

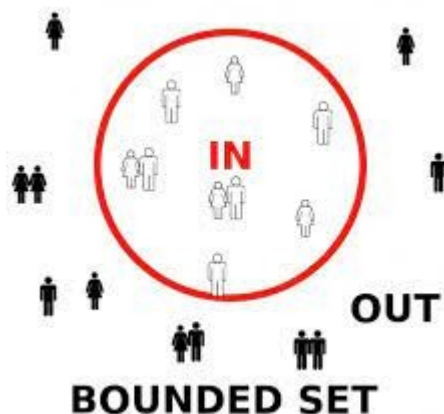
## Foundations, Walls, and Borders

A ranch owner in Arizona struggled to keep his cattle from straying. He seemed to spend all his time maintaining barbed wire fences to keep the herd within the farmstead.

Then he hit upon the idea of sinking wells on his land instead. The fences were no longer required to keep the cattle in.

This story has often been used when considering the ideas of Paul Hiebert, anthropologist and missiologist (*Anthropological Reflections on Missiological\* Issues*) relating to what he termed 'Bounded' and 'Centred' sets with respect to faith communities.

These images help to explain:

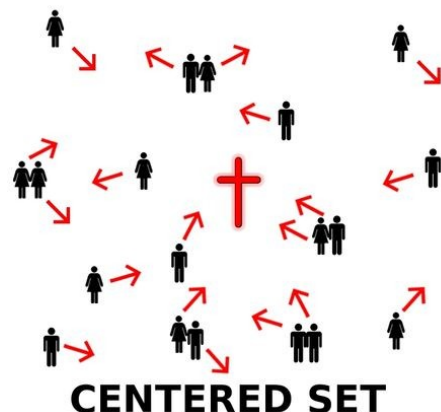


Bounded communities are those which build walls around themselves. They seek to maintain their separate identities, through rule maintenance, and to exclude others.

You're either 'In' or you're 'Out'

Centred communities are open and rooted in a central belief system. People are not in or out, but closer or further from the centre.

Everyone is 'In', no one is 'Out'.



## Reflection

- Does our faith community draw a border to determine who belongs and who does not?

We may proudly regard ourselves as an inclusive community - a church without walls. But do we have 'invisible' walls that are unintentionally exclusive?

Re-telling stories of the past reinforce a positive collective memory. But could this narrative be seen as a barrier to newcomers?

When we stop to think about it, do we unintentionally put-up invisible walls?

- Or is it defined by core values, people are not in or out, but closer or further from the centre? Everyone is in, no one is out

### **A centred faith community is about direction, not exclusion.**

- It is defined by its foundational values, people are not in or out, but closer or further from the centre
- Which way are we headed?
- Are we headed towards the centre / The core values of the community, or are we headed away from them?

### **The closer we get to the Centre, the more Christlike our behaviour.**

- Do we, exhibit the features of Christ's radical lifestyle?  
Love, generosity, hospitality, forgiveness, mercy, justice, righteousness, and peace?

Ian Talbot

\*Missiology – The study of the church's mission