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**Denominational Switching: A Study of Religious Switchers to  
The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church  
Cathedral.**

**Stephen Duncan Martin**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Religion**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts at  
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Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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**Denominational switching: A Study of Religious switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church Cathedral**

**Stephen Duncan Martin**

Participation in society, for many individuals, includes affiliation in a religious organization. Denominationalism involves being a particular type of person. Being a member of a specific religious group symbolizes a commitment to certain social values. It is therefore valid research to ask why adults, who were born and raised in a particular religious group, switch to another. What were the reasons they left their religious group? What process did they take to find a new religious group? And, what motivated them to join a specific religious group?

The answers to the above questions will shed some light on the social dynamics involved in denominational switching, other than equating it as a conversion phenomenon.

This study will show that denominational switchers are actively involved in switching, and that there is a variety of motivators involved. To understand and to group these motivators, a conceptual model has been developed and used in classifying switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church. This was done to establish patterns of denominational switching and to categorize switchers into specific groupings.

These groupings should allow for further research in the area of denominational switching which will focus on switching as a social event.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

This paper examines denominational switching in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. It discovers that most individuals intend to stay within the denomination they were born into even when they move, however, switching does occur. Most switching occurs when individuals marry into another faith or when they develop an interest in another religious system. Children tend to affiliate with the denomination of their parents. This paper will discuss what is involved when adults switch denominations in order to become part of an established religious group they were not born into, and the reasons that motivated these individuals to leave their previous religious system, as well as the process carried out in finding the new religious group.

Existing social scientific literature only partly clarifies this phenomena. It either turns denominational switching into a question of attraction or of religious experience, or, it identifies it with the concept of conversion. This study will show that denominational switching often involves all these concepts, and in some cases none of them. The question of why an adult switches from one denomination to another must be rethought and investigated. This paper will address the following questions. Why do adults

switch from one religious denomination to another ? Why do they leave their previous denomination? Why do they join another denomination ? Finally, what process is involved in making the switch ?

For this study, denominational switching will be defined as the process by which an individual attaches themselves to a religious organization, becomes a member and accepts the organization's norms. The religious organizations this paper will study is what F. Bird refers to as "ethnic church " groups, in which most members are born into, and in which the members are expected to confirm and/or reconfirm the group's beliefs. (Bird, Unpublished) The specific religious organizations this paper will deal with are Anglicans and Unitarians. It will do so by examining recent switchers to Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Montreal, and The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation In Beaconsfield, Quebec.

#### **HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED**

The research methodology used was a literature review of articles, (auto)biographies, church publications and interviews conducted with the church and/or the congregational leadership of Christ Church Cathedral and The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Interviews of recent switchers to both Christ Church Cathedral and The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were also conducted. There were twelve personal



interviews of denominational switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation including seven individuals who were male adults and five adults who were females. There were nine interviews of switchers to Christ Church Cathedral, composed of seven males and two females. Also interviewed was a switcher to Roman Catholicism as well as a member who left The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and returned. Finally, visitations to both Christ Church Cathedral and The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were made in order to experience the religious and non-religious services and other activities of each church.

#### **RELIGION AS A SOCIAL FORM OF EXPRESSION**

Religion is a form of social expression. It is a set of specific relations among specific people. These forms of expression develop from the individual's personal wants and needs interdependent of any social interaction with other people. Social interaction with other individuals, especially with a "significant other,"<sup>1</sup> may alter those wants until they are given a symbolic form, through words, action, or experience, in the social environment in which they are expressed. Individuals searching for personal meaning find themselves joining social situations in an attempt to

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A significant other for this paper is defined as a person who is most influential on the switcher. He or she may or may not be related to the switcher, nonetheless, the switcher wishes and exhibits behaviour that will please the significant other.

conceptualize and rationalize their feelings and experiences. These social situations can take form in religious or non-religious systems, such as political parties, unions, and social clubs, that seem to meet their needs and allow people to associate with other like minded individuals.

Religious groups vary and often overlap. They range from small elitist groups to national religious groups such as Shintoism, and international universalist groups such as Christianity and Islam. Even within national and international universalist religious groups, there appears to be separate groupings that attract different individual needs, such as, liberal or conservative leanings. All religious groups are organized into formal and informal structures. While these structures may be different for each group, they are designed so that a person viewing them can easily identify what it means to be a member of that group and what the group represents. The structure, formal or informal, is a symbol given by the group conveying its philosophy to the observer.

Non-religious groups such as political parties, unions, or parents' committees, offer structures in which people are able to meet their social needs. It is quite possible that an individual is a member of a non-religious group that upholds values that are different to their religious group, or their yearnings. An individual lives in several concentric social structures at the same time, that is family, culture, and community. It is possible that one is a member of several

social groups, each with its own message. These messages may or may not be consistent with one another, and it is left to the individual to reconcile the differences as best as they can.

Religious groups are only a part of the larger social network from which individuals receive messages. Even the messages delivered by the religious group, as expressed by their various symbols, may look the same to an individual, but they can be perceived very differently in various social settings. Religious groups are interpersonal and social, and a legitimate component of society in that they validate themselves in the overall composition of society. There must be accepted norms that are known to all members of society, and the religious group must communicate these to the individual in order that they may chose the group that best meets their needs.

A religious group is essentially an assembly of people who share a symbolic expression of their religious experience. This stimulates the individual's religious yearnings, expressions, experiences and legitimizes them. Therefore through the religious group, the individual can meet their needs and wants and feel more effective or important. When the religious group can no longer perform this function, it may leave the individual yearning and searching for another group that will better satisfy their needs.

Religious groups are varied and overlapping. A social

group is an establishment of individuals connected by their participation in the same activities, for example, rituals and worship, by their loyalties to each other and by their organizational and cultural realities. Religious groups are composed of people who share similar beliefs, or who use similar symbols to describe their beliefs and explain their behaviour. They can be centered around biological and cultural relationships or geography. Others can be voluntary associations of like minded people, and still others are based on conceptual or theoretical commitments. Religious groups will have a different composition of male and female, young and old, and rich and poor members, and are organized along both formal and informal lines, with a structure which includes a division of labour, and a relationship of authority and subordination, allowing each member to know where they fit. This gives consistency to the religious group as a whole.

#### **SWITCHING IN QUEBEC**

In Quebec, the Roman Catholic Church had been the dominant religious group, especially for the majority of French speaking Quebecers. Its influence was felt not only in the religious lives of its members but also on the political and daily operations of Quebec. However, since the nineteen sixties, attendance in the Roman Catholic Church has declined dramatically from an estimated seventy percent in 1957 down to

only thirty percent attendance in 1975 for Montreal's one point five million Catholics ( Associated Press, Dec. 8, 1977). It is now possible to identify as a French speaking Quebecer without being a practising or even a nominal Roman Catholic. Also, since the 'sixties' Quebec has had an increase in immigrants who were neither Jewish or Christian. Many of Quebec's new landed residents came from Africa and the Orient, and they brought with them their religious tenets. Thus, it is now common to see a variety of religious systems and sects that are not only not Roman Catholic, but also not Christian. In Montreal, there are a variety of religious systems for the population to chose from, such as, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a wide range of Christian sects.

As the break down of the authority and prestige of the Roman Catholic Church increased, it allowed more Quebecers the chance to try other religious systems without the social pressures against such a move. A period of religious tolerance, in Quebec, allowed people to familiarize themselves with other religious forms of expression. It may even have been a factor in denomination switching, especially if convenience is a factor in switching. However, this is only a hypothesis which is beyond this study. Nevertheless, it is possible that the breakdown of an authoritarian religious system, such as the Roman Catholic Church, allowed people to rethink what is important to them, which could have also contributed to denominational switching.

In the last thirty years there has been a major social change in Quebec, that is, there is more confidence among the French speaking majority, not only in their collective, but also in their individual future. This social change has initially caused a move away from most forms of religion, and towards other forms of social expression, such as secularization. In Quebec this has led to a movement towards a complete loss of any official religious affiliation. Therefore denominational switching may be viewed as simply a change in personal orientation, like changing political inclinations when the former party no longer fulfils the needs of the individual.

#### **REMAINDER OF THESIS**

Affiliation, or becoming a member of a religious group, involves, or at least implies, that the individual accepts the values of that group. It may or may not involve a conversion-like experience. It is important to understand what sociological and motivational factors influence individuals to leave their old denomination and to formally become members of another denomination in which they have no prior membership.

For some switchers becoming a member of a new religious group may be viewed as a form of rebirth, a creation of a new life with new values. For others, affiliation or joining a new religious group is done to impress a significant other, or to

keep the peace within the social life of the family. For many switchers, denominational switching fills a perceived deficiency in their lives. For them denominational switching is a vehicle used to create a more satisfying way of life.

This paper will show that denominational switching is a deliberate act, and not motivated by convenience. Switchers are characterized as having serious motives for leaving their original group and becoming a member of another religious group. This paper hypothesizes that switchers are looking for a religious group that more adequately expresses their personal religious commitment, and that they are not simply changing "brands". Affiliation is considered to be a matter of conviction rather than a matter of convenience. Switchers are people who are dissatisfied with their present religious group and look for another one that will satisfy them.

Switchers are viewed as being more active, wishing to achieve a meaningful change in their life. The new religious group is the means to initiate and maintain that change. Denominational switching is seen as a positive move that allows individuals to control their own lives. It is an accomplishment. Switchers are also believed to be more religiously committed than stayers. This is because they have chosen to join the new religious group for a reason and that they wish to participate and contribute to the group. The hypothesis of this paper is that switchers to the more liberal religious group, that is, the Lakeshore Unitarian

Congregation, will be more religiously committed than the switchers to the more orthodox religious group, that is, Christ Church Cathedral. The switchers to the 'liberal' Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation will participate more, and be more committed, because of their reasons for joining. They join with this group because it demands a personal commitment, because of its' programs and because of an individual conviction to control their own lives. The issues addressed in this study discuss why and how an individual switches from one religious group to another. It will look at why people become switchers, how they locate a new religious group, why they join a particular group and what denominational switching means to them and the new religious group. The study consists of a literature review, a conceptual model, an analysis of the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church Cathedral and an analysis of the switcher and the conceptual model.

#### **CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

There was a similarity in the reasons for leaving the old religious group, that is, switchers rejected its values or norms. Both groups of switchers were looking for a more 'liberal' religious group, and found it in their new group. 'Liberal' had a different meaning for each group. Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation defined liberal as meaning that they could individually decide how they wanted to



participate, that is, they felt that they were in control. 'Liberal' for Christ Church switchers meant that they were able to receive the sacraments, which was important to them, in a friendlier atmosphere, and from a more personable ordained priest. They required an organization which was controlled by a higher authority. Both felt a sense of acceptance and belonging in their new group.

The reasons for joining the new religious groups were different. Switchers to Christ Church wanted higher authority and structure, as well as being interested in the religious programs. The switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were overwhelmingly attracted to its programs which allowed them to maximize participation and freedom of choice.

Both groups of switchers were personally active in the process of switching. They deliberately looked for a new religious group that would meet their present desires. Both groups showed a high change in self identity: 75% in switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation; and 77% in switchers to Christ Church. A high commitment level 92% was also seen in the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, and 67% in Christ Church. The reason for the higher level of commitment in the Lakeshore Unitarian switchers is due to the fact that individuals were searching for a religious group that would allow them to fully participate in all phases of their religious life, while switchers to Christ Church were committed to participate in the religious programs while

allowing others in authority to run the religious group.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section looks at existing studies to determine what is relevant to the study of denominational switching and sustains arguments for the basic concepts of the thesis. Current literature addresses why and how people leave groups. Other literature investigates religious commitments. The literature also studies the degree of personal change by individuals, while others are concerned with the process of conversion, that is, active versus passive models.

To understand why denominational switching requires individuals to leave their present religious group and join another, we need to look at the aforementioned literature. Joining a religious group may not necessarily be related to a personal change. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how people become members of a religious group, and the degree of personal change they undergo when they join a new religious group. Apostasy, religious commitment, character and degree of personal change, models and denominational switching are other areas that need investigation.

The importance of religious socialization in acquiring and maintaining a world view was noted by Berger (1967). He stated that individuals came to adopt a particular world view through some form of socialization. They did this either

through childhood religious socialization, or by changing their world view through a conversion process. The individual establishes their world view by interacting with significant others, parents, teachers and peers.

Lenski (1963) felt that religious institutions themselves were highly dependent upon groups of people who socialized and indoctrinated other members into the world view of the religious group. Thus people acquire and maintain their world view through socialization and interaction with others.

The factors contributing to development and maintenance of religious belief, commitment to religious socialization, and to interaction with individuals who share a similar world view, have been studied by such researchers as Roberts and Davidson (1984), Welch (1981) and Gaede (1976). The influence of religious socialization on adult religious experience has focused on the relative influence of the following three agents of religious socialization: the family; peers; and, the church as an institution. (Greeley and Rossi, 1966; Greeley et al., 1976; Himmelfarb, 1979; Madsen and Vernon, 1983; and Cornwall, 1985) The majority of the research suggests that the most important broker of religious socialization is the family, but that peers and the church do influence the individual as well.

## APOSTASY

Switching from one denomination to another involves withdrawing from one group and becoming a member of another. Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) seem to support the thesis that the increase of secularization in Quebec may be a contributing factor to the increase and acceptability of denominational switching. Their study also states that previously held beliefs were rejected by the people leaving their formal religious group. However, their assumption that 'modern values of universalism' would lead to new religious identity, appears to support why people switch to Unitarianism, but it does not explain why individuals switch to the orthodox, or 'other world' religious groups, such as the Anglican Church.

Hastings and Hope (1975) and Hunsberger's (1978) studies suppose that denominational switching may be consistent with parental teaching. These studies may partly explain why such individuals might switch to Unitarianism, that is, because their parents taught religious toleration and developed good parenting skills. However, it does not appear to explain why individuals may wish to switch to Anglicanism, since religion itself nor the need for religious experimentation is important and does not fit into the religious model of Anglicanism.

Limited research has focused on why people leave new religious groups, noting that only a small minority of individuals who join new religious groups actually stay for lengthy periods of time. (Levine, 1984; Bird and Reimer, 1982)

Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) defined predictors of apostasy including: political radicalism; intellectualism; emotional maladjustment; parental alienation; and, loss of religious belief. They characterize apostasy as not only a loss of religious faith but also as the rejection of a specific community as the basis for self-identity. Switchers rejecting the norms of the religious community in which they were raised in are symptomatic of familial strain and dissociation from parents. Rebellion against parental authority, control, or religious teaching are also causes of apostasy.

There are three potential processes leading to apostasy according to Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977). First, secularization, which is the elimination of religion in contemporary society as the basis for cultural unity potentially leads to apostasy. Second, alienation-rebellion, that is, a rejection of previous beliefs that attracts the religious and the religious communal identification, leading to apostasy. Third, a commitment to the 'modern values of universalist achievement', which undermines the need for a religious identity and consciously creates a new and broader identification, again, leading to apostasy.

Hastings and Hoge (1975 & 1976), Wuthnow and Mellinger (1978), and Hunsberger (1978) testify that college students switching religious affiliation is more than a rebellion against their parents. It concludes, along with Johnson (1973)

that denominational switching is consistent with parental religious training and that religious freedom allows individuals to look for a group that satisfies their personal religious needs.

## **RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT**

Studies of religious commitment are relevant to the study of denominational switching because the act of affiliating with a new religious group involves to some degree the making of a commitment to that group. This section will review various studies that bear on the question of commitment, its nature, its forms and the reasons why individuals make religious commitments.

There are theoretical models that attempt to explain the motivation and the commitment level, for example, Hoge and Carrol (1978) and Glock and Stark (1965 & 1966). The deprivation theory, for example, relates religious commitment to a person's deprivation, such as, social or economic, and generally hypothesizes that an individual will attempt to compensate for their deprivation, and this leads to a high commitment.

Lenski (1963) conceptualized several religious dimensions, such as, doctrinal, orthodoxy, devotionism, communal and associational involvement in socio-religious

groups. Unfortunately, Lenski did not make a distinction between nominal and active participation. Glock and Stark (1965) conceptualized Lenski's ideas into five dimensions of personal religious commitment: experimental; ideological; ritualistic; intellectual; and, consequential. Stark and Glock (1968) rearranged these into the following categories: belief; experience knowledge; and, consequences. They did this in an attempt to establish a pattern that could be found in other types of commitment, such as, political commitment.

Hoge and Carrol (1978) continued to categorize the dimension of commitment into the following: deprivation; child rearing; doctrinal beliefs; status groups; and, localism. These categories were developed in an attempt to explain the different levels of individual church participation and commitment. The deprivation category stated that individuals compensated their personal dispossession by religious commitment. An individual's deprivation is assumed to be a motivational excuse for switching religious affiliation. Ringer and Babbie (1967) support this position. In their 'family surrogate theory' they state that unmarried individuals or those without families would relate to the religious group as their surrogate family and become highly committed. However, research by Hoge and Polk (1980) prove almost no support for this as an explanation for church participation and commitment.

A change in religious affiliation should be viewed "as a



feeling of deficiency for the individual who is seeking an integrative force in industrial society." (Wallace,1978). The deficiency was something an individual lacked or it was some need one wanted fulfilled, and a religious affiliation was the means to compensate for it. Wallace proposed that individuals who receive fewer rewards from society will be more prone to join a religious group whose philosophy includes a promise of other worldly rewards regardless of one's social position. Second, people who are undergoing a role change or some other crisis have to contend with stress and will join a religious group as a means of relieving the tension. Wallace also proposed that people who have not experienced religious values within a family setting or lack knowledge of religious values will be more likely to look to a religious group to give them " the kind of meaning in life which religion can afford them". When an individual has an attachment to a person who values their religious affiliation highly, then the individual will participate in that religious group in " order to share the membership with the significant other". (Wallace,1978)

The potential switcher is one who possesses social liabilities, such as, low income, low education and occupational levels, older people, and females, according to Wallace, and the more defects an individual has the more likely one will be inclined to switch religious affiliation. The possibility of switching is increased if the individual is introduced to a significant other. The significant other,

also a committed member, raises the possibility of bringing the new candidate into the group, and will have a positive affect on one's decision to become a member. Kildahl (1965) suggests that sudden conversions occur for individuals who score lower on intelligence tests and higher on a hysteria scale. This hypothesis categories switching and/or conversion as something that resides within the individual. One is seen as being psychologically dysfunctional and is often viewed as being susceptible to psychological influences rather than by situational or other social factors. While these factors might identify a limited number of switchers, such as, the disenfranchised, it does not explain why affluent people, male and female, young and old, who do not have a committed significant other in the new religious group, switch. This theory, therefore, does not explain all the factors and processes an individual takes in joining a new religious group.

The Child Rearing Theory was developed by Nash (1968) and Nash and Berger (1962). They theory found that adults with young children will join a religious group for the sake of the children and therefore participate more. This thesis confirms that switchers with children in the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation or Christ Church Cathedral also took a more active role in the church.

The Doctrinal Beliefs Theory states that religious beliefs will affect church participation and commitment. If

an individual holds orthodox beliefs the participation and commitment will be high, and vice versa. Church life is initially based on personal relationships and is often formative in developing religious beliefs. (Lofland and Stark, 1965; Hoge and Polk, 1980) found that their research supported the Doctrinal Belief Theory. However, the exact causal relationship was not identifiable. Therefore, to test this theory models need to be defined that will assess " church participation as intervening between social influences and doctrinal beliefs, and doctrinal beliefs as intervening between social influences and church participation ". (Hoge and Carroll, 1978)

The Status Group Theory ( Garth and Mills, 1958 ) surmises that individuals who share a common social identity, or people who wish to associate with other individuals of a perceived social status, will participate more and be highly committed. This theory is verified when church participation and commitment come about, partly because of the identification with a specific church, and because of the association with the church members. This theory does not, however, address nor explain why some church members who may have been committed, leave the group or socially conscious-non-committers.

The Localism Theory states that when individuals have local values, as opposed to cosmopolitan values, they participate in local groups, that is in religious groups that

uphold their local culture and values (Roof,1976), which provides the day-to-day interaction for its members. Studies found that people in rural communities participate more in the religious group than those in the city. Thus the scale of community reference should predict church attendance and lead to higher commitment levels. While Roof's focus on community orientation was not a test of plausibility structures (Berger,1967), it appears to be an indicator of religious commitment. Unfortunately, it does not solve the problem of how the local networks of interaction differ, and how they influence the individual to choose a particular world view or a religious group to express that point of view.

The Status Group and Localism theories may be seen as starting points for understanding commitment. The Deprivation theory explains why people are committed to a cult or new religious movement, but it does not explain participation in mainline, orthodox religious groups. The Child Rearing theory appears to have partial explanation for participation among parents of young children, but it does not explain why those parents continue to be active or drop out when their children grow up.

Several studies have shown that friendship ties with a significant other within a particular religious group results in a higher level of participation and commitment. (Gaede, 1974 & 1978; Welch, 1981; and Roberts and Davidson, 1984) Nevertheless, it is possible that an individual may have

several influential friends who are members of a group and not be affected, and/or have a significant other who is not a member of a religious group yet be personally active in that group. According to Marie Cornwall, religious socialization directly influences the development of a religious world view, and it is also important since it channels individuals into a social world that maintains one's subjective reality (Cornwell, 1987). The process of friendship ties is very dynamic and has not been fully addressed by research.

#### **CHARACTER AND DEGREE OF PERSONAL CHANGE**

Another major theme revolves around the amount of personal change in conversion, and how much personal change and commitment are required to classify an individual as having converted. These studies indicate that there is considerable variety in the character and degree of change which people undergo as they become involved in a religious group with which they were not previously associated. This study has discovered a great deal of variety in the degree of personal change associated with an involvement in a new religious group.

People are changed by committing to something. Nevertheless, there are degrees of commitment that an individual can display, that is, from simple attendance and participation to a fanatical level in which one will become

totally involved with the group. This question leads Nock (1933) to define the concept of adhesion as being different from conversion. Adhesion, as defined by Nock, involves the acceptance of new religions as supplement to one's personal way of living, and not as a substitute to previously held beliefs.

Berger (1963) chose to develop the concept of Alternation to define a concept different to conversion. Alternation, according to Berger, meant that an individual may alternate back and forth among contradicting religious system without converting. The individual does this in order to enter a religious group that provide him or her with a meaning to their present situation. As the situation changes for the individual, they change to another religious group that fulfils their present condition.

Travisano (1970) built on Berger's notion of alternation, by presenting an interpretation of conversion in a symbolic interactionist tradition. He believed that individuals are in control of their lives and seek out changes in identity. Travisano questioned if all switchers moved from one total universe to another, and concluded that they probably did not. However, he believed that the switcher did experience a change in perspective and in identity, if only slightly. Whether or not this leads to conversion is not answered by Travisano.

Travisano criticized Berger's (1963) model believing that it would be useful to distinguish transformation on two

levels, identity and role. Identity acknowledged that the individual must establish an identity for oneself as well as for others, if positive interaction was to proceed in a meaningful manner. He conceptualized role as social probabilities. Travisano felt that it would be difficult to delineate a personal role since it depended upon different factors. For an individual to establish a new identity one had to demonstrate it to make it valid, and this required the development of a new role with definitions of what was the new behaviour. If this new identity required a complete disruption of the old norms, then he classified it as conversion, while anything less was classified as alternation. Thus conversion was caused by drastic changes in personality and personal behaviour. Travisano's definition of conversion is similar to William James' (1958) in that religious "ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place and that (religious) aims form the habitual centre of his energy".

Personal identity changes that are not drastic as William James' definition would be classified as alternations, by Travisano. Alternation, then is a personal transition to a new identity which is permitted within the individual's established universe of discourse and is more casual than compulsory extensions to already established roles. Gordon (1974) cultivated a similar theory of distinguishing changes in identity and commitment. He defined conversion as a

radical change in a person's life, while anything less was defined as consolidation. Regeneration (Lang and Lang, 1961) was used to account for those switchers, as in the case of St. Augustine, who had previously rejected, and had not taken his original religious system seriously, and for whatever reasons returned and accepted its message.

Richardson (1980) built on the work of Travisano and Gordon, and formulated an explicit application of symbolic interaction theory. He applied the activist model to explain the individual's conversion careers in new religious movements. He felt it was necessary to research the individual's plans, desires and motives for joining a religious group.

Alternation, as a form of switching, is seen as a deliberate act. Individuals actively seek out a new religious group rather than maintain their old denominational identity and lapse into-non-attendance. (Hadaway, 1980) Individual seekers are therefore more likely to undergo a conversion process since they are actively pursuing a self-transformation. The seeker does not have the appearance of a person frantically switching because of a life changing process that has personal and/or spiritual meaning to her/him. Barson and Vestis (1982) thought that the seeker could be explained by an analogy to the psychology of creativity. The individual seeker was not passive, one did not switch because of powerful external factors, but was attempting to fulfil



his/her creative needs. Hadaway (1980) was convinced that individuals switched for many reasons, but that more people did so as a matter of conviction rather than convenience. This model has been useful in identifying parameters for switching, however, it does not explain why an individual left her/his old denomination and sought out a new religious group. Nor does it recognize nor explain why some people passively switch or simply drop-out of a religious group and do not seek out another one.

#### **ACTIVE VS PASSIVE PARADIGM**

Studies have debated the degree to which conversions occur, or the degree to which individuals are actively involved in bringing about the change. The passive model focuses on the way conversions occur, or are caused by social or personal forces. Subsequently, the active model converges on the degree individuals seek to bring about these changes.

Much of the debate between the passive and the active models is on attempts to find a mediating position between these two extremes. This thesis will find little support for the passive model, in that most switchers were actively involved in at least the process of switching.

The traditional paradigm of conversion states that the experience of radical change befalls a person. The individual undergoes this change almost passively, as described in the

'Pauline experience'. Studies show passive conversions have the following characteristics: the experience must be sudden, dramatic and emotional. It must also be inexplicable, in any terms, except that the convert was under the control of an agent not under the convert's control.

The passive model assumes that the experience was a single event causing a dramatic change. The individual has a complete break with the past, negates the old self, and implants a new self. This event has been categorized in individualized and psychological ways. It assumes a passive subject and it is considered as being predestinational or predispositional.

The most popular deterministic version of this model is the brainwashing, mind control, or coercive persuasion model. There have been attempts (Singer, 1979) to apply this paradigm in the study of new religious movements and cults. The basic thesis of this model is that the individual is converted by devious means acting upon an unsuspecting and vulnerable individual. This model implies that if enough information is available then a religious group can predict whether or not that individual can be converted.

John Lofland and Rodney Stark's (1965) article developed an example of a passive paradigm in which conversion is the main focus and is defined as when a person gives up one such perspective or ordered view of the world for another. Lofland's model consists of specific conditions that

accumulate and account for conversion to a millennium sect. Conversion, according to this model, requires the individual to have an experience that is enduring accompanied by acutely felt tensions. The individual must also have been frustrated in their aspirations, and these tensions must be felt within a religious framework. The individual must also be highly prone to impose a religious meaning to events. This is believed to lead the person to define themselves as a religious seeker, and contrary to other passive models, the individual searches for a religious group that will satisfy her or his discontent. The individual will then take considerable action to achieve their goal of finding meaning in a new religious setting.

The individual next encounters the sect at a turning point in their life. Thus, the individual has come to the moment when the old ways and their values have failed him or her, and they are faced with doing something. An effective bond is then formed with one or more of the sect's converts. Some positive attraction is developed and this allows the new member to accept the sect's message. The individual must then be effectively isolated from non-sect members. This aids the new member to accept this significant person's opinions, and this leads to conversion. After the new member is totally converted one qualifies as a deplorable agent searching for new members. The new convert, in this model, has been exposed to intensive interaction. The individual has accepted the

sect's message totally, and has put her or his life at the disposal of the sect. However, there has been no corroboration with any research that these conditions are the reasons for individuals switching to 'main line' religious groups.

The passive model depicts the individual as being driven into a religious group that then manipulates her/him. The individual is considered to be a passive object controlled by psychological and social forces. Conversion, according to this model, is caused by the following situations: first, the person has experienced antecedent psychological or social stress; second, the individual has had prior socialization or involvement with the religious group; third, there has been social interactive processes related to the group's networks, resulting in a commitment and/or encapsulation.

This model may account for affiliation or conversion to some new religious movements or cults. It provides a convenient account for people attracted to these fringe groups. It does not explain why individuals voluntarily switch to mainline religious groups in the absence of confinement, stress or overstimulation. This model also does not explain why people leave these new religious groups and cults.

An alternative view of conversion stresses an active person seeking to develop self-transformation. The seeker is seen as being on a journey for their own identity. Lofland

and Stark's 1965 model " contained an implicit focus on a volitional subject, along with more traditional deterministic elements". (Richardson, 1985) In his book " Doing Social Life", Lofland (1976) developed a more activist perspective. He assumed the individual to be more responsible for his/her switching, that is, one is active rather than reacting passively.

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) enumerated six types or motifs of conversion experiences. " These vary from individual, private investigations of alternative ideologies and ways of life that eschew social involvement with members of religious organizations (the intellectual motif) to profound experiences that are imbued with social influences and pressures such as occur in the midst of an emotionally aroused group or crowd (the revivalist motif) or under special circumstances, resemble brainwashing or mind control (coercive motif)". (Shannon, 1985)

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) identified five of the most memorable and orienting experiences a person participating in-self-transformation would encounter. They hypothesized that there was a " probability of a relatively good fit between the real experiences, of the individuals and the accounts". Conversion, for these motifs is defined as "a radical reorganization of identity" (Travisano, 1970); and/or "a conscious shift in one's sense of grounding". (Max Hierick, 1977)

Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) first motif, titled the Intellectual Model, depicts the individual as being responsible for initiating the search for the new religious group by such means as, reading books, watching TV, in order to become acquainted with other religious groups. There is little external pressure on the individual and they usually have a reasonably high level of belief before becoming a member. The second motif is called the Mystical Model. In this model there is no external pressure, however, the individual usually has had a period of stress before experiencing a high level of emotional arousal. This causes the person to believe that one has had a mystical experience after which the person becomes an active member.

The Experimental Model or a 'convert-in-process' is the third motif. The individual demonstrates an attitude towards the new religious group and is willing to try the group out, but will withhold her or his decision to convert for a considerable length of time. It then becomes the responsibility of the new religious group to prove to the new member that it is in his/her best interest to convert. The prospective convert is invited to take an experimental attitude and to participate in the religious group's activities and rituals. There is very little social pressure to participate since the new member is taking a 'wait and see' philosophy. Intensive interaction and time are the keys to conversion in this model.

The Affectional Model analyzes the positive affective bonds in the conversion process. This model states that personal attachments or a desire to impress a practising member is the key to the conversion process. The cognitive element is reemphasized and is replaced by an emotional element, that is, a desire to accept the opinions of a respected or admired person.

The Revivalist Model assumes that conversion is caused by a profound experience which occurred within the context of an emotionally aroused crowd. This model requires a high level of social pressure and the prospective convert must participate in the religious group before one is converted.

Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) last motif is called the Coercive Model. This model requires two main features: the compulsion of the individual; and, that the individual wishes to confess personal guilt or that one absolutely wishes to embrace an alternative religious group. This model requires the religious group to be able to exert a high degree of external pressure on the individual over a long period of time. During this time, the individual experiences an intense arousal of emotions and this will cause uncertainty that will lead the person to an empathic identification and to finally convert. This model describes a personality change, not a change in affiliation. Lofland and Skonovd admit that this model's adaptability is rare.

Robert Strauss, a student of Lofland, developed a model

of seekership that required the individual's need for 'creative transformation' to be satisfied in an active meaningful manner. He saw people actively desiring to create a more satisfying life. This model was expanded to view conversion as being an "accomplishment of an activity strategizing seeker interacting with the other constituting a religious collectively". (Strauss, 1979) This model sees the seeker as an individual "striving and strategizing to achieve quantum change in his or her life experience, and which treats the group and others involved in this process as salesmen, skill coaches, guides, and helpers, themselves typically converts further along in their own personal quest". (Strauss, 1979)

The seeker is actively striving and searching for a meaningful change in his/her religious life. This paradigm assumes that human beings are active, exploratory, creative and manipulative. These human factors lead people to construct and manage their lives with their social environment. Conversion, affiliation, and/or switching appears as an individual accomplishment rather than as an effect of some other factor.

The activist model hypothesizes that individuals hold some practical value in the rituals they perform, and that they attempt to maintain a meaningful and consistent life style. When the meaning or orderliness of the individual breaks down, they actively seek to find alternative means of



coping with that breakdown. Therefore, it assumes people are constantly constructing and reconstructing their social realities in relationship to collective behaviours and institutions. Religious conversion and switching are to be approached as both a collective and personal accomplishment.

How seekers choose a new religious group is by first verifying their social networks, mass media, and/or any other possible source of information, regarding alternative religious groups, including chance encounters, in the hope of finding a prospective lead. Once a potential lead is identified the individual makes contact with the group or their representatives. If the individual feels that a particular religious group looks promising then they will investigate it. The person will attend the group's meeting, talk with other members, and if the group seems acceptable, they will try it out, learn the language, rituals, and operate within the accepted norms of the group. The individual may not automatically believe or accept the group's message at this point in time.

Tippett (1977) conceptualized the switching process as happening over three definable units of time. In the first phase, The Period of Awareness, the individual becomes aware of another system, or aware of relating, that is different from her or his original religious group. This awareness may be the result of anything from a maturing process through education, contact with people from a different social

religious background, or from within, that is, person tension, direct advocacy, or from any number of other sources.

Tippett's model describes a moment, a point of realization, when the person realizes that the other religious group's philosophy is not an alternative point of view, but the one that has meaning to him or her, and that it is possible for them to accept it. At this moment the person moves into the second phase, The Period of Decision. This period is potentially a long one in which one may share experiences with the new religious group that may or may not be accepted. Tippett believes that there might be an act of modification in which the individual accepts the new religious group's philosophy with modification. This can lead the switcher to accept the basic belief system, however, they will model it to fit their own cultural background, or even develop it into a syncretion. At some point in 'The Period of Decision' the individual will eliminate most of their resistance and be ready to accept the norms of the group.

Tippett's third phase, The Period of Incorporation, is the period of acceptance, usually evidenced by a formal act of incorporation, such as baptism. Once the person has reached this point they have rejected and separated themselves from the original religious group, but may still carry the baggage of the previous group, which may make them angry or resentful of their old group.

## DENOMINATION SWITCHING

Research in this area has focused mainly on two topics: first, on the social factors of people switching to different religious groups, mainline, liberal, and fringe or new religious movements; and second, whether or not switching is associated with the phenomena of conversion. Denominational switching studies have not fully addressed the reasons why people leave one denomination, why they join another, and the process they go through in choosing the new religious group. The goal of this paper is to develop a conceptual model that outlines the main motivators in leaving a religious group, the process the person takes to find another group and the reason they have for joining a particular religious group.

Research by Strauss (1976) has allowed us to obtain an understanding of one reason why people switch. When an individual's religious group no longer allows them to maintain an equilibrium the person may switch religious groups to regain that balance. Bird (Unpublished) emphasizes the fact that there are some religious groups that do not expect new members to convert but to simply affiliate. This allows us to investigate the reasons and processes other than conversion in denominational switching.

A pluralist society lacking an established church offers a wide range of 'quasi-ethic' religious groupings. Religious affiliation is not simply one of religious faith but one of

self-identification and social belonging. Stark and Glock suggested that individuals switched 'upward' to more liberal denominations from the more conservative faith. They believed that people switched because of upward mobility and that the tendency for upward mobility was to switch to more liberal, higher status religious groups. Also, the religious dogma, or lack of it were seen by individuals as being more congruent with modern life in the liberal religious groups.

Roof and Hadaway (1979) identified a change in how Americans chose to identify themselves and they attempted to develop a model that would be more sensitive to those values. They felt it necessary to establish a 'mainline-fringe' institutional distinction. This distinction would focus on a group's value commitment and cultural style as the basis for a person's selection. What is important is whether the religious group is seen and perceived by others as part of the established normative order. A religious group would be considered as 'mainline' if it was perceived as being congruent with the existing culture. It would be considered 'fringe' if the religious group held different beliefs and behaviours from the culture at large. Within the 'mainline' religious group are both conservative and liberal mainline denominations.

Roof and Hadaway (1979) found that there were three types of switching from the major mainline Protestant American groups to other mainline orthodox mainline groups, to liberal

mainline denominations and to fringe groups. High status mainline denominations attracted switchers from the major conservative mainline groups. This finding was consistent with the expectations of Stark and Glock (1969).

Roof and Hadaway also investigated the social characteristics of denominational switchers and found that "those switchers to 'none' tend to be younger, predominately male, more educated, more committed to the new morality, less happy, and have less confidence in American institutions". (1979) They found that switchers to mainline denominations felt less alienated than the switchers to 'none', however, they had higher educational and socioeconomic status levels than switchers to fringe groups or to 'stayers'. They were also more optimistic in their outlook and kept "with the pattern of upward switching" associated with upward social mobility. Switchers to the fringe groups were characterized as being less educated, having lower incomes, were less optimistic about people and institutions, were less happy and more conservative in their moral values.

Strauss (1976) hypothesized that "when normal resources and strategies cease to maintain an individual's sense that one's life is intolerable one may act to change it". These life changes were accomplished through a sequence of strategies that first discover transformative means and then systematically exploit them. Strauss (1976) formulated that the individual first uses passive or change strategies, then

as they more closely investigate the religious group they become an active seeker using a variety of seeking tactics which eventually leads them to a potential group that will restore their equilibrium.

Maintenance or equilibrium is the continuous process needed for a social reality (Strauss, 1976), and people will act to balance their personal and collective reality. Therefore, if an individual is out of balance they will attempt to eliminate the disruption of their maintenance and find a system or group that will restore the equilibrium to a satisfactory level. However, even when this person has switched to a new religious group and has found a positive maintenance level, unqualified belief or conversion will probably be a gradual occurrence. The assumption Strauss makes is that by switching to a specific religious group to regain balance the individual will experience a conversion like transformation, yet not all religious groups expect self-transformation from their new members. Our study showed that most switchers to both the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church Cathedral did not 'convert' yet they had restored their equilibrium and have remained members.

Denominational switching or changing religious systems does not necessarily mean that the switcher has completely converted. The switcher may immerse themselves in the new religious group's world view and belief system, and if these allow the person to maintain a meaningful and consistent life,

they will remain an active member and maybe convert, otherwise the person will leave the religious group and possibly continue the search for another religious group.

Switching patterns are more complex than is generally assumed by the research. Each denomination constantly loses and gains members. There is also a growing number of switchers to fringe groups or to no religious group. These are extreme and important events. The reasons why a person switches to a fringe group or to 'none' may not be the same as switching to mainline religious groups. More research is needed in this area. Understanding why people switch denominations could tell researchers how switchers view themselves and their commitment levels. This study has developed a model that can hopefully explain why people switch without being restricted to the concept of 'conversion'.

Membership in religious groups continually fluctuates. Membership involves stayers, potential dropouts, as well as switchers. Religiosity is rarely a constant. The most stable member today may switch in the future. Religious groups must realize that the level of commitment and motivation for attending and participating in a religious group differs for each individual member. Each member may not switch simply for doctrinal or theological reasons, but because of value commitments and/or behavioural styles associated with a particular religious identity, thus offering predictors as to why people switch can be a way for religious groups to attract

new members as well as attempting to keep those members they already have.

This study was interesting in that it upheld a number of theories while rejecting others. There was little or no support for the deprivation theories of Hoge and Carroll (1978), Ringer and Babbie (1967) family theory, or the Passive model. There were conflicting results for studies that linked denominational switching with parental teaching. The paradox evident in this study indicates that while parental teaching may have fostered an idea of a religious life for the children, switchers to Christ Church and the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation approached their solution to this differently. Switchers to Christ Church wanted to continue in an orthodox religion similar to the one they were raised in, while switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were rebelling against the religious system of their parents and their parental teaching, especially as it related to their own religious education. Previously held religious beliefs were rejected by most of the switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, as stated in the research of Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977), however, this was not the situation with the switchers to Christ Church.

This study supported the Status Group Theory of Garth and Mills (1958), the Doctrinal Beliefs Theory of Lofland and Stark (1965), the Child Rearing Theory of Nash and Berger (1962), Nash (1968). Switchers to both Christ Church and the



Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation displayed behaviour that leads us to state that switching to these organizations was partially due to their status, the beliefs the group espoused and for couples with children, a genuine desire to give their children a religious education. This study also affirmed the Active Model. The majority of switchers were actively seeking a change in their religious and social life, although not all switchers went through a self-transformation while doing this. All switchers were in control of their lives, and were seeking a religious organization in which they could feel comfortable.

Joining a religious group was not always related to a personal change in self-identity, especially for switchers from a Roman Catholic religious group to Christ Church. They were looking for a religious group that held similar values to their previous group, but administered them in a more humane manner. This study concludes that the religious organization, as an institution, plays a vital role in attracting new members. The religious institution, through its symbols, rituals and forms of worship, as well as its stated philosophy, allows potential switchers to investigate them, and gives the religious seeker a focal point upon which to make decisions. This study adds to the current literature in that it focuses on why people left their previous religious group, and why they joined another, both at an individual and institutional level.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Not all denominational switchers are converted to the new religious group nor do they necessarily undergo a religious experience. There appears to be reasons other than a 'conscious shift' in one's sense of identity. It is also possible that denominational switchers who have had a change of their 'sense of root reality' may not become committed to their new religious group in that they may not participate fully in the group's activities while experiencing a change of inner sense of self-identity. It is also possible for the denominational switcher to have experienced no change in self identity yet be totally committed to the new religious group. There are a number of reasons why a person loses interest in a particular religious group and drops out or switches. However, because I have not been able to contact or interview people who left Christ Church Cathedral or The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, the reasons why people left their former religious group will therefore be based upon asking new switchers why they left their previous religious group.

### THE MODEL

The various reasons people change their religious grouping can be categorized into three functions: reasons for leaving the old religious group; reasons for joining the new religious group; and, the process of looking, locating and choosing the new group.

#### REASONS FOR LEAVING A RELIGIOUS GROUP :

- Mobility: Change from one geographical area to another on the part of the individual.

- Rejection of a member by an existing religious group, that is, because of mixed marriages or race, colour, et cetera.
- Rejection of present group because one is dissatisfied and leaves.
- Decline in interest by people, who over a period of time are not motivated to stay.
- Perception of another religious group as being more attractive or appealing.

#### REASONS FOR JOINING A RELIGIOUS GROUP :

- Need for structure in the switcher's life.
- Attraction of religious group's programs, such as, music, daycare, or social action.
- Need for reassurance from higher or other authority.
- Need for self identity or self assurance or self respect, that is, a commitment to self authority.
- Need for acceptance by perceived important people, for example, family, business associates, or friends.
- Undergoing a religious experience, that is, a positive psychological experience.
- Attraction of group's beliefs, philosophy.

#### PROCESS OF SWITCHING :

- Church shopping - Switcher actively searches, does comparison shopping, and tries other religious groups before finally choosing.
- An influential person introduces the switcher to the new religious group.
- Intellectual church shopping - Potential switcher learns about a religious group, through the media or through conversations with an individual, then invests time studying the group and becomes convinced of the merits of the religious group before joining it.
- Switcher finds new religious group by accident or by some special circumstance, such as, a marriage or baptism in a new religious group other than their own.
- Switcher checks the telephone directory for a similar

religious group, for example, for those who have just move to a new location.

This paper will gauge the degree to which the switching of denominations is connected with (a) undergoing a religious experience, (b) experiencing a fundamental change in self-identity, and/or (c) markedly increasing commitment to the new religious association. Leaving old religious groups for new ones may or may not fit into W.James explanation of switching as being due to a religious experience that perceive truths not known before and now viewing the world with a 'clean and beautiful freshness'.

The process of switching and the actual joining of a new religious group may or may not have a marked effect in the switcher's self identity. It is possible that the switchers' self identity changed before they became a member and that now they do not view themselves as being changed at all. These changes in self identity, if they do occur, may or may not be related to a religious experience, if one actually happened. Denominational switchers may have had no prior religious experience nor any change in self identity yet be very active and motivated members of the new religious group.

After an individual has become a member of the new religious group, they may or may not exhibit a high commitment to the group. This would be evidenced by the new member participating in the new religious group's activities and by the individual attaching personal importance to this religious activity. It may be equally demonstrated by a switcher who has had no religious experience nor any change in self identity as well as by a member who has had a religious experience and change in self identity.

The conceptual model developed for this paper incorporates the three elements affecting the denominational switcher, that is , religious experience, change in self

identity and commitment.

#### PROFILE OF A RELIGIOUS SWITCHER

	RELIGIOUS	NO RELIGIOUS
	EXPERIENCE	EXPERIENCE
	(1) Highly	(5)
CHANGE IN	Committed	Committed
SELF IDENTITY		
	(2) Not Highly	(6) Not Committed
	Committed	
	(3)	(7)
NO CHANGE IN	Committed	Committed
SELF IDENTITY		
	(4)	(8)
	Not Committed	Not Committed

Thus the denominational switcher can be classified in one of the following groupings :

1. Had a religious experience, change in self-identity, and became committed.

These people have spent time in a religious organization, or at least have thought about religion, and believe in the philosophy of a higher authority. They have not been satisfied with their previous life, and have been looking for something to increase value in their life. They have surrendered some part of their old self and transferred it to another

authority. They are accepting of new values and a new self-image. This is followed by new behaviour and participation which symbolize this new identity and gives them pleasure or reinforces their experience(s). They are very accepting, even confident, in knowing that this experience is what they have been looking for. These people may see themselves as special, or elite and there may be a desire to get the 'message out' so that others can experience it also. They accept the experience because it confirms their expectations.

2. Had a religious experience, change in self-identity, but were not committed.

These individuals have had some experience with religious organizations, or family religious experience. The intensity of the experience moves them and it has some value to the individuals. They accept the experience(s) and develop new values, a new self-image, but there is no new behaviour that is representative of this conversion. The religious experience(s) coincided with their previously held values. These people are loners. They have varied personally in their religious life, or are likely to be personally affected by the experience but do not enjoy getting involved with groups. These individuals may have other interests and other ways of expressing their acceptance, they may believe that 'faith' is between themselves and their 'God'.

3. Had a religious experience, no change in self-identity, and

became committed.

These individuals' subjective experiences have not resulted in a new self-image or in a new set of personal values. These people may have previously changed, or have been exposed to an environment which allowed them to accept the experience, and were probably dissatisfied with their previous religious group. Something in their religious life was missing. The previous group's message or philosophy did not address their needs. These individuals have been members of a number of religious groups and are searching for one that suits them. They are joiners and are loyal to the group and are willing to do their part for that group.

4. Had a religious experience, no change in self-identity, and were not committed.

The individuals' personal experience did not effect a self-transformation. They have had previous exposure to religious ideas and religious organizations. Their religious experience confirms a pre-formulated concept already held and accepted. These people appear to be introverted. They are personally affected by the experience, and even though the group reinforces their experience, they are unable to express themselves through the group's activities. They express their religious feelings in personal ways outside the religious group.

5. No religious experience, change in self-identity, and became committed.

The motivation for these switchers to join the group was personal. They felt that they had the power to improve their personal situation. These individuals have experienced some form of surrender of their identity and transferred it to something or someone outside themselves. These people accept new values and feel that the new group is where they belong. They now have the strength of their convictions and are willing to take a risk. The group gives these individuals support. They seem to have a positive expectation about participating in the group and this leads to more personal commitment.

6. No religious experience, change in self-identity, and were not committed.

These people feel that this is the group where they belong. It is a group in which their personal needs are fulfilled. The individuals have accepted new values and perhaps a new self-image, but have not demonstrated this within the group by any behaviour that might symbolize this new identity. These individuals are people who are personally affected by the group, but are unable to express this affection through the group. They appear to be loners or people with other equally important concerns that are expressed outside the group.



7. No religious experience, no change in self-identity, but were committed.

These individuals participated in other groups but found them wanting. They did their part within the group but may have felt that they were restricted or were not allowed to participate fully, or that the participation held little personal meaning. These people seem to identify with the social dimension of the group and are good organizational people, loyal to the group, and willing to do their part within the group. If the motivation to join the group was a significant other, who is active within the group, they may be motivated to be just as active. If the motivation to join the group was that it was nearby, or their spouse was a member, they may have come to see the group's beliefs as their own. These individuals could be interested in a cause or may see the group as doing good. The group allows these people social interaction and the chance to do good, which they cannot do individually.

8. No religious experience, no change in self-identity, and were not committed.

These individuals are nominal members. They probably joined the group to please a person important to them. These people have no new self-image and no new values. Their social and personal values have already been established prior to joining the group. These individuals seem to attend the group to please a significant other but they do not experience

any pleasure in participating in its activities. Their personal interests are successfully satisfied outside the group. These individuals may be introverted or simply do not wish to get involved. They may also be selfish people who joined for very personal reasons. It is possible that these individuals' religious education was negative, and that they are still carrying this difficult memory with them. It is also possible that these people have retained the old denominational identity and have simply lapsed into non participation.

This study hypothesizes that switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation and Christ Church Cathedral will have the following characteristics:

#### **SWITCHERS TO THE LAKESHORE UNITARIAN CONGREGATION:**

##### Reasons for leaving and/or rejecting previous religious group.

They are not satisfied with their old religious group because it did not live up to their ideals and/or convictions.

##### Process of finding a new religious group.

They will actively search for a new religious group. They will be church shoppers. They will use their intellect rather than their emotions in this search.

Reasons for joining new religious group.

An attraction for the religious group's philosophy and/or activities will be the main reason for joining. They will have a high commitment to self-authority and wish to demonstrate this through the group's programmes.

General.

These switchers will not have a religious experience, nor will they have a significant change in self-identity. They are searching for the correct religious group, an elitist religious group. They will participate in the group's activities that interest them, but they will not be highly committed to the group as a whole.

**SWITCHERS TO CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL:**Reasons for leaving and/or rejecting previous religious group.

These switchers feel that their previous religious group was not structured sufficiently.

Process of finding a new religious group.

Through Church shopping, they will actively search for a new religious group, and will use emotional factors in their decision as to which religious group to try.

Reasons for joining a new religious group.

There is a need for structure and a need for reassurance from a higher authority. These switchers seek a religious

group that embraces them and guarantees aid from a superior source.

### General.

These switchers are more likely to have a religious experience or a conversion-like experience and will have a change in self-identity. They are looking for a religious group that is structured and that is spiritual or other-world orientated. They will demonstrate a high level of commitment.

The model developed is intended to encapsulate the important characteristics of a religious switcher. Switching occurs whether or not an individual has had a religious experience or not. The process the individual uses to find a new religious group, and the reasons for joining, may or may not change the religious switcher's self-identity. Also, once the individual has joined a new religious group he or she may or may not be committed to its activities.

This model allows us to stereotype a religious switcher into one of eight groupings. By categorizing religious switchers, we should be able to identify paradigms that exist in denominational switching. The questions this model will hopefully answer include: are there similarities among religious switchers to different religious organizations? or, are there marked differences? This should allow us to build a body of knowledge from which we can make predictions, such as, do certain religious organizations attract specific types

of switchers; are there identifiable religious switchers who might be attracted to religious organizations, in general, or to specific religious groups, et cetera.

This study concludes that the overall majority of religious switchers have had no religious experience, reject or were rejected by their previous religious group and actively sought out a religious group. The rejection of the previous religious group was perceived differently by switchers to Christ Church and the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Unitarian switchers felt that their previous religious group was irrelevant and was either unable or unwilling to allow them to control their religious life. This group of religious switchers were looking for personal involvement. They demanded individual control and participated in all aspects of their religious life, and they actively searched for a religious group that would allow them to express themselves individually, and be associated with other like minded individuals.

Rejection of the previous religious group, for Anglican switchers, related to the structure of that group and the manner in which the rituals were performed. These switchers were satisfied with the belief system, rituals, and forms of worship in their old group, however, they were not satisfied with how they were being administered. These switchers were seeking a religious group with a similar belief system and a similar set of rituals, and a group in which they could

partake in the rituals and worship comfortably.

The reasons for joining Christ Church or the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were different. While both groups of switchers were looking for a religious group in which they would feel at home, switchers to Christ Church wanted the new religious group to be a continuation of their previous religious tradition and upbringing. Christ Church felt comfortable because of the similarity of its rituals and the forms of worship. Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation joined because it was totally different from what they had been raised in. The rituals and the structure were different from their previous religious group and their religious upbringing. This was a religious organization that stressed individualism, elitism, personal commitment, and attracted those who felt strongly about individual achievement.

Thus, we see that knowing and understanding the goals of the religious switchers and the image of the religious organization are essential if we wish to be able to predict the chances of an individual switching to a specific religious group.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SWITCHING AND SWITCHERS TO THE LAKESHORE UNITARIAN CONGREGATION**

#### **FORMAL LEVEL**

Unitarians trace their roots back to the dawn of human history claiming that throughout the ages liberated people have always rebelled against dogma. People have continually rebelled against the status quo and demanded the opportunity and the right to inquire about sacred matters and to express their own convictions and not rely on dogma.

The spirit of Unitarianism, an affirmation of the rights of the individual to be their own supreme authority in matters of religious, scientific, and philosophical belief, continued until the sixteenth century as an unorganized but dynamic religious philosophy. A general movement of humanism in the sixteenth century led to a variety of speculation concerning religious and philosophical matters. Religious leaders of the sixteenth century openly questioned the official church position on the Trinity. Erasmus' omission of the Trinitarian verse (John 5:7) in his publication of the Greek New Testament, and his aversion to scholastic logic, caused people to ask questions and think about their religious beliefs. Servetus was also interested in the natural sciences as a

means to answer the questions of humanity as opposed to just accepting the church's traditional answers. This interest in science, as part of a religious system, is still a tendency found in modern Unitarianism.

The word Unitarian originated with the establishment of a religious movement that was anti Trinitarian and was founded on the the conception of the single personality of the Deity versus the orthodox doctrine of His true nature. The Unitarianism that emerged in the new world was based on the writings of Joseph Priestly. He attempted to make Christianity a rational philosophy that accepted tolerance and religious freedom. The emphasis was on the humanity of Jesus.

By the eighteenth century, the type of Unitarianism practiced was that of the humanity of Jesus and the tolerance of other beliefs. In the nineteenth century William Channing formalized Unitariansm as a religion that took its truth from the rational nature of God. However, futher clarification of this new liberal theology was needed. By the twentieth century Unitarianism was refashioned to accept the development of criticism, philosophy, science, as well as the theory of democracy.

Officially, membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association is open to all people, fourteen years of age and over. Becoming a member in an Unitarian Universalist congregation or fellowship is extremely simple. The only requirement is to fill out an application asking to join and



making a financial commitment. The new member's application is then voted upon at the next board of directors' meeting. Membership is almost automatic, as there are no written criteria for excluding anyone who wishes to join. If the applicant is eighteen years of age or older they will become a full voting member. If the applicant is under eighteen years of age one may become a member, however, one will not be able to vote on the congregation's financial matters or hiring practises.

Membership in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, or fellowship requires no belief or adherence to any creed or dogma. The new member is expected to participate at the congregational level, to be tolerant of the beliefs of the others in the congregation, to make a financial contribution and to 'pull their weight to the best of their ability'. Officially, the institutional position of the Unitarian Universalist Association is that there is no central dogma or creedal system to which any of their members must profess. However, there have been several statements of belief issued by the Unitarian Universalist Association's governing body indicating that, as an institution, they do in fact have a centralized set of principles and beliefs that they expect their congregations and its members to at least affirm and promote:

1. We believe in the freedom of religious expression. Every individual should be encouraged to develop their own personal theology, and to present openly their religious opinions without fear of censure or reprisal.

2. We believe in the toleration of religious ideas. All religions, in every age and culture, not only possess an intrinsic merit, but also a potential value for those who have learned the art of listening.

3. We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, or a document, or an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual.

4. We believe in the never-ending search for Truth. If the mind and heart are truly free and open, the revelations which appear to the human spirit are infinitely numerous, eternally fruitful, and wondrously exciting.

5. We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, religion and the world, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.

6. We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice, and no idea, ideal or philosophy is superior to a single human life.

7. We believe in the ethical application of religion. Good works are the natural product of a good faith, the evidence of an inner grace which finds completion in social and community involvement.

8. We believe in the motive force of life. The governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which always seeks the welfare of others and never seeks to hurt or destroy.

9. We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism so that people might govern themselves.

10. We believe in the importance of a religious community. The validation of experience requires the confirmation of peers, who provide a critical platform along with a network of mutual support.

- David O. Rankin  
Unitarian Universalist Association

There is no formal initiation ritual for the new member in Unitarian Universalism. There is no ceremonial sacrament, no baptism, no laying on of hands, no required knowledge of any creed or specific belief system for the new member. There is, however, a public demonstration of membership in Unitarian Universalism. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation holds public ceremonies for the dedication of children and

for the recognition of its new members. During these services the following affirmation is made, with no reference to god or spirit or religion:

As members of The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation,  
We covenant to affirm and promote:  
The inherent worth and dignity of every person;  
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;  
Acceptance of one another, and encouragement to grow;  
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;  
The rights of conscience, and the democratic process;  
The goal of world community, and  
Respect for the interdependent web of existence.  
(Handout: Welcome to The Lakeshore Unitarian  
Congregation)

The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation has a pre-adult religious Sunday school activity with a varied program and curriculum. This religious educational program is designed to teach the values of love, tolerance of other religious belief systems, resourcefulness and kindness. It also attempts not to indoctrinate the young people in one particular creed or dogma, even Unitarian Universalism.

The Unitarian Universalist Church, although a corporate entity, tries not to speak as an entity. That is, it will not declare that it is in favour of this or that social issue, because it feels that every individual member has their own personal view and that it may differ from the 'official position'. Thus, the Unitarian Universalist Corporate entity respects the integrity of the individual and allows him or her to fully develop within an open-ended, liberal framework. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation reserves the right to

accept or reject any statement on social guidelines or policy issued from the Unitarian Universalist Corporate entity. They are determined that any social action comes from an individual of the congregation, and that the members at large are given the freedom to support these actions or reject joining in.

#### **INFORMAL LEVEL**

At the congregation level, there may be an unofficial ritual and public demonstration of membership known as the Welcoming Ceremony. These Welcoming Ceremonies, in recognition of new members, usually take place once or twice a year, depending upon the number of new members. During this ceremony, the ordained minister or lay leader, announces the names of the people who have recently joined the congregation and asks them to come forward, in order that the group may see them. A welcoming speech is made, by the minister or lay leader, and sometimes the new members are given something such as a rose or a book on Unitarian Universalism.

Not all Unitarian Universalist congregations, or fellowships, perform the Welcoming ceremony. Also, if a new member does not wish to participate in this ritual, they are not forced to do so. The Welcoming Ceremony is a social act which serves to bring the members, both new and old, of the congregation together. This ritual allows the new members to

feel good about themselves, to feel accepted by the group, and to feel that they are an important component of the congregation. The process of becoming members allows the new adherents to recognize that there has been a personal change in their lives. The new members are now joined with others in a community of like minded people. The new members experience a feeling that they are not alone, that there are others who have similar doubts, problems and attitudes. Usually there is a lunch after this ceremony to complete the social intercourse and to reinforce in the mind and body of the new members that they are fully accepted and are now part of an extended family.

In some Unitarian Universalist Congregations there is also an unofficial public demonstration of membership called the Chalice ceremony for young people who have turned fourteen and who wish to become members. Usually these young people go through a preparatory class, in which they learn about love, tolerance, respect for other religious systems and Unitarian Universalism. Before entering the Chalice ceremony, they are questioned on their knowledge of Unitarian Universalism. Everyone who attends these classes is able to answer the questions and is permitted to attend this ritual. If the minister feels that a young person will not be able to answer the questions, or if they do not wish to partake in the ceremony, then they are informed of this decision at least a week before the ritual. In the Chalice ceremony the Chalice

is lit, symbolizing the light of truth, usually by a representative of the class, and its symbolism is explained. Also, each member of the class receives a flaming chalice pin or necklace to symbolize their membership in Unitarian Universalism.

The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation also performs a Dedication ceremony for infants and young children. In this public ceremony, the child is initiated into the congregation. Water is the symbol used by the minister or lay leader to welcome the child into the community. The ceremony is similiar to Christian Baptism in that both claim the symbol as representing life and trace this practice back historically. However, the Unitarians go to great lengths during the ceremony to emphasise that the water is not meant to be seen as means of washing away the the sins of the child, since they do not believe that a child is born with any sins. The water is used as the symbol of life representing a milestone in the life of the child and the Unitarian community. The naming of the child, and the affirmation by the 'god-parents' and the congregation, reinforces the Unitarian philosophy that individually and collectively they are responsible for the welfare of the child and not some other unseen authority. These informal public ceremonies are social expressions of what it means to be an Unitarian.

When individuals apply for membership in the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation they are interviewed by the minister.

This is an informal process in which the minister attempts to find out why the individual wishes to join and what they know about Unitarian Universalism. It also allows the prospective members to ask questions and verify to what they are committing themselves.

This interview is an informal screening process. Even though there are no official written guidelines for rejecting an application, an applicant may not be accepted if they violate, or if the minister and the board of directors feel that they may violate the Unitarian Universalist's policies and philosophy. However, this has never happened at The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, and its leadership, does not believe that they would ever reject anyone because of their beliefs. Informally, the Unitarian Universalists do have specific characteristics that attract the type of person they wish to have as members. This person is described by Rev. Phillip Hewitt as first being one who takes life seriously. The person is prepared to ask questions about life, to search for the answers and not to accept the view of others. Second, this person is one who will not keep his or her thoughts and feelings to him/herself. The individual must formulate a position on various issues and hold them up for debate. Thirdly, they should wish to bring into the congregation the same attitude of reasoned inquiry to all aspects of life. The person must not be afraid to accept a new scientific, psychological idea, fearing that these new ideas will destroy

anything of value that has been transmitted from the past. Finally, one commits oneself to action. The individual is not afraid to champion unpopular causes if they believe them to be correct.

Informally, membership in Unitarian Universalism allows members to receive the support for the values they hold in their religious and non-religious lives. They are comforted in knowing they are able to develop their own thoughts and to find their own meaning within a religious framework that they were not able to in their previous religious system. Individuals are required to think for themselves, and in most instances this allows them to reduce the anger they held against their former religious or non-religious group. New members join with others in friendship and celebration of the highest values they can discern.

- ' Our lives and those of our children, whose participation has been voluntary all along, are enriched by the themes and feelings that interact and change, and build .' (Betty Mills)
- ' The fact that it is possible to affirm our beliefs in church ... enables us to remain true to what we feel is the essence of Judaism, if not to the institutions and forms in which that religion is practiced around us today.' (Linda Wetner)
- ' As an Unitarian Universalist Christian, I can join with others of all religious persuasion, or no religion at all, in the great struggle to banish injustice from the earth and establish the Kingdom of Righteousness.' (Richard E. Myers)

After being a member for a while, individuals view their growth potential in the congregation through participating in one or more of the congregational portfolios, such as, administration, religious education, or social action. As



they progress in the congregation, they feel that their work is valued by the group and this reinforces their feeling of self-worth.

Unitarian Universalism expects the new member to become tolerant, more relaxed and more self-confident. This reflects its underlying faith in human possibilities. New members are expected to understand their inherent powers so that they can act constructively and creatively. The congregation provides a support group for various individual needs. It allows the individual to obtain a feeling of accomplishment. As the authority of the congregation or fellowship rests on the consent of the individual member, each person, including the new member, contributes. Another means by which the group aids the individual in self-development, is by addressing social issues. New members realize that not only can they get involved in social issues, but that they can also initiate them and obtain support from the existing members.

In The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, the ordained minister is responsible for three out of every four weeks of Sunday services. However, built into every Sunday Celebration service are venues in which any member can participate. Any member can make a statement during the announcement portion of the celebration. Also, there is usually a discussion phase in which each member can comment and argue with the minister's or lay leader's sermon. In addition, individuals can partake in the actual service by participating in one of the readings or

by doing something else agreed upon with the minister beforehand. Every fourth Sunday, the Sunday Celebration is totally within the control of the congregation and this celebration is 'lay led'.

For new members with young children there is a Sunday school which is 'lay led'. The Sunday school activities are supervised and controlled by the board of directors. The ordained minister is not a member, nor is she allowed to be a voting member of the congregation. The Portfolio Co-ordinator administers the Sunday school curriculum based on the advice and concerns of the individual members. As those most interested in this activity are the members with Sunday school aged children, they have a tremendous influence on what will be done during the activity. Also, parents as well as other members who are qualified or who like to work with young people may not only administer the Sunday school, but may also run the programs.

The Unitarian Universalist congregation's structure is one in which the individual member has influence and can exercise personal power. The demand on the individual member can be extreme since there are many portfolios which must be managed by the congregation and not by the ordained minister in order to ensure lay participation.

There is a high turnover of members in the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Change of employment is a major contributing factor in turnover. Most of the members of the

Congregation are English speaking and many hold positions that cause them to move out of Quebec to further their careers. Another contributing factor in high turnover can be simply that members become dissatisfied and stop attending. One former member stated that he left because the Congregation became less 'liberal' over time, especially when they moved from lay leadership to employing an ordained minister.

Also, not all members in the congregation contribute their time equally to its administration. Informally, The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation has high expectations of its members. Membership in their previous denominations did not demand or expect significant participation in its daily life and administration. However, The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation does expect a high level of personal commitment, activity and action from its members. They are expected to be socially conscious and active and to participate in the various committees and programs. Unfortunately, not all the new members are aware of this fact when they join and are unable to participate fully. As such they stop attending because they feel they are not 'pulling their weight'. Also, some of the less committed, nominal members may feel that the level of commitment and involvement is too high for them and will drop out. Therefore, there is a need for a range of new members, diversified according to age, attitudes and abilities. New members replenish the health of the congregation. They bring to the congregation a revitalization

and a spirit that enables all members to realize that not everyone has the same beliefs and that it is alright to be different and have a different point of view.

### **INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

" Living with a religion that has no final authorities and no tradition beyond the reach of change, leaves dependent on a willingness and an ability to be accepting of divergent points of view. " (Betty Mills) Unitarians are therefore not inclusive. They believe that thier congregation is for a select group of people who accept their philosophy.

Six people interviewed were switchers who left their previous religious group with an angry and disquieted attitude. One person was angry with a system that 'did not let you think for yourself' ( U-2)<sup>2</sup>. Another was angry with his former minister because a friend was refused a Christian burial for not attending church enough( U-11). Eight switchers felt that they had been in a religious group or a non-religious situation in which they were the only ' liberal, free-thinking' people in the group.

Six people described their previous religious group as a dogmatic system which encompassed a creedal code that did

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<sup>2</sup>Note: To maintain confidentiality direct quotes from personal interviews will be classified as follows: Unitarians-U followed by anumber, in lieu of a name; Anglicans-A followed by a number. Intervoews are kept by S. Martin and have been seen by Prof. F. Bird.

'nothing for them', at best, to attempting to 'brainwash' them, at worst. ' Dogma was an attempt to turn people's brains off' (U-7), the minister did not want people to act intelligently, only accept what was being said in the sermon' (U-5). Another commented, 'sermons were the same, sin, original sin, people who did not attend were sinners' (U-10). Five interviews described their previous religious group as ones which set up ' barriers ' among people. The religious groups that required a creed or had a stated dogma were described as being systems of ' The One true Church with The One Truth' (U-1). However, as two switchers started investigating theology, attending university, reading various topics in philosophy, psychology, et cetera, they lost 'faith' that there was only one absolute truth. As one one switcher shopped around in other religious groups, she was distressed to find out they too claimed to be guardians of the truth.

A former Anglican (U-1) described how when she moved she was forced to find another church. She went to another Anglican Church, however, this Anglican Church was 'Low Anglican' while her previous church 'high Anglican'. The Low Anglican Church performed many of the rituals and liturgy differently from the High Church. When she asked why there was a difference between the two, the minister of the Low Church explained to her that they were the 'true Church', with "The Truth' having 'eliminated many of the errors of the High Church'. This caused U-1 to question seriously the whole

concept of 'The One Truth'. U-1 was willing to accept authority when she found it to be legitimate and administered by a person whom she trusted and respected. When this authority was delivered by a minister for whom she had limited respect, she questioned it. U-1 was looking for credible authority, which had to be intellectually defensible and presented in a manner in which she could rationalize and assign personal worth. The Unitarians offered her credible authority, i.e., self-authority and official authority based on a foundation of self-enquiry.

Other switchers stated that in their previous religious groups they were expected to attend because their parents were members. However, their previous religious group did not hold any attraction for them. Three switchers had been nominal members, attending religious services more for their families than for any inner convictions. As they matured or became dissatisfied with their previous religious group, all of the people interviewed stopped attending and five withdrew completely. Two switchers tried another religious group only to be faced with similar problems, that is, a religious group that was either 'trivial' or 'too dogmatic'. Four switchers found their previous religious group's Sunday School 'a waste of time'. One switcher stated that his 'previous religious group's religious education consisted of stupid things like cutting things out of a book and pasting them in another book, things they could do at home' (U-2). Another was 'offended by

dogmatic teachings in the religious education program, there was no tolerance of other religions.' (U-4) All were looking for a religious group that would support their values and beliefs.

For one switcher, the idea of searching out, or shopping around for an appropriate religious group came about after she had been divorced and was looking for religious education for her children. Her parents had not felt that a religious education was needed for her but she felt that she had been denied something of importance. She believed that part of being a good parent was giving her children a proper education, and that meant a religious education as well as a public one. Three other switchers claimed that the religious education of their children was a main reason for their choosing The Unitarian Congregation. Switchers with children all stated that they joined The Unitarian Congregation because they could not only get a 'liberal, open minded and meaningful' religious education for their children but they could also participate in that religious education. All spoke of their own religious education as either useless, trivial or potentially harmful. All expressed a wish not to subject their children to the same type of religious education that they had. They felt they were responsible parents, and that they were serving their children best by moving them away from a dogmatic and limiting system into one that allowed the best chance for self-development.

Two people claimed they switched because of an inter denominational marriage. They expressed a desire to have a 'religious' wedding that would be accepted by their parents or by some other important person. In both cases, one or more of the partners did not wish to convert to their partner's religious group and that group rejected them for not doing so.

Other motivators leading people to switch to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were a need for credible authority, a need to do good and a desire to be in a religious setting in which they could become an active participant. One argued that 'you come to realize that you can get involved in social issues or the congregation's administration' (U-2), while another commented, 'members very humanist, emphasis more on intellect and rational thought than on any book' (U-3). Finally another stated 'no church dogma to follow', 'group of open-minded humanists discussing and doing something about important social issues. People were inquisitive and demanded action and self-authority' (U-6). " I felt I could contribute and make a difference' (U-5).

This use of the intellect was evidenced in all members. They were committed to an individual choice in all matters, including religion, and the right to exercise this in all aspects of their religious life. There was a general commitment by eleven out of the twelve members interviewed to continue the search for truth in religious and social issues. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation emphasizes an individual



conscious choice and expects that all people will be allowed to express their opinion on all matters, even if there are others who may not agree with them. This reinforces the individual's dependence from another or outside authority to one of self-authority.

The nominal member, one who is not committed, does not share the same desire to be actively involved, and will stay away if pressured or if there is a service that is addressing a topic they are not interested in. For example, U-9 became a member because his wife liked the Congregation and it had a good religious education program for the children. 'However there are certain issues that are discussed during the year that I'm not interested in, so I stay at home. Also, if you attend the services they expect you to participate and do something and there are times I just don't want to do get involved, so I stay away. If my wife and children did not enjoy coming here I would not attend as much as I do now'. (U-9)

The leadership of The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation does not believe that it is possible to be a nominal member. However, this does happen. There are members who must be classified as being nominal. Nominal members are those who have joined because of an interdenominational marriage or some another reason, have made a financial commitment but who rarely attend for Sunday services or get involved in the social issues.

The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation appears to have two

overlapping groups. Members of both groups do not like to be told what to do or what to think. One group may be labeled dissenters, they wish no creed, no dogma and no other authority. Their emphasis is on rational thought, self-enquiry and self-justification. They are humanists who accept no authority other than their own. The other group have also rejected dogma and authority in their previous religious group, however, they have been willing to accept some form of authority, if it is credible and justifiable. These two overlapping groups have been able to co-exist at The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation because of the care and understanding of the needs of these two groups by the minister and the lay leadership. For example, the main Sunday service is more for the dissenters. Even so the minister does challenge them in all services by questioning the need of the spiritual and the unknown as well as the rational. Also, there are Thursday discussion groups which deal mostly with the concerns of this group, such as, philosophical or sociological issues to stimulate the mind. Since the Congregation has employed an ordained minister, they have started to attract people who fall into the second group. These people wish to have some credible authority, and this authority does not always have to be completely provable. Therefore the minister has initiated evening Sunday Vesper services which are more spiritual than intellectual. It would be of interest to revisit The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation in the future to see if they

can continue to meet the needs of these two groups, or if one group will dominate and the members of the other group will leave.

At the institutional level, the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation is committed to freedom of religious expression. It demands its members be socially active, develop a personal religious philosophy and be able to justify it. It has an ethical code that requires its members to participate in social causes. At both the informal and formal levels the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation encourages individuals to participate.

Informally it is a social fraternity that attracts people who are individualistic. These people believe that they must take total control of their lives. Since it is a social group of like minded people, it is important for the individual and the group to know that each member is part of the group. Thus there are unofficial ceremonies that allow new members, and the group, to acknowledge the acceptance of new members into its circle. Participation in these ceremonies is important to the new members for it lets them know that they are socially accepted, and that from then on they may fully participate in the group's activities. They may even bring social issues to the group which will at least be heard, if not supported.

At the individual level, the new member feels part of an exclusive club. In this group, the individual is important. The group expects them to take a position on issues and

encourages participation. The individual is able to state that he or she is a member of a religious group that allows them to be a better adult. They feel that they are contributing to the group, and this makes them feel better about themselves. Thus, switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation are highly committed and will participate more willingly and more often than switchers to Christ Church.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SWITCHING AND SWITCHERS TO CHRIST CHURCH**

#### **FORMAL LEVEL**

The Anglican Churches share a tradition of doctrine, polity and liturgy dating back to the sixteenth century. Anglicans consider themselves as part of the Catholic Church, that is, world wide, universal and consisting of a fellowship that can be traced back to the early church fathers and the saints. Anglicans affirm the canonical scriptures to be the final arbiter in doctrinal matters. They also affirm the dogmatic decisions of the first four ecumenical councils. The Anglican Church accepts and uses in their liturgies three creeds, The Apostles', Nicene, and The Athanasian. These creeds are a confession of faith endowed with authority, which summarize the essential Christian beliefs. While these three creeds are authoritative for Roman Catholics as well as for Anglicans, other members of the Christian community, such as the Eastern Orthodoxy Church accept only the Nicene creed as being authoritative.

The Anglican Church, as a catholic church, uses the creeds as the basis for its membership in the Christian Community. They are also used as prayer during public worship and special services, such as, Easter and Christmas, and they

can also be used for religious instruction of the 'faith' and as a response in faith to a divine revelation. Anglicans also use the creeds as an expression of their understanding of their community, that is, a worshipping community, and as a confirmation of the unity of that universal community.

Anglican theology is based upon the Bible. Its doctrine is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the ancient leaders and church councils that are agreeable to the Bible. Anglican theology is thus more biblical and apostolic than dogmatic or confessional. Anglican polity is episcopal and maintains the ordained order of bishops, priests and deacons. Thus, Anglicans are bonded by a common belief system that includes: 1. The Bible, 2. the three creeds, 3. the first four ecumenical councils, 4. the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons and, 5. The Book of Common Prayer. Therefore, the Anglican tradition preserves the essential beliefs which are common to all Christians while rejecting those doctrines that are not supported by the Scriptures. Thus, Anglicans consider themselves full members of the Catholic Church without having to acknowledge the claims of the Pope and the modern councils of the 'Roman Church' in such matters as the infallibility of the Pope, the immaculate conception and the doctrine of assumption.

The Anglican Church considers itself to be the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It believes it has access to the Divine for the good of humankind. Thus, it

provides, through an ordered authoritarian system, for the complete spiritual needs of humankind. The sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist), are the main vehicles through which this system is controlled. Through baptism it forgives people for original sin and any other sins already committed. Confirmation conveys the idea of new strength through the Holy spirit. The individual has a supernatural partner with whom they can face life. As the Church is viewed by Anglicans as the Body of Christ, that is, the instrument by which Jesus, the Christ, continues His work in the world and in which His character is known, joining with this body requires a person to be baptized, that is having his / her past sins washed away before becoming a member. Anglicanism also allows baptism of babies as long as there is a reasonable chance that they will be raised as Christians. The confirmation of children or adults by a priest or bishop also confirms that the person's faith has been strengthened and that they now really accept the Christian and Anglican faith and life. The bishop represents the Body Of Christ, that is, the Church, and the laying on of hands is an ancient symbol of blessing which is believed to be traced back to Peter and Jesus.

The Eucharist allows the individual to renew his or her union with the God Head through His Son. Through this sacrament Anglicans reaffirm their conviction that their Lord, Jesus, is alive and that He is among them as much today as He

was with the apostles. Most Anglicans do not believe that the bread is Jesus's physical body nor the wine His blood. However the drinking of the wine and the eating of the bread allow Anglicans to identify themselves as Christians and part of the Body of Christ.

Becoming a member of the Anglican faith depends largely on the denomination the new member is transferring from. The Anglican Church believes in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist as necessary for salvation. According to Anglican philosophy, valid baptism is by water in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Also, individuals must receive confirmation by a bishop. Therefore, a person switching from the Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox faith, who has been baptized and has been confirmed by an ordained bishop, is accepted directly into Anglicanism without ritual or ceremony. There is an official reception, by an Anglican bishop who receives the converts and gives them a certificate of membership. While it is not a requirement, a 'refresher' course on Anglicanism is offered to all new members.

If the switcher was formally a member of the United Congregation, and they were baptized, their baptism would be accepted. However, since there are no ordained bishops within the United Church system, the new convert would have to be confirmed, that is, laying on of hands, by an ordained Anglican bishop. If the new convert to Anglicanism is



switching from a group ( religious or not ), such as, Unitarian, Jew, Muslim, atheist, et cetera, that does not baptize with water in the name of the Trinity, nor has any ordained bishops, then they must be baptized and confirmed by an ordained Anglican bishop. For these new members there is a compulsory ten week confirmation course given throughout the year. The confirmation course takes the form of a discussion group in which the three creeds, the prayer book, Christianity in general, and Anglicanism in particular, are discussed. There are no exams and all who attend and participate are allowed to be confirmed.

The Anglican Church is stricter with membership for young people. All adolescents who were baptized in infancy, are expected and required, by a competent age, usually by their seventeenth birthday, to affirm the baptismal promises made by their parents or sponsors, by receiving confirmation from an ordained Anglican bishop. They must take a four to six month confirmation course, in which the content of the course is similar to that of the adult course but the methodology is different. Generally, there is a teacher giving information and participants taking notes. Also, there is a written test for all adolescents. Adults do not have to take such a test.

The confirmation of both adults and adolescence takes place once a year on Easter Sunday. After confirmation, the new member's name is entered into the church registry and they are given a certificate of confirmation signed by the bishop.

To become a full voting member in the Anglican Church, the person must be at least eighteen years of age, have been confirmed, must participate in the Eucharist and attend at least one other Sunday service. When switchers become full members they can exercise their full voting rights in the election of the Church council and the wardens.

To become a member of Christ Church Cathedral, Anglican Church of Canada, a person must be at least eighteen years of age and be confirmed. Also, the individual is expected to participate in the Church's activities, as well as financially, in projects like the choir, Bible Study, discussion groups and aid in the liturgical services. The new member is expected to grow within the church family, to participate and to become a more knowing and caring person.

#### **INFORMAL LEVEL**

Christ Church Cathedral is more than just a church that offers worship and religious services every day of the year. It is also involved in the life of the community it serves. Christ Church has a variety of programs that are designed to respond to the needs of the community, and to entice people and organizations to meet those needs. First, there is regular daily worship service. People in need of spiritual comfort are given the opportunity to receive the sacrament and

Holy Communion daily. Therefore, people who require support from a higher authority are able come to Christ Church and fulfil that need. Also, French speaking members of the community are offered a third daily service in the French language, and also, every fifth Sunday, a main 10.00 A.M. mass. These services are designed to meet the needs of a growing French population. Awareness of Anglicanism, as an expression of a Catholic doctrine, such as, the sacraments being given by an ordained priest, and the rituals which are identical to Roman Catholicism, and the marketing of its services to the French speaking community, is a response to Christ Church's shrinking traditional English speaking community. Many of its potential English speaking members have left the province and few are returning, except to attend McGill or Concordia Universities.

Lay leadership and lay members are important assets in the operations of Christ Church. Christ Church provides a Sunday School and a nursery for its members. They are administered by the parents and other lay members. The music program is administered by a Director of Music, a lay employee of Christ Church, who is supported by a music committee, the majority of whom are also lay members of the Church. They are responsible for the music programs during the year as well as the daily hymn selection. There are two choirs at Christ Church, one consisting of young boys, girls, and men, and one of adult men and women. The first choir is made up of younger

and older members of Christ Church allowing the members to fulfil an active role within the Church, and giving them a feeling of responsibility and affiliation. For the adult members, it allows them to also fulfil an active role in the Church as well as socializing with others in an activity, singing, that they all enjoy. However, not all the members of the adult choir are members of Christ Church. Christ Church has attracted new members through this policy of allowing anyone who wishes to sing the opportunity of trying out for the choir. The music program also consists of offering free concerts as well as paid concerts for world renowned visiting choirs and/or other musical attractions. The overall aim of this is two-fold: one to carry on an Anglican tradition of developing music as a means of worship; and two, as a means of getting publicity to attract people to come into the Church to hear the concerts, and hopefully become interested enough to inquire about the Church and its mission.

Another important lay leadership position at Christ Church is that of the Director of Social Service and Mission. The two main programmes administered by the Director are the 'La Passelle' and the Drop-In Centre. La Passelle is a joint programme between downtown Montreal businesses and Christ Church. This programme is located on Avenue College McGill. It offers middle and senior managers, who have been recently laid off or fired, a place to search for a managerial position and computer access to a job bank free of charge. The Drop-In

Centre is below the Church, people can access it only by taking the west side stairs down to the mall. Its raison d'être is to create fellowship for unemployed and homeless people. It helps homeless people get off the street, finds them housing, collects welfare benefits for them, et cetera. There is a full time social worker aided by many volunteers from the Cathedral as well as the street people themselves, who administer this center. Christ Church dedicates the last Sunday of every month to hosting a lunch, after the main Sunday mass, for the homeless people. The members of Christ Church and the Church of Ste. Redempture volunteer their time to provide a meal, cook and serve the meal and offer fellowship. This reaching out by members of both Christ Church, and the Church of Ste. Redempture, has been appreciated by the homeless, some of who ( five or six ) attend church services, even though they have never joined Christ Church. This activity allows the members of Christ Church to feel that they are participating in Christian work in a serious and practical form. For some of the homeless people, it reaffirms their belief in the goodness of humankind, and this has lead to at least three individuals switching and becoming members of Christ Church.

Christ Church also has a lay educational committee which advises the vicar and administers about many of the educational programmes. One such programme is Bible Study. This is lay led, usually in private homes, where any topic

arising from the scriptures is discussed. There is also the Inquiry Course, which is the adult confirmation course. This is the sole domain of the vicar. It is given in the form of a group discussion and, everyone who participates is allowed, and encouraged, to confirm, or reconfirm, their Anglican faith. Also, under the educational committee, is the Young Parents Group. This group is made up of parents of young children, who discuss any and all matters concerning their children. While this is an informal group with little structure, the vicar is involved in advising them on how to be good Christian / Anglican parents. To be a member of this group a person must be a member of Christ Church.

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### **INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

Seven of the people who switched to The Christ Church Cathedral were former Roman Catholics. All of these switchers expressed a feeling that they had not really switched religious systems as they had joined a more liberal, social conscious and socially active Catholic group. One switcher stated,

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The church of Ste. Remdempture is an independent French Anglican Church. Christ Church provides space and support for Ste. Redempture. The priest and lay leadership of Ste. Redempture, as well as most of its members are also members of Christ Church. Ste. Redempture was established by a French speaking switchers who became a priest and wished to offer serves in French. Ste. Redempture uses Christ Church's chapel for its services.

" I went to Christ Church's Wednesday service and immediately felt at home. There was a genuine concern for me and the other members(A-2); another felt that 'Anglican priests are less dogmatic, not as strict in their dogma, you could question the priest and he would offer an explanation. You would not be told to just accept what was said or written"(A-4). Another switcher felt that " Christ Church's members and leadership are doing something positive about the poor social conditions in Montreal"(A-5) .

Of the seven switchers from Roman Catholicism, none believed that there was a difference in the rituals performed at Christ Church. The creeds were the same ones that they recognized, and most important for all of them, the sacraments were administered by ordained priests who have a legitimate claim to the undivided Catholic Church. All the Roman Catholic switchers claimed that higher authority and familiarity was paramount, and they demonstrated this in their desire to receive the sacraments, a validation of a 'true' religious system. One switcher stated, " I shopped around in other religious groups, however, they did not administer the sacraments and they are important to me." (A-4), while another " needed to see a priest and participate in the sacraments." (A-2)

The sacraments allowed them to affirm their identity with the catholic community and to be part of a community that shared the same values, based on a legitimate claim to higher authority.

The need for reliance on a higher authority was characterized by all the switchers. However, they expressed this need in a variety of ways. They all felt it necessary to

believe and seek after God, even though they all admitted that there was no way to prove God absolutely, nor was it possible for them, that anyone could disprove God completely. Therefore, "people need faith, because we all have doubts" (A-4). Faith or trust in a higher authority is "like trusting and believing in your parents or friends" (A-5). All stated that our society allows people religious freedom, that is, the freedom to make up one's own mind and search for God in one's own way. Six switchers stated that it was just this freedom of inquiry and expression at Christ Church that interested them enough to think about switching :

" You could question things, join in discussions, the priests even encouraged question and criticism." (A-3), another felt that 'Christ Church's priests were more human." (A-7), another saw the "priest (as a) very friendly, ordinary person." (A-9)

One switcher, A-1, lost his faith, due to the divorce of his parents, when he was a young child. As both his parents were Anglicans who attended church regularly, and promoted its values, he came to associate those values with the failure of his parents marriage. He then came to the conclusion that Anglican values were lacking in sincerity and meaning. He grew up with a poor attitude towards religion. Also, he became very introverted, self-centered and had difficulty relating to others. He did, however, meet someone, and was about to be married when the woman called it off. Her explanation was that she thought him to be too self-centered,



and that he did not display any real feelings towards her, or anyone else. This almost destroyed him. Fortunately, he had an acquaintance, whom he respected, who was an Anglican priest. In subsequent talks with this priest, he came to the conclusion that he was indeed self-centered, uncaring, and that he had been carrying a lot of harmful feelings for a long time. He felt that if he could finally accept his parents divorce, and find something positive to believe in, then he could change. This led him to take The Enquiry Course at Christ Church, given by another priest who was also known and respected by him. During this course he realized that he was not the only person to have had a negative personal experience, and that 'faith in something beyond himself' was comforting and reassuring. Reliance on a higher authority allowed him to cope with his past, and enable him to face an uncertain future.

A-5, a former member of an United Church, stated that going to Church " was something you did when you are growing up." As he grew older, he felt that "for a religion to be meaningful, it had to be personal and there had to be the freedom to criticize and question those in authority". Unfortunately for him, his church leadership acted as if total conformity to the rules and faith were all that was required. After his marriage, he stopped going to church and did not concern himself with religion. It was only after his divorce that he decided to go back to the 'comfort of the Church'.

Unfortunately, he found the United Church still lacking in any real concern for people, that is, no one in authority expressed any concern for his personal difficulties. Christ Church Cathedral, however, did provide him with the caring and the assurance, from people in authority, that is, priests and other church workers, that he needed in order to cope. His acceptance of a higher authority changed his outlook on religion. He now believes that religion and reliance on other authority can help an individual overcome personal problems.

For five of the switchers, Christ Church's programmes were the reason that they got involved initially and finally joined: A switcher stated that it was the

"Construction project attracted me to go inside. I liked music and I went back to hear the choir." (A-3) Another "went to a social meeting of Spanish speaking people at Christ Church, ..was interested in the Bible Study programme, especially since I could participate". (A-5) "I like singing and I went to a concert at Christ Church. I liked what I saw, so I went to the social after the concert and found out that I could join the choir, even though I was not an Anglican." (A-6)

For another switcher it was the "priest and other members (that) helped me financially and in other personal ways, when no one else would. Christ Church's social action programme supported me and treated me as a somebody." (A-7)

The attraction of these programmes is that they reach out to different people in search or in need of attention. They are vehicles that are used by Christ Church to attract people to its doors. Once they are inside, there is an effort, on the part of Christ Church's leadership, to present themselves as credible and sincere, and to relate personally to each

quest. Most of the people seem to respond positively to this approach. However, I have not been able , in this study, to relate this to denominational switching.

The Young Parents Group and The Cradle Roll are two programs which have added new members. The Vicar of Christ Church will not baptize a child unless the parents are themselves members because he believes that it is his responsibility to guarantee that the child has every chance to be raised as a Christian in the Anglican faith. It is the Vicar's philosophy that to ensure this he must do all he can, even if it is to force parents into becoming Anglicans and members of Christ Church. After the child's baptism, the Vicar places the child on a Cradle Roll. The child will then be sent a card on the anniversary of his / her baptism. By the time the child is four years old (s)he, along with the parents, will be invited to join Sunday School. The parents of the newly baptized child are not forgotten by the Vicar, and every few months he sends them information, such as, books and/or lists of activities that they and their child would benefit from, mostly conducted at Christ Church. He also attempts to get the young parents to join the Young Parents Group, which administers the church's nursery and Sunday School. The Vicar believes that he has a hold on these young parents, and he uses it to the best of his advantage. He believes that if he forces the parents to attend certain church functions, because of their child, they will benefit

spiritually and become better Christian Anglican parents. He also believes that the parents will stay active members.

Two other programs have had a positive effect on attracting potential switchers. The first one is The Drop-In Centre, which officially, is part of the social and mission program that all Anglican diocese run. The Drop-In Centre at Christ Church, has been able to attract at least five new members in the last year. The main reason for this appears to be the result of its volunteer administer, A-8, also a recent new member. A-8 was an orphan who ran away from the orphanage, to the U.S., when he was fourteen. He worked in a variety of odd jobs, joined the merchant navy and, finally became a partner in a Bar. He also became involved with drugs and alcohol. In his late thirties, he found out that he had Parkinson's disease. All his life savings either fed his alcohol and drug problem or bought his medicine. When he was out of money, he returned to Canada. Unfortunately, his birth certificate, baptismal papers and proof of Canadian citizenship, were destroyed in a fire at the orphanage, and without these papers he could not prove his Canadian citizenship. He was, therefore, not eligible to receive any medicare benefits. Initially, he went to the Roman Catholic diocese for help which were either unable or unwilling to help him. After being forced to live on the street, he heard about The Drop-In Centre, from other street people. There he got the help he needed from a priest and a social worker from the

centre, who found him shelter, clothes, medicine, etc. In return for this support he helped out at the centre. The leadership of Christ Church was also able to obtain for him his Canadian citizenship, which allowed him to receive all his social benefits, such as, welfare and medicare. The care, understanding and concern shown to him, by all the people at Christ Church, had a profound effect on him. They had given him his self-identity and self-worth back. They had treated him with respect, and as a person. He wanted to repay Christ Church, and the best way for him to do so was to work at The Drop-In Centre as a volunteer. He soon found out that not only could he relate to the street people and that they trusted him, but that he was also a good administrator. His approach to administering The Drop-In Centre has been to develop it into a community center where people who drop-in are respected and their immediate needs are addressed. It is now a home, where a street person can come in and receive fellowship.

At the institutional level, Christ Church formally declares itself a member of a catholic organization. It claims authority from the Bible, early church councils, creeds and a succession of ordained priests. It states that it is a worshipping community with established rituals, such as, the sacraments and an ordained priesthood which can administer the sacraments, and mediate between humans and their God. Formally, Christ Church, as a member of the Anglican organization, emphasizes that individuals can not save

themselves, that they require the Church and that therefore individuals must accept and conform to its principles.

Individuals that are attracted to Christ Church are people who require an organization that has the "Truth", that is, a group that is based on authority. This authority must be based on tradition, and on a priesthood that has been ordained to save humankind. Individuals who join Christ Church are those willing to submit to authority, however, they wish that those in charge perform their duties in a caring fashion. For those individuals who believe that this is the situation, they will give Christ Church their allegiance. The importance of the promise of 'other world' salvation, through the sacraments, is paramount in their decision to switch. Thus switchers to Christ Church will be moderately committed, partake in the rituals and in other church activities that interest them.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYSIS OF SWITCHING AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

People make choices and decisions in every aspect of their lives, for example, whether they should go to university or go to work, whether they should get married, live together, or remain single, whether they should join this group, or another one, or none at all, et cetera. Each individual attempts to make their decisions by considering what is right or wrong with each choice, and then strives to make the most correct decision for themselves, at that particular time, for that specific choice.

Religious Institutions, as one choice among many for an individual, consciously market a set of specific belief systems, social activities, and kinds of experiences that should facilitate and aid the individual in their decision to become a member of a particular religious group.

It is useful to compare the Unitarians and the Anglicans at the institutional level using the sect, church, spiritual-cult typology of Troeltsh, (1931). An understanding of the institutional level should help to explain some of what is involved in switching into a particular religious group, that is, the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation or Christ Church Cathedral, and why switchers are likely or not to exhibit commitment or changes in self-identity.

A sect<sup>4</sup> is an autonomous voluntary association of the religiously qualified. The sacred consists of, or dwells in, the people who commit to the sect. There is a strict moral and ethical discipline within the sect. Personal perfection is the expected standard of aspiration for the members of the sect. It is an elect, possessing special enlightenment. Exclusiveness is usually emphasized. The sect establishes a boundary between itself and others, however, it embraces all who are socially compatible within itself. The sacred is subjectively expressed. It accepts the priesthood of all believers. It demands toleration and renounces enforcing opinions on its members. However, the sect exerts pressure, formally and informally, on its members, to confirm to its doctrines and morals, even if there are no declared doctrines. There is an expectation, on the part of the sect, that the member will prove themselves qualified. However, this is usually done more informally than formally. Expulsion from the sect is exercised against those members who contravene, or who do not meet the sect's norms. The sect does provide an opportunity for its members to express their commitment, and they usually have a high level of lay participation.

A church is an institution which is endowed with grace and salvation. It is an inclusive, very accommodating association, that is able to receive the masses, including

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<sup>4</sup>The following paragraphs describing a sect, a church, and a cult or spiritual movement is based on a number of interviews with Professor Frederick Bird, and on his unpublished article.



both the 'just' and the 'unjust'. Most of its members are born into it. The church is in possession of the sacred, that is, grace and redemption, and it possesses an absolute divine truth and doctrinal authority. It is able to adjust itself to the world and present the sacred objectively. Since the church's truths are universally authoritative, it claims supremacy over its priests and laity. The sacred is administered like a trust, allowing the church to be very inclusive. Membership, or affiliation, is obligatory, in that it is the assumed responsibility of the church to see that all people have at least contact with salvation and redemption, even to the extreme of forcing people into contact with itself, 'for their own good'. Affiliation with a church group proves nothing with regard to a member's qualities. However, affiliation with the church means that an individual is a member of the entire church, and does not have to qualify to join each church group, that is, the individual carries their membership with them.

A cult, or spiritual movement, is a love association, consisting of marginal followers as well as a highly committed core. Within the cult the sacred is subjective and it is present within the individual. The individual is expected to awaken the sacred within the self. Often the sacred is expressed by a revered leader. Affiliation within a cult is a loosely knit and unstructured form of religious fellowship. It is a very fluid, shifting basis of affiliation. There is

little concern on the part of the members to protect the group. Members seek personal salvation and cult membership is held together by a common belief and religious experience. The cult's aim appears to be induced mystical consciousness or expression of authentic selfhood. The structure of a cult usually has no clear set of boundaries. It's form is loose and there is no centralized leadership.

The Unitarian congregation is most like a cult-spiritual movement, however it has sectarian characteristics. In many ways, the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, at the institutional level, is sect-like, in spite of the extent to which it professes to be tolerant and non-dogmatic. Members of The lakeshore Unitarian Congregation consider themselves, as a group, to be constituted by like-minded people who are specially qualified by virtue of their intellectual integrity, their religious and social tolerance, their commitment to social responsibility and their commitment to help administer and participate in the services. Unitarian members have high expectations of their group and criticize other past religious associations for being trivial or a waste of time. They see themselves as members who possess a set of recognizable attitudes. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation is not a fellowship for all. It is a fellowship for those who are qualified to live up to these expectations.

The sectarian-like character of The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation is also demonstrated by the corresponding high

level of commitment by the switchers and its scorn for nominal members. Nine out twelve switchers were characterized as having a change in self-identity and a high level of commitment to the group.

Sectarian groups tend to call attention to the boundaries that separate them from others. Some establish higher, stronger boundaries than others. These boundaries must be passed through by potential members before they are allowed to join the group. The boundaries established by The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation are invoked by the 'welcoming' and 'Chalice' ceremonies.

The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation believes strongly in religious tolerance, in allowing people to believe what they want even though sects are often associated with having very clear, dogmatic beliefs. The sect-like character of this group is not associated with beliefs as much as attitudes and other expectations. The sect-like character does help to explain some of what is involved in switching to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, and why switchers were so likely to exhibit both strong commitment, since it was expected by the group, and changes in self-identity, because it corresponds to the group's expectations.

Christ Church Cathedral is a group that corresponds to the 'church-type', at the institutional level. It is an inclusive fellowship where admission takes place through baptism (usually infants). An Anglican does not join an

individual congregation. When an individual switches and joins, or becomes a member, symbolized by baptism or confirmation, they become a part of the world-wide Anglican church, which sees itself as being in communion with other catholic, apostolic churches. Thus individuals who join the Anglican church from other apostolic churches, like the Roman Catholic or Orthodox, are admitted without ceremony or confirmation classes.

The inclusive character of Christ Church Cathedral is also demonstrated by the way in which it attempts to include and welcome non-members, as well as members, to participate in its activities, like the drop-in centre, the development of Spanish and French Sunday services, and the holding of services that are aimed at passers-by, such as the music program. The above demonstrates the inclusive nature of Christ Church Cathedral as opposed to the exclusive character of the sectarian-type Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation.

Therefore, switching to Christ Church Cathedral is quite different from switching to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Initially, at least, less is expected of new switchers to the Anglican group. They are invited to participate, but at a level they wish to and on terms seemingly acceptable to them. Correspondingly, only three out of nine switchers interviewed indicated that switching to the Christ Church Cathedral was associated with increased commitment and a change in self-identity.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ANALYSIS OF SWITCHING AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

According to Caplovitz and Sharrow (1977), loss of faith and rejection of a specific religious community, as the basis for self-identity, is the reason for apostasy. This study confirms that rejection of previously held beliefs, or loss of faith, is the chief reason leading to apostasy. The old religious group lost meaning for most (16 of 21) of the switchers. It no longer provided them with a basis for their self-identity. Switchers had lost their equilibrium, in the old religious group, and attempted to regain their balance in another group that provided them with the necessary tools to do so.

The reason most often given (7 of 12), by switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, for leaving their former group, was dissatisfaction or rejection with that group. The comments expressed by this group centered around similar themes, that is, that the previous religious group was too dogmatic, too self-centered, too narrow, and/or not caring:

"saw United church as too restrictive, narrow...it held no attraction, not intellectually stimulating, ...yet we were expected to attend." (U-2)

"minister was only interested in sin, not redemption... did not want people to act intelligently, only to accept what was being taught." (U-5)

"Priest very intolerant, dogmatic, and narrow in his sermons. Priest preached only on sin, and attempted to make members feel guilty, if they did

not show for church on Sunday." (U-7)  
"the message was the same, sin, original sin, people who did not attend church were sinners,...Priest never talked about the good of humankind...There were no programs to address social issues." (U-10)

Dissatisfaction with their previous religious group led these people to become disenchanted and demoralized with an 'orthodox religious life style'.

There were other reason for switching to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Two people left their former religious group because they moved from their place of worship. One of these people moved from the United States because of his opposition to the Vietnam war. Since Unitarians in Canada also opposed the Vietnam war, and held a religious philosophy similar to his, he felt at home, at least spiritually, in The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Another switcher was rejected by his former religious group (U-11). This happened when he wished to marry a person of another faith, and his minister refused to marry them unless his partner converted. Another individual left his former religious group because of a declining interest. This switcher 'lost faith' (U-12) in religion. He viewed all religious systems as being 'oppressive systems', supporting intolerance and 'justifying totalitarian systems'.

None of the switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation had a religious experience. However, one individual had a 'negative religious experience' which caused him to lose the faith that he previously held as true and

meaningful. This was brought about by the refusal of a church burial, by the church's minister, for a church member, because he had not attended enough. This act was contrary to everything U-11 believed in. He was unable to reconcile this event with the philosophy of the church, the behaviour of the minister and his own interpretation of church philosophy. The personal anxiety that he endured caused him to lose faith in his religious group, and in religion.

The main reasons given by switchers to Christ Church Cathedral for leaving were: rejection of their previous group (4 of 9); and a declining interest (4 of 9). Those switchers who rejected their previous group viewed that group as being too dogmatic, too self-serving, or too restrictive.

"previous religious group was very restrictive, ... little room for personal development." (A-2)

"very authoritarian...priest not a very friendly person, could not question church/priest on any policy." (A-3)

"you could not question priest or have a personal view...must take their doctrine literally or leave." (A-4)

"left with a dislike, and mistrust of the church." (A-1)

Those individuals who left their previous group because of a declining interest demonstrated a rebellious feeling, and left at certain moments in their lives, such as, adolescence, adulthood, et cetera.

"Religion was people freely choosing to believe what they wanted. Our leadership said, here is the faith, here are the rules, do not question. After marriage I stopped going to church. Spend time on my career, did not concern myself with religion." (A-6)

"Religious service was cold, no feeling, rebelled

when I was young. Dropped out of church, school, never kept a permanent job.. was looking for the meaning of life." (A-7)  
"orphaned at 12, ran away from orphanage, church, and all institutions...wanted to be a poet/writer... became involved with drugs, etc." (A-8)

One switcher to Christ Church left her previous group because it rejected her political views and asked her to leave. " This Church did not give support to members who were controversial or trouble-makers in the community." (A-5)

According to Bird and Reimer (1982), people who join religious groups do not necessarily use church shopping as the main vehicle to find their new religious group. Only one switcher to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation used church shopping as the principal method to find a new religious group. U-1 was different from other switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, in that she was searching for more than an intellectual solution to her concerns. She felt a 'calling' not only to develop a personal understanding of life, but also to minister to others.

The most predominant process used by switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation was by accident and the use of their social networks.

"A newspaper ad sparked an interest in Unitarianism...went to a meeting to see what the people were all about, and found a group of open-minded humanists discussing relevant social issues." (U-6)

Inter-racial marriage was the process that drew two people to try out The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. Another person found this group when he was forced to identify



a religious denomination so that he could adopt a baby. An influential person was the process that brought three switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation. These individuals all expressed dissatisfaction with their previous group, and were introduced to the Congregation by a person who they considered important and trustworthy. Two other switchers found this group by looking through The Yellow Pages.

Two individuals engaged in intellectual shopping before joining the Congregation. Having rejected the concepts of religion and God, they studied Unitarianism before visiting the Congregation. These two people had developed a positive attitude towards Unitarian principles before going to a meeting. Their initial visit to the Congregation was to confirm that this Congregation lived up to their expectations.

Church shopping was, however, one of the main methods individuals used to locate Christ Church Cathedral (4 of 9).

The four switchers were actively looking for a group in which they could feel at home in. All of these switchers were former Roman Catholics, and the need to receive the sacraments played an important part in their decisions.

"went to a Roman Catholic Church...found it cold, little community...tried an United Church, but this church did not feel like "true Christianity"... needed to participate in the sacraments." (A-2)  
"tried some Protestant churches...Baptist, and United.. did not feel at home..no time to reflect, little social life, and to be able to get the sacraments were also important." (A-4)

"attended a Roman Catholic Church...found it unfriendly... little social or interpersonal activities tried an United Church, but found them shallow" (A-5)

"Roman Catholic Church in Montreal similar to the one I left...preaching only...no social activities. Tried French Baptist Church, however, it did not feel like a real church, it did not have the sacraments." (A-9)

The other dominant method individuals used to find Christ Church was by accident or by its activities and programs.

"construction of Christ Church's shopping centre attracted me." (A-3)

"went to a concert at Christ Church." (A-6)

"Christ Church helped me when others would not." (A-8)

"enroled in the adult confirmation course...I felt that religion would help me." (A-1)

One person found Christ Church through an influential person.

"Talks with a priest from Christ Church, convinced me that Anglicanism was more human, caring, and more involved with ordinary people. Took the inquiry course because priest impressed me." (A-7)

The main reason for joining The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation was the attraction of its programs and activities, such as, religious education, social action, intellectual pursuit of truth, etc. (8 of 12)

"religious education" (U-2, -U-8, U-9)

"lay leadership, ability to participate in religious services." (U-3)

"social programs..members willingness to something about them." (U-10)

"religious education and social programs." (U-11)

Two individuals had a strong commitment to self-authority, as opposed to higher or other authority, and

this was their main reason for joining.

"rely on myself..not church doctrine or church leadership."(U-5)

"not much dogma to follow, everything was intellectual rational, and challenging. Members were inquisitive, and demanded action, and relied on themselves."(U-6)

One person joined The Congregation because of the influence of one of its members. Another joined because of a need for structure in her life. This person was looking for spiritual, as well as intellectual structure.

The two main reasons individuals gave for joining Christ Church Cathedral were: a need for structure(4 of 9); and the attractiveness of its programmes (4 of 9). The only other reason given were significant other influenced them.

"felt I needed a change in my life, and that maybe religion would help"(A-1)

"needed to see a priest and participate in the sacraments."(A-2)

"needed to be a member of a "catholic" family."(A-3)

"needed sacraments to feel good about myself."(A-9)

"active social/community life after religious services, able to participate with priest in Bible Study."(A-4)

"joined the choir...people I met from choir and church socials were friendly."(A-6)

"through the drug/alcohol programme...people at Christ Church helped me, treated me as a somebody."(A-7)

"working in the Drop-In Centre, helping turn it into a community...ability to work with street people through Christ Church."(A-9)

"fellow worker introduced me...I respected her."(A-5)

This study confirms that most switchers were actively involved in the process of switching (10 of 12 Unitarians, 7 of 9 Anglicans). These switchers were actively seeking a more meaningful change in their religious lives. Most of the

switchers corroborated Strauss' (1979) model, in that human factors, such as being active, exploratory, and creative, led them to search for a religious group that allowed them to reconstruct and manage their lives in a social environment. All switchers viewed their affiliation as an individual accomplishment, not something that was imposed on them.

Most switcher received personal value from the rituals they performed. When these rituals lost meaning for them, they activity looked for another religious group to provide them with a meaningful mainstay. The need for a social fit, as well as a personal need, caused them to look at alternatives. All switchers checked their social networks and other possible sources of information, including change encounters and the 'Yellow Pages' to find a suitable religious group. However, few switchers went church shopping (1 of 12 Unitarians, 4 of 9 Anglicans). This seems to dispute most of the current literature. Most of the switchers knew what they wanted before they went looking, and most had prior knowledge of the religious group before visiting it. The high percentage of switchers to Christ Church (4 of 9) were church shoppers who did not know exactly what it was they wanted. Therefore, they tried different religious groups to see if there was a positive match. A single Unitarian switcher also did not know what she wanted and tried different religious groups.

There was no evidence that the religious group pressured

or brainwashed individuals into becoming members (Singer, 1979 & Verdier, 1979). Also, there was no evidence of a single event causing a dramatic change which led to an affiliation with any religious group. There was one individual who went through a religious experience, and joined a Roman Catholic church. She relied on a single event that she believed was responsible for her switching and conversion. However, she had been married to a Roman Catholic for ten years, her children were brought up in the Roman Catholic faith, and the priest was a friend of the family. Also, she had been thinking of becoming a Roman Catholic to please her husband. She had been depressed, since she had been brought up anti-Catholic, and did not know what her family would think of her if she converted. Therefore, her 'conversion experience' developed into switching and can be viewed as an excuse to affirm her decision.

Switchers displayed a few characteristics of Lofland and Stark's (1965) model. They were frustrated in their previous religious group, had unpleasant experiences in the old group and became religious seekers. However, not all members encountered their new religious group at a turning point in their lives. For some switchers this point was reached before joining the group, for others after joining. Previously held values had not necessarily failed. What failed was the application of these values by the previous group. Also, there was no isolation of new members from non-members.

Switchers, in this study, were not manipulated nor driven into a religious group because of social or psychological reasons. They all wanted to find a new religious group that met their needs, and when they found one they joined. Switching was a deliberate act.

The majority of switchers ( 9 of 12 Unitarians, 5 of 9 Anglicans) considered their affiliation as a change in their lives. Those that did not were either switchers from a similar religious system, such as, English Unitarian, American Universalist to Unitarianism, Roman Catholics to Anglicanism, or they were nominal members - they switched for a reason other than seeking a change in their life. Most switchers regarded their affiliation as a means to create a better life with new or renewed values. Switchers to Christ Church (4 of 9) viewed this life as social or spiritual. The majority of Anglicans (7 of 9) believed switching to be a means to a more satisfying life, in which they were able to transfer the control of their spiritual lives to a higher authority allowing them to get on with their lives. Switchers to Unitarianism (9 of 12) viewed their affiliation also as a means to create a better life for them and their families. This new affiliation allowed them to be better parents as well as to rely on their self-authority. This allowed them to feel that they were in control of their lives. Even the nominal switchers to both groups expressed feelings of more comfort with their new affiliation. The new religious group did not

present a threat to them, and it allowed them to continue their present life style.

This study found that all the switchers accepted the norms and values of their affiliated groups. There was a wide degree of commitment levels to these norms and values depended on the religious group. Switchers to Unitarianism had a high level of personal commitment, that is 8 of 12 were highly committed, 3 of 13 were moderately committed, and only 1 of 12 showed little or no commitment to the group's norms. There was also a large percentage of people committed to Anglican values, that is, 6 of 9 switchers had a high commitment, 2 of 9 were moderately committed, and 1 of 9 had little or no commitment. This was expected since the switchers were looking for these values in a religious group. All switchers, even the nominal ones, felt comfortable with their new religious group's values, and if they did not adhere to them they did nothing to suggest that those values were antinomian to them.

Individuals joined the religious groups for a variety of reasons, such as, the need for structure, the attraction of the group's activities or programs, the need for acceptance by an important person, etcetera. Switchers appeared to want a religious group that had a strong moral code that appealed to them. Switchers to the Anglican group indicated a spiritual dimension that provided a measure of comfort after a personal crisis, such as, a divorce, a death in the family, loss of

employment or dissatisfaction with a previous religious group. The time honoured rituals and traditions of the Anglican group provided the spiritual home that aided the switchers through their stressful times by giving them the comfort and the assurance they were looking for. Switchers to the Unitarian group also exhibited a spiritual dimension, and found a spiritual home, albeit one that offered a twist on the traditional view of a religious group, that is the emphasis was not on liturgy but on social issues. These switchers may have abandoned a religious group that emphasized faith and ritual. Nevertheless, they wanted a religious group with a strong moral code, a spiritual dimension and one that allowed them to feel in charge of their religious lives. All switchers had personal doubts about their own faith, and all believed that individually they might not have all the answers.

Switchers to the Anglican group needed the familiarity of a structured liturgy and believed that Christ Church Cathedral would be able to supply the answers. Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation did not believe that anyone or any religious group had the answers, but they also felt that as individuals they were not capable of practising a personal faith alone. Therefore, the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation was looked upon as being a religious group that would assist them in providing them and their families with as many anchors as were required. All switchers were made



welcome to their new religious home on their first visit. This good impression encouraged them to overcome any fears of joining the new group.

At the individual level the main reason for leaving a previous religious group was rejection of the old religious group ( 8 of 12 Unitarian, and 8 of 9 Anglicans). Both groups of switchers viewed their previous religious group as being intolerant, restrictive, limited, and having little room for personal development. This led them to be dissatisfied with their religious lives, and their religious lives were important to them. Switchers to Unitarianism appeared to have had a change in self-identity which preceded their desire to leave their old religious group and find another one. The new religious group had to be one which fit their new identity, which was individualism and self-control.

Switchers to Christ Church wanted familiarity in their new religious home, and would only commit if they felt comfortable in the new group. Thus the two groups went about their search for a new religious group differently. Switchers to Christ Church were church shoppers. They were willing to try a number of religious groups before settling on a final one. Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation were not church shoppers. They knew what they wanted from a religious group but their search was more of a social one. They sought the advice of friends or researched various religious groups before trying one. They viewed most

religious groups as being similar to the one they left and were not interested in trying different brands of religious groups. They wanted to know as much about the group before even setting foot in the door.

The religious group's programs, activities, and a significant other were the main reasons switchers joined the new religious group. The programs and activities meant different things to each group. That is, for Anglicans it meant rituals and worship they were familiar with, and for Unitarians it meant that they could be better adults and control their religious lives.

A significant other influenced switchers to join a new religious group. All switchers found a person within the new group that impressed them enough to want to join, be it an ordinary member or the minister/priest.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ANALYSIS OF SWITCHING AS BEING ASSOCIATED WITH CONVERSION

<sup>5</sup>The concept of switching as being associated with conversion was also a concern of this study. A number of factors need to be discussed before an answer can be given. First, it was necessary to discriminate between nominal group members who joined because of a social demand to belong to a religious group, and those switchers who affiliated with a religious group and held some level of commitment affecting their activities and lives. It is easy to state that nominal switchers were not converted by the process because, they experienced no change in self-identity, nor did they participate, nor were they even moderately committed to the group. However, switchers who joined a religious group, for an intrinsic reason, demonstrated various levels of commitment to their new group.

Individuals also pass through a series of personal changes in which they give up one pattern of life style for another, but this is not the 'conversion' we are studying. As people move from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, changes in self-identity require the individual to reprogramme their world view. This requires an effort on the part of the

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<sup>5</sup>The following topic on switching as being associated with conversion is based on numerous interviews with Professor Frederick Bird.

individual. These changes in self-transformation involve tension and usually require symbolic support by a group, as in a bar-mitzvah, to symbolize a Jewish male's passage into adulthood, or a high school graduation, or wedding ceremony to recognize other changes. A question that must be asked is: Is the personal act of switching religious groups just another personal change or is it conversion or is it something else ?

The problem in answering the above is that there are four distinct theories of what conversion is. First, there is a belief that the process of organization affiliation is equivalent to a conversion process. The religious group may support an adult life style, for example, through confirmation, or marriage and it may give prestige to a family or support adult authority. Religious affiliation may also aid the individual in their genuine desire to the regain the security and comfort they experienced, or thought they experienced, as a child. There are some switchers who affiliate with a religious group just to belong socially, or to please an important person. Therefore, the simple process of affiliation is not necessarily an indicator that the switcher has experienced a conversion like process.

Another dimension of conversion equates a religious experience to conversion. The religious experience is sometimes associated with a change in religious affiliation and a change in self-transformation. However, individuals can have changes in self-transformation with no religious

experience. Also, people have changed religious affiliation for reasons other than a religious experience. Thus, a religious experience is not necessarily a good indicator of conversion.

Another dimension of conversion relates it to the ritual activity of a religious organization by which an individual acknowledges a change in status, for example, people who have conversions during a Billy Graham crusade. This is usually associated with a religious experience, however, the conversion can happen apart from the activity. These ritual activities may allow an individual a temporary relief from some discomfort and assist in maintaining a psychological equilibrium, that is, each person may see themselves as a VIP within this group, if only temporarily. While religious groups deliberately use techniques or activities such as prayer calls, religious study, and meditation, to induce individuals, or attempt to convert them from one state of being to another, these activities are not equivalent to conversion.

The final dimension of conversion is that it is related to a personal transformation. This is the dimension of conversion that is best suited for this study. Conversion includes a "radical reorganization of identity, meaningful life" (Tranisano, 1970) and is 'the process of changing a sense of root reality or a conscious shift in one's sense of grouping' (Hierick, 1977). Conversion is defined as a definite

change in a person's life. The individual's new goals in life are stable, focused, and all previous aims and beliefs are expelled from the person. When this process of change in self-identity becomes permanent within a religious system, it is a religious conversion (James, 1958).

Did switchers who joined the new religious group have a religious conversion? The answer in this study is it is not necessarily so. The study did find a high degree of people with some deficiency (18 of 21), that is, something needed to be supplied or something was lacking. Life change, such as, from child to adulthood was not part of this study since only adults switchers were included. Therefore, to confirm that in order for an individual to experience a conversion there had to be two criteria; first, there must have been an identifiable change in self-identity; and, second, there needed to be a high commitment to the new religious group.

Using the dimension of conversion as described above, switchers to Unitarianism had a high number of people who converted, 67% (8 of 12); while switchers to Anglicanism had a lower number of individuals who had a conversion experience, 22% (2 of 9).

This was the most interesting result of the study. It was our hypothesis that switchers to an orthodox, conservative religious group, such as, Christ Church Cathedral, would have a high level of 'converts', and switchers to the more liberal religious group, that is, The

Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, that was officially less traditional, and had no formal creedal requirements, would have few, if any converts.

At the formal level, The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation affirmed the individuals' right to believe in anything they so wished. Formally, they professed no central dogma, except that they expected members to participate, to express their personal beliefs openly and to continue a personal search for the 'truth'. The importance of the religious group was to provide mutual support for its members.

However, at the informal level, there was an expectation of commitment, as well as participation. Members were expected to work at being a part of the group. Members were invited to use their personal talents in the administration of the group. They were expected to commit themselves to action, that is, to support social causes and to promote the Unitarian ideal. The demand on the individual is high. The person must be socially conscious and active. If a new member does not wish to participate, one is not forced to do so, but they will soon feel left out and will stop attending.

The Unitarian Congregation, does not believe that it is suited for everyone. In fact, it has a guide for identifying potential members. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation targets people with slightly higher educational levels, financial security and living in a family situation. Thus, The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation sees itself as an elitist

religious group. The individuals it attracts are people looking for a credible authority and willing to commit themselves to this ideal. Many of the switchers do not believe that they have had a conversion, nevertheless, they have moved from religious groups in which they participated little, were not committed, and found no satisfaction, to a religious group that wants them to commit, and most have done so.

Christ Church Cathedral is a catholic, universalist religious group. As such, they believe they are part of a universal worshipping community that affirms dogma set down in history. They believe that they are responsible for the spiritual needs of all people. They believe that all people require access to the truth that they administer, and that eventually everyone will require their services. Therefore, they accept anyone who will follow their rules. These rules are very easy to follow and there a few hurdles to overcome. A member must have been baptized and confirmed by an ordained priest. For new members who have never been baptized, with water, nor confirmed, by the laying on of hands, there are courses and rituals for them. No one is turned away if they have made an attempt at becoming a member. Members are not expected to believe or participate in everything that happens in the group. All that is required of the members is for them to contribute financially, and to partake in the rituals, as much as possible. This group is an inclusive religious



organization. It is grounded upon popular consent, it accepts everyone. Once an individual is a member of Christ Church they are officially a member of the entire Anglican family.

Members of Christ Church place their faith in others, such as priests, bishops, deacons, and let the 'others' make their decisions for them. The individual does not have to participate in too many of the groups activities. Even when they do, they do so as followers, and not leaders. Even members with children only have to participate minimally, in that they are not expected to be highly committed, but only to attend the programs.

Christ Church has activities that are designed to attract member and non-members to participate in. It also has programmes that are designed to provide comfort to the participants. These activities are designed to give a warm caring family feeling for the participants. They attempt to be a kinder parental family group. They care for the participants, help them when necessary and provide a group for people that need the support of a superior authority.

Switchers who join activities and participate can develop a high commitment to them, but this commitment is towards the activity and not necessarily to Christ Church's form of Anglicanism. Those switchers who became highly committed and show a high degree of change in self-transformation were the ones that were very involved in more than one activity. As they expanded their participation in the group, as a whole,

they were encouraged, by Christ Church's leadership, to participate more and to become highly committed in all the workings of the group. Like the switchers to The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, who had a 'conversion', they too, felt as if they were part of the elite group of the church.

This study did not prove that denominational switching was the same as conversion. Conversion was shown to be only a possible outcome when individuals switch religious groups. It would be better to view denominational switching as an event that individuals, who are attempting to control their lives, seek out changes in their self-identity.

As has been seen, not all the people who switched religious groups moved from one 'total universe to another'. Most of the switchers, in our study, did experience some degree of change in their self-identity, but only some of them experienced a high degree of personal change, as well as demonstrating a high level of commitment. The religious group also contributed to conversion. As Bird (Unpublished) and Bird and Reimer(1982) have pointed out, and this study has confirmed, not all religious groups require nor expect the individual to convert. Therefore, to be classified as having a conversion, individuals must surrender some form of their old identity, and transfer their new identity to a new or different ideal. If the individuals' new identities were less than a total negation of their former self, then they have experienced what Travisano (1970) called an alternation.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explores denominational switching. It explains the reasons individuals give for leaving their previous religious group, the process they take, and the reasons for joining another religious group. The major conclusions observed in this study are that denominational switching involves a deliberate act, creates a more meaningful, productive way of life, is a matter of conviction, a significant within the group is important, there is rebellion against authority, conversion and denominational switching are not synonymous phenomenon and, finally, switchers are active in their search for a new religious home.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

Individuals demonstrate serious motives, such as, the need to demonstrate good parenting skills, to regain an equilibrium in their religious life, and to maintain peace and harmony within the family unit. As a means of creating a more satisfying, meaningful and productive way of life, switchers demonstrate serious motives. They found religious groups that met their needs and they accepted the values and the norms of their new religious home. The new religious group was seen as

the means in which they could initiate a meaningful change in their religious life.

Switchers to both Christ Church and the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation rebelled against what they perceived as dogmatic, intransigent figures, that is, against paternalistic behaviour by the religious leadership. Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation also rebelled against parental upbringing. This led each group of switchers to look for a group in which the religious leadership was seen as being friendly and caring.

The new religious group became a place in which switchers could feel at home, develop friendship ties and socialize. The social activity of the religious group, and the level of participation demanded by the group, had an effect on the level of commitment. Switchers to both religious groups were influenced by a member whom they respected. Socializing with a significant other within the new religious group, and the development of friendship ties also increased the likelihood that the switcher became active, committed and experienced a high degree of change in self-identity.

Socialization had a different effect on individual switchers. Switchers with children, who developed a friendship network within the group, increased their commitment in at least the activities that involved their children. There was little evidence to show that the commitment level of Christ Church switchers with children

increased in the group's other activities and programs. However, switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation who developed friendship ties did increase their participation in the group's other activities and programs. Those switcher who had deficiencies, such as, the homeless switchers to Christ Church, developed friendship ties and participated in the group's activities and programs. In general, switchers who found a significant other to please, and developed friendship ties with other liked minded members, were more likely to be highly committed and to have a change in self-identity and be converted.

Conversion resulted only when an individual had undergone a deep change in self-identity and had become highly committed to the new religious group. Individuals who were highly committed had selected an alternative to their previous religious life and attempted to maintain it in their new religious home. Alternation (Travisano, 1970) rather than conversion better explained those switchers who wished to restore their balance, or equilibrium, through changing religious groups. These individuals remained long term members, accepted the group's norms, participated in some or all of the activities yet there was no significant change in their self-identity. This study concludes that individuals engage in denominational switching because of the value they associate with the new religious group, and may or may convert to it. Individuals may also affiliate themselves with the new

group's philosophy and activities, and as long as they hold some meaning to the switchers they will remain members and participate, yet they will never convert.

There was no irrational quality to switching. It was a matter of conviction. Individuals were responsible for initiating the search for a new religious group. There was no external pressure on them. They did experience periods of stress, but they were not manipulated by external forces. Switchers who seemed to exchange 'brands', such as, Roman Catholics to Anglicans, and Universalists to Unitarians, also had serious motives for transferring. They took an active role in their own transformation. In general, switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation had a strong desire to get involved, so much so, that the existing members tried to control their enthusiasm. The initial desire to be active should be expected from all switchers, especially if they have been influenced to join because of the group's activities, programs and there is a significant other involved. Also, if they felt their last religious group restricted them, then the freedom to participate in the activities of the new group will motivate them to do so. The institutional expectations of the religious group also has a direct effect on the degree of activity of new members. Some religious groups expect a high level of participation and others do not. Therefore, new members should be expected to move to the activity level of the group over time.

**MINOR FINDINGS**

There was some support for the child rearing, status group and doctrinal beliefs theories. Switchers with children wanted to be good parents, and wished the best religious education for their children. The difference between the two groups was that switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation, with children, felt that they were offering their children a better religious education, therefore, they were being better parents; while the Christ Church switchers were trying to give their children a religious education similar to their own, therefore, they were showing the same parental responsibilities as their parents.

Switchers to the Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation have similar social backgrounds, that is, all members have at least some university education, are financially secure, and live within a geographic area, the West Island. Switchers to Christ Church come from a wide spectrum of the social scale, from people attending university to the homeless. The study is inconclusive in determining if this factor influenced conversion. However, the study indicates that if the status group is cohesive, and the group has activities which attract the majority of the members, and friendship ties are fostered within the group, then there is a high possibility that members will become more deeply committed and participate more.

The more switchers believed the group's message, either before or after, the more committed the individual became. Those who joined a religious group with high expectations and a positive feeling towards the group tended to be more active in the group and more committed. The Lakeshore Unitarian Congregation expected and demanded that new members participate and be committed to its ideal of individual involvement, while Christ Church did not have high expectations of its new members. They were expected to submit and accept the authority of the Church.

There was little support for the depreciation theories, and this finding agrees with other recent research. There was some evidence that social, economic, and psychological factors initially led some people to join, however, this did not translate into participation or commitment. Deprivation theories might be an explanation for switching to fringe or cult groups, but it should be discarded as a motive for switching to mainline denominations.

## CONCLUSION

To obtain a better understanding of denominational switching, research must focus on the issues involved when individuals contemplate leaving their existing religious group, the process they take to find a new religious home and the reasons they give for officially joining another religious



group. This study's model offers a way of categorizing the characteristics of a denominational switcher. The patterns of switching for the two groups in this study are different, but there are similarities as well. More research is needed to develop theories on switching denominations as a process of affiliation, rather than focusing the research on the concept of conversion. To further understand the phenomenon of denominational switching, a more detailed examination of the interrelationship among the variables of this conceptual model is required. Verifying this study should allow measurement of any shifts in denominational switching patterns. These results could indicate how people view themselves, their commitment level to current values and their group loyalties. This would be a more significant area of research into denominational switching.

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