

Mutual care within church congregations based on the paradigm of the family of God



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Christians are known for their caring activities towards the world, except that it is the mutual care between believers that witnesses the restoration found in Jesus Christ to the world (Jn 13:35). The article claims that mutual care between believers may bring restoration and healing to church congregations when based on the paradigm of the family of God. The biblical family metaphors of the adoption in Christ, the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ are discussed to understand the functioning of mutual care through the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* within church congregations. The purpose of mutual care within filial relationships is to restore one another and acquire knowledge about their new identity ('being-function') and to develop their new identity in Christ by preparing one another to participate together in the mission of God ('doing-function') as they continually increase in maturity ('becoming-function'). The C.A.R.E. model, as a practical and applicable tool, employs the biblical concepts of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* that are already functioning within congregations. Enhancing these biblical concepts increases mutual care and leads to a healthier church where members live according to who they are in Christ and extend this blessing of care to others around them.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article offers a unique interdisciplinary exploration, bridging pastoral care, practical theology and systematic theology. It delves into the paradigm of the family of God as a fresh approach to fostering mutual care within church congregations through *koinōnia* and *diakonia*.

Keywords: mutual care; church congregations; family of God; koinonia; diakonia.

Introduction

Caring for others is a Christian characteristic expressed through charitable service to those in need; yet, it also needs to be expressed through mutual care between every believer. While charity is still a key Christian characteristic even as the state took over the management of many of the charitable functions of the church (Erickson 1990:1059), caring activities within church congregations often occur through the participation in outreach programmes and care ministries that mainly focus on relieving poverty or hospital visits to fellow members. Furthermore, spiritual care is addressed by clerical and pastoral counsellors, while mental care is mostly left to secular medical professionals (Vacek 2015:3). However, even though biblical caring commands such as provide for the needy (Ac 2:45), 'share each other's burdens' (Gl 6:2; NLT), 'encourage each other' (2 Cor 13:11; NLT) and support one another (Th 1 5:14) are addressed through these services and ministries, the biblical caring commands are addressed to all Christians. The implication is that every member of the church congregation needs to participate in caring for their fellow members. Mutual care, as this article proposes, is a collaborative effort that cannot be relinquished to a select few but instead needs to permeate within the church congregation, fostering a sense of connection and community.

The motivation for biblical caring between Christians may be found in Jesus' description of Christians as members who belong to the family of God (Mt 12:49). By referring to those around him as part of his family, Jesus indicated that they stood in a specific relationship with him (cf. Lk 12:50). When the relationship of Christians is to be as close as family members, the implication is that Christians are responsible to support their brothers and sisters in Christ with their resources and gifts (Gl 6:10) just as they support their families (cf. Tm 1 5:8; Frame 2013:115). This means that mutual care occurs when members bring blessings to one another by taking 'time to minister in various ways, to very specific needs of another', through words of encouragement (Heb 10:24–25), exhortation (Ja 5:20), wise counsel (Col 3:16; Eph 4:29) as well as through the assistance of material needs (Ja 2:15–16; 1 Jn 3:17; Grudem 1994:959).

This article grounds mutual care within the paradigm of the family of God and discusses how mutual care may be enhanced by optimising *koinōnia* and *diakonia* to increase the health of church congregations. The health of the church is increased when mutual care develops the God-given identity of the believer ('being-function'), which prepares the believer for their ministry ('doing-function') while growing in the likeness of Christ ('becoming-function') (Roeland 2022:122). Mutual care facilitates restoration and healing through the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* when the church congregation is rooted in the paradigm of the family of God.

The church is described within Scripture from various perspectives. The church is not exclusively a New Testament institution but was initially denoted in the Old Testament as a congregation or an assembly of God (cf. Jos 8:35; Ezr 2:65; Jl 2:16; Berkhof 1949:623, 633). There are 96 images in the New Testament that describe the qualities or characteristics of the church (cf. Jn 15:5; 1 Cor 3:6–9; Pt 1 2:5; Erickson 1990:1034; Minear 2004:269). Even though the metaphor of the family of God is one perspective from which to view the church, it may be the most illustrative to discuss the functioning of mutual care within church congregations.

The discussion in this article employs the biblical family metaphors of the adoption in Christ, the body of Christ and the bride of Christ (cf. Grudem 1994:859). Within purposeful fellowship [*koinonia*], mutual care becomes an opportunity to serve [*diakonia*] one another. Consequently, as mutual care depends on the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* within church congregations, the development and functioning thereof may further provide insight into increased mutual care within congregations.

The interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* is an ongoing discussion to address challenges such as poverty. Tetey and Nel (2020:2) call for pastoral care (as *diakonia*) not only to be reactionary (relief) aimed at alleviating and assisting people in coping with poverty in South Africa but instead be transformative through the educative aspect of pastoral care so that people are moved beyond their need for compassion towards producing Christ's love by strengthening their inner lives with the knowledge of God's truth. This implies that transformation occurs by cultivating a sense of belonging (Tetey & Nel 2020:9). In other words, true solidarity (*koinōnia* and *diakonia*) with humanity is created through relationships and not only by doing (*diakonia*) something to or for another person (Ries & Hendriks 2013:5). The experience of belonging that is created within *koinōnia* in conjunction with the compassionate activities (*diakonia*) of others, therefore, leads to restoration. However, Ries and Hendriks (2013:7) emphasised that caution needs to be taken against too much emphasis on *koinōnia*, which may lead to the self-centredness of the church congregation or too much emphasis on *diakonia*, which may result in nothing more than bringing social relief to those outside the church congregation. This indicates that the interaction between *koinōnia* and *diakonia* needs to be continuous within church congregations and importantly

also during outreach programmes. As *koinōnia* [fellowship and community] and *diakonia* [service and ministry] continue to intersect within the congregation, a process of transformation unfolds among church members.

To elaborate on the family paradigm, including biblical family metaphors, a literature study will be conducted in this article to determine the caring functions of members within church congregations. The caring functions of members form the basis for the process of enhancing mutual care within the family of God, which precedes the final discussion of transforming a church congregation into a caring family of God.

The family of God

The display of caring activities in the New Testament points out that believers lived according to the paradigm of the family of God through their caring functions as members of the family of God. The family of God may have been more than a spiritual reality of being chosen by God through His grace (cf. Eph 2) in that it may also refer to the reality of a new community who desires to display God's care towards one another in the way that a caring family does (cf. Gl 6:2). With their love rooted in Christ (cf. Viola 2008:102), their ability to care for one another comes from experiencing the love of Christ and the desire to share this love with one another (cf. Jn 13:34; Jn 1 3:16). The experience of Christ's love is such a reality that the family of God feels compelled to share it with one another. Through this act of care, God is shown to the world, and the gospel is communicated through the loving communion between members who serve others (Nel 2015:133). The spiritual reality of belonging to the family of God is expressed through authentic mutual care between believers in the New Testament, bearing witness of God's care for His family.

The close relationships between the believers in the New Testament seem to resemble a caring family. By calling one another 'brother' and 'sister' (Mt 12:50; Rm 1:13, 8:12; 1 Cor 1:10, 6:8, 7:15; Phlm 1:2; Ja 1:2, 2:5; Grudem 1994:741), the New Testament believers acknowledged one another as part of the new family of God who were interdependent on mutual care. Their ability to care for each other stems from their in-depth understanding of each other's strengths, weaknesses and needs, demonstrating the necessary act of caring (Kane 2017:103). The implication is that the needs of members within filial relationships are not hidden from one another but opportunities to care for one another. The example of the New Testament believers who lived according to the new nature of family members, therefore, illustrates that close and caring filial relationships are foundational for mutual care to flow within the church congregation.

The fellowship [*koinonia*] of the new believers in Christ displayed the characteristics of a caring family. The New Testament instructs that the characteristics of close filial relationships such as love (cf. Th 1 4:9; Jn 1 3:11; Jn 1 4:7, 11, 19, 21; Jn 1 5:2), trust (cf. Tm 1 4:12, 16), respect (cf. Rm 12:10; Pt 1 2:17), support (cf. Ac 20:35), honesty (cf. 2 Cor 13:8;

Eph 4:15; Jn 1 1:8), acceptance (Phlp 2:2), encouragement (cf. Th 1 5:11, 14) and caring of one another (cf. 2 Cor 8:12, 14; Buchanan 2014:4) be evident between the members of the family of God (cf. Jn 1 3:14). The characteristics of a caring family are displayed when members experience themselves as belonging to God and belonging to one another (Thompson 2006:207). The sense of belonging to the family of God therefore becomes evident within the church congregation that displays characteristics of a caring family.

The motivation to care for one another (*diakonia*) was found in their desire to imitate the care of the Father (Eph 5:1) to His children and the world. Like a caring father, God loves His children, sometimes rebukes His children, instructs His children (cf. Pr 1:8), guides His children (cf. Jr 3:4), exhorts and comforts His children (cf. Ps 103:13), grieves over His children (cf. Pr 17:25), deals honourably with His children and gives them the best gifts in His possession (cf. Mt 7:11; Deens 1963:68, 69). Jesus Christ calls his followers to replicate this care to one another because it is this love for one another that 'will prove to the world that you are My disciples' (Jn 13:35; NLT). Accordingly, by imitating the care of the Father through mutual care, God's care for His family becomes tangible between members (cf. Jn 1 3:19; 4:21) and visible to the world (cf. Mt 5:13–16).

Within the new community, the authentic relationships of the family of God may have encouraged transformation and strengthened God's family. The family of God provided a new community to believers who experienced severed relationships with their own families because of disagreements about the messianic identity of Jesus (Thompson 2006:196). Rejected by their own family and the world, believers were strengthened by the acceptance and support of the caring family of God. Furthermore, a new believer who was accepted into a community environment with high expectations and strong personal support, was nurtured towards maturity (Heurtz 2010:63). This indicates that the close filial relationships of the family of God produce transformation (Viola 2008:106). The purpose of authentic filial relationships is to transform believers into the likeness of God and strengthening all members by creating a sense of belonging, which encourages acceptance and support among members.

The example set by the New Testament believers indicates that the spiritual reality of belonging to the family of God has a physical reality wherein the participation of every member contributes to the transformation of all members through mutual care. The metaphor of the family of God furthermore illustrates the need for close filial relationships within *koinōnia* that stimulate an eagerness to share in the care of one another (*diakonia*). The biblical metaphors of the adoption in Christ, the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ may further reveal the contribution of mutual care between members of the family of God.

Adoption in Christ

The new reality of the family of God starts with the adoption in Christ, which describes the addition of a new member to

the family of God (cf. Eph 1:5) that may also have practical implications for the adopted child (cf. Eph 4:15). The adoption by God is a legal act that changes the status of the child in relation to God and brings the child 'under the law of filial obedience' (Berkhof 1949:573; Erickson 2001:322). The change in lineage means that there is a legal transfer from the authority of the world over the person to the legal authority of God over the child of God. While the adoption in Christ is immediate and permanent (cf. Heb 2:10–11), this God-given identity of the new family needs to be understood and developed (Nel 2015:26, 27) within the compassionate community (*koinōnia*) of the family of God. The change in lineage, therefore, has practical implications for the child of God that need to be explained and modelled through the *diakonia* of fellow members within God's compassionate community (*koinōnia*).

Healing the newly adopted child of God from the brokenness of the world may occur within the compassionate community of the caring family of God. Members of the family of God are responsible for caring for one another and their ability to comfort others (cf. 2 Cor 1:4) comes from facing their own helplessness and going through suffering with Christ (Kellemen 2015:126). By realising that every person journeys from brokenness to healing and reconciliation (Thesnaar 2010:272), a culture of care is cultivated where *koinōnia* expresses mutual love (Du Plessis & Breed 2020:3). Healing needs to include challenging any prevailing guilt, shame and deep wounds by understanding God's love and grace in Christ so that a new way of thinking and doing can be developed (Breed 2018:255). The family of God is filled with members who experienced both the brokenness of the world and the healing found in Christ. These experiences make all members uniquely qualified to serve [*diakonia*] one another through mutual care.

The compassionate community of the family of God encourages the newly adopted child to abandon the old worldview (cf. Eph 4:17) for the biblical worldview (cf. Eph 4:22). The compassionate community (*koinōnia*) teaches the child of God to pattern his or her holy and distinctly different lifestyle (cf. Eph 4:24) after God and not after the world (cf. Eph 5:1; Lv 11:44; Christian & Soal 2022:5). Replacing the old sinful nature therefore needs to start with an abandonment of the current worldview (Wright 2010:78) and the clarification of any deeply held religious convictions (Swanepoel 2009:66) as these influence how the believer handles his or her life (Breed 2021:4). Meaning found in the old worldview is therefore progressively replaced with meaning found in God, which is modelled within the family of God who lives a counter-cultural life in Christ. The replacement of the old worldview needs the care (*diakonia*) of fellow members so that the newly adopted child may live according to the new meaning found in Christ.

The newly adopted child of God needs the care of the family of God to learn how to live according to the new standards and values of God the Father, which forms the

basis of the newly God-given identity. With the standard of the moral character of the child coming from God's perfection (Erickson 1990:285), the newly adopted child needs to learn how to respond to His call, submit to the rule of Christ and live according to these completely different standards and values of what he or she has known (cf. Eph 4:21–24; Van Schaik 2019:46). Like a child learns standards and values of a family, so the child of God learns the standards and values of God, the Father, which are explained and modelled through the care of family members. The care of fellow family members is therefore needed to change the character of the newly adopted child of God into the likeness of Christ so that the child can live according to their new identity in Christ.

The metaphor of adoption describes the believer as a child adopted out of the broken world into a caring family who nurtures the child towards health. The believer becomes 'God's person' within the communion of believers (*koinōnia*), in which he or she shares and receives care (*diakonia*) (Nel 2015:134). Care of the family of God is needed to develop the 'being-function' of the newly adopted child because of the counter-cultural purpose and meaning of the newly God-given identity in Christ. The compassionate community (*koinōnia*) of the family of God prepares the newly adopted child of God for the application of their identity as they model care (*diakonia*) between one another.

The body of Christ

The metaphor of the Body of Christ indicates that the 'being-function' of the newly adopted child is more than a state of stagnation but a first step in 'becoming' as the child moves towards the application of the newly God-given identity ('doing-function'). With a newly God-given identity that must be enacted upon (Van Eck 2013:1), the newly adopted child must now learn to live ('doing-function') according to the purpose of this identity (Nel 2017:4), which is to live as a representative of Jesus Christ (Breed 2019:3). Once the newly God-given identity is understood within the compassionate community (*koinōnia*) of the family of God, the newly adopted child has a practical responsibility to apply their identity by living accordingly. Instead of being merely a spiritual reality, the Body of Christ is then the practical embodiment of the new identity of the child of God.

The interdependency of members on mutual care implies that members of the Body of Christ depend on all members to fulfil their function to express God's love to one another. Like the different roles in a biological family, each member of the family of God has a different function (Dreyer 2016:52; Viola 2008:106) and a unique gift within the Body of Christ that must be developed so that all members may contribute their unique gifts to express the love of God and the love of humans through their *diakonia* (Breed 2013:2; Thesnaar 2010:269). Members of the Body of Christ depend on all members to fulfil their unique calling within a variety of functions, which contributes to the expression of care between the family of God.

The unity of the Body of Christ is found in the variety and diversity within the contribution of all members (cf. 1 Cor 1:7) so that the entire Body functions properly (cf. 1 Cor 1:25–31). The unity of the church is to be like the unity of the Trinity (cf. Jn 17:21), which means that perfect unity does not discount the individual gifts, abilities, interests, responsibilities, preferences and desires of the person (Grudem 1994:844), but instead depend on uniquely different members of the family of God to contribute their uniquely different gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12:12–31; Berkhof 1949:634). The uniquely God-given functions and gifts have the purpose of ensuring that the Body of Christ is without any deficiency when every member contributes accordingly (cf. 1 Cor 1:12–27). Consequently, the diversity of gifts and functions works in unity when every member contributes to the benefit of the Body of Christ.

The unique gifts and functions of the Body of Christ may imply that members need to reach out to one another in care (*diakonia*) so that members of the family of God may be healed and transformed within a compassionate community (*koinōnia*). Resembling the care of members in a biological family, the family of God bears the spiritual, physical and financial burdens of their less fortunate brothers and sisters (cf. Ac 4:34). The mutual care between members of the family of God lightens the burdens of the world through the diversity of gifts and functions within the Body of Christ. Importantly, when believers receive efficient attention to their problems, an atmosphere is created in which the Word can spread outside the congregation (Breed 2012:5). Healing that occurred through the care of fellow members stimulates transformed believers to extend care towards others.

The Great Commission of Jesus to spread the gospel to every nation (cf. Mt 28:19; Ac 1:8) is a command to extend the caring activities of the members of the Body of Christ towards the world. The church must then align itself with God's eternal plan to free people from the rule of evil and renew them in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Breed 2019:6). This makes the pastoral mission of the family of God to be an agent of restoration in and through Christ that puts right the effects of a broken, bent and disordered world (Kinnaman & Lyons 2016:7). The difference of the God-given identity is thus displayed through the hope that believers offer, in the grace exhibited to others, and in the sacrificial love for others (McNeal 2009:24). The Good News of Jesus is witnessed through the mutual caring activities (*diakonia*) between members of the family of God and becomes visible through the extension of care towards the world. Consequently, mutual care between members of the family of God has the potential to transform the world.

The metaphor of the Body of Christ describes the implications of the 'doing-function' for the adopted child as a representative of Christ. With transformation occurring within *koinōnia* through the *diakonia* of every member (Ries & Hendriks 2013:4), serving others is not optional, but a responsibility of all members (cf. Mk 10:45; Breed 2019:3). The necessity of

applying the God-given identity of the child of God is that God's care for His children needs to be revealed through the care (*diakonia*) of every member of the Body of Christ, as representative of Jesus, to prepare members to reach out to the world in care by witnessing to the Gospel of Christ. Wright (2010:236) warns against the failure to reach out, 'if society becomes more corrupt and dark, it's no use blaming society'.

The bride of Christ

The spiritual reality of the Bride of Christ also has practical implications for the family of God. While sanctification is the continuous transformation of the believer into the likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit (cf. Titus 3:5), the believer is also given the responsibility to enhance the likeness of Christ (cf. Phlp 3:13–14; Col 3:10; Heb 12:1, 14) so that the Bride of Christ can be presented as 'blameless' upon Jesus' return (cf. Phlp 2:15b–16; Min 2014:46; Thompson 2006:19–20; Viola 2009:48). The Bride of Christ is then responsible to 'nurture those who are already believers and build them to maturity in faith' (cf. Col 1:28; Grudem 1994:867). Nurturing support during the journey towards spiritual maturity, brings healing and empowerment to become bearers of the healing ministry of Christ (Mouton 2012:127). This implies that every member of the Bride of Christ is needed to edify one another with the aim to grow in the likeness of Christ. Belonging to the Bride of Christ, indicates that family members care for one another to the extent that they are concerned with their growth in Christ.

The mutual care of the family of God provides a caring environment that contributes to preparing members of the Bride of Christ through mutual edification. Inasmuch as the family of God grows through personal relationship, prayer, teaching, modelling and personal instruction (Marshall & Payne 2009:78), the purpose of mutual edification is to encourage and console within an environment of mutual care, truth and love (Van Schaik 2019:70). This implies that mutual edification occurs through *koinōnia* (cf. Ac 5; 1 Cor 12:26; Erickson 2001:348) when the meaning and significance of the Word is contemplated together as the family of God (cf. Nel 2015:244). A caring environment (*koinōnia*) permits mutual edification (*diakonia*) to flourish so that the church congregation is built up in Christ.

The authentic relationships of the family of God may provide opportunities for the Bride of Christ to restore one another. Edification involves the sharing of hurt and joy (cf. 1 Cor 12:26), the sharing of struggles (cf. Gl 6:2) and occasionally correction and rebuke (cf. Mt 18:5-17; Th 1 5) with the aim to restore members to righteous living and fellowship [*koinonia*] with one another (Erickson 1990:1055). Within trustworthy relationships, members freely share their joys and struggles, enabling edification between members of the family of God. This makes pastoral care, teaching, ministry and edification (cf. Ac 18:26) the responsibility of all brothers and sisters in Christ (Viola 2008:185). The diversity within the Body of Christ brings different perspectives that contribute to the

restoration of members through mutual care. Consequently, every member of the Bride of Christ is needed to address the brokenness of the world through mutual edification within the authentic relationships of the family of God.

The Bride of Christ describes a continuous process of mutual edification that empowers the family of God to care for one another and the world. Logically, the edification of believers is prior to fulfilling the command to evangelise and occurs within *koinōnia* (Erickson 1990:1054, 1055), where believers teach one another (as *diakonia*) how to fellowship [*koinonia*] with God and one another (Viola 2008:65). Therefore, even though the church will not be perfect before Jesus' return, every member must continually work for the purity of their church congregation (Grudem 1994:875). The continuous need for edification indicates the need for the continuous involvement of every member of the Bride of Christ in edifying one another.

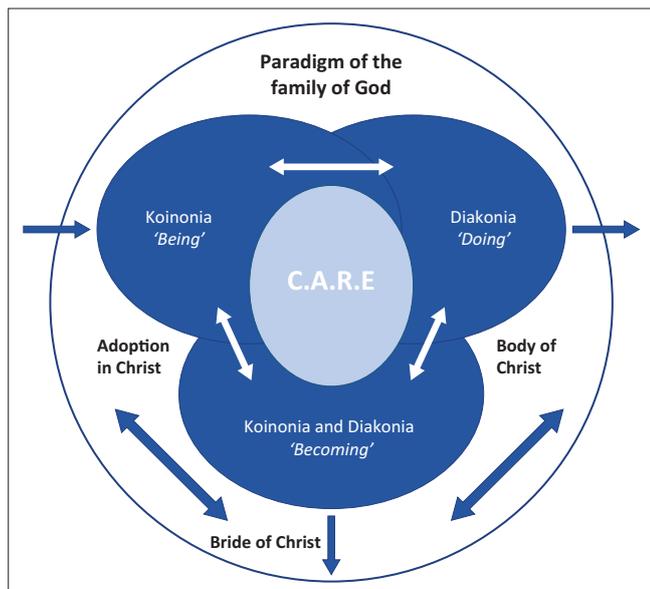
The Bride of Christ describes the continual 'becoming-function' of the child of God as he or she grows from a newly adopted child towards a mature believer in Christ. This implies a need for the continuous interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* within the family of God through which the 'being-function' is developed for participating in the 'doing-function' while increasing the 'becoming-function' of every member through the care and edification of fellow members.

The discussion of the functioning of members within the family of God revealed that its purpose is to promote the health of the church congregation through mutual care by participating in the mission of God. The missional nature of the church (Linden & Nel 2016:2) is therefore grounded first in serving [*diakonia*] one another with care, which enables members to participate in the mission of God to the world. Consequently, participating in the mission of God necessitates the optimal functioning of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* through the mutual care of every member of the family of God.

Mutual care through the family of God

The paradigm of the family of God revealed that the family of God is a compassionate community (C) in which mutual care develops the new God-given identity of the believer that empowers the child of God to apply (A) their new identity and reach out (R) to others in care through the edification (E) of every member. The acronym C.A.R.E. is used to describe the proposed model (illustrated in Figure 1) for the enhancement of mutual care that increases the health of church congregations.

The C.A.R.E. model describes the process of the adoption of the child of God into the compassionate community of the family of God in which ordinary friendship and affection for one another grows in *koinōnia* (Grudem 1994:958). With *koinōnia* as a means of experiencing grace as members talk, eat, work and play together (cf. Ac 2:46–47; Grudem 1994:959), the care (*diakonia*) of fellow family members develops the



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Note: C.A.R.E. (compassionate community, apply, reach out, edification) is the proposed model that refers to providing what is necessary for restoration, welfare, and growth in Christ.

FIGURE 1: The C.A.R.E. model.

new God-given identity ('being-function') of the child of God. Mutual care between family members exemplifies the new identity in Christ and contributes to the development of the foundational 'being-function' of the child of God.

The C.A.R.E. model builds on the foundational 'being-function' by emphasising the need to apply the new God-given identity within the 'doing-function'. When members of the family of God see that caring for others in need is a response to the love of Jesus Christ, their understanding of mission and ministry changes (cf. Mt 25:40; Heuertz 2010:77) and they begin to see their neighbour's needs as their own (cf. Mt 22:39; Bentz 2014:116; Viola 2008:101). The result of the development of the God-given identity within the mutual care of the family of God is that a desire is created to apply this identity to reach out in care to others.

The 'becoming-function' within the C.A.R.E. model describes the continuous need for edification with the purpose of increasing maturity in Christ. Because teaching and mentoring (*diakonia*) occur within the personal relationships (Swanepoel 2009:250) of *koinōnia*, every part of the congregational life needs to be an in-service training for all members (Nel 2015:194). The unique diversity of the members of the family of God enables edification within authentic relationships through mutual care. When edification is continuous throughout the family of God, the result of mutual care is that caring activities towards others increase.

In summary, the C.A.R.E. model describes the process of welcoming the adopted child into the family of God and nurturing the child towards maturity in Christ. The process of the C.A.R.E. model depends on the contribution of every family member through the continuous interaction of

koinōnia and *diakonia* to restore, develop and model the new life in Christ. Because mutual care between the family of God restores and edifies one another, the family of God grows together in Christ. Consequently, mutual care between members of the family of God increases the health of members as they continually grow in Christ.

Transforming the church congregation into a caring family of God

With Dreyer's (2015:3) appeal for a simplified model of 'what it means to "be church" of the Triune God' and the suggestion to consider biblical metaphors for the church (Dreyer 2013:3), this article suggested the C.A.R.E. model based on the paradigm of the family of God as a practical illustration of the caring activities within church congregations. With the nature of the church then derived from God the Father, caring filial relationships witness to the new nature in Christ. The implication is that the church congregation is a compassionate community that is purposefully created by God so that every member of the family of God may participate in mutual care that promotes the health and growth of one another in Christ. Transforming the church congregation into a caring family of God then begins with the understanding of the nature of the church based on the paradigm of the family of God.

The C.A.R.E. model suggests that mutual care between believers may be increased through the intentional interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia*:

Intentional *diakonia* within *koinōnia*

By providing opportunities for members to participate in the *diakonia* of fellow members, the experience of the love of God that restores members is enhanced. With the purpose of *koinōnia* between believers as acting on behalf of God to display His salvation and restoration (Botes 2016:130), the grace-filled care of the family of God transforms believers into who they already are in Christ (cf. Eph 4:15). This indicates that believers need to be served before they can serve [*diakonia*] (Horton 2009:212). As adopted children from a broken world, believers need to experience the care (*diakonia*) of fellow members within a compassionate community before being able to serve others.

The *diakonia* of fellow members prepares the child of God to fulfil his or her responsibility as a representative of Jesus by serving others. Believers who are accepted into a compassionate community where they are pastorally cared for and given the opportunity to care for others, extend their service to others outside the community (Nel 2015:134). The *diakonia* of others motivates members to do for others what God has already done for them (Wright 2010:89). The experience of being cared for by others creates the desire to care in return. The foundation of participating in the mission of God is then based on the experience of care within the family of God.

The edification (*diakonia*) of fellow members occurs within *koinōnia*. Discipleship training is relational as it needs modelling and imitation (Marshall & Payne 2009:155). This indicates that the whole of congregational life needs to be an in-service training of all members (Nel 2015:194). Similarly to a child imitating their parents, the child of God will imitate his or her new family. This implies that the child of God already imitates what is being modelled currently within a church congregation, which places a responsibility on all members of the family of God.

Intentional *koinōnia* within *diakonia*

Within *koinōnia*, members are transformed by the *diakonia* of fellow members. The *diakonia* of members of the family of God restores human dignity (cf. Mt 25:31–46) within the presence of relationships (*koinōnia*) (Ries & Hendriks 2013:5). The transformation in Christ is the healing of scars, the redeeming of failures and the forgiveness of sins (Tetty & Nel 2020:8) that is modelled through the *diakonia* of fellow members (cf. 2 Cor 1:4). Close filial relationships demonstrate restoration and creates a sense of belonging alongside the care of fellow members.

The authentic relationships within *koinōnia* encourage mutual care (*diakonia*). True relationships are formed from the awareness that every member is part of Christ's Body and results in a special interaction where one gives money, food or shelter while another gives a story, availability, a smile or a tear (Ries & Hendriks 2013:5). Being available and present to listen to the stories of the other, share a meal with or when a person's insights and concerns are found important or interesting (Heuertz 2010:80) transforms members. Mutual care is more than financial support and takes place through the smaller moments of care between members of the family of God where every member contributes from the resources available to them.

Within *koinōnia*, believers learn to participate in *diakonia*. The filial relationships enable the development of the God-given gifts of all believers (cf. Eph 4:12) to be used in the service of God (Breed 2018:99). Congregational structure therefore needs to provide opportunities for all members to become involved in ministry (Breed 2019:5). The gifts were purposefully given by God to every member so that they may be used in His service to care for fellow members as well as the world. The close filial relationships provide opportunities for members to discover and develop their gifts that is to be purposefully employed by reaching out to the world in care.

The paradigm of the family of God reveals that the enhancement of the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* increases mutual care between members of the family of God and contributes to the health of the church congregation. God equips His family with various gifts which enables His children to share in the responsibility to care for one another to prepare the family to reach out to the world in care. When the nature of the church congregation is therefore, based

upon the paradigm of the family of God, the health of the church congregation increases.

Conclusion

The article determined that when mutual care is based on the paradigm of the family of God, care between members enhances restoration and brings healing to every member through the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia*. Mutual care promotes the health of the church congregation by:

- Restoring the newly adopted child from the brokenness of the world within *koinōnia*.
- Encouraging transformation of the newly adopted child as members model a new purpose in Christ.
- Developing the newly God-given identity of the child of God as representative of Christ.
- Developing the gifts and functions of all members to increase the *diakonia* of all members.
- Creating a sense of belonging through the experience of the love of God.
- Preparing all members to participate in the mission of God within the church congregation as well as towards the world.
- Motivating mutual edification through mentorship, modelling and personal instruction.
- Modelling the new values and standards of the God-given identity to live a purposeful life in Christ.
- Growing towards maturity in Christ through mutual edification.

With mutual care contributing to the health of the church congregation and witnessing to the world (cf. Jn 13:35), the enhancement thereof needs to be purposeful. The article grounds the purposeful enhancement of mutual care within the paradigm of the family of God. Consequently, the C.A.R.E. model illustrates the purposeful enhancement of mutual care by transforming the church congregation into the caring family of God.

The C.A.R.E. model describes the nurturing purpose of the family of God who caringly receives the newly adopted child into the compassionate community (*koinōnia*) and models (*diakonia*) the 'being-function' of the new God-given identity. Understanding the 'being-function' leads to the application of the God-given identity ('doing-function') through the development of the gifts and functions within the Body of Christ. The continuous need to grow towards maturity in Christ ('becoming-function') necessitates the need for the mutual edification of the Bride of Christ. The process of the C.A.R.E. model directs the growth of the newly adopted child in Christ towards maturity through the mutual care of the family of God by enhancing the interaction of *koinōnia* and *diakonia* within church congregations to promote the health of the congregation. Instead of a radical new ideal for the church, the C.A.R.E. model illustrates the optimal process that leads a child of God to a mature adult in Christ.

In a world that desperately seeks acceptance, belonging and worth, the mutual care between members of the family of God embodies a counter-cultural lifestyle by displaying the restoration found in Christ which bears witness to the love of God.

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Data availability

The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in this article and its references.

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