me is when people claim it too strongly either way, too dogmatically. (Pause) I think a lot of people who are for women in the ministry are too emphatic about it. They are, rather, trying, I sense an element of trying, to balance the scales rapidly (chuckle), and its taken us two thousand years to come to this time of trying to balance the scales, and instead of taking another hundred or even five hundred years to balance the scales they want to do it now. And that offends me because it causes distress for both male and female.

Do you think the scales should be balanced?

I think they should be, yes. There are clear instances of the femininity of God. I have a good book on the femininity of God if you wanted to read it? (She referred me to the book "The Divine Feminine" (Mollenkott 1984), which I had read).

Do you think God gave special gifts to women?

I think He gave certain, certainly he gave us special gifts in a physical sense, by being able to give birth to children, and yet we can't do that without a man. (Laughter) I mean we could, I suppose we almost can these days,
I think the mothering gifts are very special gifts, the nurturing, and yet I don't see them as being exclusively female. I think they are more emphasised in the female, but there are many men who also have equally adequate gifts of nurturing.

I guess we can see that in Father Stephen's relationship with the older women of the parish. To me it is one of the feminine gifts of caring, that nurturing that he is able to offer to them. He laughs with them and they experience that as nurturing. He is using that aspect of his being.

Genevieve, Diana and Ruth have an essentialist view of women as nurturers and mothers. Yet their ambiguities and the ambivalence of their responses concerning gender ideologies and images of God, the lack of theological knowledge and biblical language and quotations in their answers, and their general hesitation and uncertainty all lead to the conclusion that the expression of gender ideologies is not a parish discourse. They do not have the well constructed or rehearsed answers that one would expect if that were the case.

4.3 Women as Builders of Community

The construction of women as nurturers and servers encompasses their role as the primary builders and maintainers of the parish community in three ways. Women build community by providing opportunities for social interaction, by the provision of food which is a potent symbolic of family and community life, and by creating links among the discrete elements of the parish. This feminine behaviour is not restricted to St. Hale's women only. Sacks (1989) describes how orthodox Jewish women in a middle-class American suburb construct community by ritual food exchanges at a Jewish holiday. Walker-Birkhead (1985) suggests that feeding others is embedded in the construction of femininity and individual power, in a study of elderly ladies in an Australian country town. DeVault (1991) describes how the gendered work of caring, and particularly, feeding a family, constructs the family.

As a first example showing women as builders of community, I consider the parish social committee, which planned social events for the parish such as
picnics, a day-trip to New Norcia (Catholic monastery), a formal ball, and wine and cheese nights. This was a female-dominated committee: the convenor of the committee and the majority of the members were female, contrary to other parish committees, as was discussed in Chapter Three. Women ran the social committee and performed most of the planning and detail work for it, though there were some men on it. This is clearly a female domain, but a male member of the committee explained that he did not find this unusual, since the women were “more experienced in planning parties and, besides, they were available during the day to run errands”.

As a second example, parish women provided catering for these parish social occasions and other parish events, such as confirmations and special Sunday morning teas, even when they themselves did not attend the event. “Ladies, please bring a plate” is a common command given to those women attending Anglican events. “Plates” commonly comprised home-made scones with jam and cream, sponge cakes, roulades, sandwiches, and pavlovas. There was some flexibility allowed in setting standards of appropriate food; for example, rather than one of the above home-made dishes, it was acceptable for a woman with either very small children, or a woman with children who was also in full-time employment, to bring a fruit loaf, meat pies and sausage rolls bought from a bakery. A couple of the older women told me that they knew that if the younger women were “made to feel bad about their ‘food offerings’, then the young ones would stop coming”. The provision of food as a gift of the self to others is a generalised reciprocity among the women.

The women working in the kitchen before an event kept track of which plate was delivered by whom. The quality of one’s plate could be judged by how soon the kitchen workers put it out on the tables. Thus to some extent the kitchen workers evaluated the other women’s cooking, though of course the functional reason for identifying plates was to ensure that every woman left with her own plate or other food container (thoroughly cleaned!). A sign of the conclusion of an event was the return of each woman’s plate by the women on kitchen duty.

At these gatherings the tables were laden with food: there were always
left-overs, and food was always held back “because there isn’t enough room”. Accomplished cooks were always complimented on their cooking by the other women, whereas a woman unwilling to provide food of an acceptable standard was seen by the other women as lazy or selfish. On the other hand, women were discouraged from bringing “over the top” (excessively time-consuming or expensive) plates to avoid “a competitive atmosphere”. A woman attending a function without a plate begged pardon for that misdeed from the other women. This was a very rare occurrence and was not held against her if she customarily brought food and had an acceptable excuse (such as illness in her family or accompanying a member of her family to a medical appointment). These excuses were acceptable because the woman has chosen correctly between her family and parish duties. The importance of the obligation to “bring a plate” can be seen in the behaviour of usually prompt women who arrived late to a meeting or event because a cake or roulade took longer to make than planned. Lateness was preferable to being plateless! When an elderly woman was no longer able to prepare her “very good” scones for the Mothers’ Union afternoon tea, I heard the women comment that, “it wouldn’t be too long before Mrs. Johnson went to a nursing home”.4

Women prepared plates for parish events which they did not attend, such as the parish ball or for a deanery Church of England Boys’ Society event held at St. Hales, “to show their support for the parish”. Just as a woman prepares food for her family that she may not eat herself, so a woman prepares food for her parish family. The abundance of food at these gatherings symbolises the parish as being a loving and hospitable community and demonstrates the women’s ability to nurture others. At a pragmatic level, Anglican gatherings are highly scripted and ritualised events, and thus the “tea” after or concluding the event is the only opportunity to “chat” with others. Women, by providing these opportunities for individuals to “meet others”, contribute to the creation

4 Walker-Birkhead, in a study of elderly Australian country women, found that a woman unable to feed others was considered by other women to have lost her competence as a woman.
and maintenance of community. Some women explained their willingness to provide food as their "ministry of tea". Just as the sharing of the bread and wine during the eucharist is the climax of every Sunday morning worship service as a celebration of community, so events at which parishioners eat together are constructing community.

Parish gatherings that I attended outside the female domain, such as the education seminars and the discussions on the reports of the working party on parish development, did not conclude with the elaborate "teas" of the social events or women's activities. Sometimes one or two women offered to put the kettle on for a "cuppa", which meant, besides the cup of tea, or perhaps instant coffee, store-bought biscuits if there were any available. This "cuppa" was not a planned part of the activity. I never witnessed any man offering to "play polly", as it is called; the parish kitchen is a female space. At the close of business or after education meetings the priest sometimes asked the group, "Is there a 'cuppa' tonight?", while looking at the likely women volunteers. If no one offered, he would say, "I guess there isn't one tonight". When this happened, people did not remain to talk among themselves, but went straight home. Food and drink are the signal for social intercourse, and, as in the wider Australian society, are primarily the responsibility of women.

The third way in which women are involved in creating and maintaining community is by linking potential and present members into the parish. The women's groups sent cards on behalf of St. Hale's to the parents of newborns, to couples celebrating special wedding anniversaries, to individuals for significant birthdays, and to the bereaved. This reinforces the recipient's sense of belonging to the parish community. The sending of cards is a gendered work activity which links the parish together (Di Leonardo 1987).

The Ladies' Guild, the Mothers' Union and Caritas occasionally discussed as a formal agenda item how they could improve their ministry to newcomers, especially young families. As a result of these discussions, the Mothers' Union and Caritas decided to work at welcoming new families into the parish. As was described in Chapter Two, many unchurched families in Hale approach St. Hale's
for the baptism of their babies and young children. Mothers’ Union and Caritas members delivered invitations by hand to all mothers of babies baptised in the parish, and they followed up the initial contact for a year with information on activities of potential interest to young mothers. In addition to this, a member of the Mothers’ Union attended each baptism service and presented the parents with a keepsake candle. Members of Caritas and some of their husbands attended the baptism classes so that prospective members could meet other parents of young children.

During Advent and Lent, some women and a few men door-knocked and put leaflets in mailboxes informing people, especially residents new to the area, when and where the services would be held. Door knockers were instructed by the priest to “be friendly but do not be pushy”. Unlike members of some other religious groups, St. Hale’s parishioners are discouraged from breaking social norms when conducting an evangelism activity (Ingram 1989).

The nurturing role of women in creating and maintaining community is more than an attribute of the women, it is the invisible work of women in the parish. For the women of St. Hale’s, as for the women in DeVault’s study, “… caring work is optional or exceptional for men while it is obligatory for women” (1991:151). While this caring work is obligatory, the women themselves look on it as positive, because they are “giving of themselves” to an important cause. This caring work, which is the women’s responsibility, builds and maintains the parish, and the women believe that the existence of the parish is dependent on it.

4.4 Female Experience of Gendered Interactions

It was Patricia who answered my question as to whether the women present at a craft group meeting would like to have mixed fellowship groups in the church, while I struggled one day with a patchwork quilted pillowcase (required to justify my attendance at the group). Should the church encourage groups whose members included both men and women? A few thought so, but Patricia disagreed. “It’s different when men are around”, she said, “because men take over
and change everything”. This section details the female experience of gendered interactions among Anglicans. I first relate several examples of how some women interacting in a formerly male-only domain, and now male-dominated domain, change their speech behaviour. Then the unwillingness of some women to participate in parish social occasions without a male partner is recounted. The last two sub-sections concern male teasing of women and sexual harassment and abuse of women in the Anglican Church.

4.4.1 Speech Behaviour

Gherardi (1994) hypothesises that women entering a male domain in a work organisation must perform “ceremonial work” (her terminology includes speech patterns as a type of “work”) in order to have their contributions accepted. St. Hale’s women commonly performed this kind of work when entering the discussion at such parish meetings as educational seminars, or meetings to discuss parish future development, or the annual general meeting of the parish. They always began their contribution with, “Well, I don’t know much about this but I think ...” or “I could be wrong, but I was wondering ...” and they invariably finished declarative sentences with a rising inflection or pitch. These phrases and their vocal intonations demonstrate that the women were performing a ritual which communicates their awareness of being a female who is trespassing into the male domain of the parish. Women who are formal leaders of the parish or who have a prestigious profession rarely perform this ritual - as was discussed in the last chapter, these women are granted symbolic membership in the male domain of the parish.

I observed that those women who employed deferential speech patterns in the presence of males did not do so when they were in female-only groups; they then spoke in a self-confident manner, finishing their sentences evenly or in an authoritative, declining pitch. (I am taking into account a general Australian speech pattern tendency to end a sentence with a rising pitch). When a woman concludes a sentence with a rising pitch at a meeting of a women’s group, as opposed to a meeting that includes men, I believe that she is either expressing her uncertainty, or, more likely, is posing the statement as a question so as to
deflect potential conflict or to avoid damage to the other women's self-esteem. For example, when Helen wished one day at a Caritas meeting to point out a possible problem with a proposed project (a Caritas party), she phrased her declarative sentences as questions so that she was not perceived as criticising the women who spoke before her.

Another example of this ritual work occurred at a diocesan Mother's Union and Caritas seminar on the subject of death. I saw that women are expected to laugh when men make jokes about exclusive and inclusive language. Father Cecil, while giving a Bible study on the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians, read 1 Corinthians 15 from a printed sheet. When he came to verse 22, "For just as all people die because of their union with Adam ...", he added, "In these days, you have to add Eve here with Adam". The audience laughed and he repeated the verse with both "Adam and Eve" included. When he reached the next verse with exclusive language, "What I mean, brothers ..." (verse 50), he added "and sisters" to the verse, with a much higher tone, which I believe could be described as grudging. In the penultimate verse of the chapter (58), "So then, my dear brothers, stand firm and steady", Father Cecil did not, however, add the word "sisters" to the final verse.

4.4.2 Couples Preferred

Women who are not part of a parish couple often do not feel comfortable in attending many parish social occasions. They believe that the occasions are intended for couples or families. One woman who had cooked for the parish ball did not attend because she thought she would be a "pumpkin" if she went. Even widowed women have said to me that they felt they could not go to church socials since they did not have a man to accompany them. Women whose husbands were not in the parish interacted predominantly with other women, as Anne states:

... I know mainly ladies. I think because I go mainly on my own, I don't meet people as couples. You know if you go as a couple you meet people as couples.
At the cuppa after every Sunday morning service, people gathered in couples or in groups of women; unaccompanied women did not engage in casual conversation with men. A woman could speak to a man, however, if she had parish business to attend to.

4.4.9 Male Teasing of Women

The remainder of this section describes three parish gatherings I witnessed, which highlight the “teasing” interactions that men indulge in, with women as targets. Two of the events were parish social occasions - one, a day-trip to New Norcia (a Spanish Benedictine monastery some 60 kilometers from Perth), and also to Buckland, a historic house near New Norcia; and the other, an event known as “the parish women’s dinner”. This was a dinner held in a community hall near to the church, catered and served by the parish men, and intended as a return gesture for a similar dinner given by the women for the men in the preceding year. The third occasion was a barbecue which was held at a parishioner’s home.

In the week following my introduction to the parish, I was invited by the priest to join a parish picnic to be held at New Norcia. This took place on a Saturday. Two coaches full of St. Hale’s parishioners left the church parking lot early in the morning, planning to attend the monks’ prayer service in the chapel at the New Norcia monastery, followed by a champagne picnic lunch, then by a tour of a historic house at Buckland. For my first fieldwork occasion I had dressed casually, as I thought appropriate for a picnic, but I panicked when I pulled into the parking lot because at first glance it seemed that all the women were wearing skirts or dresses with high heels. It seemed that a fairly high standard of dress was typical on these occasions. Fortunately, I noticed that Father Stephen and his wife were also dressed casually (in jeans) so I relaxed slightly. The seating in the bus was assigned by married couples and the few unattached women were assigned seats together. There were no unaccompanied men. One couple, Mr. and Mrs. Moore, married for over twenty years, were dressed in identical striped polo shirts, pants, and sand-shoes. Mr. Moore joked to the coach at large that he had “stripes from his wife’s whipping his back”. A few hours later another
man, while he was seated next to his wife, similarly joked about “stripes from his wife”. I took these jokes or teasing to be an inversion of reality, in that it seemed unlikely that these men were dominated by their wives. (Later in the fieldwork, I discovered this to be true; the women in question were “good wives”, in the view of the other women, and far from dominating their husbands).

Upon arrival at the monastery, the bus passengers assembled in front of the monastery gates. Father Stephen spoke about the the monks’ daily life. He added that when he had visited New Norcia on an earlier occasion, he had been shown around the library, refectory and workshops, but that this group could not be shown through the monastery because of the presence of women in the group. As the group headed toward the chapel, I heard several women complaining that it was unfair that they could not see the rest of the monastery, and grumbling about Father Stephen’s seeming enjoyment of that fact. A final example of this kind of asymmetrical teasing of women by men, on this occasion, came when Ellen, coming late from the toilets, tried to run in her high heels to the bus. Comments from the men (only) ranged from “can’t you hurry up”, “slowpoke”, to “can’t you start a bit earlier, love”.

The second example of the relationship between men and women I wish to cite here occurred at the “women’s dinner” mentioned above. The following are distinctly sexual teasings; they were made either to me or to women sitting near to me. While serving meatballs, one man, in response to my query, “Can I please have some meatballs?”, replied, “You can eat my meatballs any time”. A woman, when asking what kind of sweets were available from the sweets cart, was told, “Whatever you want, baby, you can have, I’m all yours”. While clearing away the dishes, a different man joked at our table that Ann, a plump 55 year old, and possibly the most self-abasing person in the parish, should entertain us by “dancing on the tables”. Ann blushed and hid her face with her hands. The other women ignored this exchange. During the evening the men drank wine in the kitchen, while the women were served at the tables.

My husband and I, along with nine other couples and their children, were asked to attend a New Year’s Day barbecue at the home of Patricia. It was at
this function that I encountered some customary Australian behaviour regarding barbecues: women make the salads and men cook the meat. As I went to place my steak on the barbecue, Patricia’s husband informed me, good-humouredly, that “women aren’t allowed to barbecue in this household”. I explained that my husband was a vegetarian: nevertheless, I was not permitted to cook my own meat. Peter, another husband, did the job for me. For a whole month afterward, Peter told me at church every Sunday, “Julie, I cook a good steak, don’t I?”. I took these incidents as forms of teasing and flirting, in which men demonstrate their dominance over women, who are powerless to stop it.

A woman who teases back is at risk of being called a “slut”. Joe was organising a “busy bee” at an elderly parishioner’s house when an attractive divorcee asked, “My lawn’s edges need to be cut too, and can you do it?” Joe responded in a provocative voice, “I’ll cut your edges any time you want”. The woman said, “Okay, how about Saturday?” Another woman, who had overheard this conversation, leaned over to me and said, “She’s such a slut. She chases all the men in the parish”.

In discussions on various occasions, I recounted some of the incidents concerning male and female interactions that I had observed, and asked the women present for their reactions. After I had mentioned the meatballs incident, a woman suggested that church socials provide “a safe place for flirting”. Another woman added that “drinking wine played a part”. I explained that I had felt that I could not respond at the time, “Because it might cause a fuss”. Emily said, “When that happened, often women were embarrassed and /or shocked, so they laughed”. Jean said that, “Some women liked flirting with men at church because they knew it was safe”. For the men’s part, one man told me on one occasion that he thought teasing “gave women a lift”.

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Some Anglican parishes have institutionalised “hugging” sessions during the church service. Several women I talked to at St. Hale’s who had been members of one of those parishes reported to me that they resented receiving hugs from men during the “sharing of the peace” and on other occasions on which “hugging” was obligatory.

Parishioners at St. Hale’s did not as a rule “hug”, but a few men were known to do so. The following instances of women being forced to endure the unwanted physical contact of men in silence illustrate the dominance of men in mixed gatherings. Eileen told me that she disliked men hugging her so tightly that her breasts were pressed against them, and she became angry when some men “snapped her bra straps”. Another woman said that once she was shocked to “feel a man’s genitals when he hugged her” in a farewell kiss. If women resist being hugged by men, according to Eileen, they are accused of behaving in an unloving manner toward a “brother in Christ”. As another example of the contrast between loving behaviour of the family and physical contact among acquaintances, one woman reported that her two teenage girls were leery of a certain layman in the parish. This man made her daughters “nervous” because he stood too close to them and touched them on the arms and on the tops of their backs. Her daughters believed this man was potentially dangerous, while the man himself may have thought that he was merely showing appropriate Christian love. I noted that in gatherings consisting of married couples at St. Hale’s, a quite acceptable form of greeting was for a woman to touch a man’s upper shoulder and kiss his cheek. I believe the crucial point is that women differentiate between social kissing, when they can control the amount of physical contact and hugging, while some men do not.

Indeed, some men more than overstep the mark. During either a formal interview or a home visit, three women reported to me incidents of alleged serious sexual abuse by clergymen. The abuse of women by professionals such as clergymen, doctors, and psychologists was not prominent in the Australian mass media at that time, though it currently is. I will not relate the complete story...
of each woman’s sexual assault, of course, so as to avoid identifying them; but that they occurred illustrates the power of the patriarchy of the church, and the subordination of women. Given the predominance of male sexual behaviour in the church ranging from relatively mild teasing incidents through to sexual abuse, the appeal of women-only groups is not surprising.

The following three women’s stories tell of incidents that happened at Anglican parishes before the women concerned moved to St. Hale’s, and are very similar to some reported in the literature (Fortune 1989; CASA House Centre Against Sexual Assault Report 1990; Morey 1990; Stange 1990; Lebacqz & Barton 1991). In those cases, the alleged abuse typically took place in counselling sessions with clergymen whom the women had held in high esteem. The women reportedly were uncertain as to how to respond to the men’s advances, and suffered doubts as to whether they would be believed, were they to report them.

Angie had sexual intercourse with a clergyman while she was receiving marriage counselling from him. She said that “it felt like she had been raped” but she “wasn’t sure if it was rape since he didn’t hold a gun or a knife at her”. Later she said, “It felt like incest” since she had considered this clergyman her “spiritual father”. Betty, in a marriage counselling session, had a priest place his hand on her breast and kiss her. Cathy, in a period of emotional distress, had gone for a walk with her parish priest, who pushed her on to the ground and rubbed his pelvis against her until he climaxed. Each of these women reported that they could not believe that “A priest, a person who was meant to represent Christ on earth”, and a person they had “never thought to distrust”, would “do that to them”. They reported that they had wondered what they had done, if anything, to encourage such behaviour. Angie, Betty, and Cathy left the parishes where these incidents occurred and never returned to them.

I emphasise that the priest of St. Hale’s was not the clergyman involved in any of these cases.
This chapter has identified five distinct gender ideologies among Perth Anglicans, but the Anglican Church does not have a single universal gender ideology which is enacted in practice. The diversity of ideologies on the correct relationship between the genders does not matter in this practice, because each ideology constructs women as nurturers and carers. This attribute of nurturing is carried over into the social role of women as the builders and maintainers of community. The symbol of Woman as nurturer, in Acker’s terms, “explicates and justifies” the partitioning of parishioners into the male and female domains. The women gain social power in the parish by the enactment, clearly visible to all parishioners, of this role. The women’s work is essential to the existence of the parish, which would otherwise become a collection of discrete individuals somewhat like a movie theatre audience.

However, the power of the patriarchy reveals itself when women have to interact with men. Gherardi (1994) argues that, while gendered symbols are unchanging, some crossing of the fluid symbolic boundaries between the male and female domains occurs in the everyday life of organisations. When this crossing occurs, the symbolic order must be “repaired” through ritual. This involves two kinds of ritual work, one of which Gherardi terms the “ceremonial work of paying homage”, and the other of which she calls the “remedial work” of restoring the symbolic ordering of male and female domains. Examples of both of these occurred at St. Hale’s. One was the use of apologetic language by women discussing topics belonging to the male domain, such as for example at those parish meetings which reviewed the recommendations of the Working Party on Parish Development concerning the possible construction of a new work centre. An example of “remedial work” occurred at the Women’s Dinner discussed in Section 4.4.3. above. Because men were serving women at this dinner, an inversion in the symbolic order occurred, which the men restored by the use of sexual innuendo. The women, by ignoring this behaviour, acknowledged the men’s need to re-negotiate the boundary between the two domains.

The safety and comfort of an exclusively female domain - a “women-only
space" - may be disrupted by male behaviour such as sexual teasing, harassment and abuse. Women crossing the boundaries of the male-female domain run the risk of this type of male dominating behaviour. If they respond in kind they may be labelled as "sluts" or "man-chasing"; if they complain, they are "not good sports". Consequently they retreat to their female domain, ignoring and avoiding the male sphere. Some women are able to successfully cross into the male domain, but only at the expense of risking being labelled a "man" – as occurred with Susan Powell (see Section 3.3.2). This discussion exemplifies well Acker's (1992) third set of processes: gendered organisations are "reproduced" by the interactions between men and women that "enact dominance and subordination" (p.253).
The following is a direct quote from The Anglican Messenger: WA's Anglican news journal.

WOMEN PRIESTS?: The Cases for and against ...

"DESPITE the month-by-month wrangling over the detailed arguments on the ordination of women, many ordinary Anglicans remain unclear on the basic positions of those who are for and those against. Back in 1979, former Messenger editor CANON RON EDWARDS summarised the two sides. To help those who find themselves in the middle of a confusing debate, the Messenger is reprinting Canon Edwards’ summaries.

"Remember though, that the issue has been altered by the decision of Lambeth Conference to approve the consecration of women bishops in those dioceses which wish to do so. These are currently some 1270 women priests, mainly in New Zealand, Canada and the US - where the first woman bishop is expected to be ordained this year. The acceptability of women bishops - and priests ordained by them - in dioceses which disagree with the principle is still uncertain.

"Both sides in the debate agree that there is a risk of disunity within the Anglican Communion and between Anglicans and other Christian denominations - particularly the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. They disagree on the extent to which this should be a limiting factor.

The view in favour of women priests

1. The theological argument

"In the New Testament Christ is the great High Priest, the reconciler of God and man.

"The fullness of the priesthood, representing Christ’s divine humanity, will be incomplete if it reflects only the manhood of Jesus, rather than the one new humanity of God in Christ.
"This understanding has led many theologians in the Anglican Church to argue that a priesthood from which women are excluded is as incomplete as a priesthood from which black men are excluded. The one is as unacceptable as the other.

"This new insight fits in with the traditional view that revelation is not a fixed thing of the past, but a dynamic process through which the Holy Spirit leads the Church to a fuller understanding of truth.

"The ordination of women involves no new doctrine but rather a new understanding of humanity.

2. Ought Anglicans to go it alone?

"The Anglican Church is indeed a very small part of Christendom, but this should not stop it offering its understanding of what is right to the whole Church.

"Already in the Anglican Church there is a doctrinal pluralism including many questions about the nature of ministry and its place within the Church.

"No one wants to impose the ministry of women on those who do not want it. This would be foolish. It is equal folly to deny ordination to those women whose call has been tested by the Church and whose ministry is acceptable by the people.

"For most liberal Anglicans there is no problem of principle at all. The average churchgoer, has, at the most, cultural reservations.

3. Further objections considered

"The evangelical, who believes in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and the finality of Biblical revelation, faces a problem in his understanding of the Biblical doctrine of creation.

"There, by the very nature of things, man is the head of the woman. This means, and this is the view of St. Paul, that female authority in the church is not on. But creation is about the whole of life and not just about religious practices and this should mean that the Queen is just as unacceptable as a woman priest.
"Many people today believe that both Priesthood and Episcopacy are better seen in terms of service than in terms of headship and status. There is no kind of Biblical warrant for excluding women from the role of sacrificial servants.

The view against

1. The new scene

"Understandably in our day the discussion tends to centre round the changing role and status of women in secular society. If women are admitted to every other profession, why cannot they be ordained into the ranks of the clergy?

"In fact this new found secular status has no bearing on their status in the Church of God, indeed the advocates of women clergy are prepared to concede this when it suits their purpose.

2. The argument from Scripture

"The authority of Scripture states quite categorically that the man is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the man and God is the head of Christ. You can read it in 1 Corinthians 11.3.

"Some would say that this is an example of Paul's chauvenism (sic) - a convenient way in contemporary society of casting aspersions on the credibility of any statement about women - others say it means what it says.

"It is stating clearly the principle of the subordination of women to men. It is plainly stating that women cannot act as head of the church and since the priestly ministry acts precisely as this, it follows that women cannot be priests.

3. Sub-ordination is not inferiority

"Sub-ordination in our own day is seen to imply inferiority. This is simply not the case. To say that God is the head of Christ is to state the sub-ordination of one to the other; this is not to say that Christ is inferior or unequal.

4. Culturally determined

"Many argue that this notion of the sub-ordination of women to men has been culturally determined, just as was Christ's choice of twelve men to be his
Apostles. They believe that neither witness to any abiding truth but only to the passing realities of a particular society at a particular time. Ideas that can be disregarded when social circumstances change.

"If you argue like this, you also have to concede that the present liberation of women today is as irrelevant as the social situation of first century Palestine.

5. *Christian tradition*

"Those who argue in favour of women priests ignore not only the evidence of Scripture but also tradition which is part of Christian witness to the truth.

"If the admission of women to the sacred ministry of the Christian Church was only rejected by our Lord because he believed it would be offensive to the Jews rather than because He didn't think they should be admitted, then surely the Apostolic Church, which was thoroughly Gentile by the end of the first century, could have admitted them. What Jews thought had ceased to matter. But they did not.

"If we believe that this long witness of both Scripture and tradition is erroneous, what then is the criteria by which we are to accept or reject many of the other characteristic marks of the Church? Today's secular culture? (Ron Edwards, October 1988, Anglican Messenger:12)"

"God's word makes clear that in creating humanity God gave a headship to man which he (sic) did not give to woman ... It is not possible to set aside the natural meaning of the word 'head' in St. Paul's statement 'the head of the woman is the man'. For there does not seem any doubt as to what St. Paul meant. His words are: 'But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.' He supports this by reference to two features of the creation narrative of Genesis 2: "For the man is not of the woman but the woman is of the man. For neither was the man created for the woman but the woman for the man." These are the theological statements enunciating a principle of relationship between men and women (paragraph 5).

"... the headship of man to woman [is] in every sphere of life, though it is of course in marriage (sic) (which is the quintessence of the relationship between man and woman) that this relation of headship and subordination is most clearly expressed and experienced. ... Christ was among us as one who served and any aspect of headship of man to woman which goes beyond that of serving the true interests of woman does not have a biblical basis nor is it part of the headship as created by God, but it is merely cultural. ... Because there is always a temptation that sinful nature will misunderstand and distort the headship from that of service to that of self-centredness, St. Paul adds to his statement of man's headship the reminder that men and women are completely interdependent (1 Cor. 11:11,12) (paragraph 6).

"Headship and its concomitant of subordination is a principle on which creation has been brought into being. In the spiritual realm there are angels and archangels, and in our world humanity has been given headship and dominion over the lower creation, and within humanity the Bible makes clear, what nature itself teaches us, that man is the head of woman. This principle of order, of head-
ship and subordination, is clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 where Christ is head over all things and yet himself is subordinate to the Father. Since Christ is both head of every man and himself subordinate to the Father he is the example (in perfect relationship) both of the exercise of headship, i.e. service, and of the response to headship, i.e. gratitude (‘I thank thee Father’) and obedience (‘I do always the things that are pleasing to him’).

It is this God-created principle of order which regulates the relationship of men and women in the congregation and in the home. In the three passages where St. Paul deals with women’s activities in the congregation he explicitly bases his instructions on this principle of headship and subordination (1 Cor. 11:3ff; 1 Cor. 14:35; 1 Tim. 2:11ff). He supports his teaching about this order from the creation narrative (1 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Tim. 2:13,14) and he reinforces it by affirming that it has the support of the Old Testament law (1 Cor. 14:34). These statements of the Apostle are theological. They cannot be dismissed as cultural.

... The leadership which God gives in the congregation wil (sic) not contradict the leadership which he has ordained in the family, so that woman who is subordinate to her husband in the family will not be over him in the things of God in the congregation. The principle of headship and subordination expressed in the theological statement ‘the head of the woman is the man’ will be true in the congregation of Christ as it is particularly true in the family. Family and congregation are closely linked, being both expressions of Christ’s relationship to his people (Eph. 5). Moreover, this principle of headship is not limited to the family though it finds its clearest expression there. It is a general statement of relationship. ...
CHAPTER FIVE

"Church Friends aren’t Friends":
The Search for Belonging

5.0 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I described initiatives taken by the parishioners of St. Hale’s Anglican Church to build social relationships among themselves. This chapter explores women’s responses to these initiatives. I illustrate several ways in which women demarcate the parish community and their private lives. The first section of the chapter discusses how women delineate the differences between stereotypical Anglican men and women. The second section treats the ways in which the church provides a place for people to “belong” and “meet others”, without “living in each others’ pockets”. I then discuss why Anglican women prefer fellow worshippers to be “church friends” instead of friends, and discuss how the norms at women’s meetings hinder the development of cliques. Measures to prevent cliques are here interpreted as essential for the survival of the groups. The last section discusses the paradox that while “church activities” are part of being a good wife and mother, they also allow women to define a space separate from their families. On the other hand, women who identify themselves, or are perceived by others, as not fitting into the female domain of the parish have great difficulty in finding a place there.

Men and women differ in how they view the parish. Some regard it as a private, others as a public, part of their life. For men, the church and the home form part of their private lives. For women, however, church activities serve two purposes. On the one hand, they use the opportunities to socialise offered by the parish to separate themselves from home and hearth, and to construct social networks. On the other hand, they also attempt to intertwine their religion and their family life, in the belief that their religious faith makes them “better wives and mothers”.

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5.1 A Typical Anglican Man and a Typical Anglican Woman

What it means to be "Anglican" differs between genders. Anglican men "take the time to be with their families". Anglican women add active church involvement to their female role of wife and mother as "always being there for their families". A member of Caritas, Jan, when asked to describe a typical Anglican man, replied that:

They usually tend to be good family men, fairly conservative. There seems to be a lot of Anglican men who (have) their wives do a lot, but they (the men) are more in the background (laughter).

When asked to describe a "typical" Anglican woman, she said:

Oh, most of them are family oriented. And well the ones I’ve met have all been interested in their children and their children’s activities. . . . (They are) concerned that their children are brought up well. And a lot of them are very involved in the Anglican church (laughter).

Jan and others, in responding to this interview question, have provided their stereotypes of Anglican men and women. In other words, "typical" or "good" Anglicans are portrayed by her (and by others) as good parents, whereas active church involvement is only assumed for women. Two other informants, responding to this question, stated that there was "no such thing as a typical Anglican man or woman"; however, both these women also stated that "women were more active in the parish". Again, this reflects a gender difference in the parishioners' perceptions of the participation in parish activities by men and women.

"Good Anglican men" ideally are propelled into active involvement in family life not only by the Christian tradition of renouncing one's worldly role (Bynum 1986b), but also by the new Christian model of family life and marriage. As described by Father Stephen in a sermon on marriage, men should spend more time with their children than they do, and men and women should submit themselves to each other. This model adds nurturer of children and companion of
wives to the traditional male role of provider and protector. This change in the ideal role of husband and father differs from the Covenant fellowship studied by Rose (1987), since the women she studied relinquished power in order to change male behaviour and roles.

This image of men as being active only in the home but women as being active in the home and church, is reinforced by the lack of an ongoing men’s group in the parish, and by the overwhelming majority of women on the parish roll and attending church services. Furthermore, it is consistent with the findings of Mol (1985) and Kaldor et al. (1994), and also with the finding of a significant over-representation of women among worshippers in the Anglican Church, compared to other Australian denominations (Kaldor 1987:110).

5.2 “Meeting People”

Jane wished to “meet people” since she was “at home” with two children. Owing to the difficulty of meeting others in a new suburb, some people adopt the same strategy as Jane did when she and her husband moved into Hale. Jane didn’t want to “get too close” to the other women on her street because she didn’t want them to “live in each others’ pockets”. She began going to church so she could “meet other people”; she didn’t expect to “make friends” at St. Hale’s. Also, she wanted her children to “learn morals”. She was not sure that she really believed all that “Christian stuff”; however, people at St. Hale’s had similar values and beliefs to hers, such as the importance of giving children a “good start in life”. After several months of attending Sunday service, Jane was invited to join the young women’s group, Caritas, by another “young mum” who sat in the same section of the church nave. Jane decided to attend these meetings for fellowship and support. Similar stories were reported to me by many members of Caritas.

One reason for women’s more active participation in parish life is that, in new suburbs, women have few opportunities to “meet people”. Note Jane’s linguistic use above of the phrase “meet people”, rather than, for example, “make friends”, since this distinction will be important in later discussions. In new sub-
urban areas, men have more opportunities to “meet people” than have women, since men can meet other men at local pubs, sporting clubs, and service clubs. In direct contrast, the lack of public places for women to meet others in a new suburb results in many socially isolated women, especially those at “home with small children”. A woman can meet others by joining an auxiliary of her husband’s sporting or service club or by “helping out” at her children’s schools, but her participation in these voluntary associations is dependent on the prior involvement of her husband or children. A study in a Perth working class suburb demonstrates that only those women who join local voluntary associations develop friendship networks which cover their whole suburb, whereas those who were not “social joiners” had few friends in the suburb (Jones 1981:110). As an example of such a “voluntary association”, a parish like St. Hale’s offers women the opportunity to form friendship ties.

5.2.1 Difficulties in Joining or Belonging to the Parish

While St. Hale’s presents opportunities for newcomers to “meet people”, there are difficulties in joining a parish, as Tina, in a formal interview, describes:

Unless you are willing to join a group, generally speaking you won’t meet people. I think that some of the people that we know, that we say hello to at St. Hale’s, are the people that were at Father Stephen’s house during Lent.

Just the sheer fact of being at some event in a smaller group of people helps. But I think this is something that ... is true, that for somebody to come right from the outside into the church, they have to jump, suddenly, hurdles – they have to be extremely willing to persist. It really is amazing there’s anybody added to the church at all (my emphasis).

Interviewer: What sort of hurdles are you thinking of?

Well obviously the hurdle first of all is to persist in trying to make friends, to persist in coming along, when you don’t know anybody, and when you feel strange and uncomfortable. So everything is new and strange to us. There is a sense in which we feel still as if we are in the wrong tradition while we’re trying to work out the prayer book.
So there’s all that sort of stuff, but we’re already Christian people, and we have a commitment to the faith. But just imagine what it would be like for somebody who has not grown up in a faith community, and who didn’t know the words, how much stranger it would be for them, and how, really, unless they are really determined to stay in that worship environment, just to give up and say, “This is too hard. There’s nobody to help me in”, you know. I think unless you can make a relationship within the centre of the parish it is extremely hard to get there [belong in the parish].

You have to be willing to join a group, you have to be willing to volunteer, to offer yourself, and that’s a very frightening thing, and there’s a lot of people who don’t have the social skills to do that. Because, I mean, churches just assume that everyone knows how to join a group.

But if you think about it, most people grow up in a small group of friends, and a small family group, and when they go to work, they add a few new friends in the work environment, but mostly, that’s it – unless they’ve been in the [Girl] Guides, or the Brownies, or Scouts, or that [they] actually had the experience of belonging to something else. A lot of people don’t know how to join groups and that really frightens them.

So how would you get ... I can’t imagine a lot of people walking up to a completely strange person and saying, “I want to join you”. We have to have someone in the group invite you in and that doesn’t happen very often.

Tina’s description of the “hurdles” encountered in joining a parish emphasises the need for “persistence” in making friends. It is necessary to attend worship services continually, to learn the liturgy, to volunteer for tasks, and above all, to “have someone in the group invite you in”.

Katherine is a mid-ranking public servant who, notwithstanding her well-developed social skills and self-confidence in her ability to join parish groups, perceives that there is a barrier to her “belonging” in the parish. She was the most articulate of those I formally or informally interviewed who believed they did not belong. As a result she was considering leaving St. Hale’s for another Anglican parish.
Interviewer: So why have you thought about going to another parish?

Because I haven’t always been happy at St. Hale’s. I think one reason you’ve chosen St. Hale’s [for fieldwork] is that it is a fairly typical sort of middle class parish, but there are a very small minority of divorced women who don’t have families there.

I feel very much an isolate, although I do have some good friends there. . . . There are some great people there, but I do feel very much an isolate. I [feel] that perhaps it might be better if I could find a parish where there were more people in a similar sort of position. I have toyed with the idea.

There have been other things that I have found difficult and sometimes I wonder whether they’re “on about” (she drew the quote marks with her fingers in the air) the things that are important to me down there. I’m probably not seeing things fairly. Yeah, it is a biased point of view I guess.

There seems to me to be an undue emphasis on committees, teams, and rosters and doing good for people, and doing good things, rather than being and being spiritually developed. That’s the way it’s coming through to me at the moment. I’m not saying that that’s necessarily right, but that’s how I feel at the moment and . . . my feelings . . . are very important to me.

And I [have] really thought about it very deeply . . . and I have felt uncomfortable there on quite a few occasions. It’s more occasions than when I’ve been to other parishes. For various reasons, there hasn’t been this uncomfortable feeling [at previous congregations] and I thought maybe I should find another parish to go to, but at the moment I’m . . . thinking that . . . [changing parishes] is not going to achieve anything for me anyway.

I’ve got to work through this and that’s what I’m trying to do right now. . . . [Through attending weekend retreats that have no relationship to St. Hale’s.] I can see . . . that there is some barrier down there that I have to overcome. I’m in the process of trying to overcome it, and probably it should be all right in the parish when I work through that.
Interviewer: What is the barrier in the parish?

I’ve sort of talked with Tom who happens to be a Catholic priest [Tom is involved with the organisation sponsoring the weekend retreats]. ... We decided that probably yes, I’m not really at the stage in my life where I want to be busy rushing and doing things. I need to be, and to be wanted for me and I feel that I’m not. At the moment I feel that I am not wanted for me as a person. I’m of interest, because of being a middle-ranking public servant, ... I’m on such and such a team, and I can do various things. But as me, as a person, what’s inside, that’s not, I don’t feel that’s getting enough priority. And I think it happens to a lot of people too. ...

For lots of people [St. Hale’s] is ideal and it suits them, but where I’m at, I need to be and I want to grow spiritually and try to get in touch with, well, with my spirituality. ... I would have almost thought of this to be synonymous with religion and religious activity, but it’s not anything like that. ...

Then again, I have found that because of this [being valued for my organisational abilities] I have feelings, in a sense, of being rejected as a person. ... I have found myself retreating and getting myself out of the involvement. ... It’s a reaction in a way ... so that I won’t be rejected there. Socially I find myself rejected, I don’t mean [literally] but I am not a part of a recognised family group, I’m not part of one of the cliques or social groups there. So socially I feel that I don’t have a place. I think that’s something that I’m coming to terms with. In my studies, I’ve studied into groups and how groups operate, and so on, and one of the things that one has to do is to work out what expectations one has of a group. Now my expectations of the group, the parish, are that I would get friendship and support and I haven’t actually had those. I think that’s perhaps where some of the disillusionment has come in. ...

Katherine offers a good example of a woman who does not fit into the female domain of the parish. She identifies the barriers to her non-belonging as not fitting into either a recognised family group, a clique or a fellowship group. She is unlikely to be invited to private barbecues or dinner parties among parishioners without a male partner, and she is unable to become a member of the women’s
fellowship groups since she is in full-time paid employment. Katherine is outside the female domain because she is divorced and has a successful professional career. She straddles the symbolic boundary between the male and female domains in the parish social organisation. She does not want to cross entirely into the male domain by occupying a formal leadership position because she is more interested in developing her spirituality than in parish administrative roles. She also refers to the style of belonging at St. Hale's as one in which participation in committees and groups is paramount. Her observation agrees with Davie's (1990) depiction of English Anglican suburban middle-class parishes as having "high levels of activity [and] endless committees" (Davie 1990:465).

5.2.2 Migrants and the Parish

I interviewed a middle-aged English migrant, Joyce, who told me how she and her family had successfully managed to integrate into the Anglican Church.

Interviewer: Have you always been an Anglican?

Always. I say always, I was born and baptised an Anglican, but in my childhood in England we actually attended a Baptist Sunday School because the local Anglican or Church of England as it was in England was very high church. They used incense and rituals, the rituals were more Catholic rituals. My mother used to faint when she got near the incense, particularly when she was pregnant. (Laughter during this sentence) So, we ended up going to Baptist Sunday School and attending the Church of England services just once a year at Christmas when my grandmother came to visit.

How often did you attend church when you were growing up?

Oh, two or three times every Sunday (amusement in voice).

Was that in England and here both?

Yes, Baptist Sunday School was morning and afternoon Sunday School. It wasn't just once a day, it was twice on a Sunday and when we came here, we came over, as I say I was nearly twelve when we arrived here, my brother is two years older or almost two years older than I am, and we both
went to the local Church of England in Bassendean because there wasn’t a Baptist Church or Sunday School close by. It was in Maylands and because of transport reasons we couldn’t get there. And we became involved initially in the Girls Friendly society and then the Church of England Girls’ Society and my brother became involved in the Boys’ Society uh, church choir youth group, you name it and we were in it. And because of that involvement within the choir, often we were at church for one of the groups at 7:30 service in the morning and at 9:00 we would be in the choir and ten o’clock we would be at Sunday School and then seven-thirty in the evening we would be back to sing in the choir again. So it was an all day thing. All by our own choice because our parents didn’t go.

Why do you think you and your brother went?

My parents never ever went, not even in England. They used to send us off to Sunday School and encouraged us to go. They put religious programs on at home on the radio and they turned the radio on to listen to hymn singing, church services on the radio. I suppose we got into the habit of going in England and coming into a strange country to find a place which had a familiar (pause) uh which was somewhat familiar in that it was Christ-oriented.

The Baptist Church Sunday School in England had been very scriptural based. While we were there, a few months before we left England, we had been involved in Scripture Union group for young people where it was involving young people in learning scripture verses in a group. Another thing Scripture Union did in England was that they had competitions for young people so that every year they had all the Sunday Schools in the whole town. Children that were interested in learning particular passages were being taught a particular passage of scripture, usually one of the gospels, and learning it very thoroughly. It might be just one chapter or you know ten verses or so. And on a particular day right throughout the whole country in all the schools the schools would be open on Saturday for the children to come and sit an exam, a Scripture Union exam. And you got certificates for it on your result, first, second, or third placings. (Chuckle)

So you know ... it was part of our lives. And I think for coming here, we needed that familiar contact again, and it was very good and [useful] for
fitting into a group that is already established with young people of our own age.

Joyce's familiarity with the customs and language of scripture union classes and Sunday school allowed her to make the transition from England to Australia easily, just as many of Western Australia's Anglican clergy were migrants themselves (Williams 1989). The outline of parish social processes differed little between the two places because many clergy were educated in Britain or migrated from Britain.

The next interview introduces Hilda, a widow with two grown up children, and a teenage daughter named Jennifer. Hilda is a recent British migrant. Like Tina, who mentioned the "hurdles" in the path of "belonging" to St. Hale's parish, Hilda had a less positive experience than Joyce, in attempting to integrate herself into St. Hale's parish. Hilda's shy and hesitant manner of speaking demonstrates her lack of confidence, and her doubts and fears in trying to establish relationships in a new parish, in a new country.

Interviewer: Do you go to any parish events, such as the education committee seminars?

I ... I'm too shy to go to that. I just feel that I'm still trying to get the feeling of belonging here - I know that I chose to come to Australia but to get that feeling of belonging is difficult, and also when you know that something has been going on for a period of time before you are there and people know each other it's often difficult. The people are very, very nice there, but it's something that I have - when everybody knows each other you feel very conscious of coming in on the party. But it's like every other relationship I guess you just keep going and you're accepted after a time and then you feel that you belong.

Have you gone to any of the parish family picnics?

No, because see the boys are, want to do their own thing, they wouldn't want to be involved, Jennifer is not very interested because she is as bad as I am, and I suppose shy, and feels that, all just self-conscious, and shy
in a situation where people, at least they seem to know each other and you therefore feel like taggers-on. You need to have somebody in your own type of situation before you get over that feeling of being taggers-on.

My next question was intended to elicit information about Hilda’s attitude toward the Mothers’ Union, but her answer relates mainly to her difficulties in joining the Mothers’ Union in St. Hale’s. (See Chapters Six and Seven for further discussion of the Mothers’ Union).

Are you a member of the Mothers’ Union at St. Hale’s, or were you in England?

In England, but apparently that counts to the present parish, but they [St. Hale’s branch] have their meetings in the day, they always have them in the day. They tried the evening and it didn’t really work terribly well, so they converted it back to the daytime because it’s mainly the people who are free in the day that attend the meeting.

Did you like it in England? Did you go to Mothers’ Union meetings often?

Yes, it was good, and they had different speakers, and it’s an acceptable place for a woman to go. Still it was also a social event.

Why do you think it was an acceptable place for a woman to go?

Socially, for a woman, it is difficult to go out of the domestic situation, whereas men can go together to a pub or something. We women couldn’t do that . . . and was company, and because it’s a Christian situation you know, the people that you are meeting are unquestionably the right kind of people. I don’t mean in any way of status in society, I mean the same as each other — background, mums, wives, all in there to try and help the community. . . . It’s a sort of worthwhile activity, you learn (something) because there is a speaker, and I don’t care what subject it is but you listen to people talking about their subject. It’s very interesting you know and you learn something from that. You learn something when you are together and you do things, and I think that’s pretty good.

Hilda tells us several important things. One is that the Mothers’ Union is
an “acceptable” place to go. However, she doesn’t like to attend parish occasions alone, because as a woman without a husband, she is uncomfortable at mixed social events. She would like to attend an evening women’s group, but not one of the four women’s fellowship groups meets in the evening, so there is no group catering to women in full time employment. Hilda is not interested in joining a parish committee, and since she attends church only sporadically, membership in a team ministry group, which meets on Sunday mornings, would not be appropriate. I continue this interview with Hilda in the next section, where I show that, despite these negative views, Hilda also finds rewards associated with religious participation in St. Hale’s.

5.2.3 Benefits of Parish Participation

The interview with Hilda also included the following.

Interviewer: So when you go, what do you think you receive?

(Pause, the beginning is very unclear, but gets stronger as she goes on.) Peace, (pause) a little bit of a while away from the pressures of everyday life, (pause) I feel that you are in communicado with a greater being, (pause) and, and, the phrase ‘give your trust in God and everything will be alright’ and I think that basically is perhaps why I sometimes want to do, is that I am (pause) please take the pressure off for a while, give me strength and forgive me for the things I do wrong, put them right somehow at the right time. (Pause) And I often find that the week goes better when I’ve been to church on Sunday compared to when I haven’t been to church on Sunday, and I find that, for a few weeks, the pressures become incredibly great and I go to church and all the anxiety is taken away.

Winsome, a retired woman, in response to the question, “What does the Church provide for women?” said:

Well, apart from (pause) making you feel that you are with other Christians and are together, that you are nurtured: that the church is nurturing you all the time. I suppose that it is the feeling of family in the church.

She emphasises “being together” and depicts the quality of nurturing in the
the church as “the feeling of family”. This nurturing is idealised as generalised reciprocity among the parishioners.

In response to the question “What does the church provide for women?” Anne, an officer in one of St. Hale’s women’s organisations and a former nursing sister, stated:

... It gives you a place. It gives you a place where you can go and meet people.

I always feel relaxed in church. I feel that the people that I meet in church, I don’t know if everyone feels the same, but with the friendship you get from the people there, it’s not something that they want [from you].

Like if you are in a work situation, people perhaps want you or they are trying to get a higher position in the work force or they are your senior or you are their senior.

There is not that same openness and honesty that when you are there, no one wants you for your friendship, for anything else but your friendship. It’s unconditional. They don’t want anything from you. (laughter) It is just open friendship. I think that’s what I get from the church. . . .

Anne begins her answer with the simple declarative sentence, “It gives you a place”. Both Anne’s and Winsome’s responses lack a religious focus. Their first thoughts are of the church as a female space (Spain 1992). Anne also alludes to the lack of public spaces available for women in new suburbs. The church provides women with “a place where you can go and meet people” and “open friendship”.

Anne, when she compares friendships in a work hierarchy unfavourably to “unconditional” or “open” friendships in the church, is comparing two types of instrumental friendships. She characterises church friendships as friendships where they “don’t want anything from you”. Anne later in the same interview told me that she had no friends in St. Hale’s, and saw no one from the parish other than at church activities. Her statement, “open friendship, I think that’s
what I get from the church” contradicts her report of “having no friends at the church”. Thus she differentiated between expressive friendships, with mutual commitments and obligations, and two types of instrumental friendships – work and church. The concept of “church friends” that I introduce and examine next reconciles these two statements.

5.3 Church Friends aren’t Friends

After a year in the parish, I began talking to women with a view to constructing a chart of friendship networks among the members of St. Hale’s. It came as a surprise to me to learn that only those women with a long history of active involvement in the parish ever described any other parishioner as a “friend”. Many said simply that they had no friends in the parish. After several interviews in which I received this response, I realised that the construction of the above-mentioned social network chart would not be useful. There were insufficient friendships among the parishioners to necessitate its mapping.

I talked to Sally, who also gave this response of “no friends in the parish”. However, I had observed that Sally and Denise came to services and activities together, worked on a parish committee together, minded each other’s children, and seemed to know a lot about each other’s lives. So I asked, “What about Denise?”. Sally’s prompt reply was, “Oh, she’s a church friend”. It was at this stage that I realised that a distinction needed to be drawn between “friends” and “church friends”. Church friends are people you “do church things with”. Pat, in a later conversation, put this distinction even more forcefully, declaring that: “Church friends aren’t friends”.

In the instrumental relationship of “church friends”, one has fewer obligations when compared to the expressive relationship usually implied by the use of the term “friends”. Church friendships differ from the instrumental relationships of work friendships since they are formed in an environment in which there is no formal hierarchy among the laity. (Leadership positions in all Anglican woman’s organisations rotate among the membership.) Church friends have certain obligations of course, among them being the requirements not to gossip about other
church members and to be "nice and supporting" to one another. When a church friend moves to another parish even in the same city, it is not uncommon for the relationship to end.

There was virtually no mixing of "friends" and "church friends" at dinner parties and barbecues in individuals' homes. The only mixing occurred at ritual occasions like baptisms, marriages, funerals, and after all, these occurred inside a church and were religious events. Sometimes, church friends become friends, but this usually takes years. A separation must be maintained between one's church network and one's private life.

Church friendships end when someone leaves the parish, although a woman's connection to the women's groups may be maintained if she desires. One or the other of the Mothers' Union and the Ladies' Guild invited formerly active members to a reunion luncheon or afternoon tea once a year. These formerly active members included women who were parishioners of St. Hale's but were unable to continue involvement in the group as a result of paid employment, illness, or family responsibilities. Also invited were women who had left the parish entirely, either because of moving house or because of a move to a parish "with a different way of doing things" than St. Hale's. Despite having left St. Hale's in search of a different kind of churchmanship, or even a different denomination in one case, these women were still welcome at the reunion meetings. The theology of one's Christianity was not as important as one's life practicing Christianity. I believe this is another illustration of the fact that one's tie is to the group, rather than to one or more individuals in the group.

The program at these reunions was unusual because there were no scheduled events and the main purpose was simply to maintain the social ties between the present and former members. At a party to commemorate the formation of the Mothers' Union branch, and also at a Ladies' Guild luncheon, which I attended, the primary conversational topics included the exchanging of personal news among the women concerning marriages, divorces, the births of children and grand-children, health, and one's current employment status.
Female church friends also have an obligation to “help each other out” in tasks such as, for example, watching a parishioner’s children while she takes another child into Perth for medical treatment; caring for her children and preparing a meal for her family when a parishioner is ill; watering her garden and feeding pets when she is on vacation; and, the most common favour of all, driving her to church events. The members of the Ladies’ Guild and Mothers’ Union, for example, had rosters for long-term help such as taking an elderly woman shopping, helping with the physical therapy exercises of a brain-damaged child, and staying with a bed-ridden woman while her “companion” ran errands and had some time alone. I gave women lifts to and from church activities. Twice, since I lived in the vicinity, I delivered cards and “We are praying for you” messages from the Caritas and Mothers’ Union members to patients at King Edward’s Hospital for Women. (This hospital is distant from Hale, and St. Hale’s women were patients at it only if there were complications with a pregnancy).

The above mentioned examples are not favours between two women personally, but between a woman and the women’s fellowship group. When a woman needs help, rather than calling another individual, she calls the parish or a women’s group care coordinator who arranges for assistance. An example of this occurred when the Caritas care coordinator called me one morning and asked if I could stay with the 12 year old daughter of Diana. Diana had to attend to a domestic crisis and the daughter had just been released from hospital following an operation. I was never able to arrange an interview with Diana, despite this assistance rendered, and I believe the reason is that she did not see the interview as an exchange in terms of a favour given. Thus institutional reciprocity exists to the extent that each women’s group and the parish as a whole have care coordinators that organise the favours, but personal friendships are not necessary for the exchanges to occur.
5.4 Behaviour at Women’s Group Meetings

This section describes those customs of the women’s groups that prevent the development of cliques and maintain the ideology of supporting and caring for one another. Olson (1989), in his study of American Baptist congregations, discovered that members in congregations with a stable or declining growth rate had many friends within the congregation. By contrast, the members of congregations with an increasing growth rate had few friends within the congregation. As an explanation for this finding he suggests that Baptist parishioners with many friends do not have room in their church social network for newcomers, and thus newcomers, lacking a church social network, do not gain a sense of belonging to the congregation. The purposes of the St. Hale’s women’s groups, as I mentioned earlier, were to provide fellowship and to increase relationships among the women. St. Hale’s church was in a period of increasing growth during the fieldwork, as I outlined in Chapter Three. The emergence of cliques (“holy huddles”) among the St. Hale’s small groups, I was told by a leader of the Mothers’ Union, would disrupt their function of integrating newcomers into the parish. Precisely this occurred in the growing congregations studied by Olson (1989), who observed that “friendships hinder the recruitment of newcomers” (p.445). Thus “church friendships” among women pose less danger to group cohesion and future growth than private friendships.

All meetings and gatherings of the Ladies’ Guild, the Mothers’ Union and Caritas had set agendas and little time for socialising. Women talked about non-group matters over a cup of tea (or a “light lunch” at Guild meetings), but the custom at all three kinds of meetings was for the women to arrange themselves sitting or standing in a circle, and this did not encourage long one-to-one conversations. Any person raising a controversial subject such as the ordination of women into the priesthood would be met with silence. Conversation could start again if the subject was changed. The inner religious life of the women was rarely revealed: they seldom spoke about the previous Sunday’s sermon, their “faith journeys”, or their religious doubts or beliefs. They did not witness to one another or speak of their conversion experiences, although such conversions, “meaningful religious experiences”, or “encounters with God”,

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were reported in my interviews with women. This behaviour contrasts with that reported in charismatic congregations (Neitz 1987; Rose 1987), in which women attempt to have sisterly relationships “in the Lord”.

5.4.1 Prevention of Cliques

The behaviour at church of women who were personal friends did not exhibit their intimate friendship, since they usually did not sit next to one another or talk to one another. I did not realise that two members of both the Mothers’ Union and the Ladies’ Guild were in fact close friends until they told the group that they were going on a holiday to the Eastern states together. When I asked them why they did not seem to be close at meetings they replied that at meetings they “had to pay attention to the people that needed attention or were new”. Also, they preferred to spend their time at church speaking to women whom they would not otherwise have time for.

5.4.2 “Building each other up”

The meetings of the women’s groups were notable for the politeness and patience they showed to each other. The emic phrases “sharing and caring” and “fellowship and support” convey the normative behaviour patterns expected by the women. The following reproduces some of a discussion by members of the Mothers’ Union in response to this observation in an earlier version of Chapter Six, “Martha, Mary, and the Mothers’ Union”, which I read to them at a meeting at my house after the fieldwork had concluded. At their request, I taped the discussion.

Eunice began the discussion by stating:

Well, I have discovered what it is for a start, as far as I can see, so far. And I want to be an honest person, but at the same time I can’t see what it is, and as far as I can gather, and these days – you would know about that [Eunice glances pointedly at the interviewer], I see it as a supportive thing.

It’s a community [Mothers’ Union], we are all supporting each other and it has no top [no authoritarian head]. And it’s a support group.
It’s saying, ‘I don’t want to drag my fellow person down and I don’t want to criticise them’, [and] then you will get their answer. ... Let’s be honest. Well, it’s not honest, that’s such a bad word, it is being able to say more”.

Marion interjects, “You don’t put the person down”.

Eunice continues:

Yes. So it is a supportive, loving thing and that’s as far as I have got so far. Correct me if I am wrong. That’s as far as I can go now. There’s so many people that are so on about the honesty bit – and I am not criticising you at this point [turning to the interviewer] – this is just talking generally; people are so on it [being honest in what a person says], [murmured agreement from the group], just saying it generally; people are so on about this honesty stuff. It’s been going on for, in my understanding, for the past fifteen years and it [being honest] is very destructive and it is immediate. You’ve got to tear all the surface stuff away and find the truth, the way they see it at the time. You know what, they see the hole, and that’s as far as I can interpret it.

Margaret posed a hypothetical question to the group on the “loving” way to answer someone who asks, “How do you like my new dress?” when you think it’s unattractive.

Eunice replied, “It’s not your place to say”.

Margaret said, “What’s the point of saying it’s terrible? Anyway, she’s bought it, she has it on.”

Eunice responded:

As far as I can understand it at the moment, it’s the love for that person you are talking to because you want to see them as they see themselves. It’s like that old-fashioned song, uh, ‘Tell me I’m nice when I’m not’ and it’s a little bit, it’s something telling me in there (pointed to her heart) that I’ve been there, done that. I’ve seen it all and I know which one is destructive
and which one is creative and it’s the one that can put the best part of that
... whatever it is.

If you don’t like it, [referring back to the question of the dress] you don’t
have to lie. Or you can say ‘Do you like it?’, it’s your choice, that’s what you
like. You know, no one’s asking me, no one is asking my opinion really.

Dorothy added, “I think if you also [have] the idea of building each other up.”

Eunice emphatically stated, “Exactly.”

Dorothy repeated, “That’s the thing.”

The members of the groups had a fundamental obligation to encourage one
another in their spiritual development, self-esteem, and self-confidence. One
practical application of this was the custom of alternating the readers of the
prayers and Bible lessons at their meetings, and thus avoiding a separation among
the women between those who were able and those not able to lead the worship
service. Jan attributed her ability to read the intercessory prayers at the Sunday
worship services to her training in the Ladies’ Guild. She recalled that the first
couple of times that she read a lesson during the Ladies’ Guild eucharist service,
the trembling of her hands caused the papers to rustle and her voice to crack.
Nevertheless she persisted because everyone “encouraged her to keep trying”.

5.5 Using the Church as a Place for Themselves

Attending St. Hale’s is something women “do for themselves”. When I
presented this idea to the parish, one woman said

... I have to admit, when my husband and children started attending
church and becoming involved in the parish, it was different. I lost something,
I had to always be aware of them.

Many women spoke of the church as a place to “get strength” for the “hard
slog” of life and to obtain “peace and quiet”. In a society which believes that
mothers with children should be at home and wives should be home with hus-
bands, the attending of church activities is among the few socially approved ways
for women to "get out of the house". Women with unemployed or retired hus-
bands, especially, joked with one another that "I married him for richer or for
poorer but not for lunch".

The rapid growth of the suburb of Hale, discussed in detail in Chapters Two
and Three, hindered the development of social integration in Hale. However,
the church provided an opportunity for individuals to connect with other Hale
residents, and women could participate in religious activities outside the home
without social criticism. Additionally, women used the church to form social
networks through the suburbs and to integrate themselves into a community,
while men used community organisations such as the Rotary and Apex clubs to
form suburban networks.

5.6 Not Socialising with the Neighbours

Every person who spoke at a bible study meeting I attended told of a dis-
pute with present or past neighbours who did not adhere to the rule that "the
neighbours should not live in our pockets". Two couples at this meeting had
resented the invasion of their privacy to such an extent that they had sold their
houses and moved. This vividly demonstrates the tension between members of
religious organisations such as St. Hale's wanting to belong to a community but
not wanting to risk losing individual privacy. Richards, in her study of a new
Australian suburb, reports observing the same ideology operating, and suggests
that there are three "problems of privacy": privacy of information, the physi-
cal invasion of constant visits, and the possibility of asymmetric reciprocation
(Richards 1990:246).

Australian suburban residents thus rarely socialise with their neighbours,
though Richards also relates how people may be friendly when constructing
fences in new suburbs but not afterward (Richards 1990). I, too, heard nar-
ratives of exactly this kind from St. Hale's parishioners. Hale men might talk
to neighbours on the back porch or veranda, or in the woodshed, but women so-
cialised mainly in the kitchen. There is some social danger involved in this, since a woman entertaining visitors in the kitchen risks exposing them to the family room with its children’s mess. Women may also socialise on the veranda, but only when the weather is fine. Men, by contrast, can also socialise at the “local pub”, where they interact to a limited extent with their neighbours. St. Hale’s women could visit the “nicer” pubs, but only in groups comprised of women (only) who they knew from church, and they did not start conversations with strangers. One of the women’s groups had a “surprise” birthday party for a member which was held in the “ladies’ lounge” at the local tavern.

Why should becoming friends with one’s neighbours be seen as such a dangerous practice? Richards, and also Perin (1988), list some reasons. If one becomes friendly with neighbours and there is a falling out, it may be necessary to move – an expensive undertaking. One’s immediate neighbours may gossip about you. It is risky to have people in your home, since it might place your middle-class status at risk. Toilets are revealing: there is a risk that people may thereby evaluate your housekeeping skills and your social status.

5.7 Discussion

St. Hale’s parishioners wanted to “meet people” and “build a community”; however, their vision of community resembles Schutzian consociates rather than Gemeinschaft. The parishioners lived in a new middle-class suburb where the cultural milieu acts to keep everyone and everything outside one’s personal life (Perin 1988). People had conflicting feelings about neighbours and community. As Richards (1990) suggests in her study of a new Australian suburb, people do not want social ties with neighbours because social interaction with neighbours has the potential for lost privacy and autonomy. The Church provided one of the few opportunities in the area for women to gain local social support and networks without risking privacy or autonomy. Women were easily able to integrate themselves into the wider community because St. Hale’s Anglican Church has the social characteristics of a church rather than a sect. With few exceptions, men did not use the church to integrate into the community.
By “fellowship”, women like Jane meant “being with other women like themselves”. Fellowship did not mean, however, the discussion of private business. Women did discuss among themselves problems with children, cooking, gardening, and so on, but these problems were always those that were socially acceptable, rather than those which implied either that one’s child might be intellectually slow or badly behaved, or reflected on one’s competence as a mother. As a member of St. Hale’s and Caritas, Jane could maintain and construct a boundary between her family and/or work life, and the church. She knew people, she was a member of a community, but she had no-one “living in her pocket”.

Parishioners from a high or middle Anglican church background generally perceived St. Hale’s as being a friendly place where they can meet people. Individuals from an evangelical or charismatic background did not find St. Hale’s as “friendly” as their previous parishes. One couple from an evangelical background referred to “God’s frozen people – the Anglicans”.

There is an institutional discourse that seeks to explain the overwhelming numbers of women in church as something inherently linking women and religion and the home together. Berger’s (1969) privatisation of religion thesis continues this tradition, wherein the influence of religion is reduced to the home. Since women are in the home, religion and women are both in the private sphere.

Among other things, this chapter has shown that Berger’s privatisation of religion thesis is valid for men but not for women in St. Hale’s parish. DeVaus and McAllister’s (1987) study of the relationship between Australian women’s church participation and employment suggests that when women enter the work force they adopt the world view of non-church going men. On the basis of the above study of the women’s use of the parish social networking opportunities, I suggest that women in full-time employment have a lesser need for the church in order to integrate into the wider community.

Dempsey (1986) concluded from his study of an Australian rural community that the church was not relevant to the friendship networks of the community. His conclusion differs from mine, but this may be attributed to the type of questions
he asked about friendships in the church. Dempsey does not distinguish between instrumental friendships, such as church friendships, and expressive friendships, as I do. Another difference between Dempsey's work and that reported here is of course the difference in cultures under study: rural women may not "need" the church to "meet people" or to network as suburban women do. Davie (1990), in her typology of belief of members of the Church of England, suggests that belief in rural areas is assumed and belonging is not articulated, whereas in a suburb, belief and belonging are articulated.
CHAPTER SIX

Martha, Mary, and the Mothers' Union

The parish discourse of Martha and Mary challenges and contests with the institutional discourse of the traditional Christian Church, which represents woman, the other, as virgin:whore and Mary:Eve. This chapter explores the dynamics of the dichotomous roles of Christian women based on the Biblical sisters Martha and Mary. Women in this parish discourse compare themselves and other women to the Biblical sisters Martha, the server, and Mary, the prayer, who are held up as role models for Christian women. The chapter traces my discovery of the Martha and Mary discourse and the valuing of Mary over Martha, the contested self-identification of a woman as a Martha or as a Mary, and the part played by this discourse in the social organisation of the parish. Consequently, this chapter also provides an introduction to the women's groups.

6.1 Introduction to the Mothers' Union

When I attended my first Mothers' Union meeting I knew only that it was a women's group in the parish. The meeting started with the women conducting, in the church nave (an area of the church where worshippers sit during a service), a twenty minute worship service from The Mothers' Union in Australia Service Book. The parish priest was not present. The service included the Mothers' Union Prayer:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who gave marriage to be a source of blessing to mankind, we thank you for the joys of family life. Pour out upon us your Holy Spirit, that we may truly love and serve you. Bless all who are married and every parent and child. May we know your presence and peace in our homes; fill them with your love and use them for your glory. Bless the members of the Mothers' Union throughout the world, unite us in prayer and worship, in love and service, that, strengthened by your grace, we may seek to do your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (The Mothers' Union in Australia, Australian Council (undated):7)

This prayer is spoken at some time during every Mothers' Union event. Some
members attach a printed copy of it to the inside of the front leaf of their prayer book for their own private devotions.

After the service the women moved into the church hall for the remainder of the two hour meeting. The four officers: president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer, sat at a small table facing the other women who were sitting in a semi-circle. Claire, the president, formally welcomed me to their meeting. The meeting agenda centred around planning the upcoming annual general meeting in the following month, organising rosters for upcoming events, and reporting on cards sent to parishioners for the births of babies, and for the birthdays of other parishioners, marriage anniversaries, and bereavements.

The meeting concluded with afternoon tea. Over a fruit bun and a cup of tea, I learned that the Mothers’ Union was the largest Anglican women’s organisation in the world and that the purpose of the organisation was to promote family life. The Mothers’ Union branch president, Claire, lent me a pamphlet (Lee 1983) for potential members that stated:

The aim of the Society is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life. The purpose of the Mothers’ Union is to be specially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life (p.6).

At this point I reproduce also the five “objects” (objectives) of the Mothers’ Union, as set out in Kyme (1991). The five objects are:

1. To uphold Christ’s teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding.

2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church.

3. To maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.

4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

The prayer, aim and purpose of the Mothers’ Union, as given above, while emphasising the fundamental importance of marriage and Christian family life, do not clearly define the essential qualities of Christian marriage and family life, nor do the five objects. The model marriage relationship is defined, rather, in a Mothers’ Union pamphlet as “That Christ-like pattern, of husband and wife each loving and giving and forgiving (Kyme 1991)”. The pamphlet is based on a paper given by the Revd. Rachel Stowe, Central Vice-President of the Mothers’ Union at the 1988 World Council of the Mothers’ Union. (St. Hale’s Mothers Union used a draft of this pamphlet for a workshop on understanding the five objects of the Mothers’ Union and for questioning whether or not they were fulfilling the objects).

The following Sunday I returned the pamphlet to the branch president and told her that I would like to learn more about the group. Claire then asked me if I would like to join, later in the week, some St. Hale’s Mothers’ Union members who would be attending a “Pram Service” at St. George’s Anglican Church (a suburban Anglican church about a 15 minute drive from St. Hales’). The pram service involved young mothers bringing their babies in prams to a weekday morning service, followed by a morning tea catered by the St. George’s branch of the Mothers’ Union. (Local groups are called “branches” since they may have members from different parishes.) I asked more questions, including the crucial one, “What are prams”? She told me that she didn’t know exactly what happened at a pram service. She had never been to one, since the services were new to Western Australia. The English migrants in the branch organising the pram service were introducing the (English) custom to Perth. Some of the national, international and other linkages among the members of the Mothers’ Union are briefly mentioned in Chapter Seven.

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1 “Pram” is a contraction of the English “perambulator”, used in Australia for a type of baby stroller in which a baby can sleep lying down.
On the morning of the pram service I and four other women “car-pooled” from St. Hale’s to St. George’s where we joined Jill, a St. Hale’s Mothers’ Union member, and her two small children. During the drive the women told me that several branches were sending representatives to observe the service, because, like themselves, they were interested in holding pram services. Pram services, they hoped, would help bring marginal members into the church and help young mothers meet other young mothers. Two women added that they were concerned for lonely young mothers in the suburbs because they thought that it was much harder for young mothers to meet others like themselves, today. They pointed out that, when they themselves were young mothers, it was much easier to meet neighbours, because, then, women “didn’t go out to work” and “walked to the corner shops” instead of “driving to the shopping centre”. Note here the dual purpose of organizational growth and community service in holding pram services for young mothers.

We arrived half an hour early to the service, owing to a mixup in the time, so Claire introduced me to the St. George’s branch president, Elisabeth Moore, and the parish priest, Father Edward. Father Edward told me that he was “quite keen to have pram services” because he felt there was “a real need in his parish for young mothers to have something specially for them.” Elisabeth Moore told me that the members of the Mothers’ Union had personally invited all the mothers of babies baptized in the parish during the last year. Father Edward supplied the names and addresses of those babies and their parents, sometimes called the “cradle-roll”, to the branch. The Mothers’ Union members were invited through their branches. A children’s play area had been created behind the pews and filled with toys, drawing pencils, crayons and butcher’s paper. It was staffed by the Mothers’ Union members. Elisabeth said that it was important that the Mothers’ Union members entertain the children since “young children cannot sit still in a pew” and we want the mothers to feel comfortable in coming to church with their babies and children.

Approximately twenty young mothers, a couple of fathers, forty Mothers’ Union members, twenty children, and fifteen babies attended the pram service. (Estimating the number of children present was difficult because children hid
under the pews and took trips to the toilets, and were continually being placed and replaced in their prams and strollers. Children approaching the altar too closely were quickly moved by their mothers. Some children had to be separated because of hitting and biting). The service lasted half an hour, during which time members of the Mothers’ Union stood up from their positions in the pews to read the epistle lesson and the prayers. The prayers for marriage and family included the Mothers’ Union prayer, reproduced above.


(38) Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. (39) And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. (40) But Martha was distracted with much serving: and she went to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me”. (41) But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; (42) one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her” (RSV).

The priest started his address by reassuring the mothers, “Don’t worry too much about the child noise; you should hear the Sunday morning family service.” He continued by asking the women to imagine a typical morning scene in their home.

You are still in your dressing gown, the dishes are on the table, children’s toys are everywhere, and the last thing you want is a visitor. The doorbell rings and when you answer the door the visitor is a well dressed woman who smiles while saying good morning to you. You glare.

The mother is embarrassed at the house and her appearance. She worries that the visitor might think she can’t cope.

Many women are like Martha in the Luke reading but women need to imitate Mary and say to themselves: “The guest is here to see me, not my house”. You should make the guest welcome and not worry about the house. Mary had learned the trick of letting go of hassles.
This is the time in your life when you should develop lasting friendships.
The trick is to not let Martha gain control or you will become an isolated, unhappy person.

Father Edward concluded the address by suggesting that his parish needed a playgroup and anyone interested in forming one should speak to him. On behalf of the Mothers' Union he then invited everyone to the morning tea which was to be held in the lower level of the building.

Father Edward's sermon highlights the tension that exists between the two aspects of the Martha and Mary activities. On the one hand he suggests that women should imitate serene Mary's indifference to housekeeping, and that a woman in the midst of domestic chaos should be able to put aside the concerns of the moment in the cause of fellowship - "developing lasting friendships" - but on the other hand he implies by his description of normal domestic life that a Christian woman not having a "neat and tidy" home has reason to feel embarrassed and "hassled". Father Edward's depiction of a mother of young children in a dressing gown, with children's toys scattered everywhere, and the breakfast dishes on the table, is not, however, of the type of chaos symptomatic of a woman unable to cope; his description is, simply, of ordinary life with children.

The sermon is meant to be helpful to young mothers but the priest offers no way of dealing with the tension between being a "good" housekeeper and mother as opposed to being a calm, serene, prayerful Mary. The standards set by St. Hale's women for a "neat and tidy" house are extremely high- a woman apologised to me, for example, for having unwashed breakfast dishes in the sink at 9 o'clock in the morning. But a woman with a home whose appearance is open to public scrutiny has no time for a spiritual life. In summary, Father Edward suggests that a tendency towards behaving as a Martha, "let[ting] Martha gain control", is less desirable than Mary-like behaviour, and may lead to an "isolated, unhappy person". He does not recognise the tensions between the role of the housewife and of the spiritual churchgoer.

During the morning tea and on the way home, I asked the women from St.
Hale’s what they thought about the sermon. They saw the sermon as a warning to women against being “houseproud” and told stories concerning women they knew who were so houseproud that their children and husbands suffered from neglect. One mentioned that she appreciated the reminder to “let go of hassles” and to remember that her self-worth does not depend on her home’s appearance. The women’s comments were generally favorable, though I learned later in the course of the fieldwork that the women were prepared to praise, for example, a sermon, a book, or a Ladies’ Guild event, as “good”, just to be polite. Their comment could only be taken seriously if they continued with their praise. (This point was more fully explored in Chapter Five). In the present case, I think the women were not merely being polite, because they mentioned specific parts of the sermon that they had liked. These women’s reactions to the priest’s sermon accord with my understanding of his metamessage to his women parishioners, as favoring the role of Mary over that of Martha, and exhorting this audience of mothers to value interpersonal relationships over domestic order.

One of the older members said at this time that she could not remember being concerned if another woman saw the normal state of her house, but that “These young ones” seemed to worry about appearances too much. This comment set off a commonly heard discussion about “Young couples getting into debt to pay for large houses” and “Young mothers having to be out to work to pay for those fancy houses”, and “We went without; why can’t they”? These comments have some validity since these women typically began their married lives in the two bedroom houses with “sleepout” of the 1950’s and 1960’s, whereas at the time of the fieldwork the minimum sized house in Hale had three bedrooms with two bathrooms and a family room. Some four-bedroom houses included a study, a games room, a family room, a swimming pool, and two and a half bathrooms. In her study of a new suburb, Richards (1990) asserts that “the possibility of [home] ownership drives (or beckons) women out of the home into mortgage-paying employment, and justifies [the women’s paid employment]” (Richards 1990:138). Those St. Hale’s women who were mothers of young children and were in paid employment justified their outside work to me by the necessity to meet mortgage payments.
6.2 Other uses of Mary and Martha

During a talk entitled "Who are We?" the Reverend Jenny Hall (Anglican Deacon) at the Mothers' Union provincial Conference (see Chapter 1) discussed Biblical individuals who are Christian role models. She spoke about Mary, Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, Gideon, and also about Hannah and Elizabeth, the once-barren women who in their later years gave birth to the prophet Samuel and the apostle John the Baptist. She also mentioned Jezebel as the classic negative example of womanhood, and Martha as having a flaw in that she "was the jittery type" but one who learned from the Lord. Martha was nominated as being one of the first to recognize the divinity of Jesus after the rising of Lazarus. "She was a woman like many of us who made a glorious affirmation of Jesus' divinity."

Late in the fieldwork I was invited to attend a planning session of the Perth Mothers' Union. The 1988 World Council of the Mothers’ Union wished to investigate the possibility of the organization having a more active and public role, and in response to this, the Perth Diocesan Council of the Mothers’ Union had invited a management consultant to help them plan the future directions of the Mothers' Union. The management consultant, Mr. Arthur Evans, asked the women to form small groups and to write down a list of the current activities of the Mothers' Union. During this exercise, many women, perhaps one fifth, made the statements: "We want to do more than serve cups of tea" or "We do more than serve cups of tea". While Mr. Evans was compiling the summary or master list of current activities, "making teas" was named by several people, but others of the women did not want to include "making teas" in the summary because making teas was "nothing". Then one woman interjected, "We should include making teas because we do a good job, we are good Marthas". Another woman replied, "But I want to be a Mary too". Other group members laughed and smiled in agreement. "Making tea" was listed as a current activity but no further discussion about it took place for the rest of the session.

There are two official Mothers' Union magazines. One, "Mia Mia" (the word "mia" means "home" in an un-named Australian Aboriginal language, and the initials also stand for "Mothers In Australia"), is published in Australia and dis-
tributed to Australian Mothers' Union members. The other, "Home and Family", is published by the English branch of the Mothers' Union and distributed world-wide. The following short article by Nicola Currie entitled "Faith and Fishfingers", was published in "Home and Family", and makes some important points about how members of the Mothers' Union deal with the contradictions between the social roles of Martha and Mary.

When the phone goes, the doorbell rings, my three year old wants a wee now and the fishfingers catch fire I ponder anew on the Mary and Martha story in the Bible. I have always felt that Martha got short measure.

The writer recognises the under-valuing of Martha, and goes on to protest that reality intrudes into the yearning for a full spiritual life.

No doubt many of us would love to be like Mary, serene, still and spiritually alert, but so often the banalities of daily life get in the way. Mothers might like to retreat from the constant round of nappies, meals and washing but these things have to be done and once done any still serenity quickly sinks into sweet slumbers...

Poor old Martha has many descendants today. Yet it is the Mary figure that Christian women are meant to aspire to. But just how practical is this for a young mother? Listening attentively when you have toddlers is an acquired art. I remember my own mother once when a new young curate came round. We had just moved house, my younger sister had whooping cough and was whooping away while the curate tried to have a sensible conversation with us all. My attentive mother was torn by the desire to listen to the curate and the need to clean up after my sister. How often when we try to listen to a sermon or interesting talk is the major part of our attention spent on silencing junior? In a three point sermon a lively two year old can have demanded juice, screamed for biscuits and crayoned the hymn book.

"There is a time and a place for everything," I hear you say. "There are Pram Services and Family Services for people like you." Spare me the Family Service, please. Here the jolly jingles and pre-school playlets vie for my toddler's attention but I have to be honest, they are not always spiritually uplifting for the over 10's.
A mother's responsibility to control her children during church services does not permit her to fully engage in the liturgy or to listen attentively to the sermon. In any service I have attended, at least 2 or 3 parents (usually, the mothers), have been obliged to take noisy or unsettled children into the parish gardens till they quietened down. Currie next ponders the ideal "saintly" aspect of womanhood again:

If we look at women saints too, the calm virgins once again have the monopoly. There are few busy bustlers among the beatified. Did the few saints who were also mothers have child minders I cynically wonder? Did they become saints before or after motherhood I ask? Sometimes even the images of the Virgin Mary are unhelpful. Church statues often show a clean and holy lady far removed from what many of us experience in motherhood.

But back to the burnt fishfingers. Surely if 80 per cent of our time is consumed by the everyday tasks of feeding, watering and clothing people then God must be there too somewhere. Martha was not the only person in Christian history who kept house. The women saints must have had their busy, active times, as well as their quiet, reflective ones.

Most mothers would identify with Martha but there are moments when Mary can take over, even if she keeps a low profile in the pre-school years. I have found it helpful to read writers who understand this active, passive tension. People who [can] catch glimpses of God in the everyday routines as well as the blessed moments. . . .

Currie, after formulating the problem, offers suggestions on the comparison between motherhood and spiritual activity. She is here addressing one of the underlying Mothers' Union aims, to help women attain a more active spiritual life.

Rabbi Lionel Blue manages to find God where most saints would not bother looking. His well-known Thought for the Day broadcasts turn simple daily realities into windows on another world. I enjoy his writings but I find his recipe book - Kitchen Blues - very satisfying. There is the danger that while you read
the tale behind his recipes you burn the vital ingredients but he does put food preparation where most mothers have to put it – at the centre of things. "I learned a lot about religion in my universities and seminary. I learned religion, not about it, in listening to the life experience of ordinary people in kitchens," he explains in the introduction to his book.

Under the heading "Motherhood and God", the article continues with a discussion of a more "practical" writer:

Another writer who I have found helpful is Margaret Hebblethwaite. There are few accessible religious writers who understand the demands and the delights of motherhood but Margaret Hebblethwaite does in her book – Motherhood and God. This short paperback is an original and deeply personal account about finding God in motherhood and finding motherhood in God. She writes vividly about the pain, humour and overwhelming joy familiar to any mother but she goes beyond her personal story to theological insight into God who is not only our father but our mother too (Currie 1989:10).

Currie recommends Hebblethwaite for the insight that God is both mother and father. This statement reaffirms the spiritual nurturing aspect of motherhood, since God also mothers.

My next quotation is a passage from the book "Women of Spirit" by the Australians Janet Nelson and Linda Walter:

The story of Mary and Martha of Bethany in Luke 10:38-42 is a well-known one. Its message is clear. For those of us who know only too well the endless demands of running a house, its message may be painful. Jesus’ reply to Martha’s complaint about Mary challenges us to see that we do have a choice as women. Of course service is important. But so is sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to his teaching. In fact, “to sit at the feet” of a rabbi meant, in Jewish understanding, to be a student. This meaning would have been clear to those around Jesus. Hardly the place for a woman at all, and certainly not when there was a meal to prepare. And yet Jesus not only approves but calls Mary’s choice “the better path”. In the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus makes it clear that women, as well as men, must bear the
responsibility of choosing the place that belongs to them (Nelson and Walter 1989:40).

Once again we see clearly the separation of domestic and spiritual life. Nelson and Walter use the Biblical Martha and Mary story in support of their argument for the ordination of women into the priesthood of the Anglican Church. More relevant for the purposes of the present discussion is that these self-defining feminists, like non-feminists, designate the Marthas of the world as being personally responsible for choosing the lesser place of wife and mother, omitting to mention Martha's apostleship and her prominence among Jesus' followers.

For this, they rely on Biblical authority such as the previously mentioned Luke passage, and on John 12:1-3:

(1) Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who Jesus had raised from the dead. (2) There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. (3) Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with fragrance of the ointment. (RSV)

6.3 Even Marys Lack Power

I talked to Thelma of St. Hale's, who told me that she had wanted to be a nun when she was a teenager. So why had she not become a deaconess or a sister? This woman was considering submitting herself as a candidate for ordination to the diaconate. Her first response was, "I still would have had people telling me what to do". Then she told me she married young and "that took care of that". But, as Thelma pointed out, the patriarchal power over Marys remains; a deaconess is always under the direct authority of a male parish priest, and communities of sisters are under the authority of the Bishop. As I have discussed already, and will detail further in Chapters Eight and Nine, laywomen had some influence in parish matters, but they had very little control over decisions such as appointing a parish priest or a new bishop, or deciding if a new parish centre would be built, and of course they had little representation.
on synods, on general synod, or on diocesan council. The role of Mary, while being a public and prestigious one, carries with it very little formal power to bring about structural or theological change.

In the popular telling of the Lucan Martha and Mary story, Martha is reproached by Jesus for wanting her sister Mary to help her in domestic work. Jesus tells Martha that: “Mary has chosen the better part”. The continuation of Martha’s story, to be found in John 11:1-27, of being one of the first to recognise Christ’s divinity, is rarely recounted. Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, is dying. Jesus comes when Lazarus has been dead for four days. Mary remains at home while Martha rushes to Jesus and says, “Lord, Lazarus would not have died if you had been here”. Jesus says, “Your brother will rise again”, and Martha says, “Yes, on the last day”. Jesus replies, “I am the resurrection and the life”. It is at this point that Martha makes her crucial recognition of Jesus:

(27) She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he is coming into the world”. John 11:27.

As Porter points out: “Martha is depicted as the disciple and a prominent one at that ... The other Martha, patron saint of housewives and all whose ministry is homely, has domesticated Martha the apostle” (Porter 1989a:13). Cheek (1991) suggests that the Lucan account of Martha and Mary was written to downplay the leadership position of women in the early church. Thus the institutional discourse of Martha and Mary has silenced the apostolic Marthas of the church.

Enabling members to emulate Mary constitutes a veiled purpose; however, there is a tension between individuals adopting the passive, pious role of Mary and fulfilling the aims and objects of the organisation. As traditionally understood, the Mary model does not place Mary outside the domestic sphere. The members of the Mothers’ Union, since its founding in England in 1885 as a diocesan organisation, have left the domestic sphere to protect and promote Christian family life by lobbying politicians. They also have established and maintained
charitable bodies. Willis (1980) describes Mothers' Union members in Australia in the first third of this century as fighting for their homes as “divine workshops”. I never heard a St. Hale's member refer to the home as a “divine workshop”, but members did state that Christian homes would prevent social problems such as marital breakdowns, juvenile delinquency, and unemployment. Most members labelled their homes as “Christian”, and thought that the activities of the Mothers’ Union should include helping other people to achieve such Christian homes. As a result of this, many of their activities are focused on the “other”: single parents, Australian Aboriginal families, “street kids”, the unchurched, and poor families.

The organisational story of the founding of the Mothers’ Union in 1885, by Mrs Mary Sumner, highlights the tension between a public active role and the questioning of a husband’s authority, wishes or convenience, with the role of the quiet pious woman. The following description is from Violet B. Lancaster’s “A Short History of the Mothers' Union”, published by the Mothers’ Union in 1958. I also heard oral versions of this story repeated a number of times by current Mothers’ Union members. The Anglican Church had arranged a Mass Meeting for women in Portsmouth, UK. Mrs Sumner attended this meeting, sitting on the platform next to the Bishop of Newcastle, the Right Reverend E. R. Wilberforce. The Bishop, as the Chair, noticed that “the women were listening rather apathetically to the male speakers” (Lancaster 1958:6). He took the radical step of asking Mrs Sumner, the wife of his archdeacon, to address the audience on her work with women in her parish. Despite her misgivings that, “Her husband would strongly disapprove of the publicity” (p.6), she was prevailed upon – indeed the Bishop “lay his commands upon her” – to speak, which she did to great applause from the women present. She spoke about her inspiration of a “Mothers’ Union, in which mothers of all classes could unite in faith and prayer” (p. 6).

Whether or not her husband was present at the meeting is not recorded by Lancaster, but the Bishop “accepted full responsibility for her actions” and “gave her his blessing”. This was the inception of the Mothers’ Union. The next day the leading women of the Winchester Diocese, including the Bishop’s wife,
met and formed the the Mothers' Union as a Diocesan organisation within the Church of England.

This story is important because it forms a precedent for, and legitimates, actions by members of the Mothers' Union that go against their husbands’ wishes, or might even meet with their disapproval. In fulfilling the aims and objects of the Mothers' Union, some members find themselves engaged in clearly non-domestic tasks. Examples of these that occurred during my fieldwork were the making of parliamentary submissions and the lobbying of members of Parliament, and the organisation of protest rallies against the imprisonment of mothers convicted of welfare fraud, and of a woman convicted of first-degree murder of her husband. Organisational stories of rule-breaking of this kind “express tension created by dualities, perhaps reducing that tension by expressing it” (Martin et al. 1983:448). In the above account of the inception of the Mothers’ Union, the rule-breaking of Mary Sumner (and of the Bishop!) is seen as essential to the formation of the organisation.

When I presented an earlier version of this chapter in a seminar to the St. Hale's branch of the Mothers' Union, I asked the members if they thought that one aim of the Mothers' Union was to help housewives become more “Mary-like”. I was emphatically told, “Yes, the Mothers’ Union is for Marys and the Ladies’ Guild is for Marthas.” They had “pushed” to have a branch because they had “grown beyond the Guild” and wanted a group with the more spiritual focus of the Mothers’ Union. It was pointed out, by women who were members of both the Mothers’ Union and the Ladies’ Guild, that an unexpected consequence of establishing a branch was the decreasing religious focus of the Ladies’ Guild. Thus a stronger differentiation of women, and of the women’s organisations, as either workers or prayers, occurred as a result of the parish acquiring a second women’s organisation.

2 The parish rector must approve the establishment of a Mothers’ Union branch. St. Hale’s rectors prior to Father Stephen had denied this permission.
The members at this meeting also expressed their belief that Martha had a lower status than Mary. To emphasise this point one woman in her late sixties (who was also a hard working member of the Ladies Guild) told the group a story about the rector's wife at her previous parish. The priest was retiring. The parish wished to honour the priest's wife for her long service to them by having a stained glass window depicting Martha installed in the church. The wife of the priest rejected this suggestion because "she did not want to be seen as a Martha". Instead, the parish installed a stained glass window depicting the biblical story of the Samaritan woman at the well with Jesus. Further, the awareness of a hierarchy between the Guild and the Mothers' Union led Margaret, not a St. Hale's parishioner, to say to me that "The members of the Mothers' Union are so busy being holy that they don't do any work. Where are they when the church needs to be cleaned or money raised for the parish?" Margaret was involved in organising an annual fete for her parish which had raised up to sixteen thousand dollars.

6.4 Discussion

I have found that there is a very reliable way to identify the author's ideology when I look at one of the numerous books in a Christian bookshop concerning women's role in the church. If the author believes that women "under God's plan" are to be mothers and wives, he or she will suggest Mary as a role model for hospitality. These are the charismatic or fundamentalist authors. A classical evangelical author will suggest that Mary is an example of serenity and piety. A feminist will state that Mary is "an example to support women priests". Most importantly for our purposes, all authors will consider Martha's behavior as less desirable than that of Mary.

The heart of this chapter is the idea that women in the Anglican Church are presented with two conflicting models of possible Christian womanhood. The impossibility of becoming a Mary while maintaining a domestic role results in women identifying themselves as "just a Martha". Yet Marthas have a secondary role— their faith is private and centred in the home. Marthas also have a tendency to become involved in the trivia of daily living. Martha's recognition of Jesus as
the messiah is rarely told. Mary's role is the best one, because she is publicly recognized for her piety. It is never mentioned that the Marys of the world have very little power in the hierarchical church. One of the primary purposes of the Mothers' Union is to help women become more Mary-like, but there is little evidence of the Mothers' Union challenging the socially defining roles of Martha and Mary. This institutional discourse of differentiating between women prevents them from questioning the patriarchal structure of the church.
CHAPTER SEVEN

"Sharing and Caring" or "Fellowship and Support": Constructing Boundaries among Laywomen

7.0 Introduction

The last chapter introduced the dichotomous female roles of server and prayer represented by the Martha and Mary discourse. This dichotomy also extends to the labelling and identification of the parish women's organizations, as was also outlined in the previous chapter. The aim of the present chapter is to link the Martha and Mary dichotomy of social roles to generational differences among the women, and to show how the resultant divisions have been partially responsible for the emergence of four distinct women's groups in St. Hale's parish. The benefits cited by women for their participation in these groups include "sharing and caring" ("sharing" of burdens and duties and "caring" for one another) and "fellowship and support" ("support" of one another in the group). However, these discourses obscure certain cleavages within St. Hale's female domain. At a time when the roles of women in the Church and in the wider society were changing, the laywomen of St. Hale's were constructing differences among themselves, which resulted in the emergence of these four groups.

The first section of this chapter describes the history of each group, while the second section discusses similarities and differences among their meeting structures. Meetings of the Ladies' Guild, the Mothers' Union, Caritas and the Craft Group each began with a litany, followed by a business meeting, and then by the program or activity of the day. Each meeting ended with a shared meal or a "cup of tea". However, each organisation had a distinctive litany pattern. This divergence in ritual patterns highlights the Mary and Martha discourse. The ways in which the members of each group adapted each part of the meeting pattern to their purposes reveal their ideals and values, and their perception of their role in the parish. For example, members of the Ladies' Guild viewed themselves as unobtrusively supporting other parishioners, while the members of the Craft Group wished to be publicly recognised for their service to the parish. Members of the Mothers' Union saw themselves as buttressing the parish
in prayer, while members of Caritas perceived themselves as a group of young mothers supporting one another in the raising of children.

7.1 The History of the Parish Fellowship Groups for Women

For each of the four groups, the following topics are included: the time of creation of the group, its purpose and aims, the composition of its membership, eligibility and rules for joining the group, and the activities of the group.

7.1.1 The Ladies Guild

The Ladies' Guild, according to its members, is either "a group of ladies organising fund-raising activities for the parish" or "a group of ladies helping and supporting other groups in the parish". Any woman in the parish could become a member of the Ladies' Guild by "showing up at meetings and helping out". The pre-eminent fund-raising activities of the Guild members, which reinforced their individual possessive sense of St. Hale's Anglican Church as being my church, occurred in the decade before the erecting of the worship centre in the early 1980's. In the memories of Guild members, those years of raising finance for building the worship centre and the rectory represented the zenith of the influence, importance, and respect of the Ladies' Guild within the parish.

The sense of "possession" of the church at that time by some of the Ladies' Guild members was intensified by the actions of some, who, together with their husbands, had even gone to the extent of mortgaging their homes to increase the parish building fund. Guild members also engaged in the traditional female fund-raising activities described by Willis (1977), Kingston (1977) and Teale (1977), such as running fetes (or bazaars), cake stalls, and raffles, and serving meals and teas at shows (or fairs), which utilized their home-making and handicraft skills. The Ladies' Guild members were dominant actors in fund-raising at this stage. The discourse of women as builders of community, which stresses the role of women in linking diverse individuals together socially in the parish, underestimates the involvement of these women in helping to provide for the material needs, the bricks and mortar, of the parish.
Guild members reported that during those “heady” or “exhilarating” fund-raising years of the 1970’s to the early 1980’s, Guild meetings were typically attended by thirty to forty women of all ages. But at the time of the fieldwork, despite the rapid growth of the parish population (as was described in Chapter Three), monthly attendance at ordinary meetings ranged from only nine to twenty women, and about half of those were in their sixties or older. Guild members provided three reasons for this decline in attendance. An officer expressed a common sentiment in saying, “The Guild is slowly dying because it doesn’t meet the needs of women anymore”. Several members claimed, for example, that “young women weren’t interested anymore” and that “they didn’t see the point of all this stuff”. A partial cause of this loss of interest was the fact that many more women were working outside the home than formerly. Others argued that it was easier to get people “behind the activities” (that is, supporting the activities) of the Guild when the parish had a building to erect. Other, dissident, members of the Guild questioned the value of Guild fundraising activities when the monetary return was slight compared to the “woman-hours” invested. An example cited by one such member was the selling of patch-work pillows at craft stalls for $25, when the material alone for a cushion was worth $15, and the time involved in making one was of the order of 15 hours. (Patchwork quilted pillows, requiring less skill and time to make than the St. Hale’s pillows, were on sale in craft gift stores in Perth for $80 – $120 at the time). Consequently by the time of fieldwork, the Ladies’ Guild’s role of parish fundraisers had been downplayed, and their emphasis had shifted back to a supportive role. Furthermore, such fundraising as they carried out was to assist church missions and other secular emergency relief funds outside, rather than inside, the parish.

Once the worship centre and rectory had been built, members report reaching unanimous agreement that the Guild should continue supporting the parish, but they had differing opinions as to the Guild’s future direction. Three main points of view were considered, one or more of them being discussed at every meeting that I attended during the entire fieldwork. Should they direct their attention to raising money for missions and other charitable appeals, should they continue to raise funds for the parish, or should they focus attention on helping members of the parish? The President stated in her 1988 Annual Report to
the Parish that fundraising is to “support . . . those who are not as privileged as ourselves, and as we strive to love and serve our Lord Jesus, may we always be aware that it is His will that we love our neighbours as ourselves” (1988:10).
Thus, according to this view, the majority of Guild monies should be directed to charities outside the parish (“our neighbours”). Of the $2365.00 the Guild earned in the following year (1989), seventy-six percent ($1800.00) was donated to appeals originating outside the parish.

By the time of the fieldwork, the Guild had decided that the parish finances were stable, and concerned themselves primarily with charitable missions directed away from the parish. When a parish need was brought to the attention of the Guild, the members debated its merits and justified their decision to grant the proposal or not. As an illustration of the policy of funding “neighbours” rather than themselves, the Guild in 1989 declined the vestry’s proposal that they purchase a new refrigerator for the kitchen because the vestry, not the Guild, had responsibility for maintaining the building. On the other hand, in that same year the Guild supplied the parish with items (related to the traditional female tasks that I listed in Chapter Three – see Table 3.3) such as altar linen ($100.00), vestments ($200.00) and flowers for Christmas and Easter ($126.00). While the parish financial statements do list the Guild donations for the altar linen and vestments, such donations did not receive wide publicity within the parish, and the members of the Guild did not gain a great deal of public recognition for their contributions – whereas their assistance with the building fund had been widely applauded, as they mentioned to me on many occasions.

The vestry and the rector officially have control of the Guild’s bank account, but Father Stephen did not in fact attempt to control or influence the financial decisions made by the Ladies’ Guild. In 1988 the Vestry passed a motion that 3% of parish income should be donated to missions. Father Stephen explained this new policy at the next Guild meeting, and assured the members that neither he nor the vestry wished to influence their decisions on which charitable appeals, either religious or secular, they should support. Nevertheless, the vestry wished to be informed of the Guild’s charitable giving so as to avoid “double-dipping”. Father Stephen at that meeting joked that, “The vestry very radically decided
not to covet Guild money". This reflects the dependence of the Ladies’ Guild on the approval of the rector and the Vestry; the rector grants the Guild autonomy in its decisions, but this can be revoked at any time.

The ability of the women to raise money was thus well recognised by the rector and the vestry, even if it was not noticed by most parishioners. Guild members consequently have some influence over the rector’s actions through their abilities to raise funds. A rector of a parish in a disadvantaged area of Perth told me that he “likes to keep the Guild ladies ‘onside’ because when the parish can’t pay its bills I ask for money from them, instead of going to the Archbishop”.¹

The Ladies’ Guild also organised social events such as fashion shows, microwave demonstrations, new product demonstrations, tupperware parties, cooking classes and luncheons. These events all served to “build the community”. The over-whelming majority of Guild occasions were for women and were held during the day. An exception was the Men’s Dinner (mentioned in Chapter Three). During the meeting at which it was organised, the Ladies’ Guild members expressed the hope that the Men’s Dinner (a “proper three course meal with BYO” – ‘bring your own’ – drinks held at a nearby hall) would provide an opportunity for evangelism. This would come about, they hoped, by inviting to the Dinner the men of families who had held weddings or baptisms at St. Hale’s in the previous year, as well as other male parishioners.

If a proposed event was judged to have wide appeal, the Ladies’ Guild invited the members of women’s groups from nearby Anglican parishes and from the congregations of other religious denominations such as the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Churches of Christ. Whenever St. Hale’s Guild was in turn invited to a function by the women of these churches, the Guild always

¹ The same priest told me that aspersions may be cast by other priests and the diocesan officials on the management skills, and ability to attract parishioners, of a parish priest who continually asks for financial aid from the Diocese.
attempted to send representatives; thus, the various women's groups were linked together. Of the hundred or so attending the Guild fashion show in 1988, the treasurer estimated that 25 were from nearby Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Church of Christ congregations. The Guild frequently held raffles, which were popular and profitable; in order that women from the Lutheran Church could attend these events, despite that Church’s prohibition on raffles, the raffle ticket itself was kept separate from the admission ticket.

The Ladies’ Guild fulfilled its second purpose of “helping and supporting other groups in the parish” by catering for other parish group’s events, teaching knitting for the Church of England Girls’ Society, and providing a creche for parish events and meetings. In addition, the Guild maintained rosters for helping the frail elderly of the parish and the ill by preparing meals for them, taking them shopping or to the doctor, and visiting them. Women in the Guild shared this workload and “cared for each other” by these means.

7.1.2 The Mothers’ Union

The aim, purpose, and (five) objects of the Mothers’ Union were set out in Chapter Six. In this section I concentrate on the history of the development of the St. Hale’s branch of the Union, and outline its basic activities. The Mothers’ Union branch at St. Hale’s came about as follows. In the 1970’s and early 1980’s, a subsection of Ladies’ Guild members felt that they “had outgrown” the Guild with its endless fund-raising activities. They wanted a group with a more spiritual focus. These women knew of the existence of the Mothers’ Union, whose stated intention is to “maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service” (The Mothers’ Union Service Book:4), but rectors prior to Father Stephen had refused to permit the establishment of a branch of the Mothers’ Union at St. Hale’s. Those rectors believed, it was reported to me by members of the St. Hale’s branch of the Union, that the presence of the Mothers’ Union at St. Hale’s would create disharmony among the women, because the Union formerly prohibited membership by various categories of women (such as divorced women, see below). St. Hales’s had a number (around five) of women not eligible for membership at that time. The women waited until St. Hale’s
had a new rector before again requesting approval. The new rector, Father Stephen, agreed to the formation of the group after "grilling" (their word) the local diocesan Mothers' Union leaders about their aims and purposes. The St. Hale's branch came into existence in 1987.

The Mothers' Union is an internationally-based organisation of the Anglican Church that is "specially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and family life." The ministry of the Mothers' Union is "sharing, caring, and praying both within the Anglican Communion and the community at large". At the request of the Mothers' Union Diocesan Council of Perth, the Mothers' Union members at their October 1989 meeting surveyed themselves as to why they had joined the Union and to provide an evaluation of their current activities. The survey material listed nine possible reasons for joining, of which each member present was to choose one. I have listed the choices below, along with the numbers of women choosing each one, out of the thirteen present. (The meeting surveyed was a relatively small one, because there was not a guest speaker that day).

1. I value praying with other women: 2 women agreed.

2. It helps me to learn more about being a good wife and mother: no woman agreed.

3. It gives me support as a wife and mother: one woman agreed.

4. I find fellowship there with other women: 5 women agreed.

5. We can help other wives and mothers through it: no woman agreed.

6. I can work for the church through it: two women agreed.

7. It is a world-wide Anglican society of Christian wives and mothers: 1 woman agreed.

8. It is a women's organisation of the church: 2 women agreed.

9. Because my mother/mother-in-law belonged and they expected me to join:
Thus five of the thirteen women present gave their reason for joining the Mothers' Union as "to find fellowship with other women". Combining this group with those whose reasons were "it is a women's organisation of the church", and "I value praying with other women" results in nine of the thirteen responding whose main reasons for joining were for female fellowship.

The Mothers' Union was formerly very conservative in its membership policies. For example, unmarried mothers, divorced women or women married to divorced men could not join, while (I quote from Lancaster 1958:35-36) a woman separated from her husband could join only if her circumstances "met the approval of the vicar and the Mothers' Union diocesan president". If a wife "is unfaithful she ceases ipso facto to be a member, that is, she automatically forfeits her membership. However, in those cases where the husband forgives his wife, and she has lived with him faithfully for at least one year since their reconciliation, she may apply ... for readmission" if her rector approves. These prohibitions were removed in 1973 (Hill 1988:34), and currently any baptised Christian may join the Union. I knew of one woman, not in St. Hale's parish, a member of Caritas, the young women's section of the Mothers' Union, who had a defacto relationship. Although all men and women "baptised in the Trinity" are eligible to join the Mothers' Union, one must formally apply for membership to the Mothers' Union. I have heard of no eligible person being refused admission, and I knew of no male members of the Union. Formally admitted members wear a small Mothers' Union pin on their lapel, and carry their Mothers' Union service book and diary in their official blue Mothers' Union carry bag to each meeting.

Formal membership in the Mothers' Union required attendance at four meetings, and demonstration of a knowledge of and commitment to the purposes and aims of the Mothers' Union. A membership subscription of seven dollars (of which only fifty cents remained with the branch) was charged, and the approval of the rector was required, in principle. Women were formally admitted to membership in the Mothers' Union at a Sunday worship service in which the branch president introduced the potential members to the priest. St. Hale's followed
the admission liturgy as set out in the Mothers’ Union Service Book (see Appendix 7.1), at these services. Membership of the union was not compulsory for attendance at meetings; however, any parishioner was permitted to attend any Mothers’ Union meeting or function, and was welcomed, and there were always women present at a meeting who were not official members.

Occasionally, the St. Hale’s branch of the Union conducted a fund-raising drive, such as a bring-and-buy stall at the meeting, or sold Christmas cards to the parish. In this way funds were raised to pay for such things as international postal vouchers for the Kenyan linked branch (see Section 7.2.2); cards and postage to St. Hale’s parishioners (see Chapter Four); and petrol and gifts to guest speakers, such as a bottle of brandy for a male speaker, or a Mothers’ Union tea towel for a female speaker. Fundraising has a very minor part to play in the Mothers’ Union – often their bank balance was less than $100. Unlike the Ladies’ Guild (see Section 7.2.1), subscriptions were not collected. Mothers’ Union members joked that, “You [did not] have to have any money to come to a Mothers’ Union meeting”.

7.1.3 Caritas

Caritas is a semi-autonomous section of the international Mothers’ Union, designed to “provid[e] open groups for fellowship within the framework of the Anglican Church” (Caritas membership leaflet). Membership is open to any woman or man who wishes to attend and each parish based group decides its own program. According to the membership leaflet, Caritas means “Christian love for others” and the purpose of the group is to promote “friendship in action” by “caring for others [and] sharing experiences”. Caritas aims to provide an “easy entrance into the church” for young parents, and especially mothers - membership of the Anglican Church is not required for membership. Caritas is regarded by its leaders as an evangelistic program “outreaching” to the wider community.

Despite the desire of the international Mothers’ Union that all mothers of all ages join together in worship and prayer, the membership of Caritas is composed mainly of mothers of young children, whereas the membership of the Mothers’
Union comprises mainly mothers of grown children. Caritas members and office-holders do not go through the formal admission liturgy for the Mothers’ Union, described above, at a Sunday worship service. One becomes a member of Caritas simply by attending meetings.

A catalyst for the formation of Caritas in St. Hale’s parish was the “Mary Thomas incident”. This took place at the very first Mothers’ Union meeting I attended and it seemed such an unimportant incident to me at the time that I did not even record it in my field notes. Yet after two months, it had become infamous within a restricted group of Mothers’ Union and Caritas members, and I realised its significance in showing two things: that the expression of conflict among the women was extremely muted, and that the irreconcilable generational difference among women that it represented were such as to necessitate the construction of a new group for its resolution.

The “Mary Thomas Incident” occurred during the business section of an ordinary Mothers’ Union meeting at which eighteen women were present, as well as three children: one eighteen months of age, one three years of age and one four years of age. Mary Thomas, an elderly woman, announced in a clear voice to the meeting that she was having difficulties in hearing the proceedings because of the noise the children were making. The President suggested to her that she move to the centre of the half-oval of chairs where she could hear better – which she did. This simple interaction became so well known to the women concerned with those groups that it was referred to as the “Mary Thomas Incident”. Several women with small children who had attended Mothers’ Union meetings ceased to do so after this incident, since, as they explained to me, they did not “feel comfortable”. Two months later the younger women of the parish had formed the St. Hale’s branch of Caritas. Those women who went on to become members of Caritas, in discussing the inception of the group, often referred back to the time when Mary Thomas “raised a fuss about the children”.

A further reflection of the generational difference among the women can be seen in the observation of one Caritas member that she did not want to attend Mothers’ Union meetings because her mother was a member. The mother and
daughter involved appeared to have a close and amicable relationship, but in saying this, the daughter was placing a boundary between herself and the older generation.

It should be stressed that the leaders and most members of the Mothers’ Union had no objection to young women attending the Mothers’ Union meetings, and they realised the need to welcome both the children along with the mothers. One older woman said, “If you want young women there, you have to put up with the noise”. As a further reconciliation, after Caritas had been in operation for about six months, a number (about five) of young women drifted back to the Mothers’ Union. These women had been, and continued to be, actively involved in Caritas, but they saw in a dual membership of both groups the advantage of having fellowship with and support from other young mothers, along with the more spiritual focus of the Mothers’ Union. These women were referred to within the Mothers’ Union as “future leaders of the Mothers’ Union”.

Nevertheless, Caritas, once formed, continued as a viable group within the parish, with eighteen women placing their names on the membership list. Apart from the catalytic Mary Thomas incident, three other factors had acted to predispose Mothers’ Union members, and other women, towards the formation of a fellowship group for younger women. Firstly, it was difficult, in a two hour Mothers’ Union meeting with no provision for child-care, for a mother to keep her very young children from interrupting. Toddlers seldom cooperated by playing quietly in a corner of the meeting room. Secondly, the originators of Caritas believed that the emphasis on prayer and corporate worship of the Mothers’ Union meetings was “too churchy” for women who had just resumed regular church attendance. Thirdly, there were obvious differences in the needs of women with younger children compared with those of older women; the former preferred the scheduling of meeting times to allow for the collection of children from pre-primary schools and kindergartens, and expressed a need for child-minding during any event. They recognised also that women with young children had little time for the baking of elaborate “plates” for meetings, and had a fundamental need for fellowship with other mothers of young children. As was described in Chapter Two, the socio-demographic context of Hale provided a large population of young families
with young children, many of whom lacked nearby intimate social relations, and Caritas was intended to fill this need.

At an early Caritas meeting the women discussed their reasons for joining, such as the need for friendship and the need for occasional help with their children. Members said that they were “looking for support and fellowship with other young mums.” They described this as “looking for fellowship and support”. The activity programs reflected this desire. A third of all programmed events were social events, such as a dinner at a local Chinese restaurant, a visit to the Ivy Watson Playground (a park designed exclusively for very young children) in King’s Park, and a morning tea for the “senior” (older) female parishioners. This was called “The ‘Golden Oldies’ Tea”, and its purpose was to help “break down the barriers” between young and old women. Other activities included the making of church bags, which were used to carry materials such as books, computer paper and coloured pencils for entertaining children during church services. The service activity of the group included collecting, organising and packing twenty Christmas hampers for needy families associated with Daisy House, the Anglicare community centre in a nearby suburb with a high proportion of unemployed residents. The value of each hamper was estimated at around seventy dollars.

Guest speakers at Caritas meetings included a woman lawyer speaking on family law, a speaker from the Cancer Foundation talking on breast and cervical cancer prevention, and a woman from the Red Cross who spoke on basic first-aid and on the need for “poison-proofing” the home. Caritas members also watched the James Dobson (1979) video entitled, “Shaping the Will Without Breaking the Spirit”, on Christian parenting and disciplining of children. In the discussion following, there was no mention by the women of Dobson’s belief in the submission of women in the God-given order of the family, which was a sub-theme of the video. Rather, the women’s discussion of the film centred around the truth or otherwise of Dobson’s premise that the actions and not the emotional level of a mother determine the behaviour and obedience of the child.
7.1.4 The Craft Group

Roberta, a very skilled needleworker, proposed to the Ladies’ Guild in the autumn of 1988 that the Guild create a Craft Group in which members could prepare items for sale at a craft stall. She offered her supply of fabric remnants as materials and her house for meetings. The Guild approved this suggestion, owing in some part to the encouragement of an active Guild member who cited the case of a St. Hale’s parishioner who had recently changed her allegiance to a near-by Church of Christ congregation because it ran a craft workshop.

Consequently, the Craft Group came into existence in the Autumn of 1988. Women were recruited to the group through a notice placed in the parish pew sheets and announcements following the Sunday morning services. The first twelve of the weekly meetings were held in Roberta’s home, as she had suggested, but after she and her family moved house, meetings were held in the church hall. At the time of the fieldwork, the Craft Group consisted of nine women, the oldest of whom was fifty years old, and most of the others were in their thirties.

Women joined the Craft Group looking for “Fellowship and Support”, with an underlying assumption that women as a collective would be friendly and supportive toward one another. This contrasted with the Ladies’ Guild, which stressed, via the discourse “sharing and caring”, each individual woman’s role in service to others (see Section 7.1.1 above).

The Craft Group was considered to be a subgroup of the Ladies’ Guild, since it received advance funding from the Guild in order to buy craft materials. It had no recognised leadership structure and the aims of the participating members were diverse. Some wanted to learn craft skills so as to decorate their own homes, others desired the fellowship with other women afforded by the group, but as far as I could discern, except for one woman, members showed little or no interest in actually raising money. They never discussed the potential market price of any craft item by comparison with the cost of its materials and labour. The completed items were indeed sold, when finished, at Guild fetes, but for prices that did not reflect their cost of manufacture, as I discuss below.
This dissension led to discouragement among the Craft Group members, and ultimately, contributed to the decline and demise of the group.

The craftwork made by the women included such items as patchwork quilted pillow slips, embroidered tablecloths, embroidered Christmas tree ornaments, soft toys, toilet paper holders, fabric covered picture frames, pomanders, and ribbon embroidered pillow slips. Needlework was the basis of most projects. The items were offered for sale at a craft stall which was opened after each Sunday church service in late October, in the year that I was there, with the idea of providing Christmas presents. Some but not all of the items offered items were sold at the stalls. The following, however, created some dissension: some parishioners commented to the members of the Craft Group that the sale items were too expensive. This infuriated the Craft Group women, since the cost of the materials alone for most items was close to the asking price, and, as noted above, handcrafted items of similar or inferior standard were priced much more highly in specialist gift shops in the central retail district of Perth. Those parishioners then argued that they should not be required to pay the true market value “because it was for church”, and people expected to be able to purchase items at low prices. The women felt that their labour and their skill were being devalued, and complained to this effect at many of the Friday meetings that I attended.

Further discouragement of the Craft Group occurred at a Ladies’ Guild meeting which the members of the Craft Group attended in order to show the Guild their items, and to request an advance loan to the value of fifty dollars so as to purchase more materials for their crafts. The Guild agreed to the request with very little discussion. However, it seemed that the items brought to the meeting by the members of the Craft Group were insufficiently appreciated by Ladies’ Guild members: at the subsequent Craft Group meeting, one woman commented sarcastically, “Their enthusiasm was deafening”. When I asked an older member of the Guild why the goods had not been applauded, she replied that, from the point of view of the older women, a Christian woman should not expect to be praised for doing her duty. She added that the event had occurred during a very tightly timetabled business meeting at which there was little time
to admire the Craft Group's handiwork.

The members of the Guild on the whole considered the Craft Group part of the Ladies' Guild; however, the Craft Guild defined themselves as separate from the "old-fashioned" Ladies' Guild. The Ladies' Guild members, in turn, referred to the Craft Group as the "craft ladies" or the "crafty ladies", terms which the women of the Craft Group found demeaning. Only two of the nine craft members identified themselves as housewives; six of the remaining seven had had professional careers and were planning on resuming these careers. They had accepted some feminist ideas, as was revealed in conversations in their meetings, and this reinforced their rejection of demeaning descriptive terms such as those mentioned above.

The normative rules governing conversation within the Craft Group differed from those of the Ladies' Guild. The content of the former's conversation was directed outside the parish and the latter's was directed inside the parish. The Ladies' Guild members, among themselves, spoke on parish matters, Guild affairs, and their own families, while the Craft Group focused their conversations outside the parish and their families. A rule of group maintenance among Guild members was the avoidance of expressing disagreement or disapproval of another's statements. By contrast, the Craft Group women enjoyed friendly disagreements concerning public affairs, art and literature. The members had long discussions, for example on former Australian Government policies towards indigenous people such as are depicted in Sally Morgan's book *My Place* (a best-seller at the time of the fieldwork), and on the relative merits of internationally successful Western Australian authors such as Elizabeth Jolley and Tim Winton. There were also discussions on the appropriate Christian response to topics such as invitro fertilisation and passive euthanasia; the proposed changes in tax laws on capital gains and how it would affect their family finances; the platforms of the Australian political parties, and the situation of the East Timorese people within Indonesia, as well as other international issues.

The Craft Group became unstable during the fieldwork because several of the women entered full-time employment, one woman had a difficult pregnancy.
and another moved house. Attracting new members proved to be difficult because, in the absence of child-minding facilities, women with small children could not take them to meetings; on the other hand, older women, owing to eye problems and arthritis, were losing the high level of skill needed to meet the exacting standard of this group's craft work. An additional problem was that many women were not taught even basic needlework skills. Two Guild members, in explaining to me their reasons for not joining the Craft Group, said "[we have] been there [and] done that". A further, more significant, issue was that the group had no long term plans and no formal leadership structure, and consequently, there was little impetus for its continuation. By the end of the fieldwork, the Craft Group had virtually ceased to exist.

7.1.5 Summary

While the purpose of each women's group was to help other people, both within and outside the collective, the groups placed contrasting emphases on the form of this assistance. The Ladies' Guild and to a limited extent the Craft Group worked for others through fund-raising and the supplying of practical help, while the Mothers' Union and Caritas worked through prayer, and by providing opportunities for women to increase their sense of the divine. Once again these roles display the self-identification of the members of the Ladies' Guild as the Marthas, and those of the Mothers' Union and Caritas as the Marys. However, some Craft group members were uncomfortable with identifying themselves as Marthas because they did not consider themselves subordinate housewives.

Furthermore, there was a generational difference among the women's attitudes toward their parish work and involvement in these women's groups. The older generation members of the Ladies' Guild and the Mothers' Union members understood that the helping of others should be self-sacrificial - "Sharing and caring" is outwardly, not inwardly, directed; it is a duty towards others that does not require or request recognition. By contrast, the younger generation, while also wanting to serve, desired certain rewards for themselves: "Fellowship and support" is a more self-directed phrase.
7.2 Ritual Differences

The Ladies’ Guild and the Mothers’ Union were polar opposites in that the Guild members passively received communion from the priest at the begin­nings of their meetings, whereas the Mothers’ Union actively produced its own litany to start each of their meetings. Further differences included the impor­tance attached to the business section of their meetings: for the Mothers’ Union and Caritas, it was slight, and quickly resolved, but for the Guild it was the paramount. The optional nature of craft members’ attendance at the parish’s Friday morning Eucharist presided over by the rector illustrates the difficulties experienced by that group in formulating or articulating a Christian justification for their activities.

7.2.1 The Ladies Guild

Each monthly meeting of the Ladies’ Guild began on a mid-week morning at ten o’clock with a Eucharist service from the prayer book. This was conducted by Father Stephen, who did not include a sermon or a hymn singing as part of the opening. The intimate and communal spirit of the service was enhanced with the reading of the lessons and prayers by the women in the pews. During the “sharing of the peace”, each woman shook hands or socially kissed every other woman present. This contrasted with the custom of the ordinary Sunday morning services, at which individuals did not leave their positions in the pews. At these services, Ladies’ Guild members received the communion elements as one group in a half circle at the foot of the altar.

The opening of the monthly meeting was followed by the business section of the meeting, which took place in the church hall ten minutes after the conclusion of the eucharist. At this point the chairs were placed in a half oval facing the executive committee’s table, and the treasurer went to each woman, shook a collection can so as to gain her attention, and collected the meeting “subs” (subscription) of one dollar for the Guild “kitty”. (Fifty cents from each dollar was allocated to the Guild’s annual Christmas lunch, and the other half was kept for operating expenses.) The treasurer then handed each woman a ticket for the “lucky number” drawing for that month’s prize. The winner of the previous
month’s drawing presented the prize (which she had been obliged to purchase), consisting of a jar of imported jam or tea, some straw paper plate holders for barbecues, or bath salts, etc., to the value of about five dollars, to that month’s winner of the prize. At the same time, people signed the attendance book and engaged in social chitchat.

The president began the meeting proper by proclaiming, “Ladies, it is time to start”. Next followed a prayer read from a mimeographed sheet which was passed out at each meeting. I reproduce it below. The petition of this prayer, “May we learn to love and care”, expressed a core value of the ethos of the Ladies’ Guild.

**Opening Prayer**

O God, We thank you for your
Goodness, Your Beauty, your
Love and for Yourself.

We thank You for the world, for
life, for family and friends,
and for the fellowship we will
enjoy.

May we become aware of one another
and our needs.

Most of all, may we learn to
love and care.

Amen.

The business section of the meeting followed a formal agenda. Apologies for absences, which were considered as “part of the business”, occupied an important role in the procedure. Sending one’s apologies for non-attendance of the meeting was crucial for maintaining membership in one’s absence. The names of women
who had sent apologies through the president or another member were listed in
the attendance book. Women who were not present were inquired after, and
possible explanations of their absences were hypothesised, but such women were
not listed as having sent apologies unless they were known to be too ill to do so.
This “apologies” component of the meeting took at least five minutes, because
explanations for absences were also presented. For example, one heard, “Joy’s on
holidays.” or “Roslyn has overseas visitors.” Apologies place individuals within
the boundaries of the group and locate their position within the group. Women
not participating regularly in Ladies’ Guild meetings neglected to send their
apologies, but active members always did so. The sharing of information as
to individuals’ circumstances or whereabouts increased the linkages within the
group. Visitors and newcomers were always formally welcomed at their first
meeting, and introduced to the Guild by the president after the apologies.

The content of these meetings, once they were under way, concerned the
organisation of Guild events and decisions as to which charities should receive
donations. The executive committee – comprising the president, vice-president,
secretary, and treasurer - met prior to the meeting to set the agenda items and
to propose suggestions for future actions. On this evidence, the Ladies’ Guild
may have appeared to have been an hierarchical organisation, yet the Guild
leadership solicited and accepted suggestions on present and future activities
from the general membership at the meetings. On one occasion, the president set
a date for a jumble sale without the prior approval of the members. At the next
meeting the members expressed no disapproval of this decision. Nevertheless, the
president apologised profusely for taking such a liberty, her excuse being that a
quick decision had been necessary and there had been no time for consultation.
By acknowledging that she had acted without consent, she reinforced the Guild’s
values regarding consensual decision making.

At a typical Ladies’ Guild meeting there were usually about four or five
projects to discuss, all in various stages of planning. The priest did not vote
at these meetings and usually restricted his comments to providing information
about other groups’ activities and the availability of the Church hall. He was
always careful, at the meetings I attended, not to dictate to the Guild concerning
their activities. His opinion was occasionally solicited; for example, on one occasion, he was questioned as to the appropriateness of holding a jumble sale at a shopping center in a poor area of the Perth metropolitan area rather than in the church hall. The Guild members were concerned that this could be interpreted as raising money for the church from the poor. The main reason for the priest’s presence at each meeting was apparently to avoid the necessity to consult him separately on the scheduling of events. His approval was formally sought for decisions that had not arisen before, but it was always given.

The business part of the meeting ended with the following prayers.

**A Prayer for the Parish**

Heavenly Father, you have called us to be your people in St. Hale’s Anglican Church. Take from us those things which prevent us from serving you; fill us with a deep love for your Holy Name; make us joyful in our fellowship with Jesus your Son, and strengthen our commitment to offer to you our time, talents, and possessions for the Glory of your Name, and the benefit of our Parish. We ask this in the Name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**Grace**

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with us all now and forever. Amen.

After the close of business, those women who had been assigned to the kitchen made the tea and coffee and laid the food out on the table. The luncheon which concluded every meeting had a crucial symbolic value in demonstrating the women’s “caring and sharing” for each other, as was discussed in detail in Section 4.3. Newcomers to the Guild were never left to eat alone; one of the duties of an office-holder of the Guild was to visit with them. In addition, if necessary, a lift home was arranged for members without transport.

This discussion of the activities and the prayers of the Guild has emphasised the “serving” nature of its members. The religious component of their meetings
was provided by the parish priest, and the women had little input into choosing the monthly liturgy. As outlined in Chapter Six, Guild women referred to themselves as "just Marthas", but those Guild activities which had a fellowship component, such as luncheons, fashion shows, and microwave demonstrations, provided an educational resource in traditional female homemaking skills, and it should also be recognised that the Ladies' Guild had a role in increasing the organisational skills of the women.

7.2.2 The Mothers' Union

Each Mothers' Union meeting started in the church sanctuary with a litany, read by the members, from the Mothers' Union Service Book or with another Mothers' Union litany for a specific purpose or occasion, obtained from the Mothers' Union Resource Centre. In contrast to Guild meetings, where the priest presided over the Eucharist, the Mothers' Union members themselves conducted the service; the priest was usually not even in the building. The President of the branch allocated the intercessory prayers and Bible readings - which were often decided on the day - to members at random, who repeated them from the pew in which they were sitting. Even a diocesan leader who opposed the ordination of women into the priesthood said at a meeting of the Mothers' Union, "It is not the place of the priest to lead the prayers of the Mothers' Union meetings". Prayers for certain Mothers' Union dioceses and branches throughout the world were also offered as part of the liturgy. The Mothers' Union prayer (reproduced in Section 6.1 of Chapter Six) was included in every service.

After the Blessing that concluded the service, there were a few minutes of silence while the women, some kneeling, held private meditation. After praying, they assembled in the church hall, and chairs and a table were set out in the manner described above for the Ladies' Guild. The President then chaired a short meeting, discussing Mothers' Union activities in the diocese, and hearing reports from women who had attended the deanery or diocesan council meetings and events. Apologies were read as described above in Section 7.2.1. The overseas representative for the branch read the correspondence between St. Hale's and its "linked branches". Every organisational section of the Mothers' Union was
"linked" in prayer to a similar section overseas. The St. Hale’s branch was linked in this way to a branch in Swansea, England, and to one in Kenya. Mothers’ Union members had visited these linked branches on trips overseas, and, in turn, had been visited by members of the overseas branches.

Typical meetings discussed issues which arose from the wider Mothers’ Union or concerned parish activities. For example, the Diocesan Council of the Mothers’ Union may have decided to hold a “Quiet Day” (a day retreat, in one of which I participated), but each branch decided separately whether or not to participate in it. The branch executive council met regularly to plan for future activities, but also, at every meeting, suggestions for future activities were solicited from members. Decisions were usually arrived at through open discussion until a consensus was reached and could be articulated by the chair. I once heard the president suggest an idea for an activity, that each member take turns visiting the parents of babies which had recently been baptised in the parish, that the meeting rejected. The rejection was not formal; instead, individual members simply did not place their names on a roster which was to be drawn up for the visits. The chair recognised the rejection by stating that she understood that members did not approve of this activity. A few heads nodded, and she simply passed on to the next agenda item. I was later told by members that they objected only to the idea that every member should be placed on the roster – some individuals were already making such visits to parents of babies.

While the St. Hale’s branch usually accepted any suggestions made by the Diocesan Council, on two occasions they rejected them. In 1989 the Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Church sent two letters to the Mothers’ Union branches requesting their involvement in political campaigns which were controversial. The first involved the compulsory jailing of mothers for social security fraud in circumstances that were unclear as to whether or not each woman was the sole supporter of her children. The second was a campaign for the judicial review of a certain woman who had been convicted of first degree murder of her former husband. Evidence of his sexual abuse of their daughters, his physical and emotional abuse of her, and her mental condition at the time of the offence, had not been taken into account at her trial. Information about campaigns such
as these was not conveyed to the general membership of the Mothers' Union branch because the executive council decided that it was not relevant to the St. Hale's members, and "they did not want to be seen supporting lawbreakers".

After the short business section, lasting fifteen minutes or so, the main program commenced. This usually included a guest speaker or a workshop on the aims and purposes of the Mothers' Union. Guest speakers spoke on such topics as the international activities of the Mothers' Union workers in the Third World, and the World Conference of the Mothers' Union (1988). Other speakers discussed their Australia-wide Mothers' Union activities, such as the raising and allocating of money for a fund used to finance Australian Aboriginal women at Nungalinya Theological College, and "Message Home", a service by which women could convey messages from run-away teenagers to their parents. Jim Crawley, the then head of the Marriage Guidance Council of Western Australian, spoke on the work of the Council during the National Marriage and Family Week of 1989. Other seminars were given by a Roman Catholic priest who recounted his journey to Taize (in France) and a visiting Anglican priest who spoke on nursery rhymes and fairy tales. On two occasions a Gospel singer performed.

The international organisation of the Mothers' Union requires that no office-holder hold a position for longer than three years except in very exceptional circumstances. As a result of this ruling, the members of the St. Hale's branch executive council and the general membership openly discussed at meetings the need to "encourage and build up" other women to become office-holders. The policy of annual elections for office-bearers and the rotation of office-bearers had specific benefits for the maintenance of the organisation, as was explained to me by the leaders of the branch. They believed that one-year terms of office-holding shared the workload among women, prevented the development of a leadership clique within the group, and, by increasing the pool of potential leaders, would ensure the survival of the branch. Some women told me that they were willing to hold office for a limited or well-defined time, knowing that others would not expect them to continue indefinitely. Nevertheless, after several years, the same woman could be nominated again for a position already held, or for a different one. Only a formal member of the Mothers' Union could be so nominated, and
her permission was required for this. At the annual meetings of the St. Hale's branch of the Mothers' Union that I attended in 1988 and 1989, which were chaired by the rector in both cases, elections were uncontested and nominations were found for each position before the meeting. Nominations from the floor were not needed. I was told that the meetings were typical in this respect.

Ordinary meetings concluded with afternoon tea laid out on the two metre long table used by the executive committee. The table was covered by an embroidered tablecloth and upon it were set "plates" brought by members. These plates held baked goods such as cream cakes, sponge cakes, pavlovas, lamingtons, slices, and scones with cream and jam. Sandwiches, fruit platters and salad were also provided. Beverages were served from the kitchen by women on roster and included instant coffee and tea from the urns. A fuller description of an Anglican afternoon tea is found in Chapter Four.

7.2.3 Caritas

Caritas members met in the parish vestry room, not in the church hall, although children and rostered members on child-minding duty used the hall so that the children had room to play and access to the toilets. Caritas meetings began with an opening prayer printed on a mimeographed sheet. The prayer was:

Lord, we ask you to bless our group, and the homes and families of all members. Grant that through its influence many parents may come to a knowledge and love of you, and be inspired and strengthened for the task of bringing up their children in the Christian faith. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord, help us to make each house a home, full of joy and security; a home to which all will be eager to return at the end of the day; a centre of understanding and love. Amen.

Following the prayer, a short business meeting of less than ten minutes ensued. It included apologies from absent women, the treasurer's report, the
secretary’s report, and old and new business. The chair repeatedly asked for the approval of proposed activities and suggestions. The meetings were informal, as was reinforced by the casual dress of the women. During the winter the women wore track suits and jeans with casual shoes, while in the warmer months, they wore shorts or sleeveless cotton dresses and thongs or sandals with bare legs.

Caritas engaged in one fund-raising activity: a cake raffle, for which the voluntary admission fee was one dollar per meeting. The monthly raffle winner won a home-made cake and was expected to provide the same again for the next month’s raffle. The members consequently joked that winning the cake raffle was the “booby prize”. At the conclusion of the activities section of the meeting, the following prayer would be read:

A Closing Prayer

As we leave this meeting today Lord, help us to hold the joy we have found here in each other’s company warm in our hearts until we meet again. Help us to give unfailing loyalty to our friends and loved ones. Help us to be forgiving to those who hurt us, and thankful to those who help us. Help us to share the happiness of those who are happy, and the sadness of those who are sad. Help us to be faithful in our attendance at this fellowship, that it may grow and help others.

   God, abide with us now, and evermore. Amen.

Some women left at this point to collect their children from pre-primary school or kindergarten. Others stayed for a morning “cuppa”. Each month two women were assigned to kitchen duty to prepare the tea and instant coffee, and to set out a bakery-bought fruit loaf and a store-bought loaf cake. The two women rostered for child-minding brought “fairy bread” (well-buttered sliced white bread cut into small pieces and sprinkled with coloured ‘hundreds and thousands’).

The generational difference between these women and the Mothers’ Union members was illustrated through the language they used. Caritas members referred to their group members as “you guys”. In more formal speech, they
occasionally used the term “Ladies”, but more often they used “Women”. Unlike the older women they did not use the term “you girls”.

7.2.4 The Craft Group

The weekly Craft Group meeting was timed so that women who desired could attend the parish mid-morning Eucharist service prior to the meeting. Not all Craft Group members went to the Eucharist service. After the Eucharist service, several Craft Group members, often including myself, crossed the street to the bakery and purchased a fruit loaf, sausage rolls and apple slices or cheese rolls for the entire group to share for lunch. Spontaneous contributions of, say, vegetable crudites with dip, were also offered by the women, but the bringing of a “plate” was not necessary in order to participate in the group. On arrival at the meeting, women immediately started working on their craft project, or else had a “cuppa” - the first of many. At about mid-day, the query, “Don’t you think it’s time for lunch?” elicited the response, “Well, I’ll play Polly today”, and that person made the tea. Another volunteered “Well, I’ll be Mother today” before serving the teas. The preferences of each woman were known to the usual “Polly” and “Mother”: the strength of the tea, the amount of milk and sugar, etc. A very short spontaneous grace was said before lunch. Most women took a turn at being “Polly” or “Mother” or else washed the dishes. The signal for the close of the meeting came around three o’clock, when it was suggested that it was “time to put the kettle on”. At this point, everyone packed up their bags and drank a final “cuppa”. A closing prayer including the Lord’s Prayer finished the meeting.

The items crafted at these meetings—patchwork quilts, etc. — were listed in Section 7.1.4. Styles of crafted items were discussed at length at the meetings, and members were unanimous in their dislike of “tacky”, chintzy goods, which were perceived to be lacking in quality, elegance and style or not aesthetically pleasing. Their main criterion for the quality of items to be crafted was that they be suitable for display in their own homes.
The Craft Group made decisions, such as whether or not to request fifty dollars from the Ladies' Guild to buy fabric, in an open consensual discussion. While there were no official leaders of the group, the women deferred to those few women who were most skilled in the making of craft items, and, in addition, the woman at whose house the meeting was being held seemed to me to be accorded some extra influence.

7.3 Discussion

This chapter has traced the increase in the number of women's fellowship groups from one to four in the space of two years, followed by the subsequent virtual demise of one of the groups. Accompanying this increase was an intensification of the women's perceptions of the differences among the groups. Several Guild members informed me that they believed that the Ladies' Guild members had spent more time on prayer and on studying the Bible before the establishment of the St. Hale's branch of the Mothers' Union. The establishment of two new groups for younger women further extended the available number of symbolic domains for women within the parish, but deepened the divisions between them, in that Caritas and the Craft Group catered for young mothers while the Mothers' Union and the Ladies' Guild were for middle-aged and older women.

The rewards of participation for the older women can be inferred from their emic discourse, "sharing and caring", which embodies an underlying assumption of a long-term commitment of service towards others both in the group and in the parish. The rewards of group membership for the younger women, implied by the emic discourse, "fellowship and support" included an opportunity to expand their social networks and to receive help and moral support from others in the raising of their families. Table 7.1 illustrates graphically these points of distinction among the women's groups.
TABLE 7.1: TYPOLOGY OF WOMEN'S GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing and Caring</th>
<th>What they gain for themselves</th>
<th>What they do for others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martha (service)</td>
<td>Mary (pray)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and Fellowship</td>
<td>Craft Group</td>
<td>Caritas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The history of these groups demonstrates that even among a collective of middle-class Anglican women, most of whom were housewives, there was disagreement about the purposes and aims of women’s fellowship groups, and how they should attempt to fulfill individual women’s interests and needs. Schwartzman (1989), in an ethnographic study of meetings at a mental health clinic, suggested that the process of attending a meeting is the re-enactment of belonging to a group. Part of the definition of a good Christian woman is to affirm other women or “build them up” (as was discussed in Chapter Five), and the enhancement of the self esteem of its members was one of the functions of each of the four St. Hale’s women’s groups. Women were rewarded for attending meetings by being affirmed as “good women”.

Apart from their functional value, as discussed above, Schwartzman (1989) emphasises also the symbolic value of meetings as representing the collective identity, and reaffirming the identity of the individuals participating, in a symbol of togetherness. The rituals of the women’s meetings emphasise the cooperative egalitarian spirit from their beginnings with a litany through to the sharing of food and drink with which they conclude. The selflessness of the leaders in leading by example, rather than by direction of the members, is another facet of this ideology of egalitarianism. On the other hand, the Craft Group did not have an outward looking vision, and, in the view of the majority of members, their activities demanded too much time for too little return. As Gillespie (1992:195), in her oral history study of American Episcopalian women notes, “For the younger generation volunteer work is as deliberate a choice as paid
work”. Younger women must allocate scarce leisure time to church work, therefore involvement in church women’s groups, including attendance at meetings, must be “self-fulfilling” (Gillespie 1992:194).

Mauss (1990) argues that a “pure gift” does not exist (p.73); there is an ongoing circulation of exchanges in a society in which every individual is obligated to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. The obligation to give, and to receive an equivalent amount in return, is called by Douglas (1990:viii), in her foreword to Mauss’ book, a “stable system of statuses”. The exchanges by St. Hale’s women of such gifts as plates of food form a “stable system”, rather than a “potlatch”, which has nuances of politics, economics, and the development of status hierarchies. However, the women differed as to the value placed on these exchanges. Religions are “human organisations primarily engaged in providing general compensators based on supernatural assumptions” (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:8), and for the older women of St. Hale’s, this “general compensation” sufficed, but the younger women, seeking fellowship and support, expected a greater degree of “specific compensation”. Older female parishioners did not expect an “earthly” reward: “I will be rewarded in Heaven”, I heard them say.
APPENDIX 7.1: Admission Service for the Mothers’ Union

The following is an extract from *The Mothers’ Union Service Book* (n.d., p.12-15).

Priest (to candidate): Do you wish to be admitted as a member of the Mothers’ Union?

Answer: I do.

Priest: At your Baptism you were signed with the sign of the cross to show that you must not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto your life’s end. Do you stand by this?

Answer: I do.

Priest: We have just read the five Objects of the Mothers’ Union. Do you promise by God’s grace to uphold and support them by word and action?

Answer: I will, the Lord helping me.

Priest: Will you try to plan your life to include worship in church, prayer and Bible reading?

Answer: I will, by the grace of God.

The Branch President gives the Priest a membership card for each candidate.

Priest (calling each candidate by her name): I admit you as a member of the Mothers’ Union in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Receive this card to remind you of your promises; may the Lord be with you.
When all have been admitted, the service continues:

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and your families, your life and work for him, and grant you the grace of perseverance to the end.

All: We will, in the name of the Lord.

Priest: Let us pray in silence for the new members.

The Mothers’ Union prayer is then said (p.3):

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who gave marriage to be a source of blessing to mankind, we thank you for the joys of family life. Pour out upon us your Holy Spirit, that we may truly love and serve you. Bless all who are married and every parent and child. May we know your presence and peace in our homes; fill them with your love and use them for your glory. Bless the members of the Mothers’ Union throughout the world; unite us in prayer and worship, in love and service, that, strengthened by your grace, we may seek to do your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Finally the Prayer for Marriage is said (p.11):

Eternal God and Father of us all, we thank you for your creation of marriage. Bless all husbands and wives; may your presence enrich their lives and lead them to do your will. Help them to cherish each other in both good and bad times. Strengthen those who find their marriage difficult, comfort those who are in despair and help all to share each other’s burdens, for your sake. Amen.

Following this, the priest and the parishioners return to the ordinary Sunday morning Eucharist service.
CHAPTER EIGHT

“Community of God and “Household of God”: Women’s Work and Influence in the Parish

8.0 Introduction

Chapter Four described the social organisation of the parish at St. Hale’s Anglican Church and the role of women parishioners in the building of its community. This chapter explores in more depth the meanings ascribed to the “building community” discourse, and the ambivalence of the women towards traditional churchwomen’s work. This chapter also introduces two distinct ideal types of a parish community, termed “Household of God” and “Community of God”, that will be used to construct a model depicting the social processes which influence the position and power of women in a parish. I argue that St. Hale’s is primarily a “Community of God” parish, as reflected in the phrase “building community”, although traces of the “Household of God” model were revealed in fieldwork too. The quality of the relationship between the women of the parish and their priest is connected with the power and influence of the women in the parish. The priest and the institutional church are significant forces in determining the appropriate ideal type for a parish, though ultimately it is the lay parishioners who decide on and form the type of community they want.

All religions have “models of” and “models for” behaviour (Geertz 1966). The model I introduce helps to categorise the social processes operating in the parish. The dominant ideal type followed in a parish affects the amount of autonomy and power individual women and the formal women’s groups can have. I suggest that one reason for the high proportion of women in the Anglican Church is that women whose husbands are not members of the parish are better able to belong in a “Community of God” parish than in a “Household of God” parish.
8.1 Theology as Practice

Gillespie (1992), in “Gender and Generations in Congregations”, examines the responses of Episcopalian laywomen to the liturgical reforms and the structural changes in women’s roles which took place in the United States in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Her methodology was quite different from mine. She surveyed and interviewed women from four American Episcopalian congregations in an oral history project, whereas I engaged in participant observation for eighteen months in a single Australian Anglican parish. None of the four parishes studied by Gillespie had a traditional churchwoman’s organisation (p.198). Furthermore, there were and are major structural differences in the history of women’s involvement in and experience of the two churches, as I detail below. Nevertheless, there were some striking similarities in the women’s religious practice in the two research populations, as I now discuss.

In her analysis of the language of her female participants, Gillespie (1992) notes the “absence of ... theological vocabulary in the interviews” (p.209). This lack of theological and Biblical language was also noticeable with the St. Hale’s women, both among themselves and in formal interviews with me. Some religious imagery could be found in the annual reports of the women’s organisations, but it was very much in the form of routine petitions or prayers at the ends of the reports. Gillespie cites the lack of her respondents’ Bible reading as an explanation for the absence of theological language or Biblical references. Similarly, of the fourteen women I formally interviewed, only four had made any systematic study of the Bible. My informant Bronwyn admitted to neglecting her Bible reading, and also eloquently expressed the “should do” nature of Bible reading for many women in the parish.

I don’t read the Bible at all. ... I feel that I should make time in my life because I really think it would help me, even if it’s not every day. I know that in another difficult time in my life reading it did help ... I did read the Bible [then].

But I don’t read the Bible in the same context as I don’t go for a walk every day, which I feel I should do, and other things that I feel I should do
every day. And I just don't feel that there is enough time in every day and I
know that one should discipline themselves to do things.

Bronwyn equates Bible reading with a constitutional walk each day, and her
admission reflects the lack of peer pressure among the women in the parish to
make Bible reading an essential feature of one's life.

Gillespie puts forward the hypothesis that "the women's expression of 'theol­
ogy', far from being absent, is indeed a spirituality, expressible only in relational
terms" (p.211), rather than by means of an overt religious vocabulary. My ob­
servations of the St. Hale's women, with their lack of theological vocabulary,
support Gillespie's proposition. The St. Hale's parish discourses of "building
community" and "sharing and caring" convey the women's practice as being em­
bedded in their understanding of Christianity as an ideology in which "one loves
one's neighbour as one loves oneself". Through the serving of others, the women
believe they are serving God, and hence no verbal expression of piety is required.
A second proposition Gillespie advances is that the laity "have learned to asso­
ciate theology with the intellect, whereas religious experience is personal and
emotional" (p.210). In support of this, I heard some St. Hale's women express
the opinion that theological intellectualising of God or of religion ("all that book
learning") leads people away from God, whereas true religion resides in one's
"loving heart". Gillespie goes on to say:

"These women see themselves as 'doing' theology (insofar as they con­
nect their own actions with the type of thought usually associated with clergy)
in terms of service or 'giving', in terms of spiritual relationships and in deep
bonds of identity with the faith and narrative of their congregation" (pp.211- 212).

The Biblical sisters, Martha and Mary, were sometimes referred to by Gille­
spie's interviewees as she notes (p.210), but Gillespie attaches little significance
to the Martha and Mary discourse. By contrast, I attach great importance to
this discourse, because St. Hale's women identify themselves and are identified
by others as either a Martha or Mary, and this identification is linked with their
social role within the parish. Furthermore, the roles of server and prayer tend to
restrict women to the female domain, to create boundaries among the women, and to limit their opportunities to gain the social status and recognition necessary for them to be selected for parish and diocesan administrative positions.

As I mentioned above, there are significant differences between the American Episcopalian Church and the Australian Anglican Church, in respect to the structural position of women. Legislation was passed to allow women to be ordained into the priesthood of the American Episcopalian Church in 1976. The first woman was ordained a bishop in that church in the year of Gillespie’s study (1988).

Prior to this had occurred the disbanding, in 1967, of the General Division of Women’s Work, the “women’s desk” in the national office of the Episcopalian Church (Donovan 1992:146). Also, in the early 1970’s, the dismantling of the National Organisation of Episcopalian Churchwomen resulted in the loss of laywomen’s power in national church affairs (Donovan 1992:155 & Gundersen 1992:126). The Organisation of Episcopalian Churchwomen was to some extent an analogue in the American Episcopalian church of the Ladies’ Guild in the Australian Anglican Church. Episcopalian women in America lost a national structure which paralleled the institutional church with the consequence that laywomen lost their voice at the national levels of church administration. This dismantling occurred parish-by-parish as women voted against the retention of a national network, because “...‘we are willing to lose our identity as an institution with the hope that the service of women in the church may be more fully accepted in the totality of the lay ministry’” (Mott and Sydnor 1966 quoted in Donovan 1992:141). By contrast, in the Australian Anglican Church in 1988 (the year of Gillespie’s work, and the first year of my field work), women could not yet be ordained into the priesthood. Nor has there been, at any time, even under the influence of feminism, any serious consideration of dismantling any women’s group in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Despite these structural differences, the women’s modes of participation in, and practice of, their religion at the parish level were very similar in the two research groups, as I outlined above. Complete contrasts are to be found in Am-
merman's (1987, 1992) study of Christian fundamentalists, in Davidman's (1990, 1991, 1993) work on women returning to Orthodox Judaism, and in Rose's (1987) paper on women in an independent charismatic fellowship, where the women were vigorously engaged in confronting, learning, and accepting the theology of their respective religious organisations, using a wide range of religious imagery, language, and symbolism.¹

### 8.2 Family is Love and God is Love

At an evening Lenten study group I attended, a question from the study guide was posed by the study leader to the members: "What matters more in your life than anything else?" The group split into two to discuss this and some other questions that had been posed. One group reported back with a refusal to answer the first question, saying, "It is a personal matter". The second group answered it by admitting that, while they knew that their first priority should be God, in reality, it was family (my emphasis). What was additionally notable is that no-one in the rest of the study group criticised that group for their answer - and these were public statements in a church-sponsored bible study group.

I was surprised, to say the least, by this response and the lack of theological correction, because it is completely at odds with one of the basic tenets of the Christian tradition. I had expected, of course, that both study groups would reply that God was their first priority. After all, from the pulpit all had heard the priest assert that God should be a Christian's first priority. Several days later at one of the women's fellowship groups I asked a general question concerning the women's opinions of the Lenten Bible studies. They did not reply directly. Instead, Sara asked Vicki, "What are the questions for this week's study?". Vicki

¹ Ammerman's study population was a Fundamentalist middle-class congregation in the Northeast of the United States. Rose's fieldwork site was an independent, charismatic congregation in upstate New York. Davidman's work examines women in a Hasidic community in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a Manhattan based modern Orthodox synagogue
replied, "There are only two questions. One is: 'What is most important to you in life?', and the second is: 'Why do you go to church?'". Sara said, "It's hard, because you know you are supposed to answer 'God', but my kids are my life". Vicki agreed, "I would have to say that my family is the most important, but you are supposed to say that God is first". Then Sara said, "That's alright, because Marge [a leader in the Mothers' Union] told us 'Family is love and God is love'". Vicki smiled, "That's a good way to look at it".

The phrase, "Family is love and God is love" provides the key to understanding why St. Hale's women accept the social role of nurturers within the parish. Bynum (1987) argues that there is a gender difference in individuals' practice of Christianity. Men renounce the importance of wealth and social status in their acceptance of Christianity, whereas women intensify their roles as nurturers and servers (1987:277-296). Hence the women's rationalisation for placing their families first: for, in serving their families, they serve God.

Weber (1978) states that "the concentration of human behavior on activities leading to salvation may require participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them) on the basis of the religious individual's piety and his qualifications as the elect instrument of god", and calls this "inner-worldly asceticism" (p:542). Erickson (1993) argues that Weber, in the Sociology of Religion, constructs ascetic Protestantism as a "masculine experience" in the development of capitalism which "must suppress the feminine". Erickson claims that ascetic Protestantism "suppresses magical religion" and its community of women, the aged, children, and disadvantaged men, which she defines as a feminine experience (1993:80). Bynum (1991), based on her work on the spirituality of medieval women, suggests a modification of Weber's conceptualisation of inner-worldly asceticism to encompass, not just the rational economic striving of men, but also the "charitable activity" of medieval women "as discipline oriented toward the world" (1991:73). This modification of Weber's ideal type of inner-worldly asceticism by Bynum allows me to suggest that the intense serving behaviour seen in the women of St. Hale's is their "vocation" since, as the women said among themselves, "We are in the world, but not of the world."
8.3 Ambivalence Towards Serving

Some of the same women who were publicly recognised among the women as being prime servers and builders of community expressed ambivalence towards the self-sacrificial serving role which they occupied. The nature of this ambivalence can be characterised by citing examples.

My first example is a short verse taken from Mia Mia, August/September 1989:7. Mia Mia is the official Australian Mothers’ Union magazine. A copy of the verse was passed around at a Ladies’ Guild meeting.

“Many will be shocked to find
When the day of judgement nears
That there’s a special place in Heaven
Set aside for volunteers
Furnished with big recliners
Satin couches and footstools
Where there’s no committee chairman
No group leaders or car pools
No bazaar and no bake sale
There will be nothing to staple
Not one thing to fold or mail
Telephone lists will be outlawed
But a finger snap will bring
Cool drinks and gourmet dinners
And rare treats fit for a king
You ask, “Who’ll serve the privileged few
And work for all they’re worth?”
Why, all those who reaped the benefits
And not once volunteered on earth!”

This poem was circulated in a lighthearted manner, but the women’s comments on reading the poem, such as, “Isn’t that true!” and “Who do you suppose will be serving us in Heaven?” made it clear that a well defined resentment was being expressed concerning parishioners who did not take on their share of the
“voluntary” duties. This poem provided a safe avenue for the women to express their awareness that workloads were not shared equally and some took advantage of their willingness to serve. At another Ladies’ Guild meeting April made the wry comment, “My daughter came home from “Uni” (University) and said, ‘Mum, you’re a doormat’. That really made me think: am I a doormat?” April informed the meeting that, as a result of this encounter, she was going to try to learn to say “No” to unreasonable demands by greedy people.

The “Cakeless Cake Stall” provides a second example of the expression of ambivalence. Members of the Ladies’ Guild passed out a mimeographed sheet of the verse below, along with an accompanying donation envelope, to parishioners at a Sunday service:

The Ladies Guild has undertaken to donate a pew for our new Worship Centre. To help raise funds we are holding a Cakeless Cake Stall. We know you will be interested in the details and will strongly support our stall. Details are:

**The Cakeless Cake Stall**

A bit of news we have today,  
A ‘Cakeless Cake Stall’ is on the way.  
These busy days – now who could bake pies or cookies or even a cake.

You’d be surprised if you counted the cost of materials, heat and precious time lost.  
Baking for a sale is extra work, yet nobody really wishes to shirk.

So we’ve thought of a plan that’s really grand, and feel quite sure you’ll understand.  
In this envelope please put the price of a pie or a cake or just something nice.

Without fuss or bother you’ve done your part,  
We’re sure you’ll give with a willing heart,  
And so in the end it’s good for us all –
It's a calorie free day on our Cakeless Stall.

Implicit in the institution of the cake stalls is the understanding that parishioners will indeed buy the cakes provided by the "ladies". Teale (1977) recalls the historical dependence of Australian Anglican parishes on women's fundraising activities. The poem recognises the expenses, both in terms of time and money, involved in the baking of the cakes, and the possible reluctance of parishioners to purchase a calorie-laden cake which they may not be able to consume before it becomes stale. The Cakeless Cake Stall shifts the material essence of the exchange from money plus cake to money alone, while still continuing the traditional fundraising role of the members of the Ladies' Guild, and their reliance on the parishioners' obligation to donate. Also implicit in the verse is the recognition of the inefficiency inherent in the churchwoman's self-sacrificing traditional roles of baker and homemaker, whose real cost is substantially in excess of the monetary value of the goods produced.

The following poem by Esther Woodhouse, a member of St. Cuthbert's Mothers' Union, Tweed Heads, NSW, was also printed in *Mia Mia*. It encapsulates the dilemma of Martha's serving to others as being taken for granted.

**MY TIME**

Is like a tray of biscuits I have baked.  
When my family and friends have  
Helped themselves to what they feel  
Is their share, there are only crumbs left  
For my consumption;  
But if they take with appreciation and love,  
And not as their right,  
I do not mind,  
For it is for them I bake.

One of the latent functions of the Mothers' Union is to enable mothers to become more Mary-like. The publication of "My Time" in the Mothers' Union magazine is an emic comment on the desire for recognition of a mother's giving
of self on behalf of her family. Woodhouse does not ask for the behaviour to change, but asks that the exchange be more symmetrical in its obligations. In other words, she asks: please honor and respect the choice I have made to be a Martha.

The women of St. Hale’s differed among themselves in the degree of appreciation they showed for the other women’s handicraft and baking skills. For some women, hand-made items such as these were imbued with the symbolic value associated with the giving of themselves to the community. Other women valued these exchanges, rather, on a purely economic rationalist basis, which is to say that they valued them little, and believed that women’s attention would be better focused on evangelism and Bible study. Gillespie’s (1992) survey of Episcopalian women shows the same dichotomy. She surveyed three generations of female parishioners which she terms the “older generation” (those over sixty years of age), the “bridge generation” (those between forty-one and sixty years of age), and the “younger generation” (those under forty years of age). She notes that those in the oldest cohort “associated the idea of ‘church’, first and foremost, with activities and products” (p.195), while the younger generation were much more interested in spiritual fellowship groups and were dismissive of traditional churchwomen’s work. As noted above, even those St. Hale’s women who greatly valued the traditional ways of serving and supporting the parish realised the inefficiencies associated with them, lamented the lack of public recognition of their good works, and they resented the lack of reciprocity of some parishioners in their volunteering for church tasks.

In St. Hale’s the split between those who valued and those who scorned women’s baking and handicraft was not as strongly along generational lines. The younger members of St. Hale’s women’s groups – those in Caritas and the Craft Group – appreciated the traditional work, but were not as strongly motivated towards self-sacrificial giving, seeking also some public recognition for their efforts (see Chapter Seven). The Ladies’ Guild adhered closely to the traditional high esteem placed by Anglican churchwomen on activities and products, as did Gillespie’s older cohort, whereas the St. Hale’s Mothers’ Union, whose aged status is revealed in their joking reference to themselves as the “Grandmothers’
Union”, valued the coming together of women in spiritual activities, but not the production of goods for sale. The attitudes of women who were not members of any of the four groups varied, from being interested in and appreciative of the women’s activities and products, to being quite disdainful of them.

8.4 Women’s Domain: “a Church within a Church”

Bliss (1952), in the introductory chapter of a review of reports received by the World Council of Churches’ “Commission on Life and Work of Women in the Church”, points to the existence of the female domain in religious organisations, whilst stressing the dangers presented by its existence.

A danger lies in the very virtues of women, their ability to make sacrifices and raise money and the thorough-going nature of much of their organised work. Few of them think theologically and few theologians turn their minds to the enormous work done by women and ask what it all means in terms of a doctrine of the Church. Yet for countless women work for and with women is the only way open to them to make their contribution to the life of the Church. The more vigorous the women’s activities in a particular congregation, the more an organisation, group or fellowship tends to become ‘the Church’ for the woman who finds there Christian fellowship, worship and the upbuilding of her faith. Thus there can arise in practice, although the theory of it is denied, a church within a church, or a church alongside a church. Women constantly feel that in spite of what is said in preaching the men are really ‘the Church’ and their own participation is derivative from and dependent on, that of men. (Bliss 1952:30-31).

Bliss’ description of the women’s domain as “a church within a church” accords with my observation of a female domain in St. Hale’s whose existence is characteristic of St. Hale’s gendered social organisation. The existence of this female domain is an essential element of Acker’s (1990, 1992) theory of gendered organisations. Claudia and her husband Simon, a professional couple in their thirties with two children, described to me the gendered organisation of St. Hale’s in terms of “boxes”:

Claudia: ... it is odd that churches construct groups in that way [by sex].
Simon: “Young and old”.

Claudia repeats: “Young and old”.

Simon: “Men and women”.

Claudia: “Men and women, boys and girls, children, teen-agers, young married, did they just start a young married group, isn’t that what I heard, or was it at playschool? There are always little boxes and you sort of find your box and then you fit in there.

As well as vividly drawing attention to the existence of the various socially identifiable groups in the parish, Claudia questions the necessity and perhaps even the desirability of individuals classifying themselves according to a strict set of criteria based on gender, age and marital status. She goes on to point out that one must fit oneself into a pre-assigned classification. In other words a parishioner is obliged to construct him or herself according to parishioners’ pre-conceived perceptions of designated groups. These groups are simply the male and female domains of the parish, sometimes further subdivided according to age and other factors.

Because of the existence of the “church within a church” for women at St. Hale’s, the genderedness of the patriarchal church is masked. Women place little symbolic value on, and separate themselves from, the male domain of administration, which they do not perceive as being closely related to the Christian witness. Because of their involvement in the Sunday services and in the litany (by assisting the priest in the serving of the Eucharist; by reading Biblical lessons; and by leading prayers), many women do not consider themselves as being oppressed within the parish. The church within the church provides an opportunity for the empowerment of women, and provides one rationale for the attraction of the Anglican Church to women.

8.5 Women’s Influence and the Priest

A central argument of this thesis is that women obtain social rewards and construct social networks by their participation in the parish. On the one hand,
this ability is dependent on the prerogative and good will of their parish priest. During a formal interview, Elizabeth recognises this dependence:

We have been under different priests and there is a difference each time. A woman’s situation is pretty good now.

Interviewer: Why is it good now?

Because he can encourage women to, say, serve on the vestry or leave certain decisions to the laity, which might be or might not be important, it doesn’t matter. I think this would [have to] be the greatest thing, that the lay people have a lot of decision-making and organizing. And in most of those cases, there is no differentiation about whether it’s a man or a woman who does it.

I was in one parish where a woman is the organist, so the woman chooses the hymns, [since] she knew the readings for that Sunday and she was the choir mistress. [She would] choose the hymns for that service. In another situation, you might have a man organist and he would do it or you might have a priest that likes to choose his own hymns whether it’s [a] man or woman organist. So that’s the sort of thing I mean about the variation really depends greatly on the minister of that church.

And you see I am deliberately using priest and minister and rector, you know; and some prefer to be called Father and their Christian name and some don’t want to be called Father.

On the other hand, the parish women exert a great deal of influence over the priest, as well. The history of the Mothers’ Union at St. Hale’s as discussed in Chapter Seven recounted the repeated attempts by some parishioners to establish a Mothers’ Union branch against the opposition of the previous priests. Pauline, in response to my questioning about the women’s tactics in reaching their goal, replied, “We waited out the priest, [since] they come and they go”. She told me that once a program is established in a parish it is very unlikely that a new parish priest will dismantle it because it would cause disharmony in the parish. This kind of “incremental advance” of the female domain was overtly recognised by the women. At a meeting held in my house to discuss the material in Chapter Six of this thesis, the women recalled their former priests’ vetoings of the formation
of the St. Hale's branch of the Mothers' Union, as outlined above, and also the institution of pram services at St. Hale's (discussed next), against Father Stephen's initial tendencies, and commented: "We bide our time".

Herein lies a possible explanation for my observation of the absence or, at least, the mutedness of a parish discourse on the ordination of women into the priesthood. When asked their opinion of ordination, the majority of women responded with the belief that women would be made priests at some time in future, but that at the present time the issue remained quiescent because of its potential for conflict within the parish. Consistent with this, Lehman (1987a; 1987b; 1986; 1981a; 1981b) suggests that English and American lay resistance to female ministers rests not on theological opposition so much as on concerns for the maintenance of congregation numbers and parish finances, and the avoidance of conflict in the congregation. Nason-Clark's (1987b) study on the relationship between religion and the sex role ideologies of Church of England clergymen and their wives suggests that "religion is most instrumental in the maintenance rather than the development of one's sex role ideology" (p.269). Nason-Clark's work points out that the priest’s support for or opposition to women’s ordination does not depend on his religious ideology but on his inherent attitudes to women’s roles in the family or in the wider community. Furthermore, the autonomy of the women's domain is dependent on the goodwill of the parish priest, since he can revoke the women's semi-autonomous status at any time.

In Chapter Six I described the inception of "pram services" in Perth at the nearby Anglican parish of St. George's. Following the success of St. George's pram service, the St. Hale's branch of the Mothers' Union requested that Father Stephen officiate over a similar service at St. Hale's. Although he was not "thrilled with the idea", he agreed to a trial service. The first Mothers' Union pram service attracted forty-three women and their babies. Furthermore, women who rarely or never attended the Sunday services took part in the pram service. Following this success Father Stephen acknowledged to the members of the Mothers' Union that he had not realised the outreach potential of the services. He offered fully to support their efforts in the future.
The successful outcomes of the women's struggles for a branch of the Mothers' Union at St. Hale's, and for the establishment of the pram services, illustrate the fact that, while women lack power in the wider domain of the institutional church, they possess power at the congregational level. They possess this power not only by virtue of the crucial importance of their work in building the community, but also by their numerical strength, and by the possibility of their defection to a competing religious denomination or another Anglican parish. I mentioned in Chapter Seven an example of a woman changing denominations so as to be able to attend a Craft Group, and in Chapter Four I cited an instance of families (there were five of them) who disapproved of the churchmanship of their local Anglican church, and consequently attended St. Hale's. These are reflections of an "open market system" for religious organisations, in the terminology of Warner (1993), where religious activity "comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics" (Berger 1969:138). Those two authors were referring to American religious behaviour, but, based on Kaldor et al. (1994) and his description of the "Protestant supermarket", I argue that the new paradigm applies also in the Australian Anglican church.

The members of the Mothers' Union, by initiating the pram services as they did, were acting in their capacity of builders of community. One reason for Father Stephen acceding to their request was that to deny it would have violated his openly proclaimed belief in the mutual ministry of the laity along with the priest. The following extract is from Father Stephen's contribution to the Report of the Parish Development Working Party.

For a long time our church was divided between clergy and laity, the former being seen to be 'ministers' and the latter given a quite passive role. From this practice the word minister has collected many inappropriate and limited connotations which discourage the lay members of the church to claim the terms 'minister' and 'ministry' as rightly referring to all baptised people.

The New Testament speaks of the laos, that is the people of God, and as such it refers to the whole Church, clergy and laity alike. Our Church is coming to a new understanding of ministry whereby we are learning to exercise mutual ministry, as we discover the unity of the one body, which
though it has many limbs and organs, yet it is one body – Christ’s body.

Mutual ministry demands an acceptance of every member’s part in Christ’s ministry, it requires a conscious effort to facilitate ministry. 

Therefore we must learn not to expect our clergy to be all things, but rather to stand with them in exercising ministry. In parish life this means that the Rector must fulfil his ministry as priest and encourage every member to fulfil their particular ministry that the church might be stronger and more complete. 

Mutual Ministry is an exciting concept which sets people free to do ministry, enabling every member of the Church to contribute and enables the church to grow out of what was a clergy dominated ministry. As Hendrick Kraemer says, “The total activity of the Church in its worship, its preaching its teaching, its pastoral care, should have the purpose of helping the ‘ordinary membership of the Church’ to become what they are in Christ.”

For our parish to grow and flourish we need to foster this concept of Mutual Ministry inviting every member to ministry and facilitating that. This will set the clergy free to exercise what is for them appropriate and to draw upon the ministries of others in the pastoral care of the people of the Parish. With this concept comes the need for recognition and delegation so that there is full participation by everyone and no-one is overloaded by either the expectations of others, or the neglect of others. Mutual ministry enables evangelism as the Church grows and spreads through the participation of all her members, and like a tapestry she is seen with many colours and textures forming the whole (1988:1-3).

The concept of “mutual ministry”, while still acknowledging the privileged position of the clergy, is an attempt to lessen authoritarianism in religious organisations by encouraging semi-autonomous participation and decision-making among the laity. This adovcation of the practice of mutual ministry opens the way to the women of St. Hale’s having a “church within the church”, in the terminology of Bliss (1952), by the allowance of semi-autonomy for the women.

In religious denominations which have an openly expressed ideology of the
subordination of women, women can obtain a modicum of influence in the con-
gregation and in the home. Ammerman (1987, 1992) suggests that while United
States fundamentalist women accept the ideology of submission to the author-
ity of their husbands, nevertheless, owing to their specialised knowledge of their
household’s needs, they have considerable influence in family decision making.
Rose (1987) notes that while the charismatic women from the Covenant Com-

munity in the United States give verbal assent to male authority, both men
and women “negotiate gender roles and expectations” (p.245) in daily life. The
women as “prayer warriors” use the tool of prayer to oppose male domination and
“to exercise power and influence within the fellowship and the family” (p.255).
Orthodox Jewish communities, according to Davidman (1991), “offered their own
version of a distinct alternative to the liberal feminist goal of equality: that of
equity, the idea of separate but equal roles” which provides an avenue for women
to achieve “the kinds of family lives they wanted” (1991:199).

In contrast, the influence exerted by St. Hale’s women within the parish
and over the priest represents their power in the congregation, just as, according
to Foucault (1978), “power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay
of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (p.94). One way in which power in St.
Hale’s is contested is through parish discourses, primarily, I contend, through
the “building community” discourse. Foucault (1978) also states: “discourse
transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes
it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p.101). The women
“produce power” because they are the builders and creators of parish social
relationships, a crucial role in the survival of the parish. They “undermine” and
“thwart” power by “waiting out” a priest who opposes their requests.

The existence, in itself, of the “building community” discourse exposes a
weakness of the Anglican Church in Australia, which resides in its belief that it
is in decline. Whether or not this is so is a matter of much debate (Bouma 1982,
1992), but regardless of its truth or otherwise, the idea is held very strongly: the
perception that “the church is in trouble” is expressed continually by parishioners
and clergy, and is shown by the continual efforts of clergy and committed laity
to build up the numbers attending the Church, and also in their attempts to
increase members' religiosity and spirituality (Drayton 1989). It is difficult, in their perceptions of themselves, to go beyond the point of view I heard expressed by a bishop at the Perth Diocesan Synod of 1989: "We are members of a dying church, in a dying religion." Buchanan (1992) explains that this view, expressed in reference to the Episcopalian Church of America, can be attributed mainly to a decrease in the proportion of young to old men and women in theological training, and to a decrease in the numbers of male laity; a church without men is supposedly a dying church. Yet the proportion of women in theology schools increased by 220% between 1972 and 1980, and that Episcopalian congregations were increasingly being composed of females. Corresponding statistics for the Anglican Church in Australia are not available but there is a perception which I heard expressed in Synod that the same processes are operating. Be this as it may, a consequence of the widely held view of the Anglican Church as being in decline is the further reinforcement of the importance of the women’s role, in attempting to reverse the process.

8.6 Ideal Types of Community

The Archbishop of Perth, the Rev. Dr. Peter Carnley, delivered a sermon relating the Trinity and the Community during a baptism and confirmation service at St. Hale's in 1989. In the following reconstruction from my fieldnotes of a section of his address, he spoke of three ideal types of community:

... There are three ideal types of community. The first secures community life at the expense of the individual. Totalitarianism and authoritarianism have been used to maintain unity of the community. Unhappily, at times the church has had this view.

The second ideal type of community is a loose association of individuals that share some views together, not unlike a golf club. It is an aggregate of individuals such as some political parties in recent times. The church at times has been a group of individuals.

The third ideal type of community has a balance between groups and individuals who freely choose to be together. A church is a community of individual persons united by mutual consent given in love. In the ideal
church, a Christian is to be an individual in a community of love. . . .

This ideal of community is given to us by God. It is a constant obligation given to us by the Holy Trinity. . . .

A husband and wife resolve conflict by taking notice of each other's wants and needs. There is no sense of subordination, no loss of identity in the other, in a true model of community. . . .

To cause division in the church is a denial of God. . . .

Archbishop Carnley in his presentation uses the Weberian concept of an "ideal type". According to the Archbishop, each ideal type of community embodies the qualities of the social processes among the parishioners, rather than geographical boundaries or demographic characteristics. He does not label the three ideal types or attempt to outline a model of parish life from them. In the next section, I construct a model of the parish community, loosely based on Bishop Carnley's types of community, but also on concepts and ideas taken from the literature on conservative evangelicals and charismatics, and on data gathered during my fieldwork at St. Hale's.

8.6.1. Introduction to the Ideal Types

The first ideal type "secures community life at the expense of the individual." Carnley's use of the word "unhappily" implies his dislike of this type which has used "totalitarianism and authoritarianism . . . to maintain unity of the community." When this ideal type is developed into a model of parish life, in which the parish is conceptualized and idealised as a family, the personal autonomy of individuals, especially women, is submerged into that family. This ideal type requires that all relationships within a congregation mirror the Biblical plan of ordered hierarchical relationships in the family. I shall call it the "Household of God" model.

Readers may ask why I do not employ the term "Family of God" for this purpose. However, that term has a theological meaning; all Christians are baptised into the "Family of God", for example. An alternative emic term commonly

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used in the anti-ordination of women literature (e.g., Hutchinson c. 1989) to de-
scribe the gathering of believers in a parish, is the “Church Family”, but this conveys, in informal language, the same theological meaning as “Family of God”. Consequently, I will use the term “Household of God”, to describe Archbishop Carnley’s first ideal type. A further rationale, apart from the possible confusion of the terms just mentioned, is as follows. A woman speaking against the ordina-
tion of women into the priesthood, in describing her objections to the proposal, referred to a parish as “a model of a household” (October 16 1992, ABC Ra-
dio: Religion Report). Women Against the Ordination of Women distributed a pamphlet entitled “The Household of God” in which the Church is described as a “Household of God”. I have not heard or read the term “Household of God” used other than in the sense in which I define it above.

The second type of community, consisting of a loose association of individ-
uals, is not of great relevance to my current thesis, because its existence has no gender specific consequences. The third ideal type of community mentioned by Carnley, however, is crucial to an understanding of women’s attraction to the Anglican Church. In this third typology of parish life, by which a community is composed of “individual persons united by mutual consent given in love”, women are recognised as autonomous individuals, and their individual identities are not submerged into a family. I propose to call this ideal type the “Community of God”. I often heard the priest and laity, both male and female, of St. Hale’s, when describing their mission, say, “We are a building a community of God”.

St. Hale’s, I assert, is best described as a “Community of God” parish. The parish does not exactly conform to this ideal type in all respects, but for the most part parish relationships are based on mutuality and low levels of intimacy. The proposed classification helps explain the over-representation of women in the parish social organisation by showing how they are able to maintain a separate women’s domain. The next section connects the teachings of the religious leaders with the ideal types used in the model.

A further rationale for classifying St. Hale’s as a “Community of God” was provided by the priest, Father Stephen, who asserted to me that in his sermons
he never used the term 'Family of God', but rather, the term 'Community of God', when referring to the parish or to the Church. The terminology "Family of God" was used at baptisms, as I mentioned above, because, theologically, the child baptized is "becoming part of God's family": this Father Stephen explained to me. The priest explained further that, were he to use the term "Family of God", people without a spouse and/or children might "feel that they were being left out".

8.6.2 A Link Between Gender Ideologies and Ideal Types

There is a profound link between the competing ideologies of gender relations in Christian denominations and the two ideal types of parish life. In a "Household of God", the clergy and other leaders teach that the hierarchical and complementary male and female roles in marriage should be reproduced in parish relations and organisation. By contrast, in a "Community of God" congregation, the clergy and leaders do not teach that individuals should mould their behaviour according to their gender or that gender should be a factor in parish interactions and organisation. The salience of the clergy's teaching on gender roles can be illustrated by Lehman's Australia-wide survey of Anglican and Uniting Churches members on attitudes toward women in ministry. His study found that "especially amongst the Anglicans, the attitudes of lay members were predictable on the basis of whether they perceived their priest as either endorsing or opposing women's ordination" (Lehman 1994:121). People also learn the differing theological viewpoints on gender relationships from sources other than their parish priest. As was described in Chapter Four, individuals receive these theological perspectives from seminars, books, radio, television and newspapers, too.

8.6.3 Guide to the Model

Table 8.1 sets out the factors associated with women's influence in a congregation and shows how these factors are manifested in each ideal type of community. The left hand column of Table 8.1 lists the important distinguishing characteristics of the two ideal types. For example, in the first line of the table, "Emotional intimacy (confession to parish)" refers to the encouragement or lack of encouragement in a congregation for individuals to "testify" their past sinful
behaviour and their current struggles against sin. What I am terming Household of God congregations encourage this behaviour in an attempt to increase the emotional and spiritual bonds and ties between members. In her study of charismatic Catholics, Neitz (1987) comments that the congregation tries to replicate the emotional intimacy of the family through witnessing to one another. In contrast (as was discussed in Chapter Five), St. Hale's had social mechanisms in place to hinder the development of close-knit ties among members of the congregation. "Church friends aren't friends"! Thus in regard to this category, St. Hale's should be considered as a Community of God parish. Relevant to this point also is that female parishioners of St. Hale's sought to expand their social network in Hale, but insisted that this not occur at the cost of losing their individual privacy; "keeping themselves to themselves" cannot be maintained if confession to the parish is a requirement of parish membership.

The conceptualisation of a Household of God congregation as a "family", combined with the gender ideology of male headship over women in families, forbids the emergence of women as formal leaders of congregations. Ammerman (1992) states in her paper on gender discourses in fundamentalist congregations that they "systematically exclud[e] women from various visible leadership positions – always from the pulpit, almost always from ruling boards of elders or deacons, and often from teaching and committee roles that would put them 'in authority over men'" (p.10). By contrast, Archbishop Carnley, in his discussion of ideal types, stresses the mutual submission of men and women in marriage, which is not consistent with the privileging of men in leadership roles over women. Community of God congregations should in principle have both male and female formal parish leaders. This is seen to a large extent in St. Hale's, with women as church wardens, members of vestry and committee conveners. Nevertheless, women are under-represented in these offices, as was discussed in Chapter Three.
### TABLE 8.1: TWO IDEAL TYPES OF PARISH COMMUNITY

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>HOUSEHOLD OF GOD</th>
<th>COMMUNITY OF GOD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional intimacy</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>(confession to parish)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal Parish leaders</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male &amp; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women seen as</td>
<td>Part of a family</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interactions</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with other religious groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of relations</td>
<td>Women under headship</td>
<td>Mutual submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between men &amp; women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders of Women's Groups</td>
<td>Wives of Clergy</td>
<td>Laywomen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of sermons</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentioning gender</td>
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<td>relationships</td>
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Carnley described his third ideal type of community as being "composed of individuals". Household of God congregations, however, are idealised as being composed of families, and an unmarried or divorced woman belonging to such a congregation must be placed under the headship of a male elder or clergyman. Dempsey (1992) noted in his study of a rural Australian community that, upon marriage to a member, women were automatically added to the church's roll. St. Hale's parish is far from this situation: its Membership Roll does not even list a person's marital status. Rose (1987) in her ethnography of an evangelical congregation states that "women are only able to give spiritual guidance to other
women if the woman is 'covered’” by the authority of a male (p,255). Women in St. Hale's found it relatively easy to construct a semi-autonomous female domain in the parish, as evidenced by the coming into being of the Craft Group, and Caritas, during the period of the fieldwork. However, women “under” a male's authority have difficulties in organising themselves without an overt male presence. This construction of women as autonomous identities by Community of God congregations but as subordinate entities by Household of God congregations is another aspect of the dichotomy between the two ideal types.

In a Household of God congregation social interactions with other religious groups are “closed” in the Weberian (1978:44) sense, in that such social interactions are kept to a minimum (Peshkin 1986), while they are “open” in a Community of God. Archbishop Carnley was involved in the Ecumenical movement necessitating inter-faith dialogue with, for example, the Lutheran Church. At St. Hale's, the women's groups visited the women's groups of the Lutheran Church, the Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, women stated to me in interviews that they were not concerned whether or not their children remained in the Anglican church when they reached adulthood, as long as they remained Christians. St. Hale's women thus had a broadly inclusive definition of Christianity, whereas people in a Household of God congregation have a very exclusive definition. Members of the latter must meet very strict criteria, one of which includes membership of the church or sect in question, to be defined as Christian (Peshkin 1986:135).

In Household of God congregations, relations between men and women are mirrored on the congregation's concept of the family; thus women are under the headship of men (McNamara 1985; D'Antonio 1980, 1982). The Anglican Canon Knox (1977), in his Minority Report on the General Synod Commission on Doctrine: The Ministry of Women, also argues that women should be subordinate and under the authority of men (see Appendix 4.2). Knox's authority for this view is of course Paul's statement in 1st. Corinthians:11: “... the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband”. Archbishop Carnley, however, in the sermon reconstructed above, conceptualised marriage as having the man and woman mutually submit to each other with “no sense of subordination,
no loss of identity in the other". This was echoed in a sermon to the St. Hale's parish by Father Stephen, when he spoke of marriage as being "composed of people submitting to each other". However, the elderly widow, Genevieve, in response to my interview question, "What do you think the relationship should be between husbands and wives?", replied with a combination of both ideologies: "... my marriage was a mutual submission to each other", but also, "The husband is the head of the house" (see Section 4.2). This demonstrates that congregations cannot always be categorically placed in one or the other of the ideal types; they sometimes exhibit features of both, in respect to at least some of the factors listed in Table 8.1.

The leaders of women's groups in Household of God parishes are almost always the wives of clergymen or of lay leaders. However, in a Community of God congregation, leaders of women's groups are selected without regard to their husbands' position in the congregation. In St. Hale's, leaders were drawn from the membership of those groups with no reference to the parish status of their husbands. Additionally, the wife of St. Hale's rector was in full time employment at the time of the fieldwork, and was not involved in any woman's organisation.

The frequency of sermons mentioning gender relationships given to a congregation is an indication of the clergy's desire to resocialise members of the congregation into new gender roles. Ammerman (1987), in her study of a fundamentalist Northeastern USA congregation, and Rose (1987), in reporting her study of a charismatic community, made particular mention of the frequent occurrence of sermons and other teachings discussing the correct ordering of the genders. In the time of my fieldwork at St. Hale's, there were exactly two sermons that mentioned gender relationships. These were both given during the Australian "National Marriage and Family Week", and stressed only the doctrine of mutual submission in marriage and parents' responsibilities towards their children. The lack of discourse on the subject of interactions between males and females in St. Hale's shows that there was very little attempt to change peoples' roles or ideologies concerning gender relationships. Nor did the rector or the male parishioners of St. Hale's attempt to resocialise parishioners into different gendered social roles through behaviour such as denying women leadership
The listing given in Table 8.1: Ideal Types of Parish Communities, is not intended to be exhaustive. There are many other distinguishing characteristics of the two ideal types, but I have limited the table to those factors that are most important to the empowerment of women in congregational life. For example, another aspect of church practice and belief, relevant to the influence of women in the parish, is the model of ministry advocated by the rector: hierarchical or mutual ministry. This was discussed in Section 8.5 above.

8.7 Conclusion

Warner (1993), in his review of the new paradigm in the sociology of religion which regards religions as part of an open market system, suggests that “the role of religious organizations for the empowerment of women presents a rich test case for the new paradigm” (p.1071). The thrust of this chapter has been to present evidence that the existence of the female domain within the gendered organisation of St. Hale’s provides various opportunities for the influence and power of women to be made manifest. Furthermore, the parish discourse of building community exposes the existence of this power and influence via the women’s roles of serving and building the parish community.

However, the power and autonomy of women remains dependent on the goodwill and policies of the parish rector. A model of ideal types of parish organisation identifies social processes which may allow the empowerment of women, but women have little direct control over these social processes, which are in the province of the patriarchal Church. A Household of God type of parish excludes people who do not fit the model of the nuclear family. St. Hale’s parish conforms more closely to a Community of God type of parish, and this type allows women some autonomy; they are not subject to the male disciplinary gaze, membership of the parish is based on individuals, rather than the family and, most importantly, women are able to avoid open displays of emotional intimacy. Women whose husbands are not members of the parish are able more easily to belong in a Community of God than in a Household of God parish.
This is again related to the lack of close emotional bonds between parishioners and to their desire to maintain their privacy.

The literature on the Sociology of Religion lacks ethnographic work on moderate Protestant Churches. The bulk of qualitative research in the sociology of religion has been on the process of conversion. The grounded research (Glaser & Strauss 1968) reported here is the only ethnography (besides Franklin’s (1986) case study) I am aware of concerning the experience of women in a mainstream Protestant congregation in an industrialised society. The oral history study of Gillespie on the older generation’s perception of traditional churchwomen’s work as being synonymous with religious experience accords with my observations. The Martha and Mary discourse, for example, which is so crucial to the creation of the divided female domain of St. Hale’s, was revealed through the anthropological fieldwork, whereas surveys, interviews, or oral histories are not able to contextualise discourses like these.

Resistance to modernity in a Household of God parish is revealed through its insistence on a unitary gender ideology and practice. In a Community of God parish, with its focus on individuals rather than families, women are free to express their ambivalence toward their role as servers without fear of attracting the criticism of rejecting their femininity. In addition, conflict is avoided by tolerating a plurality of gender ideologies held by parishioners. This toleration represents an accommodation with modernity, or at least, a truce.
CHAPTER NINE

Conclusions

9.0 Introduction

What does the Anglican Church, a patriarchal organisation, provide for women? The first chapter of this thesis opened with the recounting of two diametrically opposing views of the relationship between women and the Anglican Church of Australia: some assert that the Church marginalises women, while others define the Church as "... an organisation run almost entirely by women, apart from the preacher!" (Harford 1989:12).

In order to understand how a group of women could define the patriarchal church as "run almost entirely by women" I conducted participant observation research in the parish of St. Hale’s Anglican Church. I used the Glaser & Strauss (1968) grounded theory approach to qualitative research.

The sociology literature on women and religion contains little on the experiences of women in moderate Protestant denominations, especially with an emphasis on ethnography, and this thesis helps fill this gap. Previous studies on women in religion have centred on subjects such as the work force participation of women (Dowdall 1974; Marcum & Radosh 1982; de Vaus & McAllister 1987; Hertel 1988); gender roles in new religions (Palmer 1993 & Aidala 1985); feminist spirituality (Porterfield 1987; Finley 1991 & McPhillips 1994); the influence of religious ideology on women’s gender roles (Gage 1893; Warner 1976; Porter & Albert 1977; Newman 1986; Himmelstein 1986; Jelen 1989); images of God (Nelson, Cheek, Jr. & Au 1985; Blombery 1989; Yeaman 1987; Cornwall & White 1988) and clergywomen (Rodgers 1980; Kwilecki 1987; Aldridge 1989,1992; Ice 1987; Stevens 1989; Field-Bibb 1991) and women and social change (Haddad et al. 1985; Atkinson et al. 1985). The earlier studies of Rose (1987), Ammerman (1992, 1987), Sacks (1989) and Davidman (1991) locate the position of religious women in a social organisation and grant the women agency. Yet women in the religious organisations studied by those authors resisted modernity, whereas, as
I have outlined in detail, the women of the Anglican Church accommodated to modernity.

Recent work on modern economic organisations provides a path for helping to understand the social processes involved in the production and reproduction of gender differences within organisations, but it is concerned only with work organisations, and sheds little light on the way genderedness arises in an organisation such as a parish (Hearn 1994; Rothschild & Davies 1994; Lewis & Morgan 1994; Mills & Tancred 1992; Alvesson & Billing 1992; Martin 1990; Mills 1988). The work of Acker (1990, 1992) is also concerned with the theory of gendered work organisations, but the set of social processes she defines has wider relevance, and constitutes the framework on which many of my arguments are based.

In summarising the findings of my research, I divide the chapter into sections. The first four of these sections relate the results of my ethnographic observations to four sets of social processes distinguished by Acker (1990, 1992). The four sets are used to explain the creation of a gendered organisation (Sections 9.1-9.4). In Section 9.5 I discuss female parishioners' use of the St. Hale's parish to integrate themselves into the suburb of Hale and to create local social networks. This section also sheds light on the benefits they receive from their religious participation. Finally, in Section 9.6, I sum up the main arguments of the thesis, recalling the different identities held by the women, and way the gendered organisation of the parish provides a "church within a church" in which women may obtain instrumental friendships and engage in generalised reciprocity with one another.

9.1 Differential Structural Location of Men and Women

Acker's (1990, 1992) first element is concerned with organisational practices which divide an institution or an organisation along gender lines. The prohibition against the ordination of women into the priesthood of the Anglican Church of Australia, which was current during my fieldwork, is a primary example of the structural division between genders within the institutional church. Yet the ordination issue was not a parish discourse, and debate on it was avoided by
parishioners for fear of creating conflict among themselves. At the time of the fieldwork, the ban on women entering the priesthood was the only structural division of the genders within the Anglican Church; there were neither any canonical prohibitions against laywomen holding any other church office which was open to the laity, nor any restrictions on the composition of a parish's social organisation. Even the prohibition against ordination was lifted in the Perth Diocese in 1992, although at the time of writing, there are still Australian Anglican Dioceses which retain it. Despite the Perth Diocese's gender-neutral policy, and the lack of directives in the Anglican Church against women's participation in any lay sphere of activity within a parish, a gender division into male and female domains was produced, and re-produced, in the social processes of St. Hale's parish.

The rapid growth in the membership of St. Hale's, which doubled twice in less than a decade as a result of the rapid growth in the suburb of Hale (see Sections 2.5 and 3.5), compelled the parishioners to devise ways to build a community by creating social relationships among the parishioners (Cohen 1982, 1985). As a reflection of their belief in the essentialist nature of men and women, the parishioners, in responding to the rapid growth of St. Hale's, and also to the theological directive that a parish be a community, constructed a parish which was gendered. The examination of the parish administration and small groups undertaken in Chapter Three clearly revealed the genderedness of St. Hale's, and further suggested the existence of a symbolic, permeable boundary between the male and female domains. Despite the fact that parishioners perceived the process of selecting leaders as being free from gender bias, my observations suggested that both leadership and the incumbency of decision-making roles were defined as a masculine attribute. This did not preclude the selection of women for leadership positions. However, the women so chosen were mainly those in paid employment, or with "masculine" traits such as leadership qualities and organisational ability. Thus some women were able to cross the symbolic boundary into one aspect of the male domain – that concerned with parish administration – but they ran the risk of being identified by some parishioners as "men" (Section 3.3.2).
Not all women, even those perceived as possessing the requisite “masculine” skills, wished to enter the male domain of the parish. Katherine, the middle-aged woman professional and divorcee introduced in Section 5.2.1, identified barriers that prevented women such as herself from “belonging to” the parish; she did not fit into a clique or recognised fellowship group. As a woman with a professional career, and a divorcee, and interested in developing her spirituality rather than in parish administration, she was on the boundary of the female domain. Thus women who identified themselves or were perceived by others as not fitting into the female domain of the parish felt that they did not belong.

One strategy the parishioners adopted in building the community of St. Hale’s was to increase the number of small groups in the parish, from four to ten during the fieldwork period. In this way the parish leaders and rectors hoped that more opportunities would be provided for people to gain a “sense of belonging” to the parish, and that the development of social relationships among parishioners would be facilitated. Of those ten groups, eight were fellowship groups, a type of group which provides the most opportunities for social integration. Except for the youth group, fellowship groups were organised by gender, and, to a lesser extent, by age. The primary goal of the men’s fellowship group was to encourage males to find “Christian fellowship” with other men in locations outside the parish worship centre, with a secondary goal being to provide service to others in the parish. The activities of the women’s groups’, by contrast, were located in the parish worship centre, and were manifest in an emphasis on praying, serving and caring for others as well as on developing women’s mothering and homemaking skills. In consequence, the use of physical space was also gendered at St. Hale’s.

The two remaining categories of small groups – the Christian Life Groups (home cell groups) and the team ministry groups (which were task oriented groups for the Sunday worship services) – were mixed groups. There was no gender bias apparent in tasks such as reading the lessons, leading the prayers, and assisting the priest during the Eucharist. Instead, the gendered division of labor was apparent in the division of the “housekeeping and maintenance” chores. (See Tables 3.3 and 3.4). Women vacuumed, dusted, cleaned the toilets, and took
care of children, while men, located outside the church building, mowed lawns, trimmed trees, and cleaned gutters. Nonetheless, while the division of labor was obvious, it was not rigidly adhered to: the symbolic boundary between the male and female domains could be crossed by some women, and, to a much lesser degree, by some men.

The existence of the female domain at St. Hale's reflects the contested-identity of the women themselves and of the women's groups. In the space of the few years just prior to and covered by my fieldwork, the women of St. Hale's had intensified the perceived differences among themselves so as to "need" not one women's group but four groups. Women who "wanted more" than "just the Martha" role of the Ladies' Guild established a branch of the Mothers' Union to further develop their Mary-like religious and spiritual life. During the fieldwork, a generational split occurred within both the Ladies' Guild and the Mothers' Union. Two younger women's groups were established – the Craft Group and Caritas. This intensification of the differences among the women was discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Derogatory terminology such as references by men, and by some women, to the Ladies' Guild as a "cup of tea and a chat" group or to the Mothers' Union as the "Grandmothers' Union", or even worse, as the "Grandmothers' Onion", accords these women's groups a subordinate status in the parish organisation (see Chapter Three). I heard no such derogatory comments concerning the men's group, or the vestry.

9.2 Symbols that Explicate or Justify Gender Divisions

Acker (1992:252) notes that the "creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness" is important in the gendering of an organisation. As do all ideologies, those defining gender have the potential to produce symbols which typify patterns of social behaviour. The Anglican Church of Australia does not profess a universal gender ideology for gender relationships. The five distinct gender ideologies among Perth Anglicans: Anglo-Catholic, Moderate, Evangelical, Feminist, and post-Christian Feminist, identified during the course of the
fieldwork, were discussed in Chapter Four. Explicit discussion of these ideologies among St. Hale's parishioners was extremely rare, but parishioners were exposed to them through the religious media, the secular media, and from Anglican and other Christian extra-parish seminars and workshops.

Regardless of their gender ideologies or theological views, St. Hale's parishioners constructed men and women as opposing Others and had an essentialist view of male and female. Men were constructed as decision-makers and leaders whereas women were constructed as nurturers, servers, and carers. These attributes were carried over into the social role of women as the builders and maintainers of community, a topic introduced in Section 4.3. Women built community by providing opportunities for social interaction; by creating links among parishioners; by the provision of food which is a potent symbol of family and community life; and by creating social networks with Anglican extra-parish organisations and women's groups in other denominations. The role of women in creating and maintaining community is more than an attribute of the women, it is work largely invisible to individuals outside the female domain in the parish (Di Leonardo 1987 & DeVault 1991). While this caring work is obligatory, the women themselves perceive it as a religious action, a "giving of themselves" to others, symbolic of the Christian ethos which underlies their worldview.

While "Woman" is symbolised as carer, nurturer, and server at St. Hale's, the women themselves emphasised different facets of their caring role, of which the two most important and distinctive aspects were encompassed in the Martha and Mary discourse. The women's acceptance of the institutional discourse which privileges the symbolic role of the prayerful Mary, over Martha the server, hinders women's questioning of the gendered organisational structure of the parish. Although both roles were perceived by the women as being essential to the maintenance of the parish, many women, even members of the Mothers' Union, were content to identify themselves as "just Marthas", because the practical difficulties associated with a woman taking on the spiritual aspect of a Mary, while also carrying out a domestic role, were too great.
9.3 Interactions among Parishioners

Acker (1990, 1992) suggests that the interactions among individuals is the third set of processes to consider in attempting to explain the creation and maintenance of a gendered organisation. Interactions between men and women that I observed at St. Hale's included sexual teasing and even sexual harassment. Alleged sexual abuse of women in other Anglican parishes was reported to me (Section 4.4.3 and 4.4.4). These kinds of behaviour clearly demonstrated the dominance of men. By contrast, the interactions of the women with one another consisting of “building each other up” and “helping each other out” emphasised an egalitarian ethos among the women.

A strong norm among the women was the avoidance of conflict, as was described in Chapter Seven in connection with the history of the establishment of Caritas as a result of the “Mary Thomas incident”. The women made no attempt to settle the problem by discussion, and also notable was the absence of any attempt to repair the relationship between Mary Thomas and the mothers of the children. This practice of the resolving of conflict by avoidance had the effect of creating boundaries among the women.

The speech behavior of women – ending statements on a rising inflection, and with tags such as, “I could be wrong” – such as when speaking at the Annual Meeting of the Parishioners – is the “ceremonial work” which women must perform when crossing the “fluid” boundary into a “male” domain (Gherardi 1994). This ritual demonstrated that the women were aware of trespassing into the male domain, although women who were formal parish leaders or held a prestigious work position, as potential symbolic members of the male domain, were not required to perform it. Unless they had parish business to attend to, many women did not even engage in casual conversations with men.

9.4 Internal Mental Work

The last set of social processes I relate to Acker’s theoretical classification is “the internal processes in which individuals engage as they construct personas that are appropriately gendered for the institutional setting” (1992b:568). In
the case of St. Hale's women, the generational shift discussed in Chapter Seven and the ambivalence expressed by women about the level of self-sacrificial giving (discussed in Chapter Eight) is the result of "internal mental work" undertaken in an attempt to define the methodical conduct of their religious practice and behaviour. What is the appropriate, reasonable amount of obligatory giving required of good Anglican women in the context of today's world? What should be the balance between self-centred and self-sacrificial behavior, and what form should these take? Their questioning reflects an uncertainty of self-identity, both in their personal lives and in their parish roles. The women's perceptions of what constituted rational methodical conduct differed and the four women's groups oriented themselves in distinct ways. For example, members of the Ladies' Guild viewed themselves as unobtrusively supporting other parishioners while the members of the Craft Group wished to be publicly recognised for their services. Members of the Mothers' Union saw themselves as a spiritual force in the parish, while members of Caritas were simply motivated by a need to support one another in the raising of children. This contested self-identity among the women of St. Hale's supports the proposition of the new paradigm of the sociology of religion that identity is contested among and within religious organisations (Warner 1993).

9.5 Other Aspects of Women's Participation

There is a tension set up among inhabitants of a new suburb, as described by Richards (1990), in that individuals may wish to belong to their local community but shy away from losing their autonomy and individual privacy. Richards quotes a variety of her respondents' comments to that effect, among them being one that I, too, heard frequently: "Neighbours should not live in each others' pockets". However, women were able to use St. Hale's as an additional means of social integration which did not risk the loss of privacy to form social networks in the suburb of Hale, and the surrounding suburbs. (see Section 5.6).

When asked, "What does the church provide for women?" Ann replied, "... It gives you a place where you can go and meet people" (Section 5.2.3). On the other hand, Tina spoke, in Section 5.2.1, about the "hurdles" to be overcome
when joining a parish. This highlights the problem of newcomers who lack social ties with parishioners, and therefore, must show "persistence" until someone in the parish social network "invite[s] you in" – to one of the small groups.

The women received specific benefits from these parish-derived social networks. The development of instrumental, rather than expressive, church friendships enabled women to acquire access to a network of generalised reciprocity. Women, especially the frail elderly, or those with young children, required these instrumental relationships because most individuals in a new suburb such as Hale lacked relatives and friends living nearby. Favours were not exchanged between two women but rather between the woman receiving the assistance and the woman's fellowship group. Thus, a separation was maintained between an individual's "church friends" and her "real" life (see Section 5.3). Finally, parish activities were a socially acceptable way to separate oneself from family responsibilities; this was a third benefit obtained by some women from their involvement in the parish.

The last section of Chapter Eight developed a typology of parish social organisations based on two ideal types, the "Household of God" which idealised parish life as an extension of the nuclear family and the "Community of God" which conceptualised parish life as "individual persons united by mutual consent given in love". The two ideal types have implications for the influence and empowerment of women since in a Household of God congregation a woman is under the authority of the the male head of the family, whereas women in a Community of God congregation are recognised as autonomous individuals. Household of God congregations actively teach a specific gender ideology so as to resocialise both men and women into the appropriate gender roles, and have fewer interactions with other congregations outside their denomination than do Community of God congregations. Another factor that lessens the empowerment of women in an ideal Household of God parish is the requirement of mutual emotional intimacy from the congregation. St. Hale's, as a Community of God congregation with social relationships based on low intimacy and mutuality, permits women to obtain social rewards and benefits that would prove more difficult to obtain in a Household of God ideal type of congregation. Finally, I proposed in
Chapter Eight that women in a Community of God congregation would find it easier to implement and maintain a separate semi-autonomous domain within the organisation.

9.6 Summary

Since St. Hale's is a church in the sociological sense (Stark and Bainbridge 1985), it is not in tension with the mainstream of Australian society and consequently is able to accommodate the women's needs for instrumental friendships, which they distinguish quite clearly from "real" friendships. A primary reward gained by women for participating in St. Hale's parish is their social integration into the suburb of Hale through an institution which they consider safe and acceptable. In the parish social organisation they exert power and influence by their role as builders of community through the parish discourse "building community" (Foucault 1978). This is limited by the subordination of the female domain to the male domain, and more particularly, by the domination of the patriarchal institutional church in the person of the parish priest. Nevertheless, even the priest's power is circumscribed by his dependence on the support - moral and financial - of the female members of the congregation. The priest's authority is further undermined, in effect, by the Diocesan policy of transferring rectors between parishes every six or so years, which allows the women to "wait out" an unsympathetic clergyman. The women consider their domain, and their roles, to embody Christian conduct in the world, and the male dominated church administrative sector to be of lesser worth.

The world that women in the female domain have constructed for themselves in the parish - their "church within a church" - is sufficient for their needs, and in practice is little circumscribed by the institutional church; hence their perception that "The Church is lots of women and a preacher".
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