Spiritual Journal Keeping: 
An Ethnographic Study of Content, Materials, Practice, and Structure

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements 
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Abstract

This thesis reports the findings of an exploratory, ethnographic study of the spiritual journal keeping practices of Catholic university students at the “Harbour House,” a Catholic student centre and parish operating on the campus of a large, Canadian university. Guided by the question, “How and why do Catholic students keep journals in which they document their spiritual lives?” it examines journal keeping in the context of Catholic spirituality, the relationships students have with their journals as spiritual documents, and the representations of information found in spiritual journals. Findings are organized under the themes of Content, Materials, Practice, and Structure, and demonstrate that spiritual journal keeping is a deeply personal activity that involves a variety of unique and individualized information practices and behaviours, developed and used in order to better navigate a vast and mysterious spiritual path, and to work towards spiritual growth.
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I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the research project, providing a brief background of the activity of spiritual journal keeping both in the “Harbour House” environment and in the broader Catholic tradition. It then outlines the studies’ objectives and guiding research questions and provides a short overview of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.2 – Background

In a pew near the front of the chapel, a girl is seated facing the altar, with one knee pulled up to her chest. She rests her head on her arms, and the hood of her black sweater is pulled up. Next to her on the pew is a journal with a yellow, floral-print cover, and next to that, a pencil case. The book is closed, but has a pen stuck between the pages, as though she had been writing, but has paused. (Fieldnotes, January 30, 2013)

At the “Harbour House” (name changed), a Catholic student centre, student residence, and parish on a large, Canadian university campus, it is common to encounter students who are seeking silence. These students can be found sitting in the quiet corners of the house’s main floor, curled up in regal, leather armchairs. Or, they can be found in the large, stone chapel, seated on a pew or on the floor. Often, they are sitting with a journal, sometimes writing intently, and sometimes pausing, as in the excerpt above, to reflect.

Despite the ubiquity of technological platforms like blogs, Facebook pages, or twitter accounts, and in the midst of the academic and social pressures that come with being a university student, there are some who take the time to reflect and to connect with God in a more private and personal way. The creation of a spiritual journal—a handwritten, bespoke print artifact of
sentimental value, in which one documents one’s spiritual life—is a common practice amongst the students making use of the Harbour House. It was this quiet but widespread presence of the intimate recording of spiritual information that captured my interest during my time as one of the House’s student residents. Here, my peers seamlessly wove their spirituality into their academic and social lives, and were not only at home in the movement between the visible and invisible world, but seemed to have developed, in the keeping of a spiritual journal, an intriguingly material way to explore these worlds and the relationships between them.

1.2.1 – Journal Keeping in the Catholic Tradition

In this study, *spiritual journaling* (or *spiritual journal keeping*) refers to the practice of keeping a journal in order to document and reflect upon one’s spiritual life. *Spiritual journals* are handwritten, bespoke print artifacts with substantial sentimental value, containing words, drawings, doodles, and pasted-in ephemera, in which are recorded the details of students’ spiritual lives. In the Catholic tradition, the practice of keeping a journal in the context of spirituality is centuries old, being traced back to practices originating with a 4th Century monk, St. Anthony of Egypt, who encouraged his fellow monks to keep a record of their sins (Lejeune 2009, p. 54). The practice evolved over time, and became more broadly reflective in nature, developing into a way of engaging in a “dialogue with God” (p. 55), common first amongst members of religious orders and growing increasingly popular amongst laypeople. Today, the practice of documenting one’s spiritual life in a journal remains common amongst lay and vowed religious people alike, and can be assisted by a body of how-to literature that advocates for journal keeping as an essential tool for self-discovery and for deepening one’s faith. Amongst students, especially those of university age, the practice is often recommended by spiritual
directors and other mentors because of its potential to aid one in discovering his or her vocation, or calling, in life.

Throughout history, the journals of saints and other well-known Catholic figures have been published and studied. These have sometimes informed the development of spiritual innovations or the spread of new practices, such as the journals of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who kept extensive spiritual journals and whose *Spiritual Exercises* (pp. 64-65) are a method of prayer practiced widely today. More contemporary spiritual journals, such as those of Trappist monk Thomas Merton, or radical pacifist Dorothy Day, provide candid accounts of the day-to-day living out of one’s faith, addressing topics such as the importance of interfaith dialogue, the injustices of poverty and oppression, concerns about war and, in Merton’s case, the challenge of keeping his monastic vows over a lifetime (Day 2008; Merton 1998, 2001). These journals, and many others, present a real and human picture of the questions one faces in the spiritual life, and of the struggle to make sense of both the material world and what lies beyond it.

But these spiritual writings have historically been valued and examined for their content, and for what their entries might reveal about well-known Catholic figures or about the spiritual life, rather than for what they might tell us about the nature of information in the context of spirituality, the ways in which spiritual information is documented, or the significance of the role of these personal records in one’s daily life. Alongside these influential published journals, many unknown individuals are documenting their own spiritual lives in a similar way, seeking time and space not just to pray, but to write, draw, and otherwise artfully document their spiritual experiences, creating private, detailed, and imaginative records of their search for God and for spiritual understanding.
1.3 – Statement of the Problem

This thesis explores the spiritual-journal keeping practices of Catholic university students at the Harbour House, a Catholic parish and university community. My interest in spiritual information was largely inspired by Jarkko Kari’s (2007) seminal work on spiritual information, “A Review of the Spiritual in Information Science,” in which he explored the broad question, “What do information, information processes, information services, as well as information systems and technology have to do with the spiritual?” (p. 935). He did so by conducting a literature review of 31 refereed texts in information studies and examining the “manifestation of spirituality” (p. 935) therein. This and related articles will be discussed in depth in Chapter II – Literature Review, but for now, I wish to note that Kari’s article identifies the area of spiritual information as one into which little research has been done (pp. 935-936), and as an area that is minimally understood and attended to by the field of information studies. This article has informed the development of my study, which aims to contribute to what is known about information in relation to the spiritual.

Spiritual journal keeping occurs at the intersection of information and spirituality, and information and everyday life, and offers a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which individuals generate, document, and archive spiritual information, and the role these information artifacts and practices play in people’s daily living. This differs from much of the existing research in this area, which often focuses on the role of information at the level of the organization or institution, and in the lives of professionals such as clergy members or theological librarians (Karp & Keck 1996; Wicks 1999; Roland 2007; Michels 2012). This thesis’ focus on spiritual journal keeping amongst a population of Catholic university students offers an exploratory glimpse into the role of spiritual information in everyday life, with an
emphasis on the creation and use of spiritual information in the context of the day-to-day activities of Catholic students who keep spiritual journals.

1.4 – Research Objectives

My study was guided by the following question: How and why do Catholic university students keep journals in which they document their spiritual lives? Specifically, I hoped to explore:

i) The practice of journaling in the context of spirituality,
ii) Individuals’ relationships with their journals and journal collections as spiritual documents, and
iii) The representations of information in a spiritual journal.

These three questions were addressed using ethnography, by making use of participant observation, interviews, and photographs, which will be explained in detail in Chapter III – Methods. This method produced a rich record of data in the form of descriptive fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and images, from which I have drawn in order to present this study’s findings and, in doing so, contribute to the small but growing body of information studies research focusing on the religious and spiritual realms.

1.5 – Clarification of Terms

This chapter has already defined *spiritual journals* and *spiritual journal keeping* (Section 1.2.1). Here, I wish to clarify the use of the term “spiritual,” as opposed to the term “religious.” These two terms are often and easily conflated. One can be “spiritual” without necessarily being “religious” or subscribing to any particular religious tradition, but the two can just as often be “two dimensions of a single enterprise” (Schneiders 2003). Although my study of spiritual journals takes place within Catholicism, a discrete and formal religious tradition, the term
“spiritual” was deemed more appropriate for the discussion of journal keeping, as an activity that is pursued independently, occurring outside of fixed elements of public Catholic worship, and involving a focus on a relationship with God that is “personal and experiential” in nature (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). However, these terms are not independent of one another, and I do acknowledge that journal keeping in the context of Catholicism is influenced by and involves formal religious teachings, structures, and practices. Throughout this thesis, the use of the term “spiritual” in relation to informants and their journals does imply a connection to the broader and more formal structure of Catholicism.

1.6 – Outline of Thesis

Following this introductory chapter is a review of the relevant literature (Chapter II), and an outline of the project’s research method and design (Chapter III). Chapters IV through VII present the project’s findings, examining the content encountered in spiritual journals (Chapter IV), the materials used and the role of materiality in this activity (Chapter V), the practice of spiritual journal keeping, including the routines and spaced into which this activity fits (Chapter VI), and the structure of spiritual journals, using as a comparison the structure of reference books as outlined in Bates (1986) (Chapter VII). Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter VIII, a reflection on this study’s methods and findings, the broader themes it has revealed, and the questions that remain upon the project’s completion.

1.7 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the thesis project as an ethnographic study that explores the practice of spiritual journal keeping in the context of the daily lives of Catholic university students. It has provided a descriptive sketch of the environment in which this study takes place and an overview
of the practice of spiritual journal keeping in the Catholic tradition, and has stated the study’s objectives and guiding research questions. Finally, it has outlined the chapters that follow this introduction.
2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter surveys several literatures relevant to the thesis project. It first provides an overview of a context-centered approach to information research, and then surveys the literature on religious and spiritual information, from within information studies as well as from communication studies research on personal religious blogs. Finally, it examines the work of a handful of information studies scholars whose work is outside of the realm of the spiritual, but whose focus on the personal, affective, and material elements of non-work information activities was considered thematically close to the study at hand. Methodological literature is absent from this chapter, as it is discussed in detail in Chapter III—Methods.

2.2 – Information Research in “Higher” Contexts

It is common in information studies to examine information activities within a particular context. Talja et al. (1999) define context as “the site where a phenomenon is constituted as a research object” (p. 751), or the background for information phenomena. Kari & Hartel (2007) propose a contextual framework for understanding information phenomena that differs from traditional models that examine “particular kinds of information and information behaviour as embedded in miscellaneous contexts” (p. 1141). Their alternative involves examining certain contexts “as containing sundry types of information structures and processes” (p. 1141). In other words, their model is centered on a particular context (in this case, the spiritual journal keeping of Catholic university students), around which occurs various information activities and phenomena, rather
than being centered on a particular information process or information behaviour itself. In an exploratory study such as this one, this contextual framework was of great value, as it allowed for the study of multiple information phenomena and the relationships between them in the context of the spiritual journal keeping of Catholic university students.

Kari & Hartel (2007) additionally make a compelling appeal for information studies to focus on contexts outside of work and everyday problem solving. They term these “higher” contexts (p. 1131), that involve “pleasurable” and “profound” (p. 1133) experiences of life, such as leisure, relaxation, art, ethics, human development, religion, and spirituality. This appeal has informed my exploration of spiritual journal keeping in the context of spirituality, and has allowed me to situate it within information studies literatures related directly to spirituality, as well as to leisure, personal growth, and self-discovery in other contexts.

2.3 – Religion and Spirituality in Information and Communication Studies

Research into religion and spirituality in information studies is slowly gaining momentum. This section examines in detail the seminal work of Jarkko Kari (2007) on information and spirituality, whose discoveries about spiritual information were of great relevance to this thesis. It then goes on survey other relevant work in this area, primarily in the discipline of information studies, but also drawing on a small literature within communication studies on religious and spiritual blogs.

2.3.1 - The Work of Jarkko Kari

Along with his contribution to larger scale promptings to situate research in new and “higher” areas, Jarkko Kari’s (2007) “A Review of the Spiritual in Information Studies,” previously mentioned in the introduction, was the first to synthesize information research in the spiritual
domain (p. 936). To do so, the author examined 31 refereed texts in information studies and examined the “manifestation of spirituality” therein, looking specifically at the information processes of “conceptualizing, seeking, processing, using, storing, describing, and providing” (p. 935) information. He then produced a typology that encompasses the relationships between information phenomena and spirituality, which is reproduced below:

1. Information can be about the spiritual (e.g. mysticism);
2. Information itself can be reckoned holy (e.g. Bible);
3. Information can be supposedly acquired by spiritual means (e.g. trance channeling);
4. Information can originate from a source considered as a spiritual entity (e.g. God);
5. An information actor can be an expert in spiritual matters, or a spiritual community (e.g. spiritual advisor);
6. An information actor may claim to possess spiritual abilities (e.g. medium);
7. An information actor can feel him/herself develop spiritually (e.g. spiritual horizons expanding);
8. An information process can be simultaneously experienced as a spiritual process (e.g. library work as ministry);
9. Information systems can be believed to parallel or even replace asserted spiritual methods (e.g. internet as an omnipotent tool);
10. Information phenomena can be influenced by a spiritually oriented environment (e.g. spiritual happening); and
11. Information processes can be allegedly affected by a spiritual agent (e.g. providence) (p. 957)

Despite the comprehensiveness of his typology, Kari identifies areas that have not yet been researched from the angle of spirituality, including “information processing within individuals and organizations,” “storing information in personal collections,” and “creating, destroying, exchanging, and organizing” information (p. 958). He goes on to explain that spirituality is not “but one subject among others” (p. 958), saying:

…spirituality is not just an object of action, but it may actually define how a person or community views information processes and reality itself, too, potentially in a manner that is fundamentally different from the materialistic picture of the world (p. 958).
He also identifies spiritual information as something that is mysterious and subjective, observing that this information may be “entertainment” for some, and for others it is “the most precious part of their everyday life” (p. 959), and concluding that regardless of one’s view of spiritual information, “spirituality offers a context rich with novel analytic opportunities” (p. 959).

In addition to this, Kari has explored the spiritual and paranormal in other ways. His dissertation (2001) examined “informational notions and experiences of the paranormal as a case for information seeking in connection with hobbies” (p.13), and he has since completed other studies that analyze spiritual messages, as these relate to uses (2009) or to outcomes (2011) of information. These studies focus largely on non-religious spiritual information, but their detailed interrogation of alternative “ways of knowing” (Kari 2007, p. 959) illuminates the nature of the information documented and used in spiritual journals, which is often mysterious and related to unseen forces. Also currently underway is a comparative study on the roles of spiritual information in the United States and Pakistan (2012) which aims to explore the role and effect of spiritual information in everyday life in two different countries, considering such questions as, “to what activities does spiritual information relate?” and “what roles does spiritual information play in people’s accomplishments?” (“Research Questions,” 2012). These many and varied studies are beginning to capitalize on the analytic opportunities provided by the spiritual, and indicate both the increasing focus on examining information in the spiritual domain as well as its continued mystery.

2.3.2 – Other Studies in Information and Religion

There is also a growing body of research related to information and spirituality that encompasses religion and religious structures. The recent formation of the Centre for the Study of Information
and Religion (CSIR) at Kent State University reflects the growing recognition of the information phenomena in this domain. The CSIR’s accompanying online, open-access journal, *Advances in the Study of Information and Religion* (ASIR), publishes proceedings from the Centre’s annual conference on information and religion, which is hosted jointly by the CSIR and Kent State’s School of Library and Information Science. At the time of writing, this conference is still relatively new, having only been hosted in 2011, 2012, and 2013. In addition to the CSIR’s attention to information and religion, another information studies journal, the *Journal of Religious and Theological Information*, is dedicated to research in this area as well.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, research in this area tends to focus on information needs and behaviour at the level of the institution and of the professional, such as Wicks’ (1996, 1999) studies of the information behaviour of pastoral clergy in various professional roles. More recent studies of information behaviour amongst clergy devote noteworthy attention to the personal and affective dimensions of this area, including the role of prayer in seeking information. Roland’s (2007) dissertation used Dervin’s Sense-Making theory to study the information seeking and use behaviour of a pastor preparing a weekly sermon. His findings note that the “high degree of personal involvement” (p. 133) his informant had with his sermon topics involved using personal stories to illustrate broader spiritual themes. He also pays considerable attention to what he terms a “collaborative relationship with the Holy Spirit,” (pp. 136-137) in sermon preparation, that involves the use of standard documents such as the liturgical calendar and lectionary as “objective steps” preachers take to ensure they are “being true to the living Word of God” in preparing sermons (p. 136-137). This interweaving of personal experience, prayer, and authoritative religious texts is of relevance when examined against my own study of spiritual journal keeping, in which a similar entwining of personal experiences, prayer, and external texts occurs.
The work of David Michels (2012) also devotes attention to the role of prayer in seeking information. His 2012 study used ethnographic methods to study the information seeking behaviour of religious leaders of a “church in transition” (p.16), using the framework of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) behaviour. Findings concluded that a significant difference between the information seeking behaviour of these church leaders when compared to non-religious ELIS was the role of prayer in their information seeking and decision-making. Michels found that his informants viewed God as a “resource” (p. 24) comparable to the use of human sources in models of ELIS, and that they also “believed that God brought information to them” (p. 24). His findings differ slightly from Roland’s (2007), who observes that the Holy Spirit “is not just an information resource” but “the active and mysterious presence of God” at work in informants’ lives (p. 137). Whether simply a “resource” or a force more mysterious than that, these discussions of the presence of God and the role of prayer in information behaviour resonate with the experiences of spiritual journal keepers, for whom prayer plays a prominent and distinctive role as something that is practiced, documented, and used to inform life choices.

2.3.3—Religious and Spiritual Blogs in Communication Studies

In a field that often overlaps with information studies, several communication studies scholars have examined the role of religious writing in the form of blogs. Heidi Campbell (2010) conducted a thematic analysis of 100 religious blogs that explored how Christian bloggers used their blogs to “challenge and/or support traditional forms of religious authority” (p. 269) and her findings complicate the widely held notion that the internet poses a threat to traditional religious authority, as she discovered that religious bloggers often affirm, rather than question, “religious leaders, structural bodies, theologies, and core texts” (p. 269). Additionally, Cheong and colleagues (2008) conducted a content analysis of 200 blogs on topics related to Christianity and
found that religious bloggers had a “multiplicity of intents and practices” (p.126) that ranged from documenting their personal spiritual journey to engaging in Christian apologetics. The authors observe that these bloggers chronicle “how they experience faith in their everyday lives,” (p. 107) noting their efforts to communicate not just to an online community but also to themselves, and they ultimately position blogging as a form of “contemplative religious experience” (p. 107). This literature on religious blogs illustrates the variety of ways that people can and do document the spiritual, the significance this writing can have in their lives, and its relationships to other religious texts and social structures. It also demonstrates a space to be filled by an examination of personal, non-digital spiritual journaling that occurs outside of the public eye.

2.4 – Information Research Outside of Religious and Spiritual Topics

Although the literature about information and spirituality is growing, other information studies literatures often spoke more directly to my examination of personal documents and information experiences in a context related to critical self-discovery. I drew largely upon the literature of a small group of information behaviour scholars whose work was considered thematically closest to my study of spiritual journals. While these scholars do not focus on religion or spirituality, they do bring light to other potent and relevant themes related to information and personal growth. Ross’ (1999) study of pleasure reading reveals that this activity often involves a powerful affective dimension, and is deeply woven into the fabric of daily life. Yakel’s (2004) study of genealogists and family historians illuminates the personal, ongoing search for meaning and identity that is central to the information seeking done while pursuing a family narrative. Fulton (2009) also studied information seeking and genealogy, and her findings report the significant role of pleasure in searching for genealogical information. These studies illustrate the
deeply personal nature of certain information activities, and their connections to personal growth and human flourishing.

Scholars such as Hartel (2007, 2010a), Taylor & Swan (2005), Swan & Taylor (2005) and McKenzie & Davies (2010, 2012) devote attention to the documentary and material elements of non-work information activities. Hartel’s (2007, 2010a) study of the information resources of hobbyist gourmet cooks reveals the “multi-dimensionality” (Hartel 2010a p. 868) of documents in a leisure activity, describing recipes that function as sentimental keepsakes (pg. 857), and positioning the “personal culinary library” as a collection that is not just useful but also aesthetically and symbolically significant, presenting “a snapshot of the cook’s experience in the hobby,” and “adding character and intelligence” to the home (p. 862). Taylor & Swan (2005) also give prominence to the “artful” (p. 641) nature of information in the home, and their study of household organizing systems emphasizes the importance of both the aesthetic and material properties of information artifacts and their ability to shape social relations within the family. Finally, McKenzie & Davies’ (2010, 2012) examinations of wedding planning books (2010) and documentary tools in daily life (2012) bring to light the relationships these material documents have with external social forces, demonstrating that they are linked to broader institutional, organizational, and ideological systems. These examinations of documents underline their rich and diverse character, as items that are not merely functional but also sentimental, aesthetically pleasing, and complexly related to social forces outside of the documentary world itself.

In keeping with Kari & Hartel’s (2007) contextual model for information research, I also drew upon a number of approaches to understanding the various information phenomena encountered in spiritual journal keeping. I have made use of Anders Hektor’s (2001) examination of “information activities” (pg. 80) in everyday life, which involves not just seeking information
but also activities such as browsing, monitoring, unfolding, exchanging, dressing, instructing, and publishing (p. 81-88), many of which were applicable to the practice of keeping a journal, in which one’s interaction with information takes many forms beyond searching or seeking. In addition, I have made use of a small body of literature on the relationships between information and time, including work by Savolainen (2006), Hartel (2010b), and McKenzie & Davies (2004). Finally, I made extensive use of Bates’ (1986) analysis of the structure of reference books in my own examination of the structure of spiritual journals (Chapter VII). These diverse texts helped illuminate and explain the equally diverse information phenomena encountered in spiritual journals.

2.5 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has surveyed the relevant literature from both information studies and elsewhere, that addresses religious and spiritual information behaviour and other information phenomena related to personal documents and personal growth. This chapter also demonstrates that although religious and spiritual topics are examined within information studies, there remains a space to be filled by a study such as this one, which seeks to explore the nature of spiritual information in personal documents, and the role these documents have in individuals’ lives. Finally, it positions the findings of this thesis within broader conversations about the importance of examining information phenomena in new and “higher” contexts.
III
METHODS

3.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter explains the thesis’s ethnographic research design, beginning by providing a rationale for the chosen method, and then detailing specific elements of the study’s field setting, design, implementation, and analysis. Finally, it explains the process of writing, with a focus on the development of what Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2011) term a “thematic narrative” (p. 202) in order to produce the final ethnography.

3.2 – Exploratory Research and Ethnography

Ethnography, which has its roots in the traditions of anthropology and sociology, involves immersion in a field setting, typically as a “participant observer” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, p. 1), and requires extensive and descriptive writing about what is encountered. This method, with its emphasis on observation and description, is well suited for conducting what Stebbins (2001) calls “exploratory research,” or research undertaken when one has “little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity or situation they want to examine but nevertheless have reason to believe it contains elements worth discovering” (p. 6). My study of spiritual journal keeping amongst Catholic university students is exploratory, as this is an area about which little is known, especially from the perspective of information studies. The exploratory nature of this study is complemented by ethnography’s emphasis on thoughtful and detailed observation.
Ethnographic research makes use of a number of tools intended to produce descriptive accounts of social phenomena, including participant observation, interviews, and photography, all of which were used in this study, largely following the guidelines of Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2011), as well as Spradely (1979, 1980), Bernard (2006), and Collier & Collier (1986). Its cyclical and inductive approach to inquiry differs from the more traditional, linear model of formulating hypotheses and collecting and analyzing data based on existing theories. Ethnographic research projects often begin with a few guiding questions, and data collection and analysis occur almost in tandem, with new questions arising and being interrogated as the research progresses. In this way, it is closely linked to the grounded theoretical approaches of Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Strauss & Corbin (1990), in which reading, analysis, and writing are iterative and work towards an increasingly nuanced and refined understanding of the area of study—in this case, the spiritual journals and journal-keeping practices of Catholic university students.

Although ethnography is still a relatively new research method in the discipline of information studies (Sandstrom & Sandstrom, 2005), it has been used successfully in a number of studies in this discipline, including the seminal ethnographic studies by Chatman (1992, 1999) whose accounts of information needs and behavior in the settings of a retirement community and a women’s prison, respectively, illuminate many of the social elements of information. Later studies have also paid increasing attention the documentary and material aspects of information, and Hartel’s (2007) study of information in the hobby of gourmet cooking, Taylor & Swan’s (2005) study of documents in the home, and Foster & Gibbons’ (2007) examination of undergraduate library use are examples of ethnographic studies that highlight the role of material information phenomena while treating the social elements of the field setting with equal sensitivity.
My particular ethnographic study came to light in the context of a pilot study in INF 2330: *Information Ethnography*, a course taught by Professor Jenna Hartel in Fall 2012, in which we received ethics clearance to conduct small-scale ethnographic research. This course trained me in the central techniques of ethnography and gave me some initial experience in the field. During this study, I interviewed three Catholic students: two from the Harbour House community, and one from the University of Calgary, and the data from this study is reproduced in this thesis, with the consent of the informants.

### 3.3 – The Field and Field Access

As described in Chapter I, the field setting for this study is a Catholic student centre and parish at a large Canadian university. Prior to beginning research, I had been a resident and participant in this community for ten months, and remained a resident and participant throughout the study, with the encouragement and support of the community’s pastor. It is largely due to my experience here that my research interest in spiritual journal keeping arose. My existing relationship and good rapport with the community helped facilitate my access to the field site.

Lofland & Lofland (2006) recommend “starting where you are” (p. 9) to beginners in qualitative research, explaining that it is a strength when one’s interests in life and current biography coincide with disciplinary concerns (p. 9). Along with being a Catholic student and a member of the Harbour House community, the pursuit of spiritual growth—including the keeping of a journal—had been a part of my life for many years, and with growing dedication. This thesis project allowed me to merge my interests in Catholic spirituality, information studies, journal keeping, and self-development in an exciting and meaningful way. (For further elaboration on this, see the Afterword).
Often, ethnographers immerse themselves in settings with which they are unfamiliar, or are advised to set aside their prior knowledge while conducting research (Spradely 1980). However, Hartel (2007) notes that her interviews with hobbyist gourmet cooks were enriched when she revealed to them her own extensive experience with the activity (p. 68). In a different context my own experience produced a similarly enriching effect. I found my familiarity with the community, its members, and Catholic spirituality in general to be an asset, offering informants increased assurance of my respect for their journaling practice and yielding vivid field data, rich with insider terminology and detailed descriptions of the spiritual elements of daily life. I am ultimately grateful for my unique stance as both peer and researcher throughout this project.

3.3.1 – Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning research, I discussed the proposed study with the Pastor of the Harbour House, and he offered both encouragement and support throughout the course of fieldwork. Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I received clearance from the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics, and throughout the course of the study my data collection and processing as complied with the University of Toronto’s ethics requirements. I obtained consent from the students I interviewed (Appendix A) and took care to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all collected data, aided by the immediate assignment of aliases to each informant and the storing of all data in secure digital and hard copy. In cases where photographs contained potentially identifiable information, visible identifiers were blurred or blacked out using Clark & Werner’s (1997) article as a guide. In my typical public dealings while a participant observer, I did not obtain consent, but took care to anonymize all of my fieldnotes and the resulting data.
3.3.2 – Sampling and Informant Descriptions

Informants were recruited by nonprobabilistic purposive sampling (Berg 2001; Oliver 2012), and chosen based on my knowledge of the field population and their adherence to certain criteria. My study required that informants be Catholic university students (undergraduate or graduate) who kept journals in which they documented their spiritual lives, and who were participants in the life of the House in some way. This population was chosen due to my knowledge that spiritual journal keeping was already occurring here, and my unique access to the field. Additionally, one’s university years are considered an especially fertile time in one’s spiritual development, and it was my hope that this would be tied to rich journaling.

I secured several interviews through direct request, approaching students whose journaling practice I was previously familiar with through time spent at the House. In order to reach students with whom I was not familiar, I made several announcements at weekend and weekday masses at the House (Appendix B). This technique yielded the greatest number of informants. Finally, two informants were recruited through referral. Table 1 illustrates my recruiting techniques and their results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruiting Technique</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct request</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass announcement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Recruiting techniques and their results.*

The informants from this study had varying degrees of journaling experience and diverse journaling practices, which helped me to capture the breadth of students’ engagement in this
activity. The table below provides a short introduction to each informant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Brief Biography</th>
<th>Journal(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Charlotte has been keeping journals since childhood, and today her journals have much space dedicated to art and collage.</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy, Graduate</td>
<td>Lucy has been keeping a journal for three years, a practice she began when she started discerning a religious vocation.</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Anne is a Catholic student from the University of Calgary. Her journals provided helpful comparison the journal keeping being observed in Toronto.</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessa, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Tessa began keeping a journal when she started discerning religious life, and currently keeps three different journals simultaneously, each with a different focus</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, Graduate</td>
<td>John has been keeping a journal for four months. This practice was recommended by his spiritual director and intended to be a reliable record of his spiritual life.</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas, Graduate</td>
<td>Lucas’s journals include compilations of religious and spiritual information sought from various sources and not limited to Catholicism.</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name, Status</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Grace alternates writing in the two journals pictured here, in a practice she developed to preserve her privacy by keeping the narrative of her life difficult to trace.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha, Graduate</td>
<td>Samantha’s grandmother introduced her to journaling as a small child, and this year made a promise to write three times a week during the season of Lent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carina, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Carina has been keeping journals since childhood and both she and Anne (above) provided the largest collection of journals, totaling 7 books each.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew, Graduate</td>
<td>Matthew was the only informant who expressed no concern over having his journal read by others. He often passes them around to collect sentimental notes from friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Rebecca has been keeping a journal since returning from an exchange to France in high school. She primarily structures her entries as letters to God or to Jesus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fr. Henry, Pastor and Spiritual Director</td>
<td>Fr. Henry often meets with students to help them in their spiritual growth and recommends that students keep journals.</td>
<td>Not available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward, Keeper of Non-Catholic Notebooks</td>
<td>Edward’s personal notebooks were written in the context of spiritual growth and 12-step recovery. His writing also</td>
<td>Not available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Introducing the informants.

3.4 – Research Design and Implementation

The majority of the fieldwork for this study took place over the course of an academic semester, from January-April, 2013. During this time, I conducted ten interviews, seven of which were with students and two of which were with individuals who had experience with journal keeping in other contexts. Added to the data collected during the pilot study, this equaled a total of thirteen interviews. I also conducted twelve formal field outings to specific events, and lived and worked in the community as a participant observer. Data was collected in the form of jottings, field notes, audio recordings, and photographs, and the following sections elaborate on the data gathering techniques and their use throughout this research.

3.4.1 – Participant Observation

As previously explained, a technique central to ethnographic research is “participant observation,” or immersion in a field setting, in which the researcher becomes involved in the daily life of the chosen setting (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p.1). During my four months of fieldwork, I was living in the House as one of their eight student residents, and my participation ranged from the daily household routines of shared meals and times of prayer to community-wide weekend retreats and evening socials. During this time, it was my aim to observe spiritual learning and development within the community in various and diverse sites, with the intention of better locating the practice of spiritual journaling in the context of other types of spiritual learning and growth. Appendix C provides a list and brief description of my formal field outings that indicates the array of sites explored during this study.
3.4.2 – Jottings and Fieldnotes

Throughout my time in the field I produced “jottings” or “a brief written record of events and impressions contained in key words and phrases” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 29). These were taken throughout interviews (in addition to audio recordings), during formal field outings and, given the nature of my participation in the field setting, were often taken at random intervals throughout my daily activities. Later, these jottings were expanded into longer, typed “fieldnotes” or “a detailed entry of [the] day’s experiences and observations” intended to preserve as much as possible about my observations and with an emphasis on “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). This was done as soon as possible after the initial event, usually within 24 hours.

3.4.3 - Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2006) over the course of the study. These interviews followed an interview guide, or “a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order” (p. 212). Questions moved from broad, general inquiries about students’ spiritual lives to a focused discussion of their journals and journaling routines. Two questions involved a “tour” (Spradely 1979; Malone 1983; Kwasnik 1991; Hartel 2007) of informants’ journaling environments, and of their journals themselves. For both the interview schedule and a more detailed description of the mechanics of the tour questions, please see Appendices D and E. Additionally, it should be noted that due to the semi-structured nature of these interviews, not all interviews were identical, and although the guide was followed, new and spontaneous lines of questioning were also pursued at each interview.
3.4.4 – Photographic Inventory

Because journals were a central part of the field site for this study, I employed what Collier & Collier (1986) call a “photographic inventory” (p. 45), which allowed me to visually capture the details of journal collections, journal pages, and students’ journaling environments. This method was used as a way to convey details such as the layout of items on a page and the unique artistic and organizational sensibilities of individual students, and to vividly preserve the details of these that might have been lost had I only taken descriptive field notes. Photographs were taken during the final two questions of the interview, and followed a “shooting guide” that aimed to capture journals and journaling environments at varying resolutions, from whole rooms to journal collections to the details of specific journal entries. As this accompanied the “tours” taken during the interviews, further details can also be found in Appendix E.

3.5 – Analysis

All of this time spent in the field produced a vast “ethnographic record” (Spradely, 1980, p. 33) and as per the “ethnographic research cycle” (p. 29) analysis began as soon as possible after each field session and continued well into the writing of the final ethnography. Following each field outing and interview, jottings were extended into detailed field notes, interviews were transcribed on a computer, and photographs were uploaded, labeled, and manipulated as necessary, by blurring or blacking out any identifiers (Clark & Werner 1997). All data was organized into folders labeled with the aliases of each participant, with hard copies also printed, similarly organized, and stored for safekeeping. In order to preserve as many of my original impressions as possible, this initial processing was done within 24-48 hours after each outing or interview. This immediate review of collected data initiated the process of analysis; noteworthy ideas and impressions were interrogated further as data collection continued.
3.5.1 – Coding and Themes

Following the completion of fieldwork, the ethnographic record was read as a “complete corpus” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 171). This careful reading leads to “open coding,” or reading fieldnotes “line by line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate” (p. 172) along with writing “code memos” (p.185) in order to record and elaborate upon initial ideas as they occur. At this stage, both the codes and code memos entertained as wide a variety of ideas as possible. Figure 1 below displays field data during open coding.

![Figure 1. Data during open coding.](image)

Upon completing the initial, open coding, core themes were selected. These arose naturally from both the initial codes generated and the research questions with which I began the study. Then, the data was reread line-by-line in order to perform “focused coding,” (p. 191), or “building up and […] further elaborating analytically interesting themes” (p. 191), and additional memos were written, this time as “integrative memos” (p. 193) that further explored the selected themes and increasingly applied disciplinary insights, beginning to gear writing towards an information studies readership. These began to form the building blocks of the final ethnography.
I analyzed all data manually. Manual analysis was appropriate to the relatively small scale of this study, and in line with its material and documentary focus. It is also worthwhile to note that given the volume of data collected and the richness of the topic, new codes and themes were emerging even as the final ethnography was being written, and the ethnographic record has not been exhausted.

3.6 – The Final Ethnography

As discussed above, the process of writing memos naturally evolved into writing the final ethnography. Although there are several methods for producing an ethnography, I chose to follow the guidance of Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2011), whose “thematic narrative” (p. 202) format places evocative fieldnote excerpts at the centre of the story being told. Using this approach, each of the four chapters of findings in this thesis are made up of descriptive fieldnote excerpts organized around several themes, which have been unified under an overarching topic (Content, Materials, Practice, and Structure).

3.7 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a step-by-step explanation of my chosen research method its implementation in this study, explaining each of the data-gathering techniques in detail, and also outlining the process of analysis and writing. What follows this chapter are the four chapters of findings, each written in the “thematic narrative” (p. 202) format described above.
4.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the spiritual journal by examining what it contains. It first provides an overview of the variety of content found in spiritual journals. Then, it looks closely at specific types of content, focusing on the many ways prayer in documented spiritual journals, and on the role of visual information in spiritual journals, highlighting several similarities and contrasts to existing information studies research on information, spirituality, and prayer.

4.2 – What is in a Spiritual Journal?

Central to spiritual journals are written entries that describe one’s day or contain an account of one’s thoughts. In addition to these written entries, students’ spiritual journals contained diverse assortments of visual content, which appeared both spiritual and non-spiritual in nature. Although certain elements had obvious ties to the spiritual life, it was common to encounter content that had unclear ties to one’s spiritual life, or that served more practical, “administrative” purposes in its inclusion. The following table presents a sample of the range of content encountered in spiritual journals:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Content</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Photograph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Administrative”</td>
<td>Schedules (e.g., class schedules, work schedules, athletic training schedules), special diets (e.g., triathlon training diet), recipes, phone numbers, e-mail addresses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Personal and Sentimental”</td>
<td>Drawings and doodles (e.g. nature scenes, abstract designs), natural ephemera (e.g. pressed flowers, dried leaves), ticket stubs, copies of e-mails one has sent or received, personal photographs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Explicitly Spiritual”</td>
<td>Letters to God, standard prayers, self-composed prayers, clippings from Catholic media, religious icons, images of Catholic saints, scriptural quotations, notes from spiritual events and talks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Range of content found in spiritual journals*

The above table divides content into three categories. “Administrative” content involves information that helps one keep track of and remember necessary day-to-day details. “Personal and sentimental” is meaningful to the author of the journal, and includes ephemera ranging from copies of e-mails to dried leaves or flowers. Often, this content has symbolic meaning to the author of the journal, but this meaning is unclear to the outsider. Finally, “explicitly spiritual” content that has direct ties to Catholicism and to other aspects of the spiritual life. Further
discussion will reveal that the lines between these categories are often blurred, but these initial divides represent the range of content in students’ spiritual journals and provide a helpful framework for understanding the nature of its variety. It also demonstrates that not all content in a journal is clearly or obviously related to spirituality, religion, or the spiritual life.

In addition to journals containing an array of “heterogeneous” (Swan & Taylor 2005) content, it was common for content that might seem mundane or administrative to an outsider to be described by the owner of the journal in a way that cast it as an item of spiritual significance, blurring the lines between “types” of information found in journals. John, a graduate student in Medieval Studies, keeps a journal that he has titled “Blessings and Answered Prayers,” in which he writes daily, point-form lists of all the things he is grateful for, or the ways he feels God has been present in his day. His journal nicely illustrates this blurring of lines between spiritual and non-spiritual content. In the following excerpt, John reads to me the items on these lists, in which he makes note of things that are both obviously spiritual and seemingly mundane:

“…Got another book from the library for my Old English class, had some time alone at home to translate something, […] watched the BBC Pride and Prejudice [laughs] and it was very good and I enjoyed it […] got up at 7 and read my Latin, went to mass with [my wife]… went to Bulk Barn and got a bunch of deals…”

These entries in John’s journal contain no elaboration; they are simply lists. But by keeping them in a book entitled “Blessings and Answered Prayers,” these lists are given significance beyond being a mere record of daily events, and even beyond expressing gratitude alone. While they are occasions for gratitude, the term “answered prayers” suggests that these items represent something of the relationship between John and God. Later in our interview, John talks about how he enjoys re-reading these lists because not only does it make him “more thankful,” but also “more aware of how God has been involved in [his] life.” Interestingly, “getting deals at Bulk
Barn,” is just as much a blessing from God as going to mass. As spiritual journals are documents that are a part of one’s everyday life, a “spiritual lens” is often applied to even the most mundane of daily events, and recorded information is given spiritual significance that is often only fully known by the owner and author of the journal. An important and reoccurring element of spiritual journals is that a significant portion of their content has meaning that is hidden from the outsider, and that is only understood by the journal keeper himself.

Journals are often an intimate and regular part of students’ daily life, and these excerpts have shown us that in this way they sometimes serve as a “catchall” (Swan & Taylor 2005) for sundry types of information of importance to the student: administrative, sentimental, and spiritual alike. Not only does this begin to illustrate the variety of content present in a spiritual journal, but it also indicates a deep entwining of information from various aspects of life, and demonstrates that in many cases, there is no distinction between what is “everyday” and what is “spiritual.”

4.3 – Spiritual Journals and Prayer

One element of spiritual journals that makes them distinct from other kinds of journals is their relationship to prayer. Prayer had a prominent place amongst the textual entries students composed, and was represented in a variety of ways. The sections below elaborate on four of these.

4.3.1 – Recording Standard Prayers

Sometimes a journal is a place to record standard prayers to for future reference and use. Lucas, a young seminarian, had a journal that contained many prayers of this type. Below, he describes one instance in which he wrote a standard Catholic prayer in his journal:
“I looked up the rosary prayer, and I copied all the prayers that you needed to know, but I was like, ‘But I don’t know about these stories, so let me write down the stories for each of these prayers.’”

Not only had Lucas written out the rosary, which is a lengthy prayer involving many parts, but had looked up each of its “stories,”—typically called “mysteries,” or the different events in the life of Jesus and Mary that one meditates on while saying this prayer—and had written these down, too, sometimes combining the information from several sources. When I mentioned that one could often find little booklets that contain all of this information, Lucas said:

“Those little pamphlets on the rosary, I was completely unsatisfied by that. I was like, ‘This doesn’t tell me anything about – Okay, Mary was assumed to heaven. Okay, yeah, but, wha–… ha–… how did that happen? What were the circumstances? Who was involved?’”

Here, not only has Lucas recorded a sort of “how-to” on a particular Catholic prayer but, having encountered other print resources and found them lacking, he sought out to answer some of his own questions and created a resource that satisfied him in a way that existing resources did not. It is also important to note that Lucas spoke about using this information later on, describing “praying with it” whenever he prayed the rosary, and in this way making use of it as a tool.

In Kari’s (2007) article on spiritual information, he identifies “storing information in personal collections” (p. 958) as an area of further research. This thesis’s examination of spiritual journals looks in a broad way at the storage of spiritual information in a bespoke, personal collection, and the example of Lucas illustrates a specific and complex instance of this, in which he is not only storing the standard prayer itself, but also seeking out and storing additional information about it, creating a personalized resource on a topic that other sources couldn’t satisfactorily address. It also demonstrates that this activity doesn’t stop at storage, but also involves use, in this case for the purpose of prayer.
4.3.2 – Modified Prayers

Along with recording standard prayers in a journal, students sometimes encountered prayers written by others that they then modified, often in an attempt to personalize them in some way. Unlike the example of Lucas, above, in which he created a resource on a particular prayer that satisfied his questions, instances of modified prayers involve a more personal type of adaptation, that involve adjusting prayers to better fit one’s current feelings or life circumstances. In the following excerpt, Lucy discusses her practice of modifying prayers:

“This is a book I purchased…it’s essentially prayers for different themes […] so what I did was I went through those prayers and I started writing them, and making them my own prayer, and that sort of became my journaling for the day.”

Later, Lucy further explained how she does this, detailing an instance in which she modified a prayer called “Prayer for Generosity” by St. Ignatius of Loyola:

“I broke open the prayer to remind myself of how [God’s] faithfulness has made me a better person. So when I talk about, ‘Teach me true generosity,’ it then expands to a past event of how I have been more generous, or, ‘To serve as you deserve,’ about how I am now living a life where I try my best to make God the central part of my life. So, how these virtues he is talking about have come to me through God.”

This practice permits Lucy to add her own experiences to prayers in order to tailor them more specifically to her life, making her journal a place where her interaction with outside texts is recorded in a unique way. This type of content goes beyond simply recording useful information, and involves creatively adapting this information in a way that has personal meaning. In this way, it resembles information production, as much as it resembles seeking, use, or even the “storing” outlined by Kari (2007) above.

---

1 “Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will.”
4.3.3 – Journal Entries as Letters to God

Along with recording standard prayers, and modifying prayers, another common practice is for journal entries to be written as self-composed prayers, in the form of letters to God or to Jesus. In this way, they become both a prayer and a record of communication or correspondence with an invisible being. Charlotte describes her journaling practice this way:

“The way I write is basically a prayer. So every time I write, I begin by saying ‘God,’ or ‘Dear God,’ or ‘Dear Jesus,’ or ‘Lord, hello,’ [laughs]. It’s my way of communicating to Christ. I just talk to God about my feelings. And that’s why I always end in ‘Amen’ at the end of every journal entry. So basically they’re just my feelings. Me talking to God, in my journal.”

Tessa describes a similar practice:

“I’m pretty much just writing letters to him [Jesus]. I’ll be saying what happened to me today, what I’m worried about […] or just things that really struck me about today and if I feel that he is really trying to tell me something. Sometimes I’ll be asking him for help in schoolwork, or if I’m worried about family issues…”

In total, of the 10 interviews I did with students, 5 of them reported composing journal entries in ways that address God directly, either regularly (4) or occasionally (1). The frequency with which this occurs suggests that this practice has significant value, and it also reveals much about the relational element of spiritual journal keeping and prayer. Informants often spoke about their “relationship” with God. This is an element that is central to the Catholic spiritual life, and writing entries addressed to God can be a way of supporting or facilitating this.

Elsewhere in information studies research, Michels (2012) and Roland (2007) call attention to the role of prayer in information seeking, where prayer has been discussed as a “resource” (Michels 2012) in making decisions, or as a way of “collaborating” (Roland 2007) with the Holy Spirit in order to complete a task, such as preparing a sermon. But here, the role of prayer is different. In the excerpt above, Tessa does indicate an element of seeking when she says she
writes about moments where she feels that Jesus is “really trying to tell her something,” but both her description and Charlotte’s suggest more of an intimate conversation than a search for answers. Charlotte’s letters primarily involve talking to God “about her feelings,” and Tessa describes writing to Jesus about her day or her worries. These illustrate a relationship between prayer and information that is not task-oriented or aimed at accomplishing a particular goal.

Additionally, Kari’s (2007) typology of spiritual information (see Chapter II, Section 2.3.1) lists numerous ways one can receive or acquire spiritual information, and the ways information actors can possess spiritual information, by “possessing spiritual abilities” or “being an expert in spiritual matters” (p. 957). But his typology does not address information of the type reflected in letters such as these, in which one creates information meant for a “spiritual entity”—in this case, God—and communicates to him in a material way. But this, too, is a relationship between information phenomena and the spiritual, and examined against other studies of prayer (Michels 2012; Roland 2007), it suggests a broadening of the conception of prayer as an information phenomenon, to encompass activities not necessarily bound to the completion of a task or the search for an answer.

4.3.4 – Spiritual Record Keeping

In addition to prayers being written out in full, some students used their journal to maintain records of a prayer life that exists independent of one’s journal keeping. Previously, we examined John’s “Blessings and Answered Prayers” journal. John also keeps a second journal, which functions as a record of his day-to-day prayer life. John explains this below:

“[My spiritual director] asked me to keep a prayer journal—just to keep track, on a daily basis, of what my prayer life is like […] It’s mainly for record-keeping. So let’s say I meet with [my spiritual director] once a month. At the end of the month I can look back and actually review what the month has been like with my prayer....”
Here, John describes a different way of recording prayer. Instead of composing prayers in words, his journal keeps track of moments of prayer that occur in other parts of his life, making note of when and how he prays each day. Later, he reads me an example of one of these entries:

“Wednesday, January 23rd: Prayed morning routine with [my wife], quick, but sincere. Mass was very good […] spiritually felt alive, prayed for grace and for God’s glory before practicing a presentation I had to give. Evening rosary—started alert and attentive, and ended falling asleep [laughs]. Felt good today, more at ease, anxiety loosening…”

From this excerpt, one can see the difference between one of John’s entries and an entry from the journals of Charlotte or Tessa in the previous section. Rather than an entry being a prayer itself, like a letter to God, these entries are a record of prayer that occurs elsewhere in life. As another form of keeping a record, Lucy discusses recording what she calls the “results” of certain times of prayer:

“My way of keeping track of my contemplative praying is my journal, because sometimes I might forget what the result of my prayer was, or something like that.”

Lucy’s description reveals another relationship between journaling and prayer. The “contemplative” prayer she describes involves time spent simply sitting quietly in the presence of God, without writing, reciting prayers, or otherwise actively communicating. In Lucy’s case, after some time spent in quiet prayer, she writes in her journal as a way of keeping track of the “results” of her prayer, or the insights or thoughts she had while sitting in silence.

Finally, Matthew’s three journals each contained, on their inside covers, long lists of people’s names paired with different chapters of the Bible and a corresponding date, together comprising a unique record of prayer:
Of this practice, Matthew explains:

“I would read a chapter of scripture, and I would pray for people as I read them [...] I would ask people if I could pray for them and if they could choose a book for me to read [...] I wrote down what I was reading, who I was reading it for, and the dates.”

Here, Matthew describes both a unique practice of prayer—reading a Bible chapter as a way of praying for a particular person—and his way of recording it. Unlike John, who records each individual prayer experience he has in a day, Matthew’s record is a way of keeping track of just one kind of prayer. He later also describes revisiting these lists as a way of remembering others, explaining that “a lot of them are people I may not talk to anymore, and I wonder how they’re doing.” This practice adds another dimension to the relational element of spiritual journals discussed above, as here, Matthew has combined his prayers to God with prayers for others in a unique way. Additionally, it revisits previous themes of “administrative” information in a different way, again blurring the lines between types of content, and demonstrating that one can “keep track” (McKenzie & Davies 2012) in ways related to spirituality and prayer, writing down the prayers one has said or needs to say.
4.4 – A Case of Non-Textual Content

Of the 10 interviews I did over the course of this study, the role of self-made artwork played a significant role in the journals of 5 different students, featuring prominently in 2 cases, and occasionally in 3. Anne, an avid journaler an active Catholic from the University of Calgary, was a student I interviewed during the pilot study, and throughout this thesis her journals enriched my perspective on the journal keeping occurring amongst the students at Harbour House. I wish to address Anne’s journals specifically in this section, as they were dominated by inventive and evocative artwork, often involving the manipulation of personal photographs. The central role of images in Anne’s journals raised many questions about the role of art and visual information in a spiritual context. The following photographs display some of Anne’s visual journal content:
When Anne spoke about her inclusion of these images, what struck me was the way she explained their meaning. Anne’s artwork is not simply decorative, and she speaks of it as having a direct relationship to both her spiritual life and to the process of self-discovery, explaining that she often can’t articulate the details of her spiritual life in words, but is better able to capture it in images:

“I try to articulate what I can, but I have no words anymore. I document stuff, but it all has symbolic meaning now. 90% of what’s in here probably doesn’t make sense to most people.”
Of the photograph of the flower bud (bottom centre), she explained:

“On this particular day I was frustrated that this flower wouldn’t bloom. It reminded me of when I went hiking with [a friend] and he forced open a rosebud and it ruined the whole plant.”

The text surrounding this photo says, “Sometimes it’s so frustrating waiting for potential to realize itself. Sometimes the promise is torture. But it’s important not to force it to bloom before its time.” Anne’s visual journal entries also extended to a large collection of dried leaves and flowers, some of which are pictured below:

![Dried leaves and flowers](image)

*Figure 4. Dried leaves and flowers in Anne’s journal.*

These, too, revealed meaning beyond simply decoration. Anne explains:

“Sometimes it’s more of a working metaphor. I’m such a mystery to myself that I don’t know what the symbols mean. For example, I keep looking for red leaves or leaves in transition colours. It’s like I’m trying to catch the last glory of the harvest. I don’t know what it means yet, I just know that it will speak to me.”

The inclusion of images and other non-textual content in Anne’s journal raised questions for me about the nature of spiritual information in visual form. Her descriptions highlight an element of mystery, indicating that there are aspects of her spiritual experience that can’t be put into words,
and that can’t even really be contained in images, although for Anne images seem to capture more of what she wishes to express. Her descriptions also demonstrate a great trust in the process of journaling, when she describes not knowing what certain things mean, but recording them anyway with the hope that she will understand their meaning in time. This indicates that content isn’t always “complete” when it is documented in a journal, and that its meaning and significance often evolves or is made known later on. Kari’s (2007) literature review of spirituality in information studies concludes with the suggestion that “there may be more ways of knowing than we usually realize,” (p. 959). This is perhaps an apt assessment of what is occurring in Anne’s intensely visual documentation of her inner life, which involves much symbolic or metaphorical information. Here, Anne is not documenting what is known so much as what she hopes to know or understand, and what she trusts will be revealed as time moves forward.

4.5 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a picture of the content of spiritual journals. It has demonstrated the variety of content found in journals, and has begun to illustrate the frequent blending and overlapping of spiritual and non-spiritual information. It has looked closely at content related to prayer, and has examined a particularly rich case of visual journal content, asking questions about the role of art and images in spiritual journals, and beginning to reveal the role mystery plays in the documentation of one’s spiritual life.
5.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter of findings explores the material and aesthetic properties of the spiritual journal. It examines the properties of the journal as a physical object, the choice of particular writing and drawing instruments, and aesthetic practices such as deliberate writing styles. It also revisits the creation of art in a journal, examining it from a different perspective. Questions of aesthetics and materiality have thus far not been extensively addressed in the field of information studies.

5.2 – Choosing a Journal

Interviews with journal keeping students revealed that one often chooses a journal based on specific material properties. Most often, these were related to the journal’s aesthetic appeal, or to the type of creative expression the journal permitted.

Tessa, who we will later see keeps several journals simultaneously, discussed her reasons for choosing one particular book:

“This journal that I bought, it’s a nice cream-coloured paper, and it’s got the ribbon and everything, and I wanted to make it look neat and nice. I rotate between colours [of ink] just to add some variety.”

Tessa’s description illustrates several things. First, when she describes her chosen journals she lists its pleasing features: “nice cream-coloured paper,” and the ribbon bookmark. In addition to this, she expresses the desire for her journal to have a particular aesthetic, explaining that she wants it to look “neat and nice,” and also describing the way she rotates between colours to add
“variety.” (For more detail on writing implements, see section 5.3.) Not only has Tessa chosen her journal for its material properties, but she then endeavours to make the journal more visually and materially pleasing, by aiming to keep to a particular, “neat and nice” aesthetic.

Charlotte also valued her journals material properties, but for reasons that differed from the ones Tessa expressed above. In the following excerpt, she describes her appreciation for her journals material properties:

“I like that this journal has blank pages, because that way I don’t feel confined to lines, and I don’t feel confined to just writing. I like to do all sorts of stuff.”

Charlotte’s large, sketchbook-esque journal has a hard, black cover, and its pages are oriented horizontally, two 8.5” X 11” pieces of white paper jointed together at their shorter ends. Not only do its blank, non-confining pages facilitate a certain freedom of expression, but they are also pages of a substantial size. Charlotte’s expressed desire not to be confined to lined pages makes sense when she displays the content of her journals, which consists of large-print textual entries (made larger by her habitual use of Crayola felt markers), big, colourful illustrations, and saved ephemera that she has taped or glued onto the pages. The images below display pages from Tessa’s (left) and Charlotte’s (right) journals, side by side:
While Charlotte and Tessa each had different preferences for the physical properties of their journals, they were both intentional about choosing a journal with specific material features, and in each case, the emphasis on aesthetics didn’t stop with the choice of book itself, but continued through their choices in writing instruments and the ways in which they arranged and displayed content. Although aesthetics and materiality are not addressed extensively in information studies research, Taylor & Swan’s (2005) ethnographic study of organizing systems in family life also highlights the importance of the “artful” nature of information artifacts, with an emphasis on the flexibility or freedom an organization system provides both to be creative and to accommodate a variety of needs (p. 641). Hartel (2010a), too, notes that documents “can be valued for their beauty” (p. 868) These observations about the importance of flexibility, artfulness, and beauty in documents echo Charlotte’s appreciation for the freedom of expression permitted by the blank pages of her journal, and Tessa’s regard for the pleasing material features of her journal.

5.3 – “I Won’t Journal if I Don’t Have the Right Pens”

Along with the deliberate choice in the journal itself, students were often deliberate in their choice of writing and drawing instruments, expressing preferences for particular kinds of pens
and colours of ink. As we began to see above, Charlotte prefers to journal using coloured felt marker:

“I love using markers, so lots of different colours. Markers are colourful, and it’s so much more fun. I like being able to switch—whenever I get bored of a colour, I just choose another one. And it just looks nicer.”

In another interview, Anne describes the preference she developed for particular pens:

“With this journal, I became a pen snob. I don’t write in anything but ink, because it’s darker and bolder, and it writes well—it’s an aesthetic thing. I won’t journal if I don’t have the right pens. I like looking at link glistening on the page… I feel like I jumped out of Hogwarts and am using a quill. Sometimes I will just hold it up to the light and watch it glisten.”

There are several aspects of these excerpts that are of interest. First, both Charlotte and Anne state that they like their journals to have a particular look. For Charlotte, this involves using a variety of colours, and for Anne it involves the ink being “darker and bolder.” But beyond desiring a certain appearance, these excerpts demonstrate that these writing instruments are also preferred because something about them contributes to a pleasing experience while writing, often stirring one’s imagination. Charlotte’s description of switching from colour to colour when she gets “bored,” and Anne’s description of watching black ink glisten on the pages of her journal, both illustrate that the choice of materials involves a desire to enjoy the process of journaling as much as it involves enjoying the appearance of the finished product.

Throughout information studies literature, it is common to focus on information in terms of its results or “outcomes” (Kari 2012), but rarely is there a focus on the pleasure one finds in the act of creation, or on the role certain materials, such as writing instruments, play in this enjoyment. A scholar who has done this is Fulton (2009), whose study of information seeking amongst genealogists revealed the power of positive affect in the pursuit of information. Her study focuses on the pleasure one finds in both the process of information seeking and in the
“deepening of commitment and engagement” to the hobby of genealogy (p. 256). The examples above contribute a different dimension to the role of pleasure in interacting with information, which here is found in the act of creating, and through the experience of using particular materials.

5.3.1 – A Case of Calligraphy

In one particular instance, a preference for writing instruments also involved a devotion to a specific style of writing. As mentioned above, Tessa kept several journals simultaneously, and one of these is a collection she has termed her “manuscripts,” an unbound bundle of scrap paper on which she records only special spiritual insights, and on which she writes exclusively in calligraphy. The photograph below illustrates Tessa’s stylized journal writing:

![Figure 6. Tessa’s manuscripts](image)

Although this unbound format is different from the aesthetic of a more conventional, bound book, when Tessa shared her manuscripts with me, she emphasized the appeal of this document
looking “old,” and of the unbound, manuscript form being “pretty,” and she informed me that this specific aesthetic was inspired by reading the writings of St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

“I do it in my calligraphy pen, and I do it in nice italics. I guess it started off with me reading about St. Thérèse. She had several journals and they had photographs [of the journals] and she had nice writing, and I wanted to do that, too…”

Tessa’s chosen aesthetic is based on an inspiration of a distinctly spiritual nature: photographs of the writings of a Catholic saint. While the material properties of her manuscripts are beautiful and enjoyable in themselves, this is only part of their significance, and Tessa’s description reveals that they have a clear relationship to the activity of Tessa’s mind and heart. She explains:

“These thoughts that come to me are just so personal, so important to me, that I have to put it in a different type of writing […] I want to become a saint, I really want to record the spiritual things that really help me on my journey […] When I look back at them, it’s like I’m trying to read—like I’m reading a ‘Saint Wannabe’s’ work [laughs].”

Here, Tessa explains that her aesthetic choices are not merely about physical beauty, but are intimately tied to her own spiritual life, and provide an imaginative, material link to her own spiritual goals, in her imitation of the appearance of St. Thérèse’s writings. It is interesting to note the relationship between the material and the spiritual here, and the way in which Tessa’s creation of this particular document—both in its contents and in the details of its appearance—seem to be an aestheticized, material expression of Tessa’s desires, as well as serving as a reminder of Tessa’s aim of spiritual growth.

Anders Hektor’s (2001) study of Internet use in everyday life identifies a number of “information activities,” or “a set of behaviours that people display in their interaction with information” (p. 80). One of these activities is “dressing,” in which “information is framed and a cognitive product is externalized…by an acting individual” (p. 86). This can involve both making information public and keeping it privately, so long as “information output” (p. 87) is occurring.
Hektor lists photo albums and diaries as examples of “private repositories” in which one can dress information (p. 87). Indeed, much of the activity of journal keeping can be examined in light of dressing, as individuals who keep journals are consistently producing “output” in the form of written entries, drawings, and the other types of content we have previously examined. But I bring this term in here, as the example of Tessa is especially evocative of the way in which information from various sources—both Tessa’s life, and the books she has read about St. Thérèse—has been “framed” and “externalized,” (p. 86) and dressed in the form of an imaginative and aesthetically rich personal manuscript.

5.4 – Illustrations and Art as Decoration

Along with artful writing, journals are often decorated with images. The previous chapter examined an instance of images in journals, exploring it from the angle of content. Here, the use of art in journal will be examined from the angle of material properties and aesthetics. While Lucy professes that she is “not a draw-er,” her journals contained simple, colourful illustrations:

*Figure 7. Illustrations in Lucy’s journal.*
Charlotte, too, put many decorative details into her journal:

*Figure 8.* Artful decoration in Charlotte’s journal.

From these examples, it appears that along with the meaning and symbol that artistic creations contain, the presence of art within a journal further emphasizes both the multimedia nature of journal content and the importance of aesthetics, as these creations contribute to the decoration and beautification of a journal. Journals begin as enjoyable objects in themselves, and then, through one’s choice of special materials, and the inclusion of artful writing or art itself, are made more aesthetically diverse, pleasing, and meaningful to the journal-keeper. These examples also demonstrate the time and effort one can put into keeping a spiritual journal. These are documents into which one puts much care, where text is decorated with coloured drawings, or where photographs are painstakingly cut up, rearranged, and re-assembled in imaginative ways. The focus of a journal includes, but is not limited to, textual narratives of thoughts or experiences, and contains these things alongside other personalized, artful expressions both for symbolic purposes, as we saw in Chapter III, and for decorative ones. These decorated journal entries also emphasize the importance of the “artful” (Taylor & Swan 2005) and flexible
qualities of journals, in which things can be written, but also drawn, coloured, painted, and glued.

5.5 – Journals as Scrapbooks

As we have previously seen, journals contain many different artful mediums, and their contents are not limited to just text. Often, journals contain collected sentimental ephemera, and in this way, they begin to resemble a scrapbook. These photographs of Charlotte’s journals provide a sample of the variety of mediums present in one book:

![Figure 9](image)

*Figure 9.* Two “multimedia” spreads from Charlotte’s journal

From these photographs, we can see that Charlotte’s journal contains a blend of written text, drawings, and collected ephemera, and that is a mix of explicitly spiritual (the spread on the right contains an illustration of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, a biblical story), as well as personal and sentimental, including a triathlon bib, and a receipt from the first time Charlotte filled a car with gas. When Charlotte described these journal pages to me, she had a story about the significance of each item, and also pointed out that while she was writing the entry in red, in the left frame, it started to rain, and the raindrops left visible marks on the page.
In a different way, Lucy’s journal cover presents a more unconventional instance of “scrapbooking:”

Figure 10. Lucy’s personalized journal cover.

Lucy has personalized the cover of her journal by sewing beads and medallions onto the elastic band that holds her journal closed. Specifically, these are medallions of saints and other religious images, as well as the word “peace,” and beads that spell out her name. Lucy explained the significance of each item to me, each with a specific meaning related to elements of her spiritual life. One medallion is of St. Jude, and of this she explains, “With all the trouble I get into, I looked at St. Jude a lot—he’s the patron saint of desperate and hopeless cases.” She went on to explain that she also uses these visual representations of saints to remind her of certain “virtues” that she wishes to possess, saying, “I figured one way to cultivate those virtues within myself is through asking intercessions from different saints who had them,” naming “humility” and “hospitality” as particular qualities she wished to develop in this way. Finally, one medallion is of an image attributed to a particular religious order, and reminds Lucy of the time she has spent
with the members of this community and her ongoing project of discerning a religious vocation. These medals and beads are not print materials, but much like Charlotte’s displays of ephemera from different areas of her life, they are a unique presentation of items that represent both special times in Lucy’s history and overarching spiritual and personal goals.

Although we often think of people writing journals, to label the primary activity here as “writing” misses so much of what has actually taken place. It seems more accurate to say that people keep journals, which includes not only writing but also producing art, and gathering and displaying both print ephemera and other items of significance. These displays of ephemera are collections of many forms of information significant to the journal’s author, further highlighting the multimedia nature of spiritual journals. In this way, journals are similar to blogs, which often feature images, videos, and music interwoven with text. Although the journals in this study are private, non-digital documents, they contain the same variety in content, doubly noteworthy because this aesthetic richness is not done for an outside audience, but simply for oneself.

Elsewhere, Hektor (2001) and Hartel (2007, 2010a) have talked about the “multi-dimensionality” (Hartel 2007, p. 244) of documents, noting that they can be valued for their use, their beauty, their sentimental significance, or for how they contribute to the appearance of a room or home. Both scholars make mention of display element of a collection of documents, noting that these often contribute to the aesthetic of a physical space, or tell others something of their owner’s identity or interests. Journals, too, possess many dimensions, but in contrast, they are kept private, and a question that remains is why these documents are so meticulously decorated despite never being shared. In light of the carefully arranged sentimental ephemera in these examples, what is clear is that journals contain many personal remembrances of one’s
experiences and spiritual ideas, and are dear to those who keep them in part because of their ability to contain or represent some of the special moments of life.

5.6 – Noteworthy Exceptions

Although the value of aesthetics and materials was a prevalent theme, there were some notable exceptions. John’s two journals, whose content we have previously examined, are pocket-sized, coil notebooks containing simple, point-form daily notes. This photograph illustrates the utilitarian appearance of John’s journals:

![Figure 11. John’s small, coil-bound journals.](image)

At the time of our interview, John had only been keeping a journal for four months, a practice he had begun because his spiritual director recommended it to him. As displayed earlier, both of his journals have entries that take the form of point form notes. He does not write lengthy entries, but rather is concerned with retaining lists of daily events and experiences related to prayer. When he talks about his prayer journal, in which he keeps track of when and how he prays each day, he describes it as “extremely useful,” explaining:
“I can actually go back and see what I was thinking, and not always be relying on my present memory, which is not all that good. It’s useful for spiritual direction, and also for my own idea of what my spiritual life is.”

When he discusses his “Blessings and Answered Prayers,” journal, in which he keeps track of the ways he feels God has been present in his day, he describes it as “the fun one,” explaining that he enjoys being able to flip through it, because “No matter how bad a day is, there’s something fun to think about or write down.”

In contrast to the examples provided previously in this chapter, where students’ spoke about appreciating their journals for their aesthetic or material features, such as having nice paper, or allowing for creative freedom, John’s appreciation for his journals is expressed in terms of its utility. His idea of “fun” is different from the idea Charlotte expressed above, in regards to her use of markers; his is the fun of remembering and celebrating life, rather than the fun of recording it in materially pleasing ways. This is not to say that Charlotte does not enjoy revisiting her journals or documenting meaningful moments, but it is worthwhile to note that while Charlotte (and others) expressed delight in both the appearance and the experience of writing, John makes no mention of such things, focusing instead on his journals’ usefulness, and on enjoying its written content rather than its material features.

In further contrast, Matthew kept journals that were aesthetically very rich, but this seemed to be almost an accident. Matthew’s journals were given to him as gifts, and their worn covers, stained pages, and smudged ink appear to be the product of Matthew’s life of travel and friendship, rather than because of any deliberate aesthetic preferences. Matthew has travelled extensively, and the journals he brought to our interview have accompanied him on two lengthy periods of living and working with different Catholic organizations, as well as a trip to Germany for World
Youth Day, and many retreats in between. In the following excerpt, Matthew describes his practice of passing his journal around for friends to write in while on trips and retreats:

“In all of the journals, you’ll find different things that people wrote to me. And these I do like to go back and look at sometimes. I like to go back and see what funny things they said, or what they remember from me, or from a retreat.”

In addition to this, most of the intentional aesthetic additions to Matthew’s journal were created by those from whom the books themselves were a gift. The two photos below display some of these:

*Figure 12. Aesthetic additions friends have made to Matthew’s journals.*

On the left is a hand-drawn picture of the 2005 World Youth Day logo, accompanied by an inscription from a friend. On the right, a homemade label containing a scripture quotation (“God is able to make all grace about you” – I Corinthians 9:8). These labels, which include scripture passages and quotations from some of Matthew’s favourite saints, were carefully chosen and typed up by one of Matthew’s friends, and glued throughout the journal as a way of personalizing it for him.

From these excerpts, it is worthwhile to note that the aesthetic additions to Matthew’s journals came from others, and that while these additions are related to aspects of his spiritual life, they
are also reflections of his experiences of travel and friendship, and are enjoyable as “accidents” of experience rather than because of Matthew’s deliberate effort to create a journal with a certain aesthetic. In other words, Matthew’s journals demonstrate that the rich, material aspects of a journal are not always intentional, but are still meaningful.

Along with the “multi-dimensionality” of documents, Hartel (2007, 2010a) has specifically noted the “keepsake” aspects of some personal recipes, describing “culinary keepsakes” as culinary information that has “special personal meaning and value to the cook,” and that add “sentiments, memories, and family legacies” to one’s collection (Hartel 2007, p. 189). These keepsakes are often passed down from family members and treasured for sentimental details such as containing a relative’s handwriting, or the character added to them by food stains or by yellowed pages that reflect their age (p. 189). She observes that these details enrich one’s collection of culinary documents, adding “life experience and tradition” to its already functional purposes (p. 189).

From what we have seen of journals so far, it can be said that journals in general are more than just functional, and contain a significant “keepsake” dimension, even when they appear relatively utilitarian. But the relational aspect of this dimension is made especially clear in Matthew’s journals, which were carefully and deliberately personalized by special people in his life. Just like “culinary keepsakes” are often of value because of who they came from, and their history, Matthew’s journals reflect his relationships with others and his faith-related travels in a material and meaningful way.

5.7 – Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the role of aesthetics and materiality in spiritual journaling, looking closely at students’ choices in journaling materials, the imaginative and artful creation of images, scrapbook displays, and even the use of calligraphy and the imitation of the writings of a 19th
Century Catholic saint. It also highlights two counter-examples, in which the aesthetic appearance of journals reflected other themes. This chapter illustrates that journals are valued for their beauty, and materially reflect an enjoyment of the process of journaling, and elements of one’s spiritual life, travels, and relationships.
VI
PRACTICE

6.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter demonstrates the ways in which spiritual journals are a part of students’ daily lives, by describing journaling routines, the role of privacy in journal keeping, and the practice of re-reading past entries. These elements also call attention to some of the emotional aspects of journaling in a spiritual context, resonating with other research on the affective dimension of non-work information behaviour. They also demonstrate a unique instance of Anders Hektor’s (2001) information activities of unfolding, dressing, and exchanging (pp. 84-87).

6.2 – Time and Place

When I asked informants to describe the roles their journals played in their typical day, their responses revealed that, whether their journal keeping was regular or spontaneous, their spiritual journals were documents with which they had intimate relationships. With a focus on time and place, the following sections illustrate the journaling routines of Lucy and Charlotte, each representing opposite ends of a spectrum spanning regularity and spontaneity.

6.2.1 – Lucy: Journaling as a Habit

When I asked Lucy if we could meet in the place she typically journals, she suggested the Harbour House chapel. We conducted our interview in the back room, or sacristy, so as not to
disturb anyone, and afterwards Lucy walked me through her typical journaling routine from beginning to end. She began by explaining:

“If I know that I’m going to be away from home for a while—so if I’m either spending a lot of time in class, or at work, I would carry my journal with me. I try my best to go for daily mass, and I would journal before or after mass, for a set amount of time.”

She then went on to describe the way in which her journaling practice is related to attending mass:

“I keep the gospel reading or the first in mind […] When I start my entries, sometimes it’s just reflections from the homily, if I’m writing after mass, or it’s just…what is my understanding of this? So I do a simple lectio, and I write down the fruits of that lectio divina in my journal. And then I try linking it to other things in my life, and that’s how the content expands.”

Lucy’s use of the term “lectio divina” refers to the slow reading and meditation on scripture. Her explanations above illustrate several noteworthy things. First, her journaling has a place in her daily routine, and this place is linked to going to daily mass, another spiritual activity. Second, it illustrates the relationship her journal has with other spiritual texts and sources of information, in the form of the mass readings and the priest’s homily. Third, she describes her process of creating information in her journal, by explaining that “the content expands” by first reflecting on the information she has heard and then linking it to things occurring elsewhere in her life. Lucy describes this routine as a focused effort, explaining that she wants to “cultivate the habit” of writing each day, and also telling me about times in which she has persisted despite having “no inclination to write at all.”

After Lucy explained this process, she walked me through the chapel to demonstrate where and how she journals each day. The following photograph is of Lucy in her journaling environment:
Here, Lucy is captured in what was her imitation of “lectio divina.” Her bible is open before her, and her journal rests beneath it, illustrating that her journaling practice involves not simply writing but also silent, reflective prayer. In the context of Catholic spirituality, this location is also of particular significance. Not only does Lucy journal in a church, but here she is seated facing the tabernacle, which is the place in a church where consecrated hosts are kept. Catholics believe that these are the body of Christ, and treat this part of the church with particular reverence. When Lucy journals here, she does so with the understanding that she is in the presence of God in a particularly powerful way. Her journaling practice, then, does not only occur in the context of specific spiritual events (mass), and texts (the mass readings, the homily), but is also situated so that it emphasizes, by her physical location, the relationship she is trying to develop and reflect upon through the act of writing.

\footnote{Lucy was interviewed during this project’s pilot study, in which the consent form differed slightly from the one in Appendix A, obtaining permission to take photos of students as well as their journals.}
By examining Lucy’s routine, we can see the way in which, for some, journaling is a habit that is cultivated by carving out time within a daily routine, and that is enforced by the structure of one’s day and also, in this case, by the location in which Lucy journals, which has a specific spiritual focus. Her routine also involves interactions with different spiritual texts. Kari (2012) identifies a number of ways one can use spiritual information, and lists “exploiting,” as a use in which one “consumes” information by incorporating it “into oneself” (p. 70), or “drawing from it” in a personal way. This kind of use best represents what Lucy does during her daily journaling, which extends beyond simply reporting on what she hears or reads, but enfolding it into the narrative of her life.

6.2.2 – Charlotte: Emotional Impetus

In contrast to Lucy’s structured daily routine, when I asked Charlotte about her typical journaling routine, she laughed and said, “There’s no structure at all!” She went on to explain, “I just write when I feel like it, when I feel like I need to.” She then elaborated, sharing how “needing to” was related to, “moments of intense inner emotion,” that could either be “a high or a low,” and listing joy and confusion as examples of these.

Despite the fact that Charlotte’s journal wasn’t a fixture in her daily routine in the same structured, regular way that Lucy’s was, it was still a consistent part of Charlotte’s life, and had an important link to prayer. Charlotte described her journal as “a medium for conversing with God,” and in the following excerpt, she outlines the prayer-focused relationship she has with her journal:

“I would journal only when I feel like my prayer to God isn’t best communicated… I guess internally? I journal when I’m in times of confusion. So, by writing, I am better able to articulate why it is that I’m confused, and why it is I feel like I need guidance […] I stop only when I feel like I have some sort of peace, and some sort of closure.”
She went on to explain what she felt was the difference between her own spiritual journal and her previous notions of what a journal was supposed to be, positioning her documentation of self-composed prayers in contrast to journals in which one records the minutiae of their day:

“Before, I was almost obsessed with getting down every detail […] I felt compelled to write down what I did every day. And now, I just, I see the temporality of life and I… I don’t see, unless it’s going to help me in my spiritual journey, how that is advantageous. At all.”

Here, Charlotte describes an approach to journaling that is different from that expressed by Lucy, and by others who make journaling a part of their daily routine. Both use their journal as a tool for prayer, but while Lucy deliberately prays using her journal each day, Charlotte only uses hers in big moments, establishing her journal as a significant but less fixed part of her spiritual life, and something that is informed by an emotional context, rather than a physical one.

Charlotte’s approach to journaling is not fixed to a particular location, but she reports typically journaling in private, usually in her room. Like Lucy, she also transports her journal to various places, usually for the purpose of taking notes during an event or talk of a spiritual nature. Below are pages of illustrated notes Charlotte took at a public talk given by a visiting Cardinal from Ghana:

*Figure 14. Charlotte’s illustrated notes.*
These illustrated notes show us that Charlotte’s journal, like Lucy’s, has a relationship with other sources of spiritual information. Elsewhere in Charlotte’s journal, there are also clippings from a Catholic newspaper, as well as pasted-in copies of poems and prayers.

While both Charlotte and Lucy journal in the context of Catholic spirituality, Charlotte’s practice of spontaneous, emotionally-driven journaling differs from Lucy’s steady, daily cultivation of the habit of writing and reflection, revealing a different type of relationship with a journal, and a different use of the journal in the context of a spiritual life. Ross’s (1999) study of 194 pleasure readers devotes focus to the role of mood in selecting books, reporting that “the bedrock for choice is the reader’s mood” (p. 790). She explains how readers select different books based on the reading experience they desire at the time, such as a sense of comfort or the urge to be mentally or emotionally challenged, and noting that their choices were often informed by “a high or particularly low” point in life (p. 787). In a similar way, the example of Charlotte’s journaling demonstrates how her practice is informed by the way she feels, rather than by external structures of time or space, and it permeates her life in a similarly fluid way to that of Ross’s pleasure readers, for whom the act of reading can and does take place anywhere, at any moment.

6.3 – “The Horror Stories of People Reading Your Journal”

An aspect of the practice of journal keeping that differs from other everyday information practices is that of privacy. Many of the students I spoke to had deliberate measures in place in order to keep their journals private, or to ensure that, should they ever be read by someone else, their full meaning could not be interpreted. Lucas, for example, writes his most personal entries in a code he has been using since boyhood. The following photograph depicts a coded journal entry:
I initially thought this was a different language, but Lucas explained that it was actually a code, with each symbol representing a different letter of the English alphabet. This was something Lucas developed in order to earn a Boy Scout badge as a child, and he has continued to use it throughout his life. (This code actually has two forms, which are both visible in this photograph—one on the left is the cursive form, characterized by loops, and on the right is the printed form, which is more angular.) When I asked Lucas about his use of an invented code, he explained:

“[It’s] so people couldn’t read my journal… I mean, I’ve heard the horror stories of people reading your journal and I was like, ‘I’ll never have to worry about that.’”

Similarly, Grace has a habit of keeping two different journals at the same time, switching periodically between one book and the other, and when I asked her why she does this she explained:

“I think sometimes it’s more like, which one should I use so that people can’t really follow a trajectory of my life if they discover them? Especially since my brother discovered my journals from my past when I was at home, and he went through them…”
Grace also reported a practice shared by many other informants, which is that of scribbling out certain passages after they’d been written, saying, “Later on, if I’m scared that people will read it, I’ll scribble it out—especially names.”

These ways of preserving privacy begin to demonstrate the intimate relationship one has with one’s journal. Journals are a repository for one’s most personal thoughts, and the informants of this study took deliberate, careful measures to ensure that what they write remains their own. Several students even prepared for our interview by going through their journals and marking the pages they were comfortable with showing me, a task they undertook without any suggestion or guidance from me, and even though privacy and anonymity were assured in the consent statement. Between these privacy practices and the ways in which a journal is a part of one’s day, there emerges a picture of a uniquely deep relationship, in which a journal is more than simply a text, or a record, but something more akin to a good friendship or companionship. Other personal documents are less closely guarded. Blogging, for instance, is a widespread practice that involves the intentional display of your ideas to an online audience that is often very large. Interestingly, as we have seen in previous comparisons between the multimedia aspects of both private journals and blogs, the private nature of a journal does not deter one from putting great effort into creating entries that are beautiful and artistic.

Yakel (2004) and Hartel (2010a) have both noted certain celebratory aspects to the display and sharing of one’s personal, non-work information collections. Yakel (2004) characterizes the hobby of genealogy as something that involves becoming part of a community in which information is happily exchanged and shared (p. 6-7), and Hartel (2010a) observes that one’s personal culinary library is often displayed in a home in a way that adds “character and intelligence” (p. 862). In contrast, journals are aesthetically rich artifacts that possess much
character, and they are deliberately kept private, with students often employing elaborate methods of ensuring that they remain so.

6.4 – Dressing, Unfolding, Exchanging

Another regular element of journaling practices is that of re-reading a journal. All of the students I interviewed reported re-reading past journal entries, some frequently and others less so. Several students were even in the practice of making comments on past entries as they read, often keeping track of temporal differences by writing commentary in a different colour pen. The photograph below, displaying another of Lucas’s coded journal entries, illustrates an occasion in which he has gone back and made comments:

![Figure 16. Commenting on past entries.](image)

When Lucas described these to me, he explained:

“Okay, so you can see that this is my thoughts, in blue. And I’ve gone back and I’ve said, like, I was concerned about something and then I wrote my thoughts, like, ‘Okay so this didn’t work out.’”
Although not all students were in the habit of making written commentary on past journal entries, re-reading old entries was common, and students reported that this practice served to deepen their understanding of particular events, or to see how they have grown. Lucy explained that she revisits one series of entries, written while away on a silent retreat, especially often, saying, “There are lots of things I wrote that I may not have understood back then that I still, even to date, still unpack a lot.” In addition to the frequent re-reading of one particular entry, Lucy also re-reads the rest of her journal “at least once a month,” as a way of seeing how she has grown over time.

Elsewhere, I have connected journal keeping to Hektor’s (2001) “dressing,” an activity that involves framing information and externalizing a cognitive product, either for others or just for oneself (pp. 86-87). Here, in addition to dressing, the act of “unfolding” or, “taking part of a content” by reading, watching, or listening (p. 84) is also taking place, in the re-reading of past journal entries. Hektor also names “exchanging” as an information activity that involves reciprocal dressing and unfolding surrounding one topic (p. 85-86). Based on these definitions, the act of re-reading—and often interacting with—past journal entries can be understood as a unique form of information exchange, where one first engages in dressing by writing an entry, and later engages in unfolding by reading it in order to better synthesize one’s understanding of oneself, of past events, or of their relationship with God.

This is especially evident in cases where students write commentary on past entries, and is illustrative of a certain kind of communication with information prepared in the past. Hektor specifies that exchanging must involve “two or more parties” (p. 86), and while journaling is a solitary activity, in the context of spirituality there is often an understanding that when one journals, one is engaging in some form of communication with God, as we have seen in previous
examinations of journaling and prayer. Kari (2007), too, notes that information can be “acquired by spiritual means” or can “originate from a source considered as a spiritual entity” (p. 957). Examining spiritual journals reveals that this activity involves a mysterious understanding of communication, not just with one’s past thoughts, but also with God.

Additionally, this practice of re-reading and writing commentary also establishes spiritual journal keeping as a process that is never really complete. For example, individual entries in Lucas’s journal, despite being composed in a given period, are changed as time moves forward, as Lucas adds layers of commentary, and as he continues to look back for insight into himself, his life, and his relationship with God. Lucy, too, continues to search her journal entries for meaning long after she writes them, developing new insights the more she revisits old writing. Spiritual journals do not only grow in length, as more entries are added over time, but also in depth, as journal keepers add layers of commentary and re-read to synthesize entries that span weeks, months, or even years.

Yakel’s (2004) study of genealogists unearthed similar themes, and she observes that the seeking family history information is “an ongoing process of seeking meaning,” where, “the ultimate need is to create a larger narrative, connect with others in the past and present, and to find coherence in one’s own life” (p. 1). The practice of keeping a spiritual journal, too, involves an ongoing search for coherence and understanding, where there is no end or final achievement, but where meaning can be pursued to an increasing depth.

6.5 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined two contrasting journaling routines and examined the role of time and space in spiritual journal keeping. It has discussed some of the inventive methods employed for
preserving a journal’s privacy and pondered some of the more mysterious communicative aspects of keeping a journal. Finally, it has examined the practice of re-reading one’s journal as a part of the ongoing pursuit of meaning and spiritual growth.
7.1 - Chapter Overview

This chapter examines the structure of spiritual journals, using as a sensitizing framework Marcia Bates’ (1986) descriptive definition of reference books based on their makeup of files, records, and fields. Although spiritual journals do not fit neatly into Bates’ definition, they contain intriguing similarities and differences, and the use of her framework highlights the unique structure of journals and journal entries, and assists in describing the place of journals amongst other genres of book. After a brief introduction to Bates’ descriptive terms, this chapter illustrates the overall structure of spiritual journals in terms of files, records, and fields, and then steps back to examine how this structure leads to different kinds of use, highlighting the hybrid nature of spiritual journals in their ability to stand alone as “information individuals” while also being pieces of a larger narrative, and tentatively positioning one’s collection of spiritual journals over time as a personal reference book containing the history of one’s spiritual life and growth.

7.2 - A Brief Introduction to Bates

Marcia Bates’ 1986 article, “What is a Reference Book? A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis” borrows terms from the field of computer science to provide definition of a reference book based on a description of its structural features and the uses these features enable. Previous definitions of reference books have been either administrative, defining a reference book as any book that has been put in the reference section (p. 38), or functional, defining a reference book broadly as any book that can provide the answers to one’s questions (p. 39). But Bates recognizes that these
definitions do not fully capture the features of a reference book, or the reasons why these books are used in particular ways.

Bates points to the definition of a reference book provided by S.R. Ranganathan, in which he explains that a reference book is, “characterized internally by an ensemble of disjointed entries of short, though varying lengths” (Ranganathan, p. 257) that are determined by a particular organizational scheme rather than by the building of a continuous exposition or sequence of thoughts, as in a novel or other “ordinary book” (p. 257). While Ranganathan’s definition begins to describe a reference book, Bates proposes that this can be taken further, and that reference book can be described and defined by their distinct structural elements: files, records, and fields (pp. 40-41). The following table provides Bates’ definition of each of these features as they relate to reference books:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>“A set of two or more records ordered by a rule or principle…” (pp. 40-41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record</td>
<td>“A unitary or internally related body of information; an information ‘individual’” (p. 41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>“A unit or chunk of information within a record” (p. 41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Book</td>
<td>“Books that are substantially or entirely composed of files” (p. 44).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4. Structural features of a reference book*

In addition to this, the following table presents an overview of some of the structural features of the spiritual journals encountered at the Harbour House—whole journals, journal entries, and
entry elements, or regularly occurring segments of information in a journal entry—indicating which of these features resemble parallel features of reference books:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal(s)</th>
<th>Journal Entries</th>
<th>Entry Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparable to Files</td>
<td>Comparable to Records</td>
<td>Comparable to Fields</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matthew:

Grace:

Charlotte:

Table 5. Structural features of spiritual journals
Bates’ definitions will be used throughout the chapter in order to offer further insight into the structural features of spiritual journals, preliminarily displayed above, and will assist in describing spiritual journals in terms of their structure and use.

7.3 - Journal Collections as Reference Books

As stated above, Marcia Bates defines reference books as “books that are substantially or entirely composed of files” (p. 44). A reference book that many are familiar with is a dictionary, and these books are composed of separate files for each letter of the alphabet. In the case of spiritual journals, one’s collection of journals over time can be said to form the “reference book” as a whole, with each individual journal being one file. Where dictionary files are ordered alphabetically, the files in a spiritual journal collection are ordered chronologically, and files may be added as long as one continues to keep journals. The following photograph displays Lucy’s collection of spiritual journals, spanning the past three years:

Figure 17. Lucy’s journal collection.
Additionally, a closer look at Anne’s journals reveals that each book has been labeled with a number indicating its chronological place in the collection:

*Figure 18. Anne’s numbered and ordered journal collection.*

These photographs illustrate the composition of a spiritual journal collection as one that consists of files that continue to be added as one continues to fill journals with thoughts and reflections. The students from my study had collections of as few as two and as many as eight spiritual journals in their collection, and paired with previous descriptions of students revisiting past entries and combing them for new and deeper meaning, we can begin to see how one might understand a collection of journals as a growing, bespoke personal reference book.

### 7.4 - Journals as Files

As we begun to explore above, a “personal reference book” of spiritual journals is composed of individual journals, or “files.” Marcia Bates defines a file as “a set of two or more records, ordered by a rule or principle” (p. 41). We have already discussed how a dictionary consists of
files ordered alphabetically. In each file in a dictionary are all of the words that begin with a particular letter, and each of these words and its accompanying definition is a record in this file. Similarly, each spiritual journal in a collection can be understood as a file, ordered chronologically, and within each file are journal entries, or records, also ordered according to chronology and each representing particular moments in time. In the following excerpt, Lucas describes his collection of three journals in a way that illustrates this chronological file structure:

“So this guy [gesturing to a journal] is my junior year of college. So [counts on fingers] one, two, three, four, five…six years ago? And this [journal] would be the last two years, and then this [journal] would be this year.”

Later, he explains that he also knows the span of events that each journal covers, working backwards from the present:

“This is in the novitiate, this is—this was in Jerusalem, and this is when I was in California.”

Here, we can see how Lucas’s journals are defined in terms of the years and life events that they cover. Put another way, every journal in his collection is a file covering an overarching period of time—several months, or years—and each file is composed of records of individual days, events, or thoughts. The temporal layers to his and other journals resemble Hartel’s (2010b) temporal arcs in the hobby of gourmet cooking, which describe information activities at various resolutions of time. Hartel outlines a “career arc” that represents a cook’s lifetime experience in the hobby (p. 4), and it could be said that Lucas’s collection of journals over time represent a similar kind of “career.” When he defines each journal by the shorter span of time it represents, this could be compared to the “subject arc” that is shorter, and organized around a particular topic (p. 4), or in this case, a particular phase of life. Lastly, an “episode” is a distinct project that happens closer to real-time (p. 4), which here might be comparable to writing one journal entry. Lucas’s description demonstrates the centrality of time in the project of keeping spiritual
journals, and supports the above observation that a journal collection is composed of chronologically ordered journals. Thus far, this mirrors the structure of reference books as “books that are substantially or entirely composed of files” (p. 44).

7.5 - Journal Entries as Records

After examining journals as files, we can then look within a journal to examine its individual records. Bates (1986) defines a record as, “a unitary or internally related body of information; an information individual” (p. 41). In a dictionary, in which there is a file for each letter of the alphabet, a single word and its accompanying definition would be one record. But where both the files and records in dictionaries are ordered alphabetically, in the case of spiritual journals, they are ordered chronologically. In a journal, each entry is one record, consisting of thoughts written down at a particular moment in time, and typically these entries are added to a file one by one, and marked with the date of their composition. The following table illustrates an array of records as they appear in spiritual journals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John</th>
<th>Samantha</th>
<th>Grace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6.* “Records” in spiritual journals.

These photographs illustrate that records can be of varying lengths, some taking up only part of a page, some an entire page, and others spanning several pages. They also demonstrate some of the ways that entries in a journal are distinguished typographically, through the use of spaces
between entries, as well as the creation of headers that include, most commonly, the date, but also sometimes the time of day, the writer’s location, and other details about context in which the entry was composed.

But Bates’ definition of a record also includes an evaluation of its contents, and it is here that the comparison between journals and reference books becomes less neat. Bates first states that records are “internally related,” (p. 41) meaning that all of the information in a record is about the same thing. Unlike a record in a dictionary, in which all of the information in the record is about the word being defined, a spiritual journal entry can often be about many different things, or address disparate problems or ideas. But what makes the content of each entry cohesive is that they are written by, and are about, the life of one individual, and that each entry is related to a particular moment in time (which could be a day, or a span of several days). In this way, writing a journal entry is temporally comparable to an “episode” (Hartel 2010b) introduced above—a “complete, singular project” (p. 6) that unfolds discretely in real time and often involves a series of information activities.

Bates additionally states that records in a file must be “information individuals,” which she explains to mean that they can “stand alone,” or can be rearranged without harming their meaning or use (p. 47). Journal entries can be examined as “information individuals,” but, by virtue of their being an account of the events of one’s life, are also a part of a larger narrative. These aspects of journals will be examined more closely in later sections on Use. For now, though, we can see that the division of journal content into chronologically ordered segments reveals both that time plays a role in the internal cohesiveness of journal entries, and that entries are treated as “information individuals” by their writers in the way they divided within a journal, whether or not they are true information individuals according to Bates.
7.6 - Fields in Journal Entries

Within each record in a spiritual journal are a number of different fields, or distinct segments of information, and we have already begun to see the presence and use of these in the previous examination of records. Marcia Bates defines a field as, “a unit or chunk of information within a record” (p. 41). In a dictionary, in which a record consists of one word and its definition, some of the fields in this record would be the word, its pronunciation, its grammatical form, its definitions, and its synonyms. In my exploration of spiritual journals, I also encountered a number of fields. The following diagram displays a variety of fields encountered in spiritual journal entries:

Figure 19. Fields in Tessa’s journal.
Tessa’s journal entries contain a number of common fields. Pictured here is a header including the date and feast day, set apart by its alignment on the right side of the page. Also included are a salutation, the main body of text, and a closing. Sometimes, a student’s header included both the date and the time of writing, or their location at the time of writing, such as “the chapel,” and one student was in the habit of giving each of his journal entries a relevant title. Not all students composed their journal entries as letters, and so not every entry contained a salutation and a closing. In general, though, a typical entry included at least a header with the date, and a main body of text.

But Lucas’s journal stood out as an anomaly amongst all of these. His journals contained both personal reflections—written in code, as we have previously seen—and extensive notes and records of his spiritual learning, pursued individually and through his education as young seminarian. His journal contained a wide variety of fields, typographically distinguished by coloured ink, illustrations, strategic spacing, titles and subtitles, and artfully drawn page divisions. Below is an example of a typical page of Lucas’s journal:
When Lucas and I discussed the unique composition of his journals, the following exchange took place:

H: It’s interesting that your journals are almost collections of resources for yourself.

L: Yeah, the reflection and what’s happening in my life is…more of a side…like, kind of a commentary to the resources that I collect.

This transcript excerpt provides an explanation for the unique fields present in Lucas’s journal—his journal-keeping practice has a strong focus on collecting spiritual information and resources that was not the case in the other journals encountered in this study. Where most students were
primarily interested in recording personal reflections, here, Lucas describes his reflective entries as a “commentary” on the information he seeks out and records from other sources. But in both cases, the use of fields helps guide a reader through the content of a journal. Some fields are set apart visually, by underlining, or by strategic alignment or spacing, and in Lucas’s case they are often distinguished using colours, drawings, and artful page divisions. Although one is most typically guided through a journal by headers that include the date of each entry, even Lucas’s varied, colourful fields helps provide guidance through the text by distinguishing segments of information in an artful way.

7.6.1 - Access Fields

The importance of an ordering principle or scheme of arrangement in the structure of reference books is something that is stressed in Bates’ descriptions. She explains that records in a file must be ordered according to some rule or principle, and that the field by which the records in a file are ordered is known as the “access field” (p. 47). It is this segment of information that is searched for when using a reference book, and it is what guides a reader or user through a text. In a dictionary, the access fields are the words being defined, and these are ordered alphabetically. In the case of spiritual journals, the access field is most often the date, and journal entries are ordered chronologically. If one wants to search for a particular piece of information in a journal, all he or she must do is refer to when that information was recorded. We have already seen how the files and records in a journal are arranged in chronological order, and we have also examined the use of the date as a field placed at the beginning of a journal entry. During my interview with Samantha, she noted the usefulness of recording the dates of her journal entries:

“I always have [the date] on the top. And I think it’s more of a reference thing… A good example of going back [to read a past entry] is when it was my younger sister’s confirmation… It brought me back to my confirmation, so I referred back to my
confirmation… Even though I don’t often refer back, I think it’s because of the dates…”

Later in our interview, she looks for an entry about an event that took place around the time of her birthday. The following is an excerpt from my field notes:

“Samantha flips through the pages of her journal, occasionally noting a striking piece of content, usually a reference to her spiritual life. The date is written at the top right hand corner of each journal entry. After some time she says, ‘I can’t find it. I know I wrote it. This entry [referring to the open journal] is from August, and my birthday is in November.’ We then moved on to discussing another journal entry instead.”

These excerpts demonstrate the use of the date as an access field, but the last one also demonstrates an unsuccessful attempt to locate a particular piece of information. There are many reasons why Samantha may have had trouble accessing the information. It is possible that the interview setting made her slightly nervous and self-conscious about taking time to search. It is also possible that another structural feature of Samantha’s journal entries makes searching a challenge. The following photograph of Samantha’s journal pages displays the typical appearance of her journal entries:

*Figure 21. Inside Samantha’s journal.*
In the photo above, we can see the date written in the top right hand corner of the page. But despite Samantha’s use of dates, she never uses paragraphs when writing in her journal, and this might increase the difficulty of searching. Even with the dates as a guide, it would be hard to locate particular details without reading an entry from start to finish or scanning it very closely. This points to an element of structure that is not addressed in detail by Bates, which is that the typographical features records and fields might facilitate a search through their content as much as, or alongside, their ordering principles.

7.6.2 - “It Feels Like the Whole Thing is Just One Moment:” Undated Entries

Journal entries so commonly began with the date that cases in which dates were not used warranted special note. Lucy typically dates her journal entries, but during our interview she made specific mention of a period in which she deliberately did not do so. Her entries from this time are displayed below:

![Figure 22. Lucy’s undated journal entries.](image-url)
When Lucy described these entries to me, she spoke about being in a time of “desolation,” or a period in which she could not easily identify God’s presence in her life, saying:

“If you look through the very few pages that I’ve written here, it’s just text. To the point that I’ve stopped dating them, I just write […] What I end up saying is very repetitive, so it doesn’t sound like I’ve moved from one day to another. It feels like the whole thing is just one moment”

Here, Lucy demonstrates an idiosyncratic omission of a common field of information. Despite her use of paragraphs, it is unclear whether a new paragraph indicates a change in topic, a change in date, or both; it is not easy to discern with clarity what the spaces mean. It is also worthwhile to note that this omission was directly linked to an experience in Lucy’s spiritual life. The spiritual nature of her decision to omit dates suggests that those who keep spiritual journals may have conceptions of structure or order that differ from those of cultural conventions, or that they may hold both cultural and spiritual conceptions of these things in balance. In this case, Lucy prioritizes distinguishing spiritual periods over periods defined by days or hours, and does so by changing the structure of her entries, leaving out a common field. This is another way in which spiritual journal demonstrate Kari’s (2007) observation that one’s spirituality may define how one views both information process and the world itself in ways that can be “fundamentally different from the materialistic picture of the world” (p. 958).

7.7 - Use: Looking Up and Reading Through

We have examined in detail the various structural features of a spiritual journal collection, comparing these features to files, records, and fields in a reference book. Bates (1986) discusses reference books both in terms of their structure and also in terms of their use, explaining that reference books, as books composed substantially of files, are best used for “look up” or
“referral” access to information, meaning, “it is possible to find a desired datum or segment of information in a body of information directly, without having to search through the information linearly” (p. 44). This is contrasted with books that are used for “reading through” (p. 45), such as a novel. For Bates, the reading-through function and the referral function differ in that books that serve a referral function provide more rapid access to specific files than books that serve a reading-through function (p. 46). Bates also describes how these varying functions are facilitated primarily by a book’s structure: books made up predominately of files serve the referral function best, and books containing only text, or even “text plus contents lists and/or back-of-the-book indexes” are best suited to reading through, and are therefore typically thought of as “stack” books, rather than reference books (p. 46).

Another structural feature that facilitates referral access is the “information individuality” of records. Along with the ability to locate a given record without having to search a reference book linearly, it is also because each record can stand alone in terms of its content that reference books provide easy referral. For example, if one searched a dictionary for the word “good,” they could expect that all they needed to know about the word “good” would be found in that record. The “information individuality” of spiritual journal entries is less clear. We have already seen some of the ways in which spiritual journals are used for referral, and the role of the date as an access field in facilitating this kind of searching. This section will discuss some of the other uses of spiritual journals, examining the “information individuality” of their entries and the ways in which they can be used for reading through, alongside the referral access they provide.
7.7.1 - “Information Individuals”: Journal Entries as Letters

The “information individuality” of spiritual journal entries is demonstrated most clearly in cases where journal entries are composed as letters. These entries begin with a salutation, go on to communicate one or more ideas, and then end, often with a formal closing line and the author’s signature. The following table displays several journal entries of this type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tessa</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>Carina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Tessa" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Rebecca" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Carina" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7. Journal entries composed as letters.*

In the images above, one can see how each entry begins and closes neatly, opening with a greeting such as “Dear God,” or “Dear Jesus,” and closing with a phrase such as “Amen,” or “Love,” and the author’s name. Because of their letter-like structure, these entries can be understood as information that “stands alone,” which is one of Bates’ requirements for determining an “information individual” (p. 47). Using the standard conventions of written correspondence, these journal entries are much like any other letter or e-mail, in which a series of ideas are expressed and the text is sent to someone else, with the understanding that the one receiving the information will be able to fully comprehend what is being communicated. In this way, each letter “stands alone” as complete information.
But, as in other types of correspondence, these entries—whether formally composed as letters or not—also build on one another, and link ideas that span temporal bounds. Unlike other correspondence, the written communication here only goes one way, but in a spiritual journal, in which one is writing to God and working to understand oneself, a similar kind of ongoing synthesis of ideas takes place. Although there is no conventional back and forth of discussion, as in other types of written communication, in journals one revisits ideas expressed in the past and addresses them in new ways as one grows, as is evident in the many ways students re-read and interact with what they have written. In this way, the entries are connected with one another such that they provide “continuous, developing exposition” (p. 39) that is perhaps less fluid than a novel, but that by virtue of being an account of someone’s life, does communicate a linear narrative. Here, too, journal keeping moves between different “arcs” (Hartel 2010b) of time, with information being created in one episode, and linked to entries created in the past, echoing Savolainen’s (2006) observation that the “dimensions of past, present, and future” are inextricably a part of information experiences, often in complicated ways.

7.7.2 - Reading Through: Looking for Growth

While journals are often used and valued for the referral access they provide, they are just as often valued for containing some form of narrative, or an overall picture of the story of someone’s life and, in the case of spiritual journals, one’s spiritual development. This is especially evident when students discuss the way their journals provide for them a picture of their own personal growth. Here, students are not referring to past entries in order to locate specific events or thoughts, but are rather reading the series of entries from start to finish, in order to gather an overall picture of how they have developed or changed over time. In this
excerpt from my interview with Tessa, she tells me about when she re-reads her journal entries, and what she looks for when she does:

“[I re-read my journal] when I’m having like a ‘vocational crisis’ […] where I just completely doubt where I’m going, and I’m not too sure if I’m headed in the right direction. I would go back through my journal to Jesus […] I would feel like, there has been progress over here […] and there has been development. I kind of see God’s thumb pushing me.”

In this explanation, Tessa indicates that in times of uncertainty about where she is headed in life, she re-reads her journal for evidence of progress, with a specific eye towards how God has been at work. In another instance, John is in the habit of re-reading his journals on a monthly basis, in order to help him prepare for meetings with his spiritual director. We looked closely at this in Chapter III (Section 4.3.4). John re-reads his journals in order to “review what the month has been like with [his] prayer,” and to “look for common themes.” Like Tessa, he revisits past journal entries regularly, and with a particular purpose, and expresses his desire to see growth or progress in his spiritual life. The examples of both John and Tessa demonstrate an interaction with a journal that is more akin to reading a novel than it is to searching a reference book for a specific piece of information.

Journal entries do not fit neatly into the category of “information individuals” or pieces of a developing exposition, nor are they used for only looking up information, or only reading. Previous field data has demonstrated how journals are used for referral. Now, with the examples of Tessa and John, we can see how journals are also read through in a linear way, with the desire to revisit the narrative of one’s life. One can find desired information in a journal both by searching directly and by reading a journal from start to finish, and in this way, journals take up a unique position between Bates’ descriptive divisions of reference and stack books.
7.8 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comparison between the structural features of reference books and those of spiritual journals, demonstrating that both are made up of files, records, and fields, and that this makeup allows for the text to be searched easily, and for the user to make quick jumps from the whole text to a desired part. But although journals and reference books have these elements in common, they also differ in some of their uses. While both reference books and journals can be used for referral, the nature of a journal as a record of someone’s life means that they are also used and valued just as much for their ability to be read through like a narrative. It is possible to view one’s collection of spiritual journals as a growing, bespoke personal reference book that facilitates varied uses, and that continues to expand as one continues to create accounts of his or her life.
VIII
CONCLUSION

8.1 – Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a summary of the thesis’s findings, offers a short methodological reflection, and the moves on to discuss some of the overarching themes revealed by the findings. It concludes by highlighting several outstanding questions and areas for further research.

8.2 – Summary of Findings

This exploratory, ethnographic thesis has examined the spiritual journals and journal keeping practices of Catholic university students, offering in-depth discussion about the content, materials, practice, and structure of this activity. In doing so, it has addressed the original guiding questions and goals of the research project (Chapter I, section 1.4), providing a picture of the practice of journal keeping in the context of Catholic spirituality, the relationship a Catholic university student has with his or her journal as a spiritual document, and the representations of information found in spiritual journals. The findings reported in this thesis demonstrate that spiritual journal keeping is a deeply personal activity that involves a variety of unique and personalized information practices and behaviours, developed and implemented by individuals in order to better navigate a vast and mysterious spiritual path, and to work towards spiritual growth.
Spiritual journal keeping involves more than simply writing, and the students in this study demonstrated a vast array of ways to document their spiritual experience, including the creation of scrapbook-esque collections of ephemera, paintings, drawings, and personal photographs. In addition, written entries often took a variety of forms, most notably including the creation of a personalized code, but also occurring in the form of letters, lists, poems, and adapted prayers, alongside more conventional narratives. Beyond their own personal creations, students collected spiritual information from other sources, filling journal pages with scriptural quotations, sayings by Catholic saints, newspaper articles, prayers, and even teachings from other religious traditions.

Along with varied and often artistic content, spiritual journal keeping involved deliberate choices in materials, for the purpose of creating a particular aesthetic. After choosing a journal that was initially deemed attractive or pleasing, students then made an effort to further add to its aesthetic appeal, by using specific writing implements, decorating the journal’s cover, creating art inside the journal, and in one case, even imitating the style of the writings of a 19th Century Catholic saint. These findings are similar to Hartel’s (2007, 2010a) discussion of the “multidimensionality” of cooking documents, in which culinary documents have not only practical but also aesthetic and sentimental value. Journals, too, have practical as well as emotional, artistic, and imaginative dimensions. Although one student kept a strictly utilitarian journal, the rest demonstrated that their spiritual journals were documents that were not simply created out of necessity, but also something in which they found sincere pleasure, combining imagination, art, and insight to create something that contained more than just mere reports on their spiritual lives, but artfully rendered representations that attempted to capture the fullness of often ineffable experiences.
Students demonstrated a variety of relationships with their journals. Some had a “spontaneous” journaling practice that involved creating entries in times of intense emotion, or when inspired by out of the ordinary happenings. Others made journaling a part of their daily routine, in an effort to “cultivate the habit” of writing regardless of feeling like they had much to say. Re-reading past journals was a practice that helped students further their self and spiritual understanding, acknowledging that “God’s will is often better seen in hindsight,” and that one can continue to “unpack” the meanings of entries over long stretches of time. Findings also revealed the significance of prayer in spiritual journal keeping, as something that is practiced, documented in a variety of ways, and often used to make or understand life choices, echoing the findings of scholars such as Michels (2012) and Roland (2007), who have previously given attention to role of prayer in the information seeking behaviour of clergy.

A collection of spiritual journals can be understood as a personalized “reference book” of one’s life and experiences over time, and closely mirrors reference books in their structure. However, their use suggests a more complicated position amongst other genres of book, as students use journals for referral, and also read them like a narrative. In addition to this, the variety of content found in spiritual journals makes them intriguing hybrids of many kinds of book, containing many kinds of information, both textual and visual, and both original and collected from other sources.

8.3 – Methodological Reflections

In using ethnography as a research method, my thesis generated a record of data that provided an intimate picture of the spiritual journals and spiritual lives of a group of Catholic university students. As stated elsewhere in the thesis, my previous involvement with the Harbour House community was an asset both in my access to the field and in gathering field data. My prior
presence in the community, as well as my shared status as “student,” positioned me as a trustworthy person who would treat informants spiritual lives with sensitivity and understanding. This also allowed me to quickly establish a comfortable rapport with informants, and to easily observe and participate in events, retreats, and other field outings. Although the journals themselves, and the accompanying interviews, proved to be the hotspot of rich data, field outings and participant observation allowed for ongoing and deep interrogation about the role of spiritual journals in the daily lives of Catholic students, often as one of a number activities centered on spiritual learning and growth.

The “guided tour” of informants’ journals resulted in the richest field data, as the presence of the journal assisted informants in grounding their accounts in concrete points of reference. Although it was the informants, and not I, who determined which parts of the journal were discussed and which were not, there was a graceful quality to allowing students to guide me through their journals in their own way. This allowed our discussion to be both natural and gentle, complementing the very personal and individualized aspects of spiritual journals in a way more fitting than subjecting journals to my own control or driving them through my own notions of what this document might or should contain. While my approach did allow certain aspects of spiritual journals to remain unknown, it was suitable to the endeavour of exploring spiritual journals, and the surprising richness of what was found more than makes up for what remains unseen.

8.4 - Discussion

The following sections offer some reflections on the broader themes drawn out by the findings of this exploratory study.
8.4.1 – Mystery and Ongoing Discovery

The findings reported in this study indicate that there is a mysterious quality to both one’s lifelong spiritual journey and to spiritual information. For participants in this study, one of the purposes of trying to capture this information in a journal is to grow in an understanding of and a relationship with God, who is also mysterious and, in the words of informants, “limitless.” Those who keep spiritual journals develop complex and personalized practices for both generating spiritual information in their journal and also interpreting and navigating this informational world. These practices assist the journal keeper in working towards their goals of spiritual growth and growth in their relationship with God, but those who keep journals acknowledge that what they document is only a glimpse of their experiences themselves, and that in turn, that what they experience is only a glimpse of the “limitless” nature of God.

Alongside the mysterious quality of information in a spiritual context, this study has revealed that there is an element of ongoing discovery in the keeping of a spiritual journal. For informants in this study, the spiritual path is one that can be followed to an unending depth. Similar to Yakel’s (2004) insights into the nature of genealogists’ search for both personal identity and family history, the informants of this study demonstrated that keeping a spiritual journal is an ongoing pursuit for both self-understanding and an understanding of God. Between the ongoing nature of spiritual discovery and informants’ acknowledgement of the impossibility of articulating their experience of God, it seems that spiritual information is perhaps by nature incomplete, that a spiritual journal a place where this information is continually processed and documented, acting as a tool that assists with a search that one can pursue to a limitless depth, but that one can never truly finish.
8.4.2 – Relationships and Community

A distinguishing feature of spiritual journals is the way in which they are used for building relationships or community, which at first seems antithetical to the private and solitary nature of journals and journal keeping. From students writing journal entries as letters to God, to collecting and referring to the wisdom of spiritual teachers, a journal is a place where one builds relationships and connections to others: primarily God, but also saints, and other writers and thinkers. Additionally, keeping a spiritual journal enforces a relationship with oneself. Over time, one’s journal collection becomes an extensive record of one’s experiences, thoughts, and changes over time. Similar to Cheong and colleagues’ (2008) study of religious blogs, those who keep private, non-digital spiritual journals are engaged in the practice of communicating to themselves about themselves (p. 107). Despite a journal being a private document, and despite the fact that journaling is a solitary activity, the spiritual journal is often a place one turns to in order to communicate, both with oneself, and with others not physically present.

The many linkages between spiritual journal keeping and prayer also address the role of relationships in spiritual journaling. Even if one does not write their entries to God, their reflections are often informed by prayer in other ways, or happen in the context of prayer. While previous research into information and spirituality has revealed that, for those who are religious, prayer is often a form of information seeking (Roland 2007; Michels 2012), my own findings about spiritual journal keeping and prayer reveal other dimensions to its role in information activities. One can create information in the form of a prayer, by writing prayers, or by documenting their gratitude as a way of giving thanks to God. But prayer does not have to involve searching for answers; it can also be simply sitting in the presence of God and journaling while mindful of this. In this way, spiritual journal keeping does not have to involve explicit
seeking an answer from or communication to God, but can also simply take place in a mindset that involves the awareness of his presence.

8.4.3 – What is the Nature of Spiritual Information?

Kari (2007) concludes his examination of spiritual information by observing, “there may be more ways of knowing than we usually realize” (p. 959) and that spirituality, “may actually define how a person or community views information processes and reality itself,” possibly in a way that is “fundamentally different from the materialistic picture of the world” (p. 958). Findings from this study of spiritual journals have revealed that information in this context is varied, often artistic, and mysterious, frequently containing meaning that is only fully known by the journal’s author, or that is revealed slowly over time. The keeping of a spiritual journal seems to involve accepting that there is a limit to what can be known or understood, and what can be captured in concrete, material ways. While informants do demonstrate otherwise little-documented “ways of knowing,” (p. 959) such as the many uses of prayer, or the creation of art, they also acknowledge that while one can work at creating and using informational “signposts” along the spiritual path, one must also accept that these things do not provide answers so much as encouragement to continue the search.

8.5 – Further Questions

The small scale of this study, and its exploratory nature, has limited it in some respects, and what it has revealed about the nature of spiritual information in personal, non-digital journals indicates much potential for further research. This study examined the spiritual journal-keeping practices of a small and relatively homogenous population, close in age and all of the same religious tradition. Further research could involve exploring spiritual journals in other contexts, within other religious tradition or other populations within Catholicism, or across several religious
traditions. Or, one could compare journals between secular and religious contexts, to further distill features that may be unique to information in spiritual journals.

Specific practices unearthed in this study also invite further exploration. For example, a detailed look at one’s journaling practice in relation to other texts would shed more light on the roles of different kinds of spiritual information in one’s life, the variety of forms it takes, and the places this information is sought. Another ambitions undertaking would be to conduct a content analysis of spiritual journals. While I examined spiritual journals from a wide angle, exploring not just content but also materials, practice, and structure, I did not read entire journals word for word, or examine journal entries for patterns in language and expression. Doing so would assist in describing in greater detail how a person might interpret and use spiritual information.

8.6 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the thesis’s findings, and has considered the effectiveness of ethnography as a research method. It has also offered reflections on broader themes revealed in these findings, including the role of mystery, ongoing discovery, and relationships in the creation and use of information in a spiritual context. Finally, it has outlined some potential avenues for further research, supporting Kari’s claim that the spiritual is a context that is “rife with novel analytic opportunities” (p. 957).
AFTERWORD

While I have previously discussed my involvement in the Harbour House community, my own religious affiliation, and my spiritual life, my personal interests evolved significantly over the course of this project, and I wish to be explicit about that here. Beginning with the pilot study in the fall of 2012, and continuing into the writing of the final thesis, I found myself considering a religious vocation with increasing seriousness. Specifically, I began to inquire about the possibility of entering a monastic order of Catholic nuns. Twice throughout the course of the study, I took time away to visit this community, and am planning a third and final visit in the fall, after which it is my hope to enter the order. Although much about this could change in the future, I do wish to be honest about the state of my mind and heart both throughout the course of the research and now, in its final stages. Ethnographic research acknowledges that the researcher’s lens casts the study and its findings in a particular light, and over the course of the past year my own lens underwent a significant change; in parallel to the unfolding of this study, my personal interest in this spiritual path developed into a desire to pursue it in a much different way.
REFERENCES

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Science Research, 28, 110-127.


Yakel, E. (2004). Seeking information, seeking connections, seeking meaning:

OVERVIEW
This interview is part of a thesis being conducted at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. The goal of the thesis is to explore how and why Catholic students keep journals to document their spiritual lives, and the purpose of this interview is to discuss your practices of journal keeping in the context of your spiritual life.

There are no known risks to you for assisting with this project. In fact, you may find that positive feelings, such as enthusiasm and pride, occur during the interview. Your responses will be made anonymous. Participation in this interview is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. You may request and receive a summary of the research results.

The data collected during this interview will be retained indefinitely. For certain, it will be the foundation of a thesis extending into next year, and may also play a role in post-graduate studies.

CONSENT
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have agreed to participate. I know that I may ask, now and in the future, any questions that I may have about this project. I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time. I have been assured that the notes, transcript, and/or photographs relating to me will be anonymized and that no information will be released or printed that will disclose my personal identity. Regarding the use of photographs of journals, any identifying features, such as names, will be obscured or otherwise edited. Only the researcher will have access to the information I provide. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records.

I agree to be quoted directly (anonymously) in the final report  ___ Yes ___ No
I agree to be tape-recorded  ___ Yes ___ No
I agree for photographs of my journals to be taken during data gathering and analysis  ___ Yes ___ No
I agree that photographs of my journals may be used in the final report  ___ Yes ___ No
Interviewee Name (please print and sign) Date

Interviewer Name (please print and sign) Date

Principal Investigator: Hailey Siracky, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto
hailey.siracky@mail.utoronto.ca
University of Toronto, Office of Research Ethics: 416-946-3273, ethics.review@utoronto.ca
Hello everyone. My name is Hailey and I’m a resident of the “Harbour House”. I’m a second-year Masters student at the Faculty of Information, where I am working on a thesis. My thesis is on the spiritual journal-keeping practices of Catholic university students. If you are a Catholic university student who keeps a journal in which you document your spiritual life, and would be interested in being interviewed as a part of my thesis project, please come and speak to me after Mass. Thank you.
### Field Outings (Names of events made anonymous)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Outing</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Evening Dinner”</td>
<td>A dinner hosted by another Catholic student group and attended by a party of students from the House. A well-known Catholic figure gave a talk following the meal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Saturday Retreat”</td>
<td>A daylong retreat that aimed to provide students with the tools to improve their time-management and to better integrate their academic and spiritual lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Evening Adoration” (attended twice)</td>
<td>Several hours of prayer and music in the House chapel, that included periods of silent prayer and periods of prayer lead by a facilitating musician.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Catholicism in Daily Life” (6 sessions)</td>
<td>A prayer and discussion group that met once a week for six weeks, with a focus on how basic elements of the Catholic faith can be better understood in the context of everyday life. Time was divided evenly between discussion and trying various methods of prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Student Faith-Sharing Group” (attended once)</td>
<td>This group met weekly at the House and I attended one session. Meetings involved a reading and reflection on a text, and then students were invited to share, at length, the experiences of God that they had during the week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Weekend Retreat&quot;</td>
<td>A 2.5 day retreat organized by one of the House’s student groups. The focus was a series of talks about human sexuality, and the weekend also involved discussion, games, music, and various types of prayer.</td>
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APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your spiritual life.

2. Tell me about the role your journal plays in your spiritual life.

3. Tell me about the role your journal plays in your typical day.

4. Can you demonstrate your journaling process, including what happens before and after you journal?

5. Can you take me on a tour of your journal/journal collection?
APPENDIX E
GUIDED TOURS

The final two questions of my interviews with informants (Questions 4 and 5, see Appendix D) combined elements of the “guided tour” of an information space (Malone 1983; Kwasnik 1991; Hartel 2007) and the more general “grand tour” (Spradely, 1979) questions that involve the step-by-step explanations of activities or items. The tables below explain these tour questions in detail.

Question 4. Can you demonstrate your journaling process, including what happens before and after you journal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why</th>
<th>How</th>
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<tr>
<td>Because journaling is often a solitary activity, it was not always possible or easy to watch informants’ journaling in a natural way. By asking this question, I was able to gain a sense of the context in which one’s journaling occurs, which often involved moments of silent prayer, or the use of other texts.</td>
<td>Informants walked me through their journaling routines step-by-step, demonstrating the activities surrounding their journaling practice. I often used probes (Bernard 2006) such as “Can you tell me more?” or “Can you explain this?” to elicit detailed descriptions of certain aspects of one’s process. I also took photographs of the environments and objects that surrounded the informants’ journaling practice.</td>
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Question 5. Can you take me on a tour of your journal, and journal collection?

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<th>Why</th>
<th>How</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This question allowed me to both see the content of spiritual journals and to accompany that content with an explanation from its creator. Because informants (not I) chose which pages to share with me, my understanding of the contents of these documents is incomplete. Nonetheless, I was able to capture a vast array of content and this method provided a valuable technique for the exploration of personal, otherwise private documents.</td>
<td>Informants guided me through their journal(s), explaining different elements throughout. Informants were assured that they could choose what to share with me, and, again, I used probes (Bernard 2006) when particularly interesting elements were encountered. Photographs were taken throughout, and as an added measure I was sure to maintain verbal consent with informants as I took photos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>