Canadian Roman Catholic Young Adults Who Persevered in Faith

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Regis College and the Toronto School of Theology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry
awarded by Regis College and The University of Toronto

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Abstract

Many people involved in young adult ministry in Canada today are asking the question: what are Roman Catholic young adults in Canada saying about faith tradition and religious identity? One hundred and forty-four Roman Catholic young adults, aged 18 to 35, from ten provinces in Canada responded to a questionnaire focused on discovering some insight into this issue. Ten young adults from the hundred and forty-four respondents also took part in interviews while five more participated in a focus group session. The study showed that these Canadian Roman Catholic young adults find the church to be relevant in today’s world and important in their own personal lives. They are happy to be identified as Roman Catholic and see their Catholicism as being a core part of their identity. The majority of these young adults name themselves as practicing Catholics and indicate that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have an influence on their lives. They know who they are and what they believe, but they are looking for witnesses of faith, mentors who will journey with them, assist them, and accept them in all their diversity. They are committed to prayer and social justice but choose to express their commitment in a variety of practices and approaches. Their experiences of God are most often mediated through their relationships with others, and community is very important to them. They see themselves as having a purpose and role in the Catholic Church today.
Acknowledgements

I wish to extend a sincere thank you to the Roman Catholic young adults from across Canada who participated in the questionnaire, the interviews and the focus group. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity and collaboration of Vanessa Nicholas-Schmidt of FaithConnections in Toronto and of those in young adult ministry who took the time to contact and invite young adults on my behalf.

I wish to thank Sr. Lynn Cira, IBVM, the members of my ministry-based group along with Rev. Jennifer Garbin, a doctor of ministry companion, and the members of the Regis College community. Their support and encouragement along the journey have been very much appreciated and valued.

Thank you to Dr. Mary Jo Leddy for her suggestions, inspiration and encouragement and to Dr. Joseph Schner, SJ, for his direction, gentle challenges and encouraging support. It has truly been a blessing to have such wonderful advisers at my side during this endeavor.

Thank you also to my religious community, the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal, for its continued support, encouragement and prayer. A special thank you to Dr. Virginia Sullivan, CND, whose community companionship and enthusiasm helped to bring this thesis to fruition.

Finally, I wish to express thanks to my deceased parents, Joseph and Martina Baldwin, my first models of faith and to my family for their endless understanding and encouragement.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the unknown organ donors who shared with me the gift of life; with deep gratitude for their generosity.
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................ iii
Dedication .............................................................................................................................................. iv
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................... v

Chapter One                                                    Context of Ministry

1.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1
1.2 Context of Ministry ......................................................................................................................... 1
1.3 Personal Vocational Identity ........................................................................................................... 3
1.4 Theology of Ministry ....................................................................................................................... 6
1.5 The Postmodern Context of Young Adults ................................................................................... 10
1.6 Canadian Catholics, Evangelization and Popular Piety................................................................. 13
1.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 14

Chapter Two                                                    Review of the Literature

2.1 Research Problem and Reason for the Study...................................................................................... 15
2.2 Naming Young Adults Today........................................................................................................... 15
2.3 Catholic Culture and Vatican II..................................................................................................... 16
    2.3.1 Lumen Gentium and Gaudium Spes......................................................................................... 20
    2.3.2 Summary .................................................................................................................................. 22
2.4 Review of the Literature ................................................................................................................ 23
    2.4.1 Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development .............................................................................. 23
    2.4.2 Fowler’s Stages of Faith........................................................................................................... 25
    2.4.3 Emerging Adulthood ................................................................................................................ 28
    2.4.4 Change and Religion ................................................................................................................ 30
    2.4.5 Relativism and Morality and Young Adults............................................................................. 33
    2.4.6 Young Adults, Individualism, and Religion............................................................................. 34
4.5.1 Friends ...................................................................................................................................... 66
4.5.2 Catholic Education ................................................................................................................... 67
4.5.3 Social Media ............................................................................................................................. 67
4.5.4 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ............................................................................... 68
4.6 Morality ......................................................................................................................................... 69
4.6.1 Relativism ................................................................................................................................... 69
4.7 Social Justice ................................................................................................................................. 70
4.7.1 Concern for Others ................................................................................................................... 71
4.7.2 Care for the Earth ..................................................................................................................... 71
4.8 Community and Belonging ............................................................................................................ 72
4.8.1 Diversity and Dialogue ............................................................................................................. 74
4.8.2 Catholic Identity ....................................................................................................................... 75
4.8.3 Purpose ..................................................................................................................................... 76
4.9 Vision of the Roman Catholic Church ........................................................................................... 77
4.9.1 The Poor ................................................................................................................................... 78
4.9.2 The Needs of Young Adults ..................................................................................................... 78
4.9.3 Joy & Pope Francis ................................................................................................................... 79
4.10 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 79

Chapter Five                                          Discussion and Implications for Ministry

5.1 What Catholic Young Adults Are Saying ..................................................................................... 80
5.2 Experience of God ....................................................................................................................... 80
5.2.1 Practicing Catholics .................................................................................................................. 81
5.2.2 Pious Practices ........................................................................................................................ 82
5.3 Influences ...................................................................................................................................... 84
5.3.1 Social Media ............................................................................................................................. 86
5.3.2 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ............................................................................... 87
5.4 Morality ......................................................................................................................................... 88
5.5 Social Justice ................................................................................................................................. 90
5.6 Community and Belonging ............................................................................................................ 91
CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

1.1 Introduction

What are Canadian Roman Catholic young adults saying about faith tradition\(^1\) and religious identity\(^2\)? This is the predominant question that I have encountered among people involved in ministry to and with Roman Catholic young adults. So, I set off on a journey to see if I could glean some understanding of what Canadian Roman Catholic young adults are saying about faith tradition and religious identity today. I gathered data from 144 Canadian Roman Catholic young adults from various regions of Canada using three methods of data collection: questionnaire, one-on-one interviews and a focus group.

1.2 Context of Ministry

As a teacher and guidance counselor, I have always been interested in working with youth and young adults. As a member of a Roman Catholic religious congregation of women, my interest in working with young people expanded beyond the classroom as I worked for many years in ministry with both youth and young adults on the parish and diocesan level.

My current work is primarily in Vocation Ministry within my religious congregation. In this ministry, I connect with young adults who are discerning their vocation options and provide them with resources and possible directions they might explore. I frequently work with groups of young adults in retreat settings, workshops and rally settings. As well I participate in and lead sessions for those who minister to young adults. Working in this context provides me with a direct access and opportunity to interact with a diverse group of Catholic young adults from across the country.

Aside from working directly with young adults in various capacities, this ministry also involves working with members of my own congregation and other religious congregations to create and nurture a

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\(^1\) Faith tradition as used in this thesis connotes faith as expressed through religion in the three ways identified by Thomas H. Groome in *What Makes us Catholic; Eight Gifts for Life*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 174. They are: a confession of beliefs that summarize its convictions, spiritual practices and ways of worship that reflect relationship with the transcendent and a code of ethics that guides and evaluates life choices.

\(^2\) Religious identity implies an identity specifically formed around belonging to a particular religion and the role that the importance of this identity to an individual’s concept of self.
culture of vocation in the Catholic Church. This is a culture in which each and every Christian is free to discern how he or she will respond to a baptismal call to service, holiness and community; a culture, in which all states of Christian life are honored, respected and valued as an integral part of the Christian community.³

A large part of fostering a vocation culture is working to remove barriers or mindsets that elevate one vocation over another, and cause division and rivalry. In this ministry, the goal is to be companions journeying together to work to support and encourage each other as we each strive to be ambassadors of Christ in and for the world.

One of the most common questions in this ministry is the cause of the growing trend toward the more traditional and pious practices⁴ among young adults in our church today. I personally experienced this growing movement when I worked with young Roman Catholic adults across the country. There appears to be a deep desire for these practices and rituals among some young adults, while others are drawn to attitudes and behaviors that seem to be in line with a more secular approach to living daily life. This movement is reflected in the research; such as, the work by Hoge, Dinges, Johnson and Gonzales who found that, while adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Virgin Mary scored high on a list of Catholic essentials among young Catholic adults, many do not see the Catholic Church and its teaching on authority as essential in their lives.⁵ Likewise, Smith and Longest found that young Catholics were individualistic in their attitude toward religious beliefs and the authority of the church, and very selective in what parts of their tradition they decided to believe and to practice.⁶

Looking at the current trends unfolding among young Roman Catholic adults is a critical area. It is my hope that the findings of this research will offer insight into ways to expand the dialogue around faith practices among young Catholic adults.

³This is drawn from a mission statement that I composed on Vocation Culture for NAVFD (National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors) during my time as Executive Director (2008-2012).
⁴Pious Practices refer to the observing of devotions such as Eucharistic Adoration, reciting the Rosary, novenas etc.
⁵Dean R. Hoge, William G. Dinges, Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, Juan L. Gonzales, Jr. “Who are today’s Young Adult Catholics?” Horizon (Fall 2001), 35.
1.3 Personal Vocation Identity

Anthony Gittins, in his book entitled *Called to Be Sent: Co-missioned as Disciples Today* (2008), talks about the God who disturbs; the God who invites each one of us into discipleship daily and who interrupts the best laid plans. Gittins says, “All of us at some time, and some of us all of the time, resist the God who disturbs ...We like the quiet life.”

This is a perfect description of the full resistance mode that was transpiring within me when I was asked by my congregation to leave my teaching position and to go to study. My quiet life in the known was being disturbed and I sensed that nothing was going to be spared. This would not be a time without discomfort and distress but, as Whitehead and Whitehead point out: “Emotional distress challenges familiar patterns.” And indeed in this space and time I would take a long look at the reality of who I was and what I stood for; I would begin to ponder and reflect deeply over my life. As Whitehead and Whitehead go on to say, “Our reflection carries the seeds of significant transformation; both personal and social change start here.”

As I entered into the experience of theological reflection this is exactly what was occurring within me; I was beginning to change as I looked at the experiences in my life through a different lens. I was entering into deeper encounters of not only self but of God.

Kathleen McAlpin defines theological reflection as “...a way of doing theology that starts from the experiences of life and leads to searching in faith, for deeper meaning, and for the living God.” In hindsight I now recognize that starting my new journey via the route of theological reflection was a crucial step as I needed to begin to unpack my lived experiences before I could enter fully into the new encounters of self and God that surfaced before me. I had always considered myself to be quite capable and able to handle life on my own. By today’s standards I would appear as “having it all together,” knowing exactly what I was doing and what my life was about. The truth of the matter, however, is that

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something was missing, some of the pieces of the puzzle of my life were either gone, out of place or did not seem to fit anymore. I was in search of what I referred to as wholeness, a complete picture. I wanted to be able to say with confidence that “yes, I finally have it all together.” Au and Cannon point out that the idea of having it all together, finally being in harmony and peace, is how the world at large presents wholeness. They go on to say “Christian spirituality associates it with a wholehearted commitment to “always being on the way” rather than “having it all together.” Reflecting on my lived experiences revealed to me that, as my life progressed, bit by bit I was being continually transformed; with each encounter, at every turn in the road I was growing, I was changing. It wasn’t until I took the time to stop and really listen that I began to discover who I was in the process of becoming. To others this may sound like a confusing experience and, in truth, it was confusing and distressing but life-giving. This was to be my first deep encounter with the God who disturbs, and it was to be a true awareness of myself as a child of God.

In the deepening awareness that I was a child of God, made in the image and likeness of God, I began to attach meaning to so many areas and experiences in my life. As Killen and DeBeer state, “As human beings we reflect, ask why about our lives, because we are drawn to seek meaning. We need meaning as much as we need food and drink.” In this vulnerable space of the unknown I was asking the why and searching for the meaning in my life; both the meaning of what I had experienced in life so far and the meaning of this time of change and transition. Through theological reflection I have touched the heart of my faith tradition and have begun to see how integral they are to my life, to my relationship with and experience of God. The stories of my life are interwoven with the narratives of God. In each and every encounter and experience of my life God has been present. I have begun to see God in the suffering as well as the joyful and light moments of my life.

Now, one might ask, “As a woman consecrated to God or even as a Christian woman, isn’t that a given?” The reality is, however, that often the busyness of my life can cause the God moments to become

12 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer, The Art of Theological Reflection (New York: Crossroads, 1998), X.
a blur. In this fast-paced world in which we live, the calendar, the clock, the meetings, and my desire to be about other things can cut short the depth of my reflection and, as Au and Cannon point out, it is only by my “going deeper, soul searching and uncovering more closely what the spiritual journey involves”\(^\text{13}\) that I began to truly see the complete interconnectedness of my stories with the stories of God. As Philip Sheldrake explains, in order to move beyond the immediate, seemingly pressing needs and desires of our life to make this sojourn deeper, “There is a journey into the cave of the heart where our essential self and God both dwell.”\(^\text{14}\) I was being called into the very core of who I was to meet with God and to share my authentic story.

John Staudenmaier says that, “In the very act of remembering and telling our stories we grow to understand our own callings;”\(^\text{15}\) the sharing during theological reflection has helped to bring more clarity and meaning to my life. In the context of reflective prayer I have more readily opened myself to receive the many gifts that God showers upon me. As Pat Collins so beautifully says, “Self-disclosure in prayer ploughs the field of the heart in readiness to receive the seed of God’s loving self-disclosure.”\(^\text{16}\) The more open and honest I am before God, the more God is revealed to me in the depths of my heart, and the more open I am to changing what needs to be changed in my life. This act of changing, of being transformed, is not an easy task but one that requires a total commitment. However, “It is God who does all the transforming; all we have to do is show up.”\(^\text{17}\) My part of the process is being totally present in mind, body and spirit.

When talking about the role of faith in our lives, Karl Rahner says, “It puts squarely before us only the deep roots of this life which we would otherwise overlook or shut out: faith proclaims the radical character of freedom, of responsibility, of love, of hope, guilt, forgiveness, and the ultimate ground of

\(^{13}\) Au and Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*: 18.


their radicalness it calls God.\textsuperscript{18} I truly believe that learning to explore my lived experiences in light of my faith tradition in the process of theological reflection was a key element in helping me to enter more fully into my theological studies. The reflective ploughing of my inner soil produced a fertile ground in which to plant new shoots of thought and also to yank out a few misplaced weeds or old dried up brush that were creating clutter. It moved me to the point of readiness for action, for change. It allowed me to see not only the root systems of my life through the eyes of faith which Rahner speaks of, it also enabled me to examine them more closely and to discover the texture, strength and weakness that was ingrained in each one. Through this process I answered the call to continue my studies and my ministry with young adults.

This personal vocational journey is an important foundational element of my study and focus on young Roman Catholic adults. Only in recognizing, naming and sharing my own transformation of faith and sacred journey do I believe that I am qualified to then turn and look at those to whom I minister. As a teacher I would not ask a student to do something that I myself would not do, and so this tenet transfers into my ministry with young adults. As you will see later in this thesis, I firmly believe in mentoring and modeling as a means of ministry with young adults, and for me that includes a sharing of my own faith journey, my own experience of God. In this technological age where we are inundated with endless facts, figures, images and information what young adults need are more experiences of God.\textsuperscript{19}

1.4 Theology of Ministry

Henri Nouwen defined ministry as “The ongoing attempt to put one’s own search for God, with all the moments of pain and joy, despair and hope, at the disposal of those who want to join this search and do not know how.”\textsuperscript{20} For Nouwen, proclaiming to be Christian or Christ-like meant that you were in ministry as modeled by Christ (I came to serve). Nouwen’s definition speaks to my own beliefs about ministry and experience of ministry. I believe that being in ministry is being in relationship with others


who, like me, are seeking to draw closer to God. This implies that we are on the journey of faith together and on this adventure we learn and grow together; not necessarily at the same speed or time but in the same direction, i.e., focused on God. I believe this relational approach based on mutuality is essential to my ministry with Roman Catholic young adults.

Theologian Michael Downey, when addressing the issue of secularity in our society, highlighted God’s gift of Jesus as “one of the richest resources we have in our Catholic tradition.” In this act of self-emptying God provides us with a concrete model for ministry in the church and world. “The kenotic Christ refers to engaging in exercise of authority, power, and control of ‘the world,’ rejecting a type of power that controls and dominates, he embraced instead human weakness and vulnerability.” It is this vulnerability and complete openness that we are called to in ministry. Downey proposes that in nurturing a greater understanding of the importance of God’s example of kenosis, we foster an approach to ministry where we go “with empty hands, willing to receive the gift on offer in the other,” with “a willingness to listen,” with “a greater measure of tolerance,” with “a profound respect for those who are different from ourselves,” having “a hefty measure of confidence” and “a spirit of humility.” This approach speaks to me very clearly of the model laid out by Jesus and his ministry, a going out to the other in a spirit of openness, willing to both give and receive. As Merton says, “…love can only be kept by being given away, it can only be given perfectly when it is also received.” When we share our gift of love, the gift of God, it becomes a mutual exchange of the grace of God.

Dean and Foster in their book, *The Godbearing Life*, explore this relational ministry which they prefer to call “incarnational ministry.” For them, this style of ministry highlights the reality that we cannot find Christ by ourselves and that “Only the power of the Holy Spirit makes ministry possible at all. The presence of the Spirit transforms us into an “incarnation” of another sort: the “flesh and bone” of the

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23 Ibid., 127-129.
church, the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{25} So, we become the bearers of the love of God to those we serve in the ministry of the church. This is not a self-serving approach to ministry where the “I” becomes the central focus but one that requires a handing over of one’s self to the service of God. Merton underscores this as he writes:

My will must be the instrument of God’s will in helping them create their destiny. My love must be to them the “sacrament” of the mysterious and infinitely selfless love God has for them. My love must be for them the minister not of my own spirit but of the Holy Spirit. The words I speak to them must be no other than the words of Christ who deigns to reveal Himself to them in me.\textsuperscript{26}

I believe that it is in these encounters with the other that we draw closer to God and move toward a deeper understanding of God’s love. As Rahner says: “There is no love for God that is not, in itself, already a love for neighbor; and a love for God only comes to its own identity through its fulfillment in a love for neighbor”;\textsuperscript{27} so, as we meet each other, we in turn draw closer to God. This is echoed by Thomas Merton who writes:

True happiness is found in unselfish love, a love which increases in proportion as it is shared. There is no end to the sharing of love, therefore, the potential happiness of such love is without limits. Infinite sharing is the law of God’s inner life. He made us to share of ourselves the law of our own being, so that it is in loving others that we best love ourselves.\textsuperscript{28}

This moving toward others and the desire for a deeper encounter of God appears to be in line with the thinking of young adults as research shows that today’s young adults place a great deal of emphasis and importance on relationships and friendships.\textsuperscript{29} They are seeking to connect with significant others within their faith context which is important because Christian relationships reveal to us a glimpse of what God is like - this God who love us unconditionally and willingly suffers for our mistakes.\textsuperscript{30} As Thomas Groome writes:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Dean and Foster, \textit{The Godbearing Life}, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Merton, \textit{No Man is an Island}, 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Karl Rahner, \textit{The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor} (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 71.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Merton, \textit{No Man is an Island}, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Reginald, Bibby, \textit{The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation is Responding to Change & Choice} (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2009), 21-39.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Dean and Foster, \textit{The Godbearing Life}, 29.
\end{itemize}
Because our God is relational, we are made for relationship and find our personhood only in and through relationships. Likewise, as God is in right and loving relationship within God’s self and toward us, so we are called to live in right and loving relationship with all.31

St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor. 12:4-11) speaks of this call to right relationship:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.32

Recognizing that all gifts are given by God and that each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good is living in a spirit of right relationship. We see that we are connected to each other by God and that “…we unashamedly bear the ‘marks’ of a Christian, those family resemblances make Christ recognizable through us.”33 By the generous sharing of these gifts with others, we each grow in the gift of God’s love.

In my own ministry I strive to model the right relationship approach; to be aware and appreciative of the diversity of gifts in all encounters and with an openness to receive as well as to give. I believe that an emphasis on the encounter with others, a truly relational approach, is especially important in young adult ministry for, as mentioned above, they are in search of significant faith relationships. This may seem to clash with research flagging the blossoming of individualism and relativism among young adults. This will be addressed later in this thesis, but, in fact, as we will see in the results of the present study, the desire for relationship and community is high on the priority list for young adults today.

As young adults go about their searching for relationship and community, some focus on the words and actions of the person of Jesus. This can be heard in the language they use such as WWJD,

32 NRSV 1Corinthians 12:4-11
33 Dean and Foster, The Godbearing Life, 140-144.
what would Jesus do or TTOC, turn the other cheek. Yet, others focus on individuals and/or events
that speak to them of the love of Jesus. When speaking about the perspective of future generations,
Mary Jo Leddy described the experience of young adults at World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto, saying
they heard only the words they were longing to hear: “Your lives are important. You have something
to give to the world, and it matters that you give it.” She explained that the words carried weight for
the young people because they were spoken by St. John Paul II whom they admired as they knew by
his sheer physical presence that they mattered to him. This exchange between the Pope and these
young adults is a powerful example of kenosis at work in ministry, the power of being in right
relationship.

1.5 The Postmodern Context of Young Adults

It is important to get a snapshot of the context of young adults today, since context has a direct
impact on the developing worldview of young adults. According to Arnett, a worldview includes
religious beliefs and values, and it is a crucial element of the development process of emerging
adulthood. At this time of personal development and growth, young adults are being formed by the
world around them.

Postmodernism finds its intellectual and spiritual roots in the work of philosophers like
Friedrich Nietzsche who hypothesized that the world is the product of our wills and our wills’ desire for
power. This focus on self-will and power is exactly what a postmodern context looks like today. In a
postmodern society it seems as if the sky is the limit and that individuals have the freedom to accept or
reject anything if they so choose. In this environment there are a plethora of choices and activities that

34Mary Jo Leddy, “Naming the Context of North America: Where is here? How is Now?” In Secularity and the
Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children, 140-141.
35 Jeffrey Jenson Arnett, Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the late Teens through the Twenties (New
York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 212.
36 The concept of Postmodernism used in this context is drawn from the work of anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle,
Catholic Identity or Identities? Refounding Catholic Ministries in Chaotic Times (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical
Press, 2013), 53-56.
37 James Penner, et al., Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and
consume one’s time and attention. Groome highlights two feature of postmodernism that cause
difficulties for the passing on of faith: a resistance to metanarratives, and the view that all universal truths,
values, principles are the product of their contexts. Since everything is critiqued and looked upon with
suspicion, this can be a challenging and hostile environment for young adults seeking to explore their
faith.

Theologian Richard Mc Brien published a list in the National Catholic Reporter in March, 2000,
that underscores the cultural context of the millennials who would be entering his class in 2004. Some
of the areas covered in his list were that Tiananmen Square meant nothing to them and that an awareness
of AIDS has always been a part of their lives. He also included events that had happened in their lifetime
that have impacted the world: such as, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1981), the dissolution of the Soviet
Union (1991), free elections in Africa (1993), the Oklahoma City bombing (1995) and the Columbine
High School Massacre (1999). Finally, millennials welcomed the age of technology with the introduction
of: video games, Microsoft Windows, the VCR, camcorders, CDs, cellular phones, internet, E-mail and
satellite dishes. McBrien was drawing attention to the major and rapid changes that these young adults
were and are experiencing in their lifetime and how this was markedly different from the generation
before them. Today, McBrien’s list would continue to grow. We could add: 911 (2001), the election of
the first Afro-American President (2008), the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI (2013), the election of
Pope Francis (2013), and inventions such as the IPhone, the IPad, and body cameras. The rapid change
and advancements of the postmodern reality seem never-ending.

Anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle indicates that, in this postmodern era, the pressure on young
adults to adopt an extremely fluid identity with little or no depth is great. Exploration and experimentation

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38 Groome, *Will There be Faith*, 160-161.
39 The National Catholic Reporter (NCR) is a newspaper in the United States which covers topics on
the Catholic Church. Based in midtown Kansas City, Missouri, NCR was founded by Robert Hoyt in 1964 as an
independent newspaper focusing on the Catholic Church.
40 The millennials McBrien is referring to are young adults born after the year 1982 and before 2000.
41 Richard McBrien, “Trying to Catechize a Generation that Can’t Define Biretta” In *the National Catholic Reporter*,
are now the “in thing” as one can flow from one identity to another with the ease of changing clothes.\textsuperscript{42} We certainly see this in society with celebrities who visibly change appearance and behaviors at the drop of a hat. This can be a source of strain on young adults as they try to fit into this postmodern scene. In this time of postmodernity, everyone is “seemingly” free to be themselves, choose for themselves and stand out; however, an extreme pressure to fit in appears to be greater than ever before. One just needs to watch how quickly a clothing fad, hairstyle or body art takes over in society; individuals want to be different but they end up looking the same.

Research has shown that many young adults today take a much longer time (up to a decade) to settle into their life work and family life.\textsuperscript{43} Setran and Kiesling offer some informative insights as to why this is happening: the cultural acceptance of premarital sexual relations and the ease with which birth control can be accessed have removed the perceived link between marriage and sexuality. This has led to a delayed move toward marriage, with the average woman today waiting until 26 to marry while men are more around 28. Also, many young adults leaving high school go on for further study in order to compete in a global economy that requires young adults to walk a variety of career paths.\textsuperscript{44}

Berard, Penner and Bartlett indicate that learning to be consumers rather than producers, a reversal of the meaning of becoming an adult historically, has altered the coming of age process.\textsuperscript{45} The push to constantly buy and to have the biggest, the best and the newest is a daily event. We are inundated by technology and media sources to up-grade, have it now and pay later. Some companies even offer credit cards and loans to make it easy for young people to acquire what they want, when they want it.\textsuperscript{46} Consumerism touches all of our lives, but there is a direct attempt by multinational conglomerates to target youth and young adults. “Through the synergy created by highly specialized production,

\textsuperscript{42} Gerald Arbuckle. Catholic Identity or Identities? Refounding Ministries in Chaotic Times (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 54.
\textsuperscript{44} David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 2-3.
\textsuperscript{45} John Berard, James Penner and Rick Bartlett, Consuming Youth: Leading Teens Through Consumer Culture (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 33.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 13.
sophisticated advertising, and strategic endorsement, this group is able to ‘manufacture the consent’ of the rest of society so their corporate interest can be met.”47 They own the machine that drives the economy and they ruthlessly go after their target. It is very hard in this context for young adults to know what to avoid and what to buy into. In this environment even “Church may be viewed as something to be consumed, a product or service to meet the needs of the consumer.”48 We see this driving need to consume clearly reflected in society’s hunger for multiple types and styles of spirituality.

In this fast moving and highly competitive society it seems that young adults have slowed down the movement toward adopting more adult responsibilities. The landscape is shifting and the movement toward adulthood is a much more self-directed event in which young adults get to set their own pace and agendas, often without the influence of institutions or family. 49

1.6 Canadian Catholics, Evangelization and Popular Piety

The context described above is very much the reality for Canadian Catholic young adults. As with these young adults, the Catholic Church in Canada is not immune to the societal trends affecting other parts of North America. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has named pluralism as one of the main challenges facing the church in Canadian society. They state that, “The proclamation of the Gospel can no longer presuppose – as in other times – a Christian cultural foundation common to the whole of Canadian society.”50 In a multicultural country like Canada, where there are many faiths and all with the freedom to express and practice them, the challenge to proclaim the good news and evangelize is great. All Catholics and Catholic communities are called to take part in the proclamation of the gospel, the call to evangelization. The bishops highlight the call of the Catholic parishes or faith communities in Canada to enhance their missionary spirit of encouraging and welcoming people to the faith, to focus on new

47Ibid., 55.
49 Penner et al., Hemorrhaging Faith, 8.
catechetical and pastoral approaches. This call includes a reminder to pay close attention to the needs of youth.

The majority of young Canadian Catholics today were born in the era of St. John Paul II. John Paul established and began the practice of the World Youth Day movement which became a hit with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. St. John Paul also placed a great deal of importance on piety within the church:

Authentic popular devotion, expressed in a variety of ways, takes faith as its source and for this reason must be appreciated and respected. In its most authentic forms, popular piety is not opposed to the centrality of the Sacred Liturgy, but rather, it fosters the faith of the people who consider it to be a connatural religious experience and disposes for the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries. According to the Canadian Bishops, the practice of piety is very popular in Canada. They indicate that it has significant value to both Latin and Eastern Canadian Catholic alike and is expressed in a multitude of ways. They name Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as being central to these practices. The great fervor for the practice of adoration among young Canadian Catholic adults was evident at the International Eucharistic Congress which took place in Quebec in 2008. Hundreds of young adults from across the country gathered in prayer and adoration. The bishops highlight the fact that becoming familiar with the popular practices of the faith in Canada assists in the understanding of how the faith is passed on in the lives of people.

1.7 Conclusion

It is obvious that there are many cultural, societal and religious trends that make up and influence the lives of Catholic young adults today. These trends have a direct impact on ministry with young adults. The following chapter will look at the theory around young adult moral and faith development, the historical impact of the Second Vatican Council and provide a review of the literature focused on young adults and faith.

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CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Research Problem and Reason for the Study

This study began by exploring what Roman Catholic young adults (ages 18-35) are saying about faith tradition and religious identity. It explores why there seems to be an attraction to the practice of piety; such as, the Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, fasting, etc., and how young adults perceive these forms of worship as being connected and integral to their everyday life and identity. Some of the broader questions that surfaced were aimed at providing more detail and clarification to the main research question, such as: Do young adults consider themselves to be practicing Catholics and what does that look like for them? What do they know about their Roman Catholic tradition? What does piety mean to Catholic young adults? Does their faith tradition inform their daily living? What does Social Justice mean to Catholic young adults? Are Catholic young adults practicing an individualized spirituality or are they more focused and concerned for the common good of their faith community? How can those in ministry with Catholic young adults assist them on their journey of faith?

The purpose of this study was to provide guidance and direction to those in ministry with young Catholic adults today. The rationale was that by gaining a better understanding of the trends influencing the lives of young adults those in ministry would be more prepared to provide them with assistance and a sense of community. It was also a means to expand the dialogue around faith practices among our young adults in the Catholic Church and to discover paths to a more informed approach to ministry to and with them.

2.2 Naming Young Adults Today

Some psychologists put the age of young adulthood as early as 17 years of age while others believe it does not begin until approximately 22 years of age. However, most psychologists and sociologists peg the beginning of adulthood at 18 years of age. One problem that develops in trying to pin down this age

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range is the diversity and inconsistent use of the categories of youth, maturity and middle age used by researchers.\textsuperscript{55} The phrase most consistently used in research today, however, is emerging adulthood.\textsuperscript{56}

The term “emerging adulthood” was coined by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett and describes a whole new life stage focused on the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. According to Arnett, “Emerging adulthood lasts from roughly age 18, when most young people finish secondary school, to age 25, when most people begin to move toward making commitments that structure adult life….”\textsuperscript{57} However, there is some flexibility in the median age as Arnett indicates that internationally the age range for transition varies.\textsuperscript{58} Any variety of factors can have an influence on the age range.

Choosing to stay in line with research trends but with a slight deviation, the term “young adults” was chosen to describe the target group in this study. The age range was also expanded to include young adults between 18 and 35 years of age. This terminology was chosen as personal experience indicates that this is the language most commonly used in Roman Catholic circles in Canada.\textsuperscript{59} The age range of these groups of Catholic young adults also extends well beyond 25 and, in some cases, goes to the age of 39.\textsuperscript{60} Although the measures have been expanded slightly, the group who participated in the study still falls within the stage of life described by researchers.

\textbf{2.3 Catholic Culture and Vatican II}

Theologian John O’Malley states that the overall importance of Vatican II is measured differently among commentators but “many would agree that it was the most important religious event of the

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{59}Young adults is the term most often used in documents from Canadian Church officials, e.g., the document \textit{Conversion Discernment Mission: Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America}. Also, the expression young adult ministry is used extensively in the Canadian Catholic Church.
\textsuperscript{60}The FaithConnections ministry in Toronto is an example both of the use of the term young adults and extending to the age of 39.
twentieth century."⁶¹ As Downey indicates, some writers believe that the impact of the Council was felt 
by many other denominations that were impacted by the ripples created by the waves of change.⁶² And for 
others, Vatican II was the beginning of and most visible sign of changes in the areas of spirituality and 
religion:

…with Vatican II we beheld the spectacle—truly remarkable—of an institutional communion of 
faith solemnly and publically going through the anguish of fundamentally altering its self-
definition and structures of authority. From a church defined by the hierarchy and its 
authoritative control of scripture and tradition we saw a move toward a church defined as the 
“people of God.”⁶³

This was a significant event in the life of the Roman Catholic Church and set the stage for the 
development of a new public image of the institution. For the proceedings of Vatican II, the discussions, 
the debates and the disagreements, to be witnessed in such a public venue meant that the Roman Catholic 
Church, which had presented itself internally and to the entire world as the church that did not change, 
was indeed changing before the eyes of the world.⁶⁴

The Second Vatican Council may have had an impact on many areas of spirituality and religion 
as indicated above, but the largest impact, by far, was felt by the millions of Roman Catholics whose 
daily lives were directly impacted. Since Vatican II “… gave shape to a new understanding of Christian 
life and practices,”⁶⁵ it was only natural that the implication for Catholics was that things were about to 
change and change they did.

For many Roman Catholics, Vatican II was a radical shift from the past and their spiritual 
traditions as “…statues that once filled their churches were discarded along with many vestments and 
other religious garbs. Novenas, rosaries, relics, holy cards…were now seen as something that belonged to

Edition: Location 84.

⁶²Michael Downey, Understanding Christian Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 75

⁶³James W. Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith (San Francisco: 


⁶⁵Downey, Understanding Christian Spirituality, 75
another time in history.”66 There seemed to be nothing that was not affected by the sweeping changes moving through the church. Some of the more striking changes that happened were having the Mass language shift from Latin to the vernacular. Catholics were now encouraged not only to read but to study the Bible, an activity that have been frowned upon prior to the Council; and Catholics were encouraged to befriend their non-Catholic neighbors of other religious denominations and even to enter into religious dialogue with them.67 For some Catholics this was a welcomed, liberating experience, but for others it was confusing and resulted in what Fowler has called “vertigo of reality,”68 meaning their world was completely turned around.

As Arbuckle points out: “At the same time as Vatican II became a catalyst for a cultural revolution within the church, the Western world was itself experiencing a most profound cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity….”69 In the 1960’s, the world and world order was changing rapidly and was in the midst of, what Arbuckle has termed, the “expressive revolution.” During this time, institutions, customs, values, churches, family, and government were under attack in what was essentially an assault on all beliefs and boundaries. This multifaceted cultural shift, he believes, is now where we turn for a definition of postmodernity as we know it today. Arbuckle identifies three broad and distinct sets of reactions to this expressive revolution which he believes continues to develop even today: 1) Pro-order Reactions: a desire to return to the order and predictability characteristic of modernity; 2) Anti-order Reactions: characterized by the rejection of totalizing narratives such as Christianity, skepticism and cynicism toward human progress, and the assumption that individuals alone are important; 3) Paramodern Reaction: the sign of a new culture model that is slowly emerging in which we see new ways to envision ourselves. There is an important emphasis on the vitality of the imagination and intuitive knowledge, storytelling, interdependence, collaboration, spirituality, gender equality and reconciliation.70

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67 O’Malley, What Happened at Vatican II, Location: 713.
68 Sammon, Vocation Promotion in Contemporary Culture, 5.
69 Arbuckle, Catholic Identity or Identities? 53.
70 Arbuckle, Catholic Identity or Identities? 54-56.
that we see reflections of these reactions operative in our church today; thus, I include them as they will be revisited in a subsequent chapter of this thesis in relation to the faith of young adults.

It is hardly a surprise that, in the wake of the sweeping changes and adjustments that occurred in Vatican II, some divisions have cropped up among those who felt betrayed and devastated by the changes and want to go back, and those who rejoice that the changes finally arrived.

We have all seen these divisions and experienced them in our church today. Thomas Rausch delves into this exact issue as he examines the divisions in the church. The Catholic Left he describes as consisting of a variety of people, some committed to the spirit and theology of Vatican II and others driven more by their own personal agendas. He points out that in this group there are many persons advocating for change “…often in ways that directly challenge church teachings and ecclesiastical authority.”71 The Catholic Right he names as the Conservative Catholic Subculture which he is quick to point out is not homogeneous, but represents those who see the papal magisterium as being the epicenter for solving all questions facing the church today.72 Within this movement, Rausch highlights two subcultures, the neoconservatives who often critique feminism, abortion and the gay movement agenda, and the “new apologists” who have made a polemical apologetics popular and are closely aligned with Protestant fundamentalism.73

These divisions are a reality in the lives of all Catholics and, perhaps most especially, in the lives of Catholic young adults as they maneuver the Catholic landscape. As one young woman (FI-4, p.7) interviewed stated: “Sometimes I feel my way in a group before I speak to find out if I am with a conservative group of thinkers or a more laid back Catholics.” In the end, as Rausch indicates, both the left and the right groups are focused on their own concerns and with little or no regard for “…careful reflection on the tradition or speculative theology.”74 One of the positive focuses within these divisions is

72 Ibid., 5
they highlight the reality that Catholics care and are truly interested in their faith tradition. This is a source of hope for the Church. Catholic young adults are a vibrant part of this dialogue and they want their voices to be heard.

2.3.1 *Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes*

As we have seen, Vatican II brought about change in the church which was devastating for some and a source of fresh air and renewal for others. Some debates and divisions arose which we are still facing today, but just as many, if not more, graced developments have touched the life of the church since Vatican II. With the introduction of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, comes the declaration that “…the universal church is seen to be ‘a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit,’” signaling that the people of God are in fact the church and as such are called to share in the mission and ministry of the church. This was a major move within the church: “From a church identified by its hierarchy and its authoritative control of scripture and tradition we saw a move toward a church defined as the ‘people of God.’” This same move was life-giving and invigorating for Catholics looking for change.

The call of the people of God is rooted in our baptism:

> For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another”. (191)
> Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (192); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus.” (193)

*Lumen Gentium* highlighted the fact that all are one in Christ and, since its unveiling, Roman Catholics have grown in awareness and “have become much more familiar with the notion of a universal

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75 *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, 4*
76 *Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian,* 5-6.
call to holiness… based on their baptismal call.”  

This new awareness of call has been taken seriously as all Catholics were “…given access to scripture and tradition and called to personal responsibility, along with the hierarchy, for shaping faithful lives and institutions in an acknowledged pluralistic world.” All Roman Catholics, no matter their state in life, were now being affirmed as having an important part to play both within the church and in the mission of the church in the world. All share responsibility for the church, not just a chosen few, or as Lavin so aptly states: “As the people of God, we all form the community of the church, and we are all responsible for its wellbeing.”

*Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, addresses the tremendous changes occurring within modern society and points to the need for the church to respond in aid to the people of God: “… the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” Catholics are encouraged to become more active in the life of the church and the mission of the church. As Downey states, “The assumption of *Gaudium et Spes* is that the church and world each has something to give and receive from the other.” In order to fulfill this role the church has turned to the faithful and has begun emphasizing their call to respond and carry the mission of the gospel to the world. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, we read:

For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as life of the body: so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church… In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise shares in the

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82 Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 84.
priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. 83

This emphasizes that all members of the Church are called to be involved in the mission of Christ which, prior to Vatican II, had lost its emphasis with more focus being placed upon the role of the clergy. The importance of this call to all Catholics is echoed by St. John Paul II in his Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*:

The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12). Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works. 84

The church after *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* is the only church in which young adults today have a first-hand experience. They were raised in a church where these documents were implemented and they know that everyone, by virtue of the baptismal call, is called to take an active role in the mission of the church. These teachings impact Catholic young adults as they serve as an affirmation of their belonging to God and their belonging within the church. As previously noted, young adults today are of the era of St. John Paul II who underlined the universal call to holiness and encouraged young adults to become saints of the third millennium. For Catholic young adults, this means embracing their call as sons and daughters of God and reflecting the teachings of Jesus in their daily lives.

### 2.3.2 Summary

Many Catholics have mixed emotions about the Second Vatican Council and the direction it provided for the life of the church85 as these directions had a very concrete impact on their spirituality and relationship with the church. However, for many Catholic Young adults today, Vatican II is another

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85 *Downey, Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 86.
historical document that they learned about in school or university. They did not experience the council as a moment of renewal and liberation in the church. 86 As biblical scholar Laurie Brink so aptly expressed, “We who only know Vatican II from a history book have no idea what the church and religious life were like prior to its gathering. Nor do we know the excitement and potential that folks felt in its wake.” 87 Although many young adults value and appreciate the significance of the Vatican II, it does not have the same meaning for them as it had for their parents or more likely their grandparents. However, the emphasis on the people of God as the church, baptismal call and vocational call is what they have grown up with as a norm and therein lies the significance of Vatican II for the young Catholic Adults today.

2.4 Review of the Literature

One of the reasons for embarking on this study of Roman Catholic Young adults in Canada is the surprising lack of research that has been done on this age group within a Canadian context. The majority of research published on this topic is based on samples from the United States and focuses primarily on the American context with some reference to the North American scene. While this research does speak to the realities faced by young adults in Canada as well, in this review specific reference will be made to the research of Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby. This section will begin by looking at the moral and faith development theories of Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler with a specific focus on young adults. That will be followed by a review of the literature around young adults and faith.

2.4.1 Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development

It is important to have knowledge of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development in young adults since he is one of the foundational theorists in this area. 88 His work was influenced by Piaget and, like Piaget, he developed a theory that examines how the psyche organizes understanding of the world. 89 The foundation of Kohlberg’s work is not theological but it has had a powerful influence on people focused on

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89 Peter Feldmeier, The Developing Christian: Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle, 41.
the exploration of moral development and moral education in the church.\textsuperscript{90} His theory of morality is based more on the reasoning behind one’s actions than on the actions themselves.\textsuperscript{91} Kohlberg’s theory consists of three moral operational levels with six stages that build on each other which indicate the stages cannot be skipped but must progress sequentially. Progression from one stage to another occurs when one experiences cognitive dissonance between experience and reasoning.\textsuperscript{92}

When looking at Kohlberg’s theory, the young adults in this study would be located mainly in the conventional level placing them in stages three and four of his moral development theory with some moving into the postconventional level. At the conventional level, maintaining the expectations of one’s family or social group take on an ultimate value. A good person is one who has an attitude of loyalty and conformity to the group. A just cause is one that supports the group’s designs or values. One does not question but simply obeys. This level is aligned with Piaget’s concrete operational thinking.

In stage three, Interpersonal Concordance of Good Boy-Good Girl Orientation, young adults move beyond their own needs and wants and focus more on seeking the approval of others. What is good and right is what the authority says, so one’s moral energy is focused on following the rules in the hope of being regarded as acceptable. The young adults, who fall into what Rausch\textsuperscript{93} earlier described as the Conservative Catholic Subculture and who focus on the magisterium, are a good example of this stage. They are rule oriented and are looking for outside approval for their actions and behaviors. They want to be recognized as good Catholics who follow the letter of the law. Also reflected in this stage are the young adults who place emphasis on relationships and turn to their peers for approval and acceptance. They give their peers a role of authority in their lives and allow them to influence their actions and behaviors.

\textsuperscript{91} Feldmeier, The Developing Christian, 43.
\textsuperscript{93} Rausch, see 25-26.
In stage four, Law and Order Orientation, young adults do their duty and consider themselves as good no longer by what others think, but by maintaining social unity and social values for their own sake. This stage is reflected in young adults who want to adhere to the laws and teachings of the church but want to live their own lives at the same time. It is in this stage that young adults begin to express a sense of guilt for not always following the rules established by the church. However, some who move into the postconventional stage five, Contractual/Legalistic Orientation begin to ask critical questions as they become more aware of the need to respect others and human rights.

Studies exploring the connection between Christian belief and moral reasoning are divided, with some reporting a link and others refuting that claim. Kohlberg himself has stated that evidence of culturally universal moral stages is evidence against the idea that moral thinking depends on particular religious belief systems. Yet, research seems to support a connection between religious conservatism and principled moral reasoning. Research also indicates a leaning toward the belief that individuals who accept the basic doctrines of the Christian faith are much less apt to reason at Kohlberg’s highest stages than their peers who do not adhere to the Christian doctrine. Kohlberg viewed religious belief as not just a single, unitary, homogeneous set of notions; and viewed religious thinking as taking many forms and changing with development. Moral maturity for Kohlberg rests on one’s ability think consistently using patterns of thinking connected with the higher stages.

2.4.2 Fowler’s Stages of Faith

James Fowler is considered to be the most widely researched and referenced spiritual and religious development theorist in the area of faith development. He focused on the connections between

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95 Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, “The Adolescent as the Philosopher: The Discovery of the Self in a Postconventional World” *Daedalus*, Vol. 100, No. 4, Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence (Fall, 1971), 1051-1086
97 Ibid., 197.
99 Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian*, 63.
theology, human development, and psychology and pioneered in the study of applying human
developmental theory to the understanding of spiritual development.\textsuperscript{100} He proposes that faith and
spirituality change over an individual’s lifespan.\textsuperscript{101} The stage model proposed by Fowler is very similar to
the moral development model proposed by Kohlberg; however, his focus is on human faith development
rather than moral judgment. As Dykstra points out, Fowler’s definition of human faith relies a lot on Paul
Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr who, he says, think of "faith as a way of seeing the world. Faith for them
is a kind of knowing, a constructing of the world in light of certain disclosures of the character of reality
as a whole that are taken as decisive."\textsuperscript{102} He sees faith as striving to recognize an “Ultimate Horizon—that
is, Truth in its largest sense—and embracing it."\textsuperscript{103}

Fowler holds that faith development is based on a series of structures that work together and
cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Based on the seven structures which constitute part of
his propositions, it becomes possible then to address the challenge of seeing faith from only the religious
perspectives which can be highly limiting. Fowler’s explanation of faith development is that stages
progress from simple stages towards stages of greater complexity. The structures of faith on which Fowler
based his work include the following aspects as pointed out by Parker:\textsuperscript{104} logic from pre-logic level to the
level of abstract thought; moral reasoning based on Kohlberg’s theory from simple to more complex ways
of establishing what is right from wrong; perspective taking, the singular and multiple frames of
perspectives when dealing with change; world coherence, premised on how people perceive the world;
Centre of authority, based on whether individuals look inwards or outwards; The limits of social
awareness, based on the understanding of who an individual includes or excludes when determining the
meaning; The importance of symbolic function, based on the understanding of how different symbols are
used to create meaning and are attached to transcendental values or experiences as well.

\textsuperscript{102} Craig R, Dykstra, \textit{Transformation in Faith and Morals}, 56-64.
\textsuperscript{103} Feldmeier, \textit{The Developing Christian}, 64
Fowler proposes six stages through which an individual’s faith develops. Since the young adults in this study fall predominately within Fowler’s third and fourth stages, emphasis will be placed upon these two stages. Stage three, Synthetic-Conventional faith (arising in adolescence; aged 12 to adulthood) is characterized by an individual’s conformity towards religious authority and the development of a personal identity. This identity is based on the group to which the person belongs. At this point, the individual knows in what to believe. Here, young adults are able to remove themselves from the narrative that has emerged and they are able to assess or critique a situation; they define where their authority is centered, which is usually in their peer group. Their faith desires companionship, support and affirmation; thus, their image of God is connected to the feelings they experience during prayer. In stage four, Individuative-Reflective faith (usually mid-twenties to late thirties) is a stage marked by struggle as young adults try not to depend on the beliefs of other people and try to develop their own unique identity and beliefs. As young adults take personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings, they have to deal with conflicts in earlier beliefs which were established before in the light of the emerging complexities in faith during this period of time. This is a time of critical reflection and reevaluating their commitments and responsibilities based on their own, inner authority.

Fowler uses the term “faith-knowing” to describe the common human effort to find meaning for and to make sense of their world; for Fowler this faith-knowing is universal. Fowler believes that these different patterns of faith-knowing are not peculiar to any one religious tradition. They may be found in all, and they may even be found in "non-religious" people. No religious tradition is universal. But, for Fowler, the activity of faith-knowing is. Everyone is involved in the activity of trying to give some kind of meaning to and make some kind of sense of themselves, their world, and their ultimate environment.

105 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 10.
107 Dykstra, Transformation in Faith and Morals, 56-64.
108 Ibid., 64
Kohlberg and Fowler, as noted above, are seen as the pioneer theorists for studying young adults’ moral thinking and faith development. However, today there are other theorists who propose a view of young adult development that is more fluid and less structured.

2.4.3 Emerging Adulthood

Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, and Tanner believe that developmental psychology needs to improve its approach to life span development in the modern world and, most especially, with a focus on emerging adulthood. Arnett stresses that this is indeed a whole new stage of development which is defined primarily by its demographic outline. Longer and more widespread education, later entry into marriage and parenthood, and a prolonged and erratic transition to stable work have opened up a space for a new stage between adolescence and young adulthood.

American sociologist Christian Smith underscores the fact that emerging adulthood is a new stage of development that falls distinctly between adolescence and full adulthood, effectively redefining the understanding of “self, youth, relationships, and life commitments, as well as a variety of behaviors and dispositions among the young.” As a product of this cultural shift, many individuals in this new societal construct have a very different experience of life than their predecessors. These experiences are marked by rapid change and the realigning of cultural and personal values including the stance toward religion, religious beliefs and practices. Smith, along with other researchers such as Canada’s Reginald Bibby, indicates that this new stage of emerging adulthood is filled with an infinite number of opportunities along with an immense experience of hope. The scope of choices placed before young adults today is phenomenal and, one would venture to guess, completely overwhelming at times for young adults.

110 Arnett, Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the late Teens through the Twenties, 8.
112 Ibid., 227.
Arnett holds that our society today offers young people at least the illusion of endless choices in a variety and flexibility of areas of life, along with the idea that in their social lives “anything goes.” 114 So by these standards, young adults can try on and try out just about anything in life, including lifestyles, people, beliefs, etc., and, to use a catch phrase commonly used today, “it’s all good.” With this abundance of flexibility, all decisions and choices can be reversed, changed, replaced, including partners, jobs and homes. 115

Both Arnett and Smith highlight that, in order to appreciate the importance of this new stage of emerging adulthood, one must understand that life stages are “cultural constructs” and are constantly undergoing change since they are “profoundly shaped by the social and institutional conditions that generate and sustain them.” 116 In other words, this new stage of emerging adulthood is not static but is heavily influenced and altered by the surrounding environment and its influences. Arnett explains that experiences are likely to vary by cultural context, educational attainment, and social class; therefore, we cannot look at a twenty-year old and say “he/she is in emerging adulthood therefore this is how he/she will act.” 117 So much depends on what is happening in the society around them and in their own personal lives.

Based on his over twenty years of research in this area, Arnett highlights five features of emerging adulthood that are more prevalent in this stage, but not unique to it.

1. Identity explorations: answering the question “who am I?” and trying out various life options, especially in love and work;
2. Instability in love, work, and place of residence;
3. Self-focus, as obligations to others reach a life-span low point;
4. Feeling in-between, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult;

115 Ibid, 5.
117 Arnett, et al., Debating Emerging Adulthood, 7.
5. Possibilities/optimism, when hopes flourish and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.\textsuperscript{118}

During the exploration of identity, emerging adults look not only at who they are as individual persons, but who they are in relation to work choices, relationships with family and peers, and beliefs. As Arnett points out, this is a time when having moved away from their parents and having not yet locked themselves into any adult roles or responsibilities, they can explore numerous possibilities in work, love and, I would add, beliefs.\textsuperscript{119} As a direct result of this time of exploration, emerging adults sense a level of instability in all aspects of their lives. Nothing is settled and nothing is on solid ground; their landscape is always moving. It has been said that there is no other time in life that is more focused on self than emerging adulthood.\textsuperscript{120} Their world revolves around only what is happening in their own lives; they are so busy trying to learn to stand on their own two feet and carve out an identity that other, more global concerns, get pushed to the back burner. This exploration of identity, sense of instability and focusing on self leads to an increased feeling of being in between adolescence and adulthood. It is a time of endless transitions of roles and not really being sure where one fits in all of it. Arnett found that when asked if they had reached adulthood, many emerging adults gave very vague and uncommitted answers, indicating that they really were not sure if they had or not. Finally, this is a time marked with tremendous opportunities and possibilities for the future that breeds optimism and hope.

\textit{2.4.4 Change and Religion}

There is a saying that “the only thing constant is change.” According to researchers, this is acutely evident in the lives of young adults today. In fact, many hold that the movement from adolescence to adulthood is more difficult for young adults today than in past generations.\textsuperscript{121} This is most assuredly connected to the phenomenal pressures placed on young adults as they leave the protective and providing home of their parents and (for most) the familiar circle of their adolescent friends and enter the work

\textsuperscript{118} Arnett, \textit{The Winding Road from the late Teens through the Twenties}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{121} Arnett, \textit{Debating Emerging Adulthood}, 4.
world (or study world), where they are expected to thrive on their own. However, living on one’s own, becoming independent and self-reliant comes with a substantial amount of stress and strain.\textsuperscript{122} To use a well-known phrase, “they must learn to sink or swim” if they are going to survive in the “real” world. The responsibilities and decisions in life are now placed in their hands; they need to make their own choices.

Fowler holds that, in order for young adults to be successful in this process of emerging, two things must occur at the same time or in order: First, they must review and examine their values, beliefs and life narratives that made up the previous state and, second, they must deal with the question of identity and self-worth apart from their previous connections to others.\textsuperscript{123} In other words, as Sharon Daloz Parks explains, they must dissolve their adolescent ways of constructing meaning by developing critical self-awareness.\textsuperscript{124} As young adults master this developmental transition, they begin to redefine their meaning of self, the world and of faith.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, they don’t sink but begin the process of swimming for their lives.

Once they have begun the transition to their new life, young adults who feel they are no longer (for the most part) under their parent’s microscope, begin to make their own unique lifestyle choices. Researchers Penner, Harder, Anderson, Desorcy, and Heimstra, hold that as young adults begin to develop their new life, new circle of friends and, ultimately, their new identity, they may let go of some of the practices, such as attachment to church, that they held when they were with their parents.\textsuperscript{126} They now have the personal freedom to decide whether or not to take part in church which may not have been an option when they were with their parents. The decision is theirs and, as Penner, et al. state, “…unless they conscientiously give their faith a place of high priority, emerging adults are quick to put it on hold until

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{123}Feldmeier, \textit{The Developing Christian}, 128.
\item\textsuperscript{124} Sharon Daloz Parks, \textit{Big Questions Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 83.
\item\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 84.
\item\textsuperscript{126} James Penner, et al., \textit{Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church}, 16.
\end{itemize}
life settles down.”  With the majority of their familiar and secure support systems gone or significantly changed, the vastness of the world they face can be daunting at best.

Smith, Christofersen, Davidson, and Herzog indicate that another factor associated with change that influences the religious views and practices of young adults is the major distractions that enter their lives. Their worldview now becomes captivated by the tasks of achieving self-sufficiency and independence. And, for the majority of young adults, God, prayer, and worship are hardly on the priority list for gaining self-sufficiency and independence. As Penner, et al., so aptly state, “Attending church on Sundays, reading one’s Bible, praying and other faith practices are not considered relevant to achieving autonomy.” They are on the fast track toward full adulthood and, for some, this means sacrificing certain elements from their past lives.

Research is also finding that the majority of young adults are stating that they simply do not have any spare time and that they are too busy to focus on religion. When they are not diligently honing the skills for their jobs and trying to make a living, a good portion of their time seems to be spent on nurturing their personal relationships. Young adults are now focusing on what they need to succeed at transitioning from dependence to independence and, by all accounts, it looks as though religion and religious practices are not making the short list.

This trend is not surprising according to Smith and Snell as they underscore that religious faith and practice, which are usually connected to a settled lifestyle, are often disrupted by a multitude of transitions in life. In other words, young adults who were religiously active when they were adolescents or when they lived with their parents, may not continue that practice during this unsettled time of great change. Smith adds: “This connection between religious and other kinds of disruptions is a

127 Ibid., 17.
128 Christian Smith et al., Lost in Transition, 15.
129 Penner, et al., Hemorrhaging Faith, 16.
130 Ibid., 16.
132 Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 75.
broad sociological fact.”¹³³ When there is change and movement in a person’s life, everything about his/her life is affected. This is true for adults as well as young adults.

2.4.5 Relativism and Morality and Young Adults

For the majority of young adults today, relativism is the “in” thing. Sayings, such as, “No one holds all the truth but everybody holds a bit of the truth” or “No one has the right to tell you that something is right or wrong” are often heard and accepted among young adults. This is not entirely surprising as young adults have been raised in an environment where they are told to respect other cultural traditions, to respect other religious traditions and to basically respect and value other people. This is taught in our homes, our schools and, for the most part, in our churches.¹³⁴ This, according to researchers, is where we see development and entrenchment of religious pluralism.

Reginald Bibby states that, like their predecessors in the 1970’s, 80’s, and 90’s, today’s emerging generation tends to adhere to relativism.¹³⁵ In fact, he reports that “some 7 in 10 explicitly endorse the cliché that “everything’s relative.”¹³⁶ According to Bibby and other researchers, this is not a value or practice that young adults have developed in isolation but something that has been passed down from the time of the 1960s “baby boomers” to the present.¹³⁷ The movement toward individual rights, the freedom of speech and the freedom to choose were openly and readily accepted. In Canada, Bibby points to the introduction of official multiculturalism in the 1970s and the adoption of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in the 1980s as key points where relativism began to take hold.¹³⁸ This embracing of relativism is not just happening in the ranks of young adults but in society in general.

Smith and other researchers indicate that we do need to pay attention to just how this embracing of relativism is impacting the moral judgment and decision-making of our young adults. In Bibby’s

¹³³Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 75.
¹³⁵ Bibby, The Emerging Millennials, 6-7.
¹³⁶ Ibid., 7.
¹³⁷ Ibid., 208-210.
research with emergent youth inquiring about the bases for their moral views, he discovered that the majority based it on how they feel at the time (43%) or a subjective, personal decision (7%). For around 20%, the views of the parents, friends, and others are important. Only 10% say that religion is the primary basis for their moral decisions, slightly below the number who say they have no basis for their moral views. Although the emerging youth that Bibby is polling are slightly younger than the young adults, it is not a stretch to conclude that young adults would give similar or very consistent responses.

Smith, et al., differentiate between the terms moral individualism and moral relativism but accept the reality that many young adults do not make such distinctions. As with some of the young adults polled in the Canadian study, young adults in the Smith sample have a difficult time explaining on what their moral views are based. Smith found that three out of ten of the young adults they interviewed strongly adhered to moral relativism. And, like their Canadian counterparts, they simply believe that what is right and what is wrong is relative to the individual’s beliefs and feelings. The majority certainly do not look to religious groups or institutions to provide them with a moral measuring stick for what is right and wrong. True to the relativism that they wholeheartedly embrace, they view morality as something based on personal opinion or cultural consensus.

2.4.6 Young Adults, Individualism, and Religion

More than any other time in history, researchers see this as a time filled with seemingly endless choices. Bibby and other researchers point once again to the baby boomers and their cohorts as the pioneers who tilled the soil of society to prepare the way for the seeds of change, freedom and choice. As Bibby states, “Boomers, together with older and younger Canadians, have interacted with demographics,
technological, and global realities in transforming their country in the post-1960s.”

The face of Canada (and other countries) has been forever altered and transformed by the impact of this generation.

As relativism and the ethos of consumerism are embraced, the rights of individuals to pick and choose as they see fit is held sacred. Individuals essentially become the designers and gatekeepers of their own worlds. Individuals decide not only what they will do or not do, but also with whom they will interact or avoid. This is a practice that is perpetuated by the advancement of technology as people move from interacting face-to-face with others and spend more time developing “virtual friendships” and even “virtual communities.”

A perfect example is the new virtual world of Facebook. Since everyone has his/her own Facebook page, each person has complete control over the privacy settings and, thus, have control over whom they invite in and whom they exclude. If there is a disagreement with someone, they can be “un-friended,” or if someone sends a request to become a friend they can be ignored or “declined.” No explanation is required as to why some are invited in and others denied or excluded; it is a personal choice.

These changes and movement toward individualism have had a tremendous impact on religion and religious institutions. Gone are the days when people may have considered that church-going was a duty –something, for example, that “a good Catholic,” did with no questions asked. Today, people do not (for the most part) feel that it is their duty to heed what leaders of their religious tradition tell them. When they weigh the options of becoming involved with religious groups, they do so in a very pragmatic, consumer-like fashion.

In society today everyone is a target for criticism; no one is protected from being ridiculed or questioned. As a result, some researchers indicate that we have diminished our appreciation for the sacred

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144 Bibby, The Boomer Factor, 207.
146 Ibid., 32, 37.
147 Bibby, The Boomer Factor, 33-36.
149 Ibid., 28.
and reverence.”150 We freely question, critique and criticize more openly and demand that our leaders give us a voice. Like everyone else in society and in the church, young adults want to be heard, want to give their input, their two cents worth, and want to voice their opinions.151 This is something they have become used to in every other area of society, school, work place and online, and they expect no less of the church. They feel they have the right to speak and the right to be heard.

This trend is obviously at work with young adults as they opt in or out of religion and have no problem questioning the church and what it stands for.152 They apply the very same consumerist approach they practice in other parts of their life to their practice or lack of practice of faith traditions. If they are practicing or hold that they value religion, they are not shy to say clearly what parts of a particular faith tradition they like and what aspects they cannot abide. 153 They are not a generation that will blindly accept anything. They want to have a say about their faith, how it is practiced and what they believe and do not believe. In many ways, much like their boomer predecessors, their loyalty and commitment needs to be earned and respected. As Bibby so aptly puts it, “for some time now, the majority of us have been highly selective consumers in every area of life. Religion has not received an exemption.”154

Smith and Snell indicate that one of the downfalls of this individualism is that young adults are left on their own, thrown back on their own devices, often lacking the cognitive and emotional tools and concerned conversation partners needed to intelligently sort out life’s big issues, including those about which religion makes claims.”155 This exact sentiment is echoed by Ron Rolheiser who says, “We acknowledge that it takes a village to raise a child, but in the struggle to grow from a boy into a man or from a girl into a woman, our young people are left mostly on their own to let life, circumstances, and

150 Bibby, The Boomer Factor, 45, 46.
151 Bibby, Beyond the Gods and Back, 22-23.
153 Ibid., 7.
154 Bibby, Beyond the Gods & Back, 21.
155 Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 284.
Perhaps in the rush to embrace relativism and protect freedom of choice, young adults (and we) forget the importance of mentoring.

Leaving young adults to tend to their own souls can also lead to or encourage a completely individualized sense of religion where it would be easy to concoct or create one’s own religion. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton introduced “Sheilaism” outlined in the book, Habits of the Heart. This refers to a young woman named Sheila who has created her own personal religion with some belief beyond belief in God. She describes her religion as “just my own little voice… [telling her] Just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself.”

This extreme approach to individualized religion can leave young adults isolated and, thus, severed from any sense of community or support.

### 2.4.7 Religious Polarization in Canada

In his book, Beyond the Gods & Back, Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby starts by briefly revisiting his previous books tracking religious trends in Canada and underlines the fact that religious times have shifted and changed significantly in the past fifty years. He continues on to say that in the midst of all this change “…the dominant story is the emergence of unprecedented polarization between those who are religious and those who are not, and what it means for personal and social life.”

This is obviously not a trend isolated to Canada as we have seen reflected in the research. Two common factors at work in this climate of polarization are secularism and pluralism, both movements which are proving to have dramatic impacts on religious beliefs and practices of young adults. Bibby holds that in Canada, pluralism has, in fact, created a series of mosaics that move beyond culture to impact every aspect of Canadian life, and in turn, influence the very core of the Canadian identity. It is in this sea of mosaics in which the young adults of today must learn to maneuver their way toward adulthood. These mosaics have impacted not only the secular trends in society but colored our religious institutions as well.

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156 Ron Rolheiser, “Ron’s Take” in The Emerging Millennials, 83.
158 Ibid., 221.
159 Bibby, Beyond the Gods & Back, 4.
160 Ibid., 18.
According to Bibby, “Canada is far from being a Godless country” and, in fact, he states that “God is doing quite well in the polls.” His studies show that some eight in ten Canadians not only believe in God but believe in a God who cares for them personally. Bibby admits he was pleasantly surprised to discover that the percentage of teens reportedly attending religious services in Canada (which was 23% in 1984 and 18% in 1992) rose to 21% (except in Quebec) in the 2000 youth survey. So there is reason to hope that trends are beginning to turn around and, perhaps, God will continue to break records in the polls.

2.4.8 Roman Catholic Young Adults

The old adage “once a Catholic always a Catholic” still rings true for Catholics today according to Bibby. However, this does not necessarily mean that Catholicism is flourishing or that Catholics are storming the pews. In fact, studies show that the Catholic Church has experienced a steady decline in attendance over the past forty years. So, although many identify themselves as Catholic, this does not always translate into an increased number of practicing Catholics. Bibby refers to these religious identifiers as “affiliates,” both inactive affiliates who do not participate in worship services or attend particular churches and the less-involved affiliates who turn to the church for rites of passage, which Bibby categorizes as “baptism, marriage and funerals.” These are people who are baptized into a particular denomination and, although they may not be regular practitioners of the faith, still hold close ties to their familiar denomination.

Hoge, Dinges, Johnson and Gonzales, in their research among young Catholic adults, found that the overwhelming majority of the Catholic young adults they interviewed were not only proud to be Catholic but could not see themselves moving to any other religion. For them, being Catholic is a part

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162 Bibby, Beyond the Gods & Back, 36.
163 Bibby, Secularity and the Gospel, 189.
165 Hoge, et al., 35.
of their identity. They express a desire to be more involved in the church and applaud the church’s approach to social justice, and many consider themselves to be spiritual and prayerful. Like other young adults today, they are very positive, upbeat and ready to take on the world. As Hoge, et al., indicate, vitality among young Catholic adults is alive and well.

Catholic young adults also follow the trend of religious polarization between what might be referred to as the “liberals” and the “conservatives.” The liberal camp is made up of those who, much like the rest of young adults in society, value relativism, choice and Individualism. They have been referred to by some as “Cafeteria Catholics,” or they could also fit nicely with Bibby’s group of religious affiliates. The conservative camp consists of young adults who are balking the trends in society and are opting to embrace a more orthodox Catholicism with strong emphasis on Church tradition and traditional practices. This group has been referred to by some as “The New Faithful” or “Devote Catholics.” Both groups of Catholic young adults are seeking in some way to reclaim and define their Catholic identity. They are looking for a common ground as their experiences of faith and the level and depth of their faith formation varies from one person to the next. As Carroll states, regardless of their religious formation, young adults have never had the luxury of accepting orthodoxy without critical reflection. The pluralistic culture they live in will not permit it.

Hoge, et al., underline what they found to be a “problematic” trend among the Catholic young adults they polled. They discovered that four factors scored as “most essential” to Catholic identity were uniquely Catholic: “Belief that God is present in the sacraments; belief that Christ is really present in the Eucharist; devotion to Mary the Mother of God; and having religious orders of priests, sisters, brothers, and monks.” Upon reading this, one wonders what is problematic about this outcome.

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166Ibid., 33.
167Hoge, et al, Who Are today’s Young Adult Catholics?, 33.
168Rausch, Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice, 10.
170Carroll, ibid., 11.
171Hoge et al., Who Are today’s Young Adult Catholics?, 35.
For the researchers, the issue is that there is a tendency to see these factors as “sufficient indicators” of a Catholic identity with no real focus on ecclesial issues or concerns.\textsuperscript{172} For Hoge and his cohorts what is missing is that the Catholic identity also needs to include that “core to Catholicism is a sense of the unique role of the institutional church in salvation, the primacy of the papacy, the role of the church’s teaching authority, and the importance of sacramentalism.”\textsuperscript{173} So, one problem is that the factors used to define the Catholic identity among young Catholic adults today do not go far enough, and do not include some key elements. A second problem that they found in their research is that a substantial number of Catholic young adults “do not see the Catholic Church as unique or essential, the pope as necessary, the church’s structures as important, or tradition as a source of objective truth. Their actual connection with the church’s sacramentalism is also limited.”\textsuperscript{174} As Rausch indicates, this shows that the bonds that attached young Catholics to the Church have faltered and the Church has little or no authority in the lives of young Catholic adults.\textsuperscript{175} The good news is that many young Catholic adults continue to identify themselves as just that, Catholic. The not-so-great news is that they adhere to the trends prevalent in society where relativism, individualism, consumerism and the freedom to choose rule. They will pick and choose the aspects of the Catholic tradition which are relative to their lives.

Christian Smith and Kyle Longest in their book, \textit{Young Catholic America} (2014), build on and extend beyond many previous studies of Catholic youth and emerging adults, such as the one mentioned above by Hoge, et al. Smith and Longest found that the majority of previous studies discovered that post-Vatican II and millennial Catholics were affected quite differently by societal and cultural changes than were the older Vatican II and Pre-Vatican II generations. This led these studies to find that young Catholic Americans were:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Less well educated and knowledgeable about their Catholic faith,
  \item More individualistic in their approach to religious authority and beliefs,
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{172}Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{173}Ibid., 38
\textsuperscript{174}Hoge, et al., 38.
\textsuperscript{175}Rausch, \textit{Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice}, 10.
• Therefore very selective in what parts of their tradition they decide to believe and practice
• More tentative and weak in their affiliation with the church,
• Less involved in the church as an institution,
• More liberal minded and tolerant about non-Catholic faiths, and non-religions viewing the Catholic Church as only one denomination among many,
• Still largely adhering to a general Catholic identity,
• Less likely to place their Catholic identity at the center of their personal identity structure,
• Unable to articulate a coherent account of what it means to be Catholic

In their recent study, Smith and his colleagues reached the following conclusions about young Catholics today and factors that impact them:

• They need to be placed in context of the social economic and ecclesial transformations over previous decades.
• The inability and sometimes unwillingness of a critical mass of the parents of these young Catholics and ex-Catholics to model, teach and pass on the faith to their children.
• The decline of Catholic ethnic neighborhoods which triggered the decline of older, more communal, taken-for-granted forms of religious practice and catechesis.
• The dramatic decline in the number of priests and religious women and men who shared the task of forming the faith and religious practices of rising generations of Catholics.
• They exhibit a strong decline in church attendance over the past four decades even more so than their non-Catholic counterparts.
• In all others areas accept attendance; young Catholic adults over the past four decades look very similar to their non-Catholic peers of the age during the same time period.
• Due to factors; such as, being a white Catholic or being a first, second or third generation Hispanic Catholic, having a parent who identified as traditional, moderate or liberal Catholic and

176 Smith and Longest, Young Catholic America, 3.
having two Catholic parents or only one—give rise to a variety of types of young Catholic adults

Smith and Longest’s goal was to understand what happens to the religiosity of young people as they emerge from adolescence and become young adults. While their results and conclusions do not reflect a very positive outcome they do give a clear indication what young Catholic adults today are saying.

2.4.9 Reflection

In the story *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint Exupéry, the little boy says to the little Prince, “Don’t you see - I am very busy with matters of consequence.” The author is focused on building and rebuilding “his” plane and is not paying attention to the needs presented to him by the little Prince. Young adults today are very much like the little boy in this story; they too are “busy with matters of consequence.” They too are focused on building and rebuilding their place and identity in the world. Research is showing that young adults today are faced with more choice, more freedom and more possibilities than their predecessors. It seems true that the sky’s the limit but, to use a common paraphrase of Luke 12:48, “to those whom much is given much will be expected.” With choice come consequences and responsibilities. This is something that young people today are well aware of; whether they heed it or not is another thing. Young people today are under constant pressure to keep up with the pace and demands of this time of rapid change and technological advancement. They know that they can’t sit back and wait for the world to come to them because chances are the world will pass them by at an alarming rate.

In the midst of everything and everyone vying for the attention of young adults, religion and religious concerns fall victim to being one area of choice among many. It does not gain any priority. As some researchers have indicated, if young adults today don’t specifically assign a time or space for religion in their busy lives they are more likely to put it on a list of to do’s for the future. And, as we

177 Smith and Longest, *Young Catholic America*, 264-273.
know, they may or may not get back to it. Gone are the days when everybody followed a set path and the road was clear. People went to church, prayed, cared about their community and respected and heeded the authority of their religious tradition. Today’s young adults have moved away from the blind obedience of the past and are moving more toward critical reflection on what is important and central to their lives. This critical reflection is greatly impacted by the many “isms” in their lives, relativism, individualism, consumerism, secularism and pluralism to name a few. It is up to young adults to make good choices that will lead them to a “good life” which research consistently shows is what they seek.

The focus of this study is on what Roman Catholic young adults are saying about faith tradition and religious identity. The following chapter will look at the research methodology and design used in this study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this research is looking at what Canadian Roman Catholic Young Adults (18-35) are saying about faith tradition and religious identity. Chapter One explored some of the cultural realities, both within the Roman Catholic Church and society at large, that are impacting the lives of young adults today. The review of the literature in Chapter Two presented some of the more complex and empirically based research on young adults today including a highlight on Roman Catholic young adults in particular. These issues will be revisited in the last two chapters as the data from the study are analyzed and interpreted. This chapter presents the method used in the study.

3.2 Case Study

Canadian Roman Catholic young adults are a very large group living in a variety of contexts. In order to study this vast group, the case study approach was selected as the research instrument because it tends to have a focus that includes many facets of the life of a person and group. The case study approach as John Creswell states is “… a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bound system (a case) or multiple bound systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.”

Using case study allowed for an in-depth view of the lived reality of Roman Catholic young adults.

3.2.1 Research Participants

Merriam defines a bound system as “a single unit and entity around which there are boundaries” or, as she goes on to explain, “I can fence in what I am going to study.” Within the fence of this study,

the participants were all baptized Roman Catholics, they belonged to a set age group and all were Canadian. Taking these three factors into consideration, there are definite values, traditions, beliefs, rituals, symbols and experiences, etc., that form a part of their common narrative, their sacred story, as will be seen in the results of the study.

In order to gather the participants for this study, others involved in ministry with young adults in Canada were contacted. The largest concentration of participants came from Faith Connections\(^{181}\) a ministry focused on Catholic Young Adults (18-39) in the Greater Toronto Area. Other collaborators came from high schools, colleges, universities, and dioceses from across Canada. Each of the collaborating groups was presented with the rationale for and focus of the research, participant consent forms and a link to the on-line questionnaire. They were then asked to invite individuals who fit within the boundaries of the study to participate. Other young adults in the greater Toronto area were extended personal invitations by the researcher to participate in the study. As a result, 144 Roman Catholic Young Adults representing 10 provinces in Canada took part in the on-line questionnaire. Ten of this group were interviewed and another five participated in a focus group (See Tables 1, 2, & 3).

### Table 1: Age

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^{181}\)FaithConnections, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, welcomes young adults 18 to 39 to engage in opportunities that generate spiritual growth and community-building.
Table 2: Gender

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 3: Canadian Provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further study of the demographics of the participants shows that the young adults in this sample came from various backgrounds, i.e., single, married, vowed religious, common law, divorced and life commitments including a mix of full and part-time students and full and part-time employed (See figures 1 & 2).
The diversity reflected in the demographics of the participants added to the rich blend of responses found in the research.
3.2.2 Methodological Triangulation

The triangulation of methods is an approach that allows for a check on the validity of the data. It is a way of checking the accuracy of the data by gathering samples by a variety of methods, and comparing and contrasting the results.\(^{182}\) The study used a progression of methods: questionnaire, interview, focus group that were sequential, the second dependent on the responses of the first, and the third on the responses of the second. In this way a depth of data were collected and triangulation of methods achieved.. The questionnaire provides a large sample from across the country, the interviews provided further exploration of some of the areas polled in the questionnaire, the focus group provided an exploration of these areas by a vibrant group exchange; the use of these three methods served to check the validity of the data collected. The study began with the questionnaire in order to use the results as a lens to fine-tune the questions for the ensuing interviews and the focus group.

3.2.3 Stage One: Questionnaire

The desired approach to the study was to obtain a sample from Romans Catholic young adults from various regions of Canada; therefore, an on-line survey was used. This was the most reasonable choice to make as a survey is essentially a lengthy questionnaire with fixed choices that give insight into the characteristics of a larger group of people.\(^{183}\) The survey developed had a mixture of both open and closed questions to allow for the collection of a greater variety of data. The questions, which were based on the focus of the study and on research previously conducted with young adults as referenced in Chapter Two, were formulated with the assistance of guides focused on questionnaire development.\(^{184}\) It contained a total of 54 questions that were arranged as follows:

- Questions 1 – 8 Personal information, i.e., age, gender, employment, etc.

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\(^{183}\) Ibid., 115.

• Questions 9, 10, 27 Belief in and experience of God
• Questions 11, 15, 16, 45 Practices, i.e., attendance, reconciliation, etc.
• Questions 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 31, 39, 40, 50 Influences
• Questions 17, 18, 52, 53 Awareness of church
• Questions 32, 33, 36, 37, 38 Justice and service to others
• Questions 24, 25, 26, 30 Pious practices
• Questions 21, 22, 23 Prayer
• Questions 28, 29 Spirituality
• Questions 43, 49, 51, 52 Identity
• Questions 40, 48 Issues of importance, Care of the Earth, Human Rights
• Questions 41, 42, 43, 44 Morality
• Questions 46, 47 Belonging and Purpose

The majority of the questions, with the exception of four that were open ended, were closed. The closed questions allowed for yes, no or somewhat answers, predetermined lists to choose from, or statements with which to agree or disagree. However, 15 of these questions provided comment boxes which allowed participants to expand, clarify or add to their answers.

The questionnaire participants were volunteers who had been contacted by people involved in young adult ministry in various areas of Canada. Each contact was given the purpose and rationale for the study along with the letter of invitation, participant consent form and a link to the on-line questionnaire. The contacts were asked to invite participants who met the criteria of the study; i.e., they were a baptized Roman Catholic, between the ages of 18 and 35 years of age and a Canadian citizen. The on-line questionnaire began on October 8, 2014, and closed on December 16, 2014, with 144 participants responding. The results of the questionnaire were tabulated and coded as will be seen in the data analysis in Chapter Four.

185 See Appendix 6 “Questionnaire”
3.2.4  Stage Two: Interviews

The participants for the one-on-one interviews were drawn from the 144 participants of the questionnaire. Since the desire was to have a diverse representation of the target group, five young women of differing ages and five young men also of varying ages were chosen. All of the participants in this stage of the process came from the Greater Toronto area (GTA). The decision to focus on the GTA was based on the researcher’s inability to travel to other locations. An effort was made to have representation from different locations in the GTA with some coming from the downtown core and others from areas further north and south.

Arrangements for the ten interviews were made allowing flexibility for the participants’ time and availability. The meetings took place at the University to allow for a neutral and safe environment. Participants were reminded of the rationale and purpose of the research. Each interview, which was conversational in nature, lasted approximately one hour and was recorded and later transcribed. The procedure of the interview consisted of a number of open-ended questions focused on topics related to the focus of the study and based on the research presented in the previous chapter.186 Interviews are seen as “one of the most important sources of case study information”187 because they provide a more in-depth experience of the participant. The interviews gave more insight into the how and the why of the thought processes of the participants. Participants gave their answers, but then expanded on them and used examples to clarify or place more emphasis. Insight was gained not only from their verbal responses which were recorded, but also from their non-verbal communication which was noted as well.188

3.2.5  Stage Three: Focus Group

The participants of the focus group were also chosen from the 144 participants in the questionnaire who had not taken part in the one-on-one interviews. Participants were screened according

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186 See Appendix 4 “Interview Procedures.”
188 See Appendix 5 “Interview Observation Notes.”
to their age, gender, location and availability. The focus group, which is often considered to be a group interview that allows for an exchange of multiple ideas,\(^{189}\) consisted of five young adults, three females and two males. The intent was to have an equal representation of male and female participants of a range of ages but the reality was that schedules and availability became a factor in selection. The meeting took place at the University and lasted approximately one hour and forty-five minutes. The procedure \(^{190}\) consisted of a number of open ended questions on topics related to the focus of the study and the research presented in the previous chapter. Participants were reminded of the rationale and purpose of the research and were encouraged to respect and be mindful of others during the course of the meeting. The session was recorded and later transcribed. Originally, there was to be a co-moderator involved in the focus group but, unfortunately, availability and scheduling conflicts made this impossible.

### 3.3 Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is crucial to the study and the presence of the researcher with the participants is fundamental to the methodology. Even if interaction between the researcher and the participants is brief, the researcher still enters into the lives of the participants.\(^{191}\) Although all of the participants in the questionnaire were not met in person they were, however, invited into a space of contemplation on the questions presented, a way of engaging with them on another level. In both the face-to-face interviews and the focus group, the participants were met in person and the process of direct dialogue began. Irrespective of how the participants were engaged in dialogue, care was taken to respect and honor each one or develop what Sensing has called “Good Practice.”\(^{192}\) The topics explored in the research, faith tradition and religious identity, are topics that are very personal in nature, and the potential to cause uncomfortable feelings or awkwardness was very real. In fact, on two separate occasions during interviews there was an awkwardness that needed to be

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\(^{189}\)Stacey Edmonson and Beverly Irby, *Ten Tips for Producing a Top Qualitative Research Study* (Boston: Pearson Education INC, 2008), 91.

\(^{190}\) See Appendix 3 “Focus Group Questions.”


addressed (related to dis-ease around the topic of morality), so the need to be vigilant to the needs of the participants proved to be crucial to the success of the research.

Care was taken to ensure that ethical considerations and protocols, which are very important when dealing with participants in research, were followed: the needs and concerns of the participants must be considered first; their rights must be protected; they need to be presented with the objectives of the research: their privacy must be protected; they should not be exploited and results of the research should be shared with them. These ethical elements were built into the presentation of this study and were operative in the approach to the collection of data.

As a participant observer, whether during the reading of responses on the questionnaire or listening to an oral response in an interview, I was aware that things were stirring within me. I was definitely reacting to what was transpiring. Merriam underscores the reality that humans have “shortcomings and biases” that can influence research and that all would be better served if these reactions were recognized and named to monitor their influence on the research. I personally have found that the naming and recording of my feelings and reactions has been a crucial step in the research process. I believe that this step of critical self-reflection and note taking have allowed me to be more open and transparent in my analysis and interpretation of the data.

### 3.4 Validity

Eight Roman Catholic young adults, again using contact people in the ministry base as a resource, who fitted the criteria of the target group; i.e., baptized Roman Catholics, aged 18-35 and Canadian were asked to participate in a pre-test of the questionnaire. They provided feedback that allowed for fine-tuning of the questionnaire before it was distributed. As a result of this screening, descriptive data questions about location, work, and marital status were added.

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194 See Appendix 2 “Letter of Consent to Participate in Research.”

A triangulation of methods was used in this case study to get more diverse data and to examine the validity of the processes being used.\textsuperscript{196} Having access to three different sources of data collection provided a wealth of content to work with in the analysis and interpretation. In turn, the heightened expanse of the data increased the validity of the research.

Another process used to increase the validity of the research was the sharing of a summary of the data collected with some of the participants from the one-on-one interviews and the focus group. Participants were asked to read through the summaries and indicate if they were accurate or in need of editing. Their responses confirmed the accurateness of the data and were pleased to leave it as was reported. This feedback, along with personal field notes, gave a greater level of accuracy to the content.

3.5 Assumptions in the Research

This research project arose out of a desire to learn more about the experience of Roman Catholic young adults today. This quest was sparked by ministerial experience of working with young adults along with questions and concerns that were often topics of discussion in circles with others who were also involved in young adult ministry. Questions; such as, why are young adults choosing to practice the way they do; and how do we, as people in ministry with young adults, best serve them. The assumptions brought to this study were as follows:

1. Roman Catholic young adults are gifted and are looking for avenues to use their gifts for others and, in turn, forge a relationship with God.
2. The different history and experiences of the Roman Catholic Church have been and continue to be a source of generational tension within the Church community and among its members.
3. Roman Catholic young adult are just as affected by the cultural trends of change, technology, individualism and relativism, etc., as are other young adults today.

4. The decision-making processes of Roman Catholic young adults are based more on personal choice than Church teachings and their religious identity is dictated by personal choice and relationships.

These assumptions were at work throughout the research and will be addressed again in Chapter 5 of this thesis.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

As was highlighted in the introductory chapters of this thesis, the research question being explored in this study is focused on what Roman Catholic young adults aged 18 to 35 are saying about faith tradition and religious identity. The data presented here come directly from that target group and reflect what the Catholic young adults in this study are saying about these issues. This study is not intended to make hard and fast pronouncements; such as, “This is how Roman Catholic young adults in Canada are today;” but is intended to serve more as a snapshot of the movements, issues, and discussions occurring within this group at this time. In this chapter, the results of the research will be presented within the framework of the seven themes arising from the data. Excerpts from all three sources of data collection, i.e., questionnaire, interviews and focus group, will be used throughout.

4.2 Process of Data Collection

The methods used for data collection in this study were a questionnaire (on-line survey) comprised of 54 questions, ten face-to-face personal interviews each lasting approximately one hour in length, and one focus group with five participants which lasted approximately one and one-half hours. The questionnaire was sent out by email to Roman Catholic young adults aged 18-35 across Canada in October, 2014. By December 16, which was the date the questionnaire closed on line, 144 participants had responded (See Table 4). A tabulation of the results of the close-ended questions was done, the narrative data from the open-ended questions and the comments from the questionnaire were transcribed and coded for further analysis.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QM = Q Male</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QF = Q Female</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the letter of invitation to participate in the study, respondents were asked to indicate if they would be willing to take part in a one-on-one interview. Participants from the greater Toronto area who indicated that they would be interested were contacted, and from this group ten participants for the interviews were selected, based on age, gender and location. The group of interview participants consisted of five females and five males all falling within the age range of the study (See Table 5). Ten one-on-one interviews with the young adults from the target group took place between October, 2014, and January, 2015.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Interview (FI)</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI-1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI-2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI-3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI-4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI-5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Interview (MI)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MI-1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI-2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI-3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI-4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI-5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews took place in a meeting room on the University of Toronto campus. Written consent to participate in the interview was established and participants were assured of their anonymity in the reporting of the research. Each session was audio recorded and observational notes and field notes were kept during and immediately following each interview. The interviews were conversational in

197 See Appendix—Letter of Consent.
nature, and each participant was reminded at the onset of the interview about the purpose of the study and the procedure that would be followed. The interview began by addressing the question: “Do you consider yourself to be a practicing Catholic, and what does that look like for you?”

In the letter of invitation, participants were also asked to indicate if they would be willing to take part in a focus group session. The ten who had been selected for one-on-one interviews were removed from the group in order to get content from a variety of participants. Participants from the greater Toronto area who indicated that they would be willing to participate in the focus group were contacted. The intent was to have an equal representation of male and female participants of a range of ages but the reality was that schedules and availability became a factor in selection. The group consisted of three female participants and two male participants from the target group who had participated in the questionnaire but not the interviews (See Table 6).

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Participants (FGP)</th>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGP -1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGP-2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGP-3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGP-4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGP-5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus group session took place in a meeting room on the University of Toronto campus and lasted one and one-half hours. Observational notes and field notes were kept during and immediately following each interview. The session began with a review of the purpose of the study and an outlining of the procedure for the time together. Written consent was confirmed and participants were assured of their anonymity in the reporting of the research. It was an open-ended discussion in which participants were invited to dialogue around topics presented starting with: “Do you consider yourself to be a practicing Catholic, and what does that look like for you?”
4.2.1 Process of Data Coding

Once the data were collected and transcribed, all the documents were read through thoroughly several times. An ethnographic coding system was used which involved sorting the data according to common topics and phrase patterns and then identifying and naming themes (categories) that were arising. To facilitate the naming of themes, a variety of colored highlighters were used to color code the data. During the coding of the data, seven themes that surfaced throughout the data were highlighted. Each of these themes is comprised of a number of subthemes that will be addressed in the results.

The seven main themes are:

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of God (EG)</td>
<td>Image of God (IG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Catholics (PC)</td>
<td>Mass Attendance; (MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pious Practices and Reconciliation; (PPR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Spiritual Practices; (OP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer and Spirituality (PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences (INF)</td>
<td>Family, Friends; (FF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic Education; (CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Media; (SM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (HR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality (MC)</td>
<td>Relativism (RL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice (SJ)</td>
<td>Concern for Others; (OT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care of the Earth (CE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Belonging (C&amp;B)</td>
<td>Desire for Community; (DSC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity &amp; Dialogue; (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic Identity; (CID)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose (PR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision of the Roman Catholic Church (VC)</td>
<td>The Poor; (SP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs of Young Adults; (NYD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joy &amp; Pope Francis (JPF)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Experience of God

When asked if they personally experienced the presence of God in their lives the majority of Roman Catholic young adults in this study, 138 of the 144 surveyed, indicated that they do experience God personally, while six indicated they do not. One young woman (FI-2, p. 3) described her experience of God in the following way: “I guess I would say that I experience God in the ins and outs of my daily life; things happen in my life and whether they are good or bad I know that God is in there somewhere loving me and trying to lead me to some new understanding;” another young man (MI-2, p. 4) described his experience of God as: “There are times when I go into full panic mode and all of a sudden there is this wave of calm that comes over me telling me to chill out, to take a breath and relax; that calm is God, he keeps me moving, keeps me in play.” Both of these young adults describe their experience of God as always present and a caring and calming influence in their life. Another young woman (FI-4, p. 6) who was very animated and joyful spoke of her experience of God in the context of relationships with others and with nature:

My experience of God is very concrete. I meet God in other people, family, friends, even people I’ve just met for the first time; it’s just a knowing, a feeling that God comes to me through the lives of these people. I also meet God when I am out in nature and I see the trees, the water and, yes, even the snow. God provides all of this for me, for us, it’s the freshness, the aliveness of everything; this is how I experience God.

She is obviously very touched by her encounters with God and finds great consolation in knowing that God is with her. One young man (MI-3, p. 7) indicated that he does not believe that he experiences God, but his response also spoke of the importance of relationships with others: “I believe that my experience with real people is what counts; is that an experience of God? I don’t know, but what I do know is that my interactions with others is what concerns me and that is where my focus for life comes from.” Based on his response, this young man is still in the process of exploring what constitutes an experience of God but, like the young woman, he places an emphasis on relationships with others as a focal point in his life.
4.3.1 Image of God

Experiences of God as an awareness of a caring, loving and concrete presence were reinforced when participants were asked to choose from a list of descriptors about God: 132 chose “God is Love” and 124 selected “God is loving and compassionate.” Other expressions offered by respondents included: God is the Trinity (QF1, p. 9); All taught by the magisterium (reflected in a personal relationship) (QM1, p. 9); God is my savior (QM2, p. 9); God is infinite; God is a universal being (QF2, p. 9); God is my conscience (QF3, p. 10) and, as one participant stated, “God is in the interconnectedness of all beings, is the ground of being, is continually revealing God’s self in creation, speaks to me in my heart of hearts, has a will for me that I can cooperate with, fills the world with transformative grace, is present to me in the power of creativity and possibility, is with me in suffering” (QM3, p. 10). Although the majority of the young adults express a belief that they do experience God in their lives, how they choose to name and define that experience is reflected in a variety of ways.

4.4 Practicing Catholics

When asked if they considered themselves to be practicing Roman Catholics, 122 respondents indicated that they do see themselves as practicing Roman Catholics, while a further 14 indicated that they consider themselves as somewhat of a practicing Roman Catholic; the remaining eight did not categorize themselves as practicing Roman Catholics. In the interviews and focus group, this question was explored in more detail when participants were asked to describe what a practicing Roman Catholic looks like to them.

Some indicated that being a practicing Catholic is about following the teaching of the church and attending Mass: “It means being faithful to the teachings of the church (MI-2, p. 3)”; “It means going to Mass and being true to the magisterium, (FI-4, p. 5)” and it means “Attending Mass and taking part in the sacraments (QF4, p. 11).” Yet for others, it is about all that has previously been mentioned, along with putting that faith into action: “Not just saying I am Catholic but really living it day in day out (QF5, p. 11). “Reflecting the gospel message by putting my words into action; it is not just enough to say I go to
church, you really need to show it through your actions, (QM4, p. 11); “People should know we are Catholic by the way we live, by the way we treat others (MI-4, p. 4);” and “to be a practicing Catholic means exactly what the phrase says; it means practicing what we believe by sharing God’s love with others (FG6-1, p. 3).”

Still others hold that to be considered a practicing Catholic one does not necessarily need to attend Mass on a regular basis or participate in the sacraments regularly; it is more about how one lives according to the values of one’s faith in daily life: “I lead a Catholic life, and I hold Catholic beliefs, but I do not attend church regularly (OM5, p. 11);” “I try to attend Sunday Mass when I can but I’m not a slave to it; but prayer is a regular part of my life (QF7, p. 11);” “I don't live everything to the word of the Bible but I have a strong faith life (QM6, p. 18);” “I believe in God and I believe in the Church but I don’t always follow all the rules; but I am Catholic to the bone (QM7, p. 18);” and “I pray for the Catholic Church, I pray Catholic devotions for personal use; I do not participate in Mass or any sacraments (QM8, p. 18).”

There is a diversity of opinion among young adults as to what constitutes a practicing Roman Catholic, and there is certainly a varying degree of understanding as to what criteria are required to claim this title. This diversity is reflected in the stances taken by two young women who were interviewed; the first young woman (FG-4, p. 5) stated:

You can’t just say you’re Catholic because you were baptized and then not show up for anything or show up when you feel like it. If you can’t be bothered to participate in the life of the church, you can’t say that you are a “Practicing Catholic” it just doesn’t work that way.

And another young woman (FI-5, p. 3) stated:

I wouldn’t want to judge or, like, presuppose people’s beliefs. I think that for some people attending Mass once a month or whenever they can attend Mass is what they’re able to do at the time, and, what I think they feel they’re called to do. That is something between them and God.

The first young woman’s idea of a practicing Catholic is very clear, very direct and firmly stated. I might add that, when this young woman expressed this opinion, she became physically more rigid, with her arms folded across her chest; her voice became firmer and she spoke with great authority. Whereas the
second young woman’s statement was more yielding, and she remained physically relaxed and open, maintaining a very calm and even pattern of speech.

4.4.1 Mass Attendance

As can be noted in the literature review, research conducted by both Reginald Bibby and Christian Smith indicates that religious attendance at places of worship is often used as a means of measuring religiosity.\(^{199}\) When asked about their attendance practices on the questionnaire, 36 indicated that they attend daily Mass, 102 attend weekly, four attend monthly, 30 attend on special occasions, such as, Christmas, Easter, weddings and funerals, and two indicated that they never attend Mass. Among the ten participants interviewed one-on-one, seven indicated that they attend regularly and three attend but not on a regular basis; whereas in the focus group, all five participants indicated that they attend regularly.

4.4.2 Pious Practices and Reconciliation

In the questionnaire, the importance of pious practices was measured by questions related to praying before the Blessed Sacrament, praying the Rosary, and fasting on religious occasions. In total 135 participants indicated that praying before the Blessed Sacrament is very or somewhat important to them. When asked how often they pray the Rosary, 128 participants reported praying the Rosary; daily, 33; weekly, 22; monthly, 27, or occasionally, 46, while 124 indicated that fasting on religious occasions is important or somewhat important to them. A total of 132 participants indicated that pious practices are of some importance to them, which gives further indication that these practices do play an important role in the lives of many Catholic young adults. When asked in the interviews and focus group to talk about the significance of these practices in their lives, it became clear that prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is by far the most prevalent practice named by respondents in all three data collection groups.

When speaking about the significance that praying before the Blessed Sacrament has in their lives, one young woman explained (FI-4, p. 6): “Adoration gives me time to sit in quiet reflection. My life is so busy and people are always around; there never seems to be enough time to be alone. For me it’s

\(^{199}\) Smith and Longest, *Young Catholic America*, 128
about the silence.” She went on to explain that this time in silence helps her to refocus and gives direction to her faith life. Another young woman (FI-1, p. 8) described praying before the Blessed Sacrament as: “a time for me to be alone with Jesus when I can say what’s on my heart and just sit there before all that love.” For her it is time alone with Jesus and time to “reconnect with God’s love.” One young man (FG-5, p. 2) used the analogy of going on a date to describe his experience of praying before the Blessed Sacrament:

It’s almost like you’re going on a date or something with someone, where you start off in the beginning with just, like, the conversation and whatnot and it just starts getting to climax and climax; like you feel more of that burning passion, and then, finally, you get to this one awesome moment when you can just stare and look into each other’s eyes and have that quiet moment where you just enjoy each other’s presence. That part is like the Eucharist part. And it’s just like a very, I guess, strong, special thing that really helps me, like, every single week in my faith life.

Adoration provides time for young adults to be silently alone with God which helps them live their faith.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation is another practice that appears to be very important for Catholic young adults. One hundred and thirty participants indicated that they celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation weekly 19, monthly 69 or occasionally 42. When asked to talk about the significance of this sacrament, the responses reflected a deep belief that reconciliation is a way to grow in one’s relationship with God. As one young man (MI-3, p. 9) indicated: “It gives me a sense of getting back on track with God, although I hate having to say it out loud; it helps me to take that last step to fess up and go at it again,” and for another young man (MI-4, p. 7): “Reconciliation reminds me that my mistakes or my failings are not set in stone. That God loves me and I just need to keep trying.”

4.4.3 Other Spiritual Practices

Traditional Roman Catholic practices of piety, such as, adoration, praying the Rosary, and fasting are certainly some of the ways in which Catholic young adults choose to express their faith. However, when asked if they had any other spiritual practices that are meaningful for them, some spoke of alternate ways of praying: “I take time to pray every night before going to sleep (QF8, p. 35);” “Praying the Divine Office and spending time in silence and examination of conscience. (QM9, p. 35)” Also, “I pray with the imagination, especially placing myself in scripture passages (QF9, p. 35),” and “Praying before meals
(QF10, p. 35).” Others looked to different modes of expressing their faith: “I sing sacred music on my own or in choirs and participate in community liturgies (QM10. p. 35);” Spiritual direction helps me to focus and live my faith more fully (FG-1, p. 8);” “Service work, prayer, exploring nature and exercise (QF11,p. 35);” “Walking and listening to music are my most effective spiritual practices (QF12, p. 35);” and “I find helping others, doing volunteer work helps me be a more spiritual person (FG-2, p. 9).” Though very diverse in approach, each focuses on deepening a relationship with God, and, as one young man explained (MI-1, p. 11), “I am just aware that while I am singing this song I am singing a prayer to God; I am giving praise and worship; it’s my way of praying.”

4.4.4 Prayer

Prayer has a very high priority in the lives of Catholic young adults as indicated by the responses of 140 participants to the question of how often they pray in private: 103 practice private prayer daily, 28 several times a week, 5 monthly and 4 occasionally. They also value prayer with others as 127 respondents indicated that they pray with family, friends or others on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. They described prayer as being, “a life line,” or “a peaceful practice” or “a calming agent” in their lives. Prayer is also described as a process for working things out, “a way to sort through the things happening in my life, and prayer is a space in which to escape the busyness of life (Mi-4, p. 9).” “It’s time to step back from the endless demands of this world and to sit still with God (FI-4, p. 8).” And, as one young woman (FG-4, p. 2) in the focus group, stated:

I think we probably all agree that you don’t have a relationship with God without prayer and you can’t be faithful without a relationship with God. So I think praying, even just being aware of the presence of God around you and in your life and the lives of people around you, that kind of constant awareness is in itself prayerful.

All focus group participants nodded in agreement with this statement, another indicator that prayer holds a position of importance in the lives of Catholic young adults.
4.4.5  Spirituality

Young adults were asked if they considered themselves to be spiritual and 138 indicated that they believe they are spiritual or somewhat spiritual. However, the term spiritual is defined and used in a variety of ways in our society today. So respondents were asked: “What does being a spiritual person mean to you?” The majority of their responses are framed in the context of faith: “It means that I take God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit seriously, as real and true. It means to live out my life as a Christ-follower and follow His teachings through Scriptures and the Catholic Church (QM11, p. 34),” and it also means, “Someone who has integrated their religious beliefs into the way they live. Participating in the life of God (QF13, p. 34);” or “A person who turns to God, who looks beyond themselves for guidance and assistance; someone who knows that they are part of a larger faith community (QF14, p. 34).” Others responded using a framework from a broader context: “Understanding that there exists something more than ourselves and the material world, and making the effort to connect with it (QF15, p. 34);” also, “Being a spiritual person is believing in a higher power no matter what religion you are and taking the time to give thanks for what gifts you were blessed with and praying for the wellbeing of others (QM12, p. 34).” “A spiritual person is someone who simply loves, someone who has a deep love at the core of their being that they share freely with others. They can be religious or not; what matters is that they love (FI-3, p. 11).”

4.5  Influences

Participants see their parents (131), and to some extent their grandparents (77), as having played a significant role in their early faith development and in the shaping of their patterns of living their faith. As one young woman shared (FG-1, p. 3), her parents laid the foundation for both her past and present faith journey: “I’d say that obviously because they raised me they, like, influenced my faith life too. So in terms of just having, like, a good conversation about a faith topic that will ultimately push me, my mom and my dad, to a large extent, in terms of just foundational, like, they put me on the path.” Likewise a
young man (MI-5, p. 7) saw his parents as role models for his own faith life: “Definitely seeing my
parents living a faith life has encouraged me to do the same.”

One young man (FG-2, p. 4) spoke about the significant influence his mother has on his life since
his father, whom he described as the “real church goer,” died tragically: “My mother went from not
practising really at all, like she would skip out of mass and stuff, and now she’s more faithful than ever
and that’s driving me forward as well, to see that conversion.” In a similar manner, a young woman (FI-3,
p. 9) reflected on her mother’s continuing faith after having faced a diagnosis of cancer: “I have to say
that my mom and her courage really inspires me to practice my faith; she has such a strong faith
commitment and she is so happy in life and I want to be like that too.” Young adults also indicated that
their faith lives are influenced to some extent by their siblings (115). One young man (MI-3, p. 10) spoke
very affectionately about the role his sister plays in being a model of faith for him: “She is like the key
role model for me; she is a bit too traditional but she is solid in her faith. We talk about the church and
issues and she challenges me to try to be more faithful. I don’t always succeed but I’m trying.”

4.5.1 Friends

The beliefs of friends do play a major role in the lives of Catholic young adults today according
to the responses of 137 participants who indicated that friends have an influence both on their everyday
lives and on their decision-making processes. One young woman (FI-2, p. 8) explained why she often
looks to her friends for advice and guidance:

Well, my friends are the ones that I interact with the most these days, so they really understand
what is happening in my life because they live with the same stresses and expectations….even in
matters of faith they are the ones that I practice with the most so I look to them as sort of
companions in faith.

Her friends are really part of her community of faith and, therefore, have a significant influence on her
life. This is a similar scenario for another young woman (FG-4, p. 4) who converted to Catholicism:

…for me, God has really blessed me with really awesome friends and some really, really great
priests who have sort of walked me through this and have been there, and, you know, people
come in and people go out and they all serve different ways in my life and my faith development
and I’ve just been really, really lucky to have people like that. So, for me, it was a lot of friends
who have come into my life at the right times and I could relate to them through our faith, and so that’s what it’s been for me - good relationships with people, peers mostly.

4.5.2 Catholic Education

Eighty six of Roman Catholic young adults in this study indicated that they were enrolled in Roman Catholic educational institutions at some time during elementary, middle and high school years. The exposure to post-secondary Catholic institutions in college, university and trade school training decreased significantly. The participants who had experienced a Catholic education indicated that it did have some influence in their life. As one young man (MI-5, p. 8) stated; “Being in a Catholic school helped me to really appreciate Catholic community” which he explains is the working together in a faith context to become better individuals and to learn to be concerned for and care for others. And for another young woman (FI-2. p. 7), having a Catholic education gave her “the tools to make informed decisions and to think seriously about issues.” However, for some young adults their experience of a Catholic education boiled down to learning about the sacraments and the liturgy.

When asked specifically about receiving religious instruction, many participants reported receiving this mainly in the parish programs and schools more so than in their homes. The religious instruction in the home some labeled as prayers (Hail Mary and the Our Father), grace at meals, preparing to receive first communion, first confession and fasting on holy days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday). But for others their home was the place where their faith was planted and nurtured as one young woman (FG-3, p. 5) explained: “We prayed together and went to church together as a family and that has impacted my own commitment to my faith.”

4.5.3 Social Media

Young adults do not rate the influence of social media as being very high in their lives with 69 indicating it influenced their decision making process and 52 rating it as having an overall influence. Even though it was evident in dialoguing with them that technology and social media are interwoven in their daily lives they see it as simply a part of their lives. And, a necessary part.
4.5.4  Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

One hundred and thirty Canadian Catholic young adults view the Canadian Charter of Human and Freedoms as having an influence on their lives. When asked about the role of the charter in her life, one young woman (FI-5, p. 12) replied:

This guarantees not just my right but everyone’s right to practice what we believe equally. That is something that should never be taken for granted, especially in our world today. We are so blessed to live in a country where we can go to mass or pray in public and not have to worry about being punished or ostracized. There are so many people in our world who live in fear, but we are free.

Another young man (FG-5, p. 9) spoke about the significance of the charter in relation to his parents and grandparents:

I come from a Chinese family and my grandparents and my parents, too, remind me how lucky I am to have been born in Canada. Not that they are, like, putting down where they came from, but they are speaking of the importance of living somewhere where you’re allowed to express your culture, your traditions, and your religion freely. And it’s so true, I mean, when you think of it, it’s really great that here in Toronto we have many faiths, many cultures and everyone is allowed to live according to their own traditions. I think God must be very happy with this setup; it’s very Christian like.

Others expanded beyond the Charter, adding they believed simply being Canadian has an impact on how they view others as having equal rights, especially relating to issues of faith. One young woman (FI-3, p. 10) stated that as a Canadian she was raised to respect people: “This includes respecting people’s right to pray in whatever way or whatever religion they choose. It is their right just as it is my right to live a Catholic life…I just think it’s the Canadian way to respect people and allow them the freedom to live their lives.”

There was some agreement that this respect for equal rights is something that is not thought about enough, as was expressed by one young woman (FI-4, p. 9): “We don’t take the time to think about the freedom we have in our lives as Canadians; we just take for granted that it is there and we expect it to be there,” and another young man (MI-4, p. 11) pondered: “I don’t know what I would do if I had to worry about practicing my faith; it’s just so much a part of my life, It’s just something I’ve never had to do in Canada.”
4.6 Morality

When young adults were asked if they believe there are definitely moral rights and wrongs in life, the overwhelming majority 141 responded “yes,” they believe there are moral rights and wrongs. When questioned further as to whether the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church influence their beliefs about what is morally right and wrong, again the positive responses are high with 126 saying “yes,” their moral beliefs are influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church, 15 hold that they are somewhat influenced and three indicate that the teachings of the church have no influence on their moral beliefs.

When rating a list of issues according to level of importance to them, 122 respondents indicated that sexual ethics were very important or important to them. When further exploring the issue of morality, in both the interviews and focus group, there were visible signs that some individuals were uneasy with this topic. The question raised was how do you deal with issues related to morality with friends or people you encounter? One young woman (FI-4, p. 6), who began squirming in her chair, spoke of finding herself in a situation where she didn’t agree with what was happening around her but remained quiet, not wanting to be confrontational: “Even though I’m secure in my faith and I know what the church teaches, I find it really intimidating to talk about those kinds of things with people.” In the end, her response was to avoid landing in these types of situations in the future. Another young man (MI-4, p. 9), who presented his opinion quite confidently, said: “I know what is right and wrong for me and I live my life that way. What others choose to do, they must live with; it is not for me to decide.”

4.6.1 Relativism

When presented with the statement: “It has been said that everything is relative and morality should be based on personal choices made by individuals and cultures,” four respondents indicated they fully agree with this statement, 18 agreed somewhat and 122 did not agree with the statement at all. Upon further discussion of this question, one issue that surfaced in the focus group is the dilemma between the call to love as a Christian and, at the same time, being perceived as passing judgment on others: “Yes, there is moral truth, but I still don’t think that that gives me the right to disrespect another person, even if
they don’t observe the moral truth the same way, or at all… So, yes, moral truth, but I still don’t necessarily think that it gives me a right to judge others (FG-1, p. 6),” and, as another young woman (FG-3.p.7) stated, “I think there is a moral right and a moral wrong. However, if I encounter somebody who I don’t believe is living a moral life, my call as a Christian is to love. However, this is a tricky question and one I struggle with a lot.”

4.7 Social Justice

The response from Catholic young adults when asked: “Do you believe that you have an obligation to help others in need,” is almost unanimously “yes” at 142. They also see social justice and social action as very important to their lives as Catholics. However, further discussion around this topic reveals that, although there is a depth of agreement around its importance, social justice is understood and expressed in diverse ways. When asked, “What does doing social justice look like for you?; one young woman (FG-1, p. 8), obviously not at ease with this line of discussion as she began to fidget and look off to the side when speaking, made a distinction between the capital S and capital J “Social Justice” which are the large topics that people take on as a cause in their lives, and the small s and small j “social justice” which is our everyday approach to justice: “It’s one of those areas where I put my hands up and I say I can’t do it all. So it’s one of those areas that I think is really important and I pray for people who do it, but it’s not something that I have ever felt really called to engage in and devote my time to.” This is her version of the capital SJ “Social Justice.” She then goes on to explain that social justice for her is about trying to live by her virtues every day and make small attempts to be of assistance to others in need.

While many other participants tend to agree with this young woman’s approach to social justice, there are other voices that have a much stronger tone about the call to social action. This is seen clearly in the response of one young man (MI-5, p. 10) who is very active in volunteer work and with development and peace:

I believe that social justice is what it’s all about. We are all told to be gospel people and that means going out and having compassion like Jesus. For me this means actually putting myself there with the poor, with the homeless and actually walking with them. This can be hard sometimes but it’s what God calls us to as Christians and it helps me to put my faith into action.
Praying for people is great and needed, but I personally don’t believe it’s enough; we are called to be so much more, to do so much more.

These examples highlight the two different voices that can be heard coming from Catholic young adults. To use the first woman’s categories, some fall into the small s and the small j approach to social justice where social justice is expressed as “doing small things everyday” or “praying for the less fortunate and those who help them,” while others are more entrenched in the capital S and capital J approach to Social Justice which involves “meeting the poor where they are” or “putting faith into concrete actions.”

Catholic young adults are very active and involved in variety of causes and organizations with 103 reporting volunteer involvement. These young adults indicated that they volunteer their time, service and prayer to causes such as: prison ministry, homeless ministry, prayer and adoration for the needs of the poor, assisting families in parishes, development and peace, supporting hospital causes, financial assistance, journeying with new immigrants, fasting for peace, and ecology initiatives, to name but a few.

4.7.1 Concern for Others

When asked if they have an obligation to help others in need, 142 respondents indicated that they believed they did have an obligation to help. The importance for concern for others was reinforced when 143 indicated that the concern for others was important in their lives. In further discussion around this topic, participants indicated that it was a given that they had an obligation to help and be concerned for others as it is part of the Christian call to holiness.

4.7.2 Care for the Earth

One hundred and eleven participants named the care and protection of the earth as being very important or important. In further discussion on this topic in the interviews and focus group, there was a general agreement that this was a very important issue that needs to be addressed and supported but no one indicated that it was of significant importance to them.
4.8 Community and Belonging

As indicated earlier, young adults take cues for their faith life from their experiences and interactions with others. Many look to those around them as role models and mentors who inform their own faith lives. When asked about the importance of community, they are clear (143) that community is very important, as one young woman (FG-4, p. 13) emphatically stated: “It’s huge! You couldn’t do it – You can’t be a Christian in a bubble, right? You need other people; you need other Christians and you need a community. You can’t do it by yourself,” and, for another young man (MI-1, p. 12), “As humans we need each other; it’s got to be really hard to go through life without some kind of community experience. For me, my church community is a big part of my support system.”

Young adults are expressing the need for community in order to live a Christian life, a community that supports them. Another young woman (FG-3, p. 14) spoke of the need for community because of the rapid life style and the technological culture in which young adults live today:

We live in a culture where we have more screen time than face time and I think that people are thirsty to connect ... they’re searching and they’re yearning for something; It sounds kind of Pentecostal, but like: Have you found Jesus? And it makes all the difference in the world when you have a common thing to focus on, when you have a common interest, I guess, for lack of a better word; a common passion, a common love. It makes all the difference in the world and people are looking for that and people our age, our generation, we’re so thirsty for it, and I think a lot of people aren’t finding it because they’re looking for it on their computers or on their iPhones or wherever else. But they’re not looking to see that there are people out there who are thirsty for it too, and that if we all just kind of got together maybe we could find something really awesome to unite us.

So there is a deep longing for a common connection, a common purpose. One of the common experiences that several of the participants took part in was World Youth Day in Toronto in 2002. Those who attended found it to be a wonderful experience of living “Catholic community” and “Getting a firsthand glimpse of the global church.” And for one young woman (FG-4, p. 10) it was actually a conversion experience:

I went to World Youth Day, so personally I feel like being in a field with a million Catholics made me a Catholic. I like to joke sometimes that I left a Protestant and I came home a Catholic, and I say it like it’s silly but it’s true. It was a quintessential moment in my life; it was fundamental. It was formation in action, the whole experience. And so I think that what John Paul II did in creating those, gave all of us an outlet to see, okay, we’re Catholic in our parish, we’re
Catholic in this city, we’re Catholic in this country, we’re Catholic in this world in a way that young people hadn’t been able to see before.

This excitement and sense of “two weeks of pure awesomeness” (FG-3, p. 11) was shared by many young adults and was an event at which they experienced a powerful sense of community and common vision. Young adults see these types of Catholic gatherings and common Catholic projects as core to building Catholic community for their generation.

Yet, for others the desire for community has more to do with living day-to-day and being able to find the support needed to continue on their personal journeys. This desire was expressed by one young woman (FG-1, p. 10) who spoke about the difficulty of living away from home, from her family and circle of friends:

I don’t always know on a personal level if some of what’s going on with young adults is always really meeting my needs specifically, and I would imagine that I’m not alone in some of this. For instance, I don’t live in the same province as my parents, so I see them twice a year, if that. It’s been twice a year since I moved, so I really struggle a lot of times because I don’t always have like a really active Catholic role model that’s in that next generation that kind of helps me. And talking to my mom is great, or talking to my dad is awesome, but it’s not the same as having them around all the time.

World Youth Day might be good for some but what about the other issues that need to be addressed. She went on to ask: “Where is the stuff for people like me who are struggling with being single, and are struggling with being single but enjoying it?” She points to the importance of having access to a mentorship program where other young adults can interact with Catholics of a variety of age groups.

The young woman mentioned above is not alone in her questioning and her desire for an experience of community that addresses the needs of the diversity of people in the church. Other participants also commented on the need for community that is more inclusive and open to all who want to live their faith but struggle: “Since I am in a sexual relationship outside of marriage I land on the margins of the church, but I would love to be more involved, I’m not sure how that would go over (QF16, p. 53),” and “I go to church once in a while, for my parents, but I never really feel welcome when I do (QF17, p. 53)” or “It's difficult to be a queer Catholic. One often feels that one does not belong (QF18, p. 53).” While 116 respondents indicated a sense of belonging in the Catholic Church today they hold that
more needs to be done to appreciate and respect their diversity. They desire to find communities that welcome that diversity, communities with which they can identify and feel they truly belong.

4.8.1 Diversity & Dialogue

When participants in this study were asked about the importance of interfaith dialogue, 130 indicated that it is important. Many also take part in other religious services from time to time and see the value of experiencing other faith communities. A surprising result around the exploration of this topic is how many young adults see interfaith dialogue as a way to expand the dialogue around acceptance of diversity within the Catholic community. As one young man (MI-1, p. 11) stated: “This helps all of us to learn how to get along and how to respect each other” and, as another young woman (FI-3, p. 14), with a bit of exasperation in her voice, shared: “The more we talk and become more understanding of other faiths, the more likely we are to begin to talk and become more understanding amongst ourselves as Catholics, and we really need to do this.” Further discussion around this topic seems to indicate that perhaps openness to dialogue itself is what is at the core of this issue. In other words, if we as Catholics are open to dialogue with people of other faiths, then we should also be open to dialogue among ourselves.

This need for openness to dialogue strikes a chord with young Catholic adults. One area that has a direct impact on how young adults are seen by others is the often named division between the “conservative Catholic young adults” and the “liberal Catholic young adults.” This division, according to the participants in this study, is very real but, as one young woman (FI-2, p. 11) stated, “The lines are not as clear as people make them out to be.” She explains further that there are young adults who like the “more traditional” practices and the “old style church” and there are others who feel more at ease with “a more relaxed” approach to their faith; however, “we often float between these two groups.” This was echoed by another young woman (FI-4, p. 10) who finds the whole experience of being labeled disturbing, which she communicated in the interview by her abrupt hand movements and a quickening of

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her speech: “I do think that there could be a lot of listening going on, and labelling things liberal and conservative, I find, not helpful at all, but it comes up so quickly.” According to her, these labels, liberal and conservative, are laden with meanings and characteristics attributed to each one; such as, “conservatives are more into piety and adhering to the teachings of the magisterium”; whereas “liberals are seen as more attuned to the hot button issues operating in our society today.” To her, “This placing people in boxes is not even a Christian thing to do, never mind Catholic.”

When the question was asked what happens when someone “floats between” these two groups that have been named as conservative and liberal, one young man (MI-1, p. 12) explained that he likes to “experiment” with different approaches to practicing his faith, so one day he may be “rocking out with a group of friends” and on another day he may be attending “adoration at the campus chapel”; he likes to “mix it up.” However, he does note that because he takes part in adoration and praise and worship, he often gets typecast as conservative or traditional. “There’s an automatic assumptions that because I go to these events, all of a sudden I hate all gay people and I have nothing to say.” He is quick to point out that this is the way his age group often depicts conservative Catholics.

4.8.2 Catholic Identity

When asked how important their identity as a Roman Catholic is to them, some described it as being “at the core of my identity (FG-2, p.16)”; for others “integral to who I am as a person (FG-5, p.15); and, as one young man (QM13, p. 58) clearly stated, “That is the foundation on which I intend to live my life. It is not that faith is an aspect of my life, but that it infuses all aspects of my life, implicitly or explicitly. It is therefore not an accessory that I can change at will without affecting the rest of my life. All follows from that identity.” These comments reflect the feeling that is shared by the majority of the young adults in this study, as 137 indicated that their identity as a Roman Catholic is important to them, and they are happy to be Catholics. The question then becomes: what does this identity look like. The responses are very much in keeping with the responses found throughout this thesis, but most notably the sections entitled Practicing Catholic and Social Justice. However, one young man (MI-2, p. 12)
interviewed, who attempted to describe what his Catholic identity means to him, became quite animated and spoke quickly, trying to use as many descriptors as possible; but he then paused and said: “There is so much more to my identity as a Catholic than actions and prayers; it’s a feeling of being at home; this is where I come from and this is where I belong.” He smiled and seemed very pleased with his reply, and then added “yeah, these are my peeps.”

Young Catholics also indicated that they have little or no problem being identified as Catholic (95 very comfortable and 45 somewhat comfortable) when with their friends or colleagues, although some do take stock of their surroundings and the people present before speaking up: “I don’t announce it but I don’t hide it either (MI-1, p. 9),” or “If asked directly, I would say ‘yes I am Catholic’ but I wouldn’t just say it; for me it really depends on the group I’m with at the time (FG-3, p. 15).” They are proud to be Catholic and to be identified as a Catholic, but there are some circumstances where they hold back on identifying themselves as Catholics.

4.8.3 Purpose

Participants’ responses to the question: “Do you believe that you have an important role to play in the Roman Catholic Church today?” was significant with 130 indicating that they believe they do have a role to play. Some indicated that as Christians we are all called to participate in the spreading of the word: “It is what the word Christian stands for, to be “Christ like” to go out and spread the good news (QM14, p. 54)” and, for others, it is based specifically on the universal call to holiness proclaimed in Lumen Gentium of Vatican II: “We are all called to be responsible for the life of the church, we are all a part of the priesthood, called to serve (QM15, p. 54).” When asked to be specific and talk about how they see themselves fulfilling their role in the church, the diversity mentioned earlier is highlighted once again. One young man (MI-1, p. 11) spoke passionately about being a part of the New Evangelization called for by St. John Paul II in Redemptoris Missio:202 “As a Catholic I have a call, a duty to evangelize and to

201 A popular expression used among young people today to represent the word “people.”
assist other Catholic in finding their way to Christ” and for many young Catholics this call to evangelize is at the center of their common Catholic purpose. One young woman (QF19, p. 54) gave voice to her role as a laywoman within the Catholic Church which is an issue raised among many young Catholic women: “As a laywoman, I feel my role is important, I do not feel that other Catholics recognize that enough.” They feel they are called to be of service in the church and that they have gifts and talents to share with the church community, but question if those talents are truly appreciated and valued. There are also young adults who use social justice to frame their role in the church seeing themselves as “agents of change” and “the hands and feet of Christ.” They believe they are called to educate and inform the Catholic community about the need for justice; such as, “Bringing an awareness that there are problems and showing that this is what Catholic organizations are doing to combat these problems, being able to at least disseminate knowledge about issues that are hard and don’t have easy answers, creating awareness that people need to step up (FG-3, p. 8).”

Among Catholic young adults there are also those who feel called to speak for Catholics who feel marginalized and excluded. In this study, those voices come specifically from young divorced Catholics and LBGT Catholics: “I believe it's important to remind Catholics that queer Catholics are within the Church. We are not just those who have left. There are those of us who have stayed and who are praying and trying to make change happen within our Church (QF20, p. 54).” They identify as Catholics who continue to live their faith within the Catholic community and, even though they feel unwelcome by many, they are and want to be a part of the Catholic Church.

4.9 Vision of the Roman Catholic Church

Over all, young adults had a positive view of how the church is responding to the needs of the world today. They applauded the Church’s work for the needs of children and youth (117) and the Church’s promotion of global justice (110). In further discussion young adults spoke of the church as being a leader for the cause of peace and justice on the world stage. They also saw the roles of the Pope (118) Bishops (98) Priests (101) as being very important to the life of the Church. However, a greater
emphasis was placed on the role of the laity with 138 respondents indicating that the role of the laity was very important to the life of the Church.

4.9.1 The Poor

One hundred and twenty three respondents indicated that the church does an excellent or good job of responding to the needs of the poor. They saw the church as being a champion for the poor and always keeping the call to be in solidarity with the poor before faith communities. Young adults were particularly taken with the role that Pope Francis plays in promoting the cause of the poor.

4.9.2 The Needs of young adults

Seventy two respondents indicated that the church could do a better job of addressing the needs of young adults. Similarly, 70 also indicated that the church could do better in welcoming people. Some of the needs that young adults addressed were the need for positive faith mentors and mentoring communities to assist young adults in deepening their understanding and implementation of their faith tradition. They also spoke of having more inclusive liturgies in which the homilies address the needs and concerns of young adults today; such as, “learning how to manage your time in this hectic world (QM,16 p. 37)” and how to “stay true to your Catholic values in challenging times (QF, p. 37).” Another area of discussion among young adults is the need to recognize that they are “members of the church of today not the church before Vatican II (FI-4, p. 11).” They understand the significance of the second Vatican Council in the lives of “Catholics from an older generation (MI-4, p. 14);” in fact; they name it as a very encouraging event, “it shows that the church is reflective and development and growth are possible (FI-4, p. 12)” but for them it really is not a focus. They do, however, feel they are being judged as “longing after the old church (FI-1, p. 9)” based on how they choose to pray or the frequency with which they attend Mass “as if praying the Rosary and adoration were thrown out after Vatican II (FG-5, p. 3).” They want to be welcomed for who they are and the gifts that they bring.
4.9.3  Joy & Pope Francis

According to Catholic young adults who persevered in faith, the church is joyful (132) and there is a great deal of hope for the future. They see Pope Francis as someone who both encourages practicing Catholics to be true to the teachings of the gospel, to love and to serve with joy and, at the same time, he welcomes those who have strayed from their faith and “asks them to come and join us, be a part of the mission of God (FG-2, p. 19).” They see him as “a public superstar” but, more importantly, as “a much-needed role model for Catholics of all shapes and sizes (FG-3, p. 19).”

4.10  Conclusion

It is evident from the results of this study that Catholic young adults, who persevere in faith, have something to say and a desire to be heard. The concluding Chapter will be a discussion of the results and some of the implications for young adult ministry today.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

5.1 What Catholic Young Adults Who Persevered in Faith Are Saying

This study is based on data collected from 144 respondents from across Canada who volunteered
to participate. These respondents clearly represent a portion of what Canadian Roman Catholic young
adults are saying today but certainly not all. However, based on the data collected some cautious
generalizations can be made in an attempt to form a snapshot of Canadian Roman Catholic young adults
today.

These young adults appear to be well educated in general and have some understanding of the
structures and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. They experience God as being loving, merciful
and compassionate, and value personal prayer and prayer with others. The many participate in the
Catholic Mass and the sacraments and see themselves as having a vocational call to service for others.
They look to the Church and their communities of faith to help them give expression to their call, their
purpose. They hold that being identified as Roman Catholic is a critical feature of who they are and
readily embrace their Catholicity as part of their identity. These young adults are happy to be Catholic and
over half of them have considered a vocation to the priesthood and consecrated religious life. They value
the traditional practices of the Catholic Church, but they also see the need for diversity and dialogue as
being important. They exhibit an ability to apply critical thinking and thoughtful questioning.

5.2 Experience of God

Roman Catholic young adults speak of a loving and compassionate God who is present in their
life. They experience God most often in their interactions with others and are seeking real, authentic
people who mirror God for them. They firmly believe in a Triune God, but they look to Jesus as a model
and guide for their daily lives. They see reflected in Jesus someone who has experienced the things that
they themselves experience in their own lives today: joy, friendship, temptation, sorrow, betrayal, etc.,
and they see how Jesus responded in love.
The importance that young adults place on relationships and an encounter with others is well document in previous studies. The young adults in this study continue that trend and place a particular emphasis on the role of others in their encounters with God. They truly believe, as Rahner states, that they “…meet the incarnate word of God in the other human being” because God really is there present in the other. They seek other people to help then to encounter God in their everyday life. This gives support to Downey’s incarnational approach to ministry with young adults as they look to the human Jesus as a guide in their daily lives. They are attracted by Jesus’ modeling for them how to live a good life. This underscores the importance of a relational approach to ministry with young Catholic adults today.

The implication for ministry is to emulate Jesus who showed up for the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). He met them where they were, joined in their conversation and, as they journeyed, they encountered God - “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” Young adults are asking for authentic people who really want to be there with them and who come with an open heart and an open mind. This echoes the call of the Canadian Catholic Bishops who speak of being authentic witnesses of God’s love and hope. Young adults are asking for more than words; they are looking for people who also witness to lives of faith by actions in their own daily lives.

5.2.1 Practicing Catholics

The number of young adults in this study who attend Mass is impressive, but as research indicates, although religious attendance is used as a measure of participation, it is not always a true measure of religiosity. In other words, because young adults indicate that they attend Mass does not mean that they are participating in all or any other aspects of church life. However, looking at the overall

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205 NRSV
207 Smith and Longest, *Young Catholic America*, 121.
results reported by the young adults in this study, their level of attendance does seem to indicate their involvement in the Church as they speak passionately about the importance of Eucharist and being active in faith communities and the mission of the church.

Young adults take a very diverse approach to their understanding of what being a practicing Catholic means. Criteria vary: some are quite dogmatic in approach indicating that to be considered a practicing Catholic one must attend Mass and follow the teachings of the magisterium to the letter of the law. These young adults fit into Arbuckle’s Pro-order group\(^\text{208}\) who want to adhere to the rules and keep everything the same. Other young adults take a softer approach allowing more flexibility taking individual circumstances into consideration. These young adults lean toward Arbuckle’s Anti-order approach focusing more on individual needs and choices. Whatever their stance on attendance and following the rules, they all agreed that being a practicing Catholic should be a visible aspect of one’s life. To apply a common phrase used today, practicing Catholics must “walk the talk;” they need to put their beliefs and values into practice. Saying I am a Catholic is not enough; it should be seen and it should be experienced by all one encounters.

This is important knowledge for ministry as it points to the need to be aware of the language and interpretation that young adults today are using. As is seen in the responses, the understanding of what it means to be practicing varies; the likelihood that other words and concepts vary is a great possibly, especially in this postmodern era where words and expressions take on a multiplicity of meanings. This lack of clarity can lead to an increase in confusion and frustration and be the source of tension and misunderstanding for young adults and for those in ministry with them. There is little or no room for assumptions with young adults today, they need to be consulted.

5.2.2  Pious Practices

The young adults in this study indicate that they value pious practices; such as the Rosary, fasting and adoration. This is not too surprising as this is the generation of Catholics who grew up in the era of

\(^{208}\) See Arbuckle, Chapter 2.
St. John Paul II who, as seen in Chapter One, placed an emphasis on the practice of piety. He instilled in young people the importance of striving to become saints today, and taught them that piety was a way to assist them on this quest. Young adults have responded to that call and, as indicated in the results of this study, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has become the most prevalent practice sought out by young adults in their desire to draw closer to God.

When describing the significance of the practice of adoration, some of the common words and phrases used were, “silence”, “alone,” “getting away from the busyness,” and the young man who compared adoration to going on a date used the expression “quiet moment just enjoying each other’s presence.” Similarly, young adults who have named other spiritual practices that they adhere to, such as, walking in nature or listening to sacred music, etc., also talk about peace, quiet and the solitude that these practices provide in their faith lives. Both groups are naming their desire to spend time in quiet intimacy with God, but are choosing different approaches to get there. This is a significant point as young adults are making a conscious decision to select methods of prayer that assist them on their path to holiness. Given that many of these young adults are critical thinkers and prone to asking good questions, it would seem that the choosing of these practices is not just a random act but one that is well thought out. They do not see these practices, be they adoration or singing, as duties they must fulfill, but practices that guide them on their path toward God. They model their prayer on Jesus who often went off to pray in silence (Matthew 14:23, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35).

The implication for ministry with young adults is the need to develop an attitude where there is a greater awareness and reverence for the worship practices of young adults - an approach to young adult ministry that lets go of assumptions and the tendency to label as “liberal” or “conservative” and strives to meet young adults where they are in an attitude of respect and acceptance. The idea is to be creative in trying to reach out to young adults focusing more on inclusion rather than exclusion. This allows for a more inclusive approach, where all young adults are served and respected and their many gifts valued as in Saint Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians; “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same

209 See Chapter 4, 82.
Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.\textsuperscript{210}

Young adults have indicated that they see themselves as spiritual people to whom prayer is very important. They crave times of silence and intimacy with God and look for ways to find that silence in their busy lives but they also value prayer and interaction with others. Groome points out one of the blessings of Catholic spirituality is that it is both individual and communal inviting people to develop an intimacy with God within a faith community.\textsuperscript{211} Ministry with young adults needs to embrace this focus of encouraging their individual prayer styles and practices, but also on encouraging interaction and dialogue between other young adults, building community. Providing opportunities for quiet and solitude is important to them but so too is helping them to connect with others and to move outward. In other words, an approach to ministry that extends the challenge given by St. John Paul II to young Catholic adults at World Youth Day 2000:

> Young people of every continent do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer; be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace. To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to His Word, draw strength from the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. The Lord wants you to be intrepid apostles of his Gospel and builders of a new humanity.\textsuperscript{212}

A crucial role for those in young adult ministry is to welcome young adults and assist them as they respond to their call to be apostles of the gospel and builders of peace.

### 5.3 Influences

In Chapter Two Fowler’s stages of faith were presented, more specifically, the stages represented by the young adults in this study. These young people are located in or between Fowler’s synthetic-conventional stage and the individuative-reflective stages of faith development.\textsuperscript{213} This means that they

\textsuperscript{210} NRSV, 1 Cor. 12:4-6.
\textsuperscript{211} Groome, \textit{What Makes Us Catholic}, 126.
\textsuperscript{213} See Chapter 2, 35.
are forming and taking ownership of their beliefs and values in relationship to others as well as claiming their identities. They are also taking on personal authority and are in the process of self-defining and constructing roles and relationships based on this new self-awareness. In other words, they are in a period of transitioning to adulthood and taking on more adult responsibilities. As Arnett indicated, they are taking ownership of their lives and trying to become self-sufficient.  

The social context in which these young adults live, as we have seen, is transfused by individualism and consumerism. Relativism is a way of life. There seems to be an unending freedom to pick and choose whatever one wants and to discard what is not wanted, including beliefs and people. Yet, the young adults in this study indicate that excessive freedom is not what they are looking for in life. They are looking to consciously choose what is of importance to them, but always in the context of relationship with God and others. They value the faith influence they have received from their family and friends, but they are now looking to establish their own lives and their ways of living their faith. Their ways of expressing and practicing their Catholic tradition may not be the same as their parents or grandparents, but they are choosing to practice their faith and do so freely. As Parks indicates this can also be an in-between time where they are between adolescence and adulthood and not really sure if they have reached adulthood. They have a desire to embrace their new roles and responsibilities as they move toward full adulthood but they are hesitant and unclear as to what that really means.

The implication for ministry during this time of great stretching and growing is the need for an increased awareness of the vulnerability that young adults are experiencing. As Fowler implies, as young adults seek to establish their own identities they can be easily influenced by the multitude of choices around them; they begin to uncover who they are based on their interactions with others. And, as was noted in the results, young Catholic adults are looking for mentors and mentoring communities to assist them during this tumultuous time in their lives. This provides an opportunity for those in ministry to facilitate the pairing of young adults with the types of mentors that they themselves are requesting. This allows young adults the opportunity to interact with other Catholics and assists them in developing who

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214 Arnett, *The Winding Road from the late Teens through the Twenties*, 15.
they are as Christians, helping them in developing their religious identity. As the young woman from the focus group proclaimed “I feel like being in a field with a million Catholics made me a Catholic.”

5.3.1 Social Media

As indicated in the opening chapters, young people are embedded in a postmodern culture. With the technological advances in this culture, the world is literally at one’s fingertips and any news or information one wishes to access is but a click away on the internet. There are even numerous internet sites dedicated to prayer and reflection where one can go to make retreats and receive spiritual accompaniment. Young adults are well acquainted with all of this technology, and it is a part of their everyday lives. Yet, the results in this study indicate that young adults do not see social media, (internet, Facebook, twitter, etc.) as having a significant influence on their lives. They talk about it in a matter-of-fact manner and simply see it as something they access and use like their clothing or other commodities that they possess.

The implication here is that young people may be unaware of just how much influence social media has in their lives as they constantly check their iPhone and iPad and, at the same time, continue to have conversations with those around them. In this postmodern culture of endless distractions, technology appears to be one of the main offenders. Many people who work in young adult ministry have adopted the practice of requiring checking of all electronic devices at the door in an effort to remove the distractions and to capture the focus of young adults. This is a tried-and-true approach, but it might also be helpful to dialogue with young adults about the role that technology and its influence plays in their lives, an approach which is encouraged by the Church.

In the document, The Church and the Internet, The Pontifical Council for Social Communications take a positive but cautious approach to social media. They highlight the benefits of the sharing of the good news far and wide “…the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest

217 See Chapter 4, 95.
imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us…” and they encourage the use of this modern tool to help in evangelization “…Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ.”218 They recognize the internet as having tremendous potential for reaching many diverse groups of Catholics including young adults. However, they also caution that Catholics, especially young adults need “…to learn how to function well in the world of cyberspace, make discerning judgments according to sound moral criteria about what they find there, and use the new technology for their integral development and the benefit of others.”219 For those in ministry with young adults this means not only educating young adults on the role and influence of social media in their lives but also directing their awareness to the benefits and the dangers that exist as well. As the Council members suggest, ignoring the internet and social media is not an option as it is very much present in the lives of young adults today. The Church, and most especially those in ministry, has an opportunity to play an important role in directing young adults to become responsible Christian consumers in the world of cyberspace.

5.3.2 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The young adults in this study are Canadian and have grown up in a Canada that since the 1970’s embraced multiculturalism and adopted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These young adults do indicate that the Charter has an influence in their lives. They were raised in a multicultural environment of inclusion, and it is all they have ever known; it is a norm of Canadian culture. In Canada, the right to religious freedom and expression of religion is a way of life. However, as the Canadian Bishops220 rightly indicate, the multicultural aspect of the Charter and its endorsement of pluralism create an environment where the Christian message in Canada becomes one among many.

219 Ibid., 7:34.
Young adults by naming the Charter as an influence are indicating that they are politically aware and somewhat discerning of the impact that Canadian law and Canadian policy have on people’s lives, both civically and religiously. It also places them in Kohlberg’s stage four of moral development where the young adult’s understanding of being a good person means respecting the human rights of all people. In ministry this awareness and respect for others is an asset when attempting to engage young people in the mission and ministry of the Church. It shows that they are attuned to needs of others and that they have a healthy respect for the rights of others. It also implies that young adults are looking for faith communities that not only speak of the need to protect human rights and the dignity of people but also reflect it in their actions.

5.4 Morality

The young adults in this study have clearly indicated a strong belief that there are definitely moral rights and wrongs. They also take a strong stand against relativism. However, actually putting these beliefs into practice is where these young adults struggle. A huge stumbling block they face is their lack of clarity about taking a moral stand and their understanding of the call to love as a Christian. These young adults were honest about their confusion around the topic of morality and spoke openly about their need for guidance, for mentors, in this area of their lives.

In further discussion, it was clear that young adults equated speaking out against something they perceived as morally wrong with the act of passing judgement and, therefore, not showing Christian love. Keeping in mind that they are in Kohlberg’s stage four of moral development, these are young people who want to be seen as good people and do not want to offend or disrespect someone’s human rights. The popular expression “who am I to judge” has taken on a life of its own in that it implies that taking a moral stand or making a moral judgement is an act devoid of love.

This lack of clarity around morality is very much in line with the findings in the research reviewed in Chapter Two, which indicate that this dilemma is not exclusive to the young adults in this study but is an issue with many young adults. However, where the young adults in this study differ from the research is that they indicate that they do take the teachings and guidance of the Church into
consideration when approaching more complex ethical issues that they encounter. The implication for ministry is to not only be aware of this lack of moral clarity with young adults but to also be aware of their openness and desire to be receive assistance. They are asking for assistance in developing skills for good discernment and decision making.

One of the ways that this can happen is through the age-old practice of storytelling and sharing. As Wuthnow points out, “Stories have often been thought of as the vehicles by which we learn the situational rules of social behavior - that is the context-specific norms that should govern our actions in particular situations.” 221 Since young adults look to Jesus as their model, it would be important to focus on some of the gospel narratives that speak to Jesus’ approach to issues of morality. The first passage that comes to mind, and the most often quoted by many young adults in the study, is found in John 8:7 “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” This passage seems to fit perfectly with the expression cited previously “who am I to judge” but it is actually more attuned to being aware of one’s own inner state of grace rather than on not passing judgment on an act. However, as O’Collins intimates Jesus showed by the way he lived that he upheld the moral traditions of his time. 222 He adhered to the teachings of the Ten Commandments as reflected in the gospel of Mark 10:19 “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother” and, he also spoke openly against injustice and admonished those who failed to love and care for the poor. So, the stories and life of Jesus speak to similar dilemmas that young adults face today and offer teachings as to how to face these dilemmas.

Likewise, the members of the faith communities of young adults also have life stories and teaching that they can share in an effort to assist young people today. In the recalling of stories and experiences shared by others, young adults can learn ways of responding to situations and dilemmas. This

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underscores the need for dedicated and knowledgeable mentors and mentoring communities with whom they can dialogue and learn more about their Catholic values and Catholic moral norms. As Wuthnow adds, “Only as a member of a moral community am I able to make judgements about right and wrong….” Young adults are asking for guidance in moral decision making and, by their admitted struggle, this is clearly what they need.

5.5 Social Justice

Young adults addressed social justice from two standpoints: those who see social justice as part of everyday life that is addressed by acts of kindness, and those who are more focused on social action and ready to be on the front lines of the quest for justice. Both groups stressed the importance of social justice from their own vantage point. What was really impressive was the energy and desire with which they spoke about the need for justice. These young adults pointed out that living justly and responding to the needs of others is their responsibility and their call as followers of Christ. They also named social justice as a key element of their identity as a Catholic. However, it is interesting to note that social justice for these young adults was related primarily to their encounters with human beings. They rated care for the earth as being important but, much like their approach to social media, they treated it more as a given, “of course we care for the earth,” but the voicing of that care for many does not translate into action. The emphasis of this group of young adults was definitely more on their relationships with people, i.e., care for the poor, the homeless, the marginalized, etc.

It is impressive that young adults are as aware as they are of social justice, its rootedness in the gospel message and its importance to their Catholic identity. There are still many people in the church today who have yet to reach that level of awareness about justice. Recognizing this awareness and their desire to imitate Jesus, those in young adult ministry have an opportunity to help young adults to expand their understanding of social justice. Knowing that young adults wholeheartedly believe they are called to

224 Canadian Conference of Canadian Bishops—*Evangelizers of Hope in the Modern World*, Wednesday, February 10 2010 – Forum with National Catholic Associations and Movements, 9
help others-in-need presents an opening to engage young adults in the ministry of the church. They have a deep love of God and for the poor whom God holds dear and, as Pope Benedict XVI states, “Love - *caritas* - is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.” 225 They are ready and willing to be involved and want to be invited, to be included.

5.6 Community and Belonging

Young adults live in a society that is fragmented and in which it is all too easy for them to become isolated and on the margins. The lives of those participating in this study reflect the traits depicted in the research which indicates that the lives of young adults are in a time of constant change and transitioning. They are leaving home and seeking to establish themselves in the world. This change and transition also extends into their faith lives as many move away or apart from support systems they have established with family and friends. They speak with great animation and delight when they reminisce about experiences of Catholic community that they have had in the past, and they long for those encounters again. They value relationships as ways to grow deeper in their personal relationship with God and long for communities of faith in which this can happen. They are constantly working and/or studying which leaves little time for nurturing the very thing that they have indicated they treasure, namely, relationships.

Young adults see being accepted for who they are in their diversity as a crucial part of their developing a sense of belonging in communities of faith. Young adults are adamant about the fact that, although they are of a similar age, they are not all the same; they do not always think the same and they do not always worship in the same manner. In other words, there is no Catholic young adult mold in which they were created. They are diverse and they want to be valued as part of the community for who they are and the God-given gifts that they bring.

225 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritas*, 5
Young adults also express their desire to feel welcomed as part of the community. Not just to be accommodated but truly welcomed and valued. For young adults, being a part of a community of faith is all about belonging to a group of faith-filled people who care for them, support them in their daily life and who pray with them and for them. As Wuthnow indicates, community plays an important role in helping young adults to develop an appreciation of their religious identity. They do not want to simply fill the pews; they want to participate in the life of the community. They see themselves being called to be part of the mission of the church and they are willing to serve, to evangelize, mentor, etc.; they want to do their part.

For ministry with young adults, this implies that there be an effort to gain an awareness of their circumstances and their diversity. This need for awareness is echoed by the Canadian Bishops who also recognize the need to be aware of the reality of young people today “…we must recognize the fundamental values that mark their lives: the search for happiness, freedom, and authenticity” and at the same time discerning what those values represent. This provides those in young adult ministry with a starting point for engaging with young adults today. All too often the approach to youth and young adult ministry has been to come with a prearranged program. As is evident in this study, young adults know what they want and they are more than willing to state it; therefore it is important to ask them. Young adults are seeking to be welcomed and to be invited to take part; they may be slow in responding, due to the many other happenings in their lives, but it is important to keep inviting and welcoming them, leaving the door open and the light on. As Pope Francis states:

Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction.

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226 Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century*, 7
Evangelization includes everyone; invites and welcomes everyone, including Catholic young adults who want to be invited and who long to belong. They are diverse and may have a different approach to living the faith but they are eager to live the faith.

5.7 Vision of Church

That young adults state that they see the church as joyful and relevant in today’s world is a very positive finding. Based on the research presented earlier and the results of this study, young adults today are critical thinkers and are not prone to accepting things simply on face value. They ask questions, they critique, and they challenge. They take seriously their call to be involved in the mission and life of the Church; therefore, they are not hesitant to speak. So it is no small feat to pass their test of relevance. Yet, young adults are not Pollyannaish about the church and they name areas where they believe the church needs to continue to work and to grow.

One of the key areas that young adults name as requiring attention in the church is the need for open and honest dialogue about acceptance and inclusion. They point to the reality that there are Catholics who, for one reason or another, have issues with the church, but they still believe, are committed and want to participate. These are what Bibby refers to as the religious affiliates. Young adults who look to Jesus as their model of healer and reconciler call the church to embrace the same stance of loving and welcoming all equally to the church; not just to be content with those already committed to and practicing the faith, but to extend a hand of welcome to those outside that inner circle. Their message is the same as the message being proclaimed by Pope Francis, “The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent.”

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229See Chapter 2, 51.
must be more inclusive and make greater efforts to reach out to young adults both within the church and those who dwell on the margins.

Young adults would like the church to pay more attention to their needs, to what young adults themselves are saying. As was noted earlier, the approach in faith communities is often to create programs in which youth and young adults are invited to participate. As well intentioned as these programs may be, they often do not reach the needs of those involved.\textsuperscript{231} This is not to say that these programs are not useful as one has to begin somewhere, but they could be improved when young adults are asked what it is that they need or desire from their faith community. This empowers them by getting them involved and allowing them to take ownership of their faith development. It provides them with a greater sense of who they are and where they are going in life. As Pope Benedict states: “The fruit of effective youth and young adult ministry, then, not only brings a distinctive character to the Church, but also vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, to lay ministry, as well as healthy and holy families.”\textsuperscript{232}

Young adults see the church, not as a static institution, but as more organic in nature moving forward and growing. The growth they refer to does not apply to church doctrine or what they name as the non-negotiables, but growth toward greater openness and dialogue. This gives them great hope for the future.

5.8 Limitations

The overall results of this study indicate that what Roman Catholic young adults who persevere in faith are saying about faith tradition and religious identity is very positive in nature. However, it is important to make a clarification about the target group from which the sample for this study was drawn. As was pointed out in the opening chapters of this thesis, the young adults in this study came from contacts made in youth and young adult ministry in various parts of Canada. That fact alone indicates that these young adults came from groups associated with the Catholic Church and many of the young adults

\textsuperscript{231} Dean and Foster, \textit{The Godbearing Life}, 10.
have been and/or continue to be involved in their faith tradition. Also, this study relies on self-reporting from the participants which gives valuable insight to what participants themselves are saying and thinking, but it also relies on participant self-perception and accuracy. Another limitation in the study is that the individuals who participated in the interviews and focus group are from or reside in the greater Toronto area. This highlights the fact that there are many other voices coming from Roman Catholic young adults today and to indicate that the respondents in this study represent some of those voices, but certainly not all.

5.9 Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that Canadian Catholic young adults who persevere in faith are not only happy to be Catholic but also see their Catholicity as being a central part of their identity. The majority of the 144 name themselves as practicing Catholics and indicate that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have an influence on their lives. They know who they are and what they believe, but they are looking for witnesses of faith, mentors who will journey with them and assist them and accept them in all their diversity. They are committed to prayer and social justice but choose to express their commitment in a variety of practices and approaches. Their encounters with God are most often mediated through their relationships with others, and community is very important to them. They see themselves as having a purpose and role in the Catholic Church today.

Looking back at the assumptions presented at the beginning this study, it appears that they were all well founded. The results indicate that Catholic young adults do see themselves as gifted and having a purpose in the church and long to be involved in faith communities where they can grow in their relationship with God. Results also show that young adults name the tensions and divisions that exist in their experience of Church and also name their desire for dialogue and the acceptance of diversity. Results reflect the reality that Catholic young adults are also affected by some of the cultural trends

234 See chapter 3. Assumptions
impacting other young adults in today’s society. However, the last assumption, “that the decision-making processes of Roman Catholic young adults are based more on personal choice than Church teachings and that their religious identity is dictated by personal choice and relationships;” was not as accurately demonstrated as were the first three. Young adults in this study did show that personal choice does play a huge role in their lives, but many also acknowledged that church teaching had a significant influence on their more complex decision-making processes. Also, their religious identity is very much tied to the Catholic Church and its traditions. Clearly, the level of influence that Church teachings and practices have on the lives of these Canadian Catholic young adults was underestimated.

The positive response of this study is very good news if generalized for the church in Canada and for all who work in youth and young adult ministry. And, at a minimum, it provides a snapshot into the lives, thinking and practices of young Catholic adults who identify with the Church and its teachings. Their brand of Catholicism may not be quite the same as the older generations of Catholics in that they may not pray the same way or place emphasis on exactly the same concerns as them, but, nonetheless they are Catholic, today’s Catholics.

5.10 What then shall we do?

In the following section, two specific calls that consistently arose in the replies of Catholic young adults will be addressed. These are: the call for mentors and mentoring communities, and the call for acceptance of diversity and inclusion. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they are highlighted because they stand out as areas of importance for Catholic young adults.

5.10.1 Catholic Young Adults are seeking Mentors and Mentoring Communities

The call for spiritual mentors is not a new call among Catholic young adults as it appears in the list of needs among many faith communities, certainly within North America. At the North American Vocation Congress held in Montreal in 2002, the call for mentors was loud and clear from the young adult participants who stated: “Introduce us to objective mentors who are truly open to God’s will for us, and
can serve as wisdom figures.”235 They, like the young adults in this study, were naming the need for mentors and indicating that they value the input of others, “I really struggle a lot of times because I don’t always have, like, a really active Catholic role model that’s in that next generation that kind of helps me.”236 They are seeking faith-filled people who are objective and willing to walk with them on their journey. “For me, it was a lot of friends who have come into my life at the right times and I could relate to them through our faith”237 as a young participant expresses. It is not just one person that she mentions that had an impact on her journey, but a variety of people at different times. In order to address this call in ministry, it is necessary to develop an understanding of what is meant by mentoring and mentoring communities.

The title mentor is one that is used in a variety of contexts within our society, sometimes connoting relationships that are businesslike and task oriented; such as, a financial advisor or fitness coach, while others refer to a more profound relationship; such as, one with a spiritual director. Whatever tone the relationship takes, there is a certain vulnerability built into the dynamic as the person being mentored is relying on the expertise and wisdom of the mentor; they see the mentor as a role model. These young adults are developmentally at a stage where they are more self-aware and beginning to own their beliefs and, as well, claiming their identities. But it is also a time of constant transition and movement and life can become very fragmented. This makes it even more important that the mentor be a competent and trustworthy person who is invested in his/her role with the young adult.

Catholic young adults are looking for mentors who have an approach more spiritual in nature, the type of mentors described by Sharon Daloz Parks as people who are committed to being involved in the companioning of young adults on their transition into the development of “practical and worthy adult imagination of self, other, world, and God.”238 In other words, mentors who are open to journey with

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236 See Chapter 4, 95.
237 See Chapter 4, 87.
238 Sharon Daloz Parks. Big Questions, Worthy Dreams, 166,
young adults in all facets of their lives in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect. Taking it a step further, it is important to stress that the faith element of mentoring is very important to these young Catholics who are seeking to grow in their relationship with God. Faith-mentoring is a term developed by Sondra Higgins Matthaei which she describes as “a gift of God's love incarnate in interpersonal relationships” and she goes on further to define, “faith mentors are vehicles of God's grace.”\textsuperscript{239} These are the mentors that young Catholics are seeking, a relational encounter with others that leads them to a deeper awareness and experience of God. This is definitely in keeping with the importance of kenosis as an approach to ministry. Like Jesus who shows up in our human encounter, we are called to show up in the lives of young adults today and to walk beside them and with them as faith-mentors.

Along with naming the value and need for mentors, young adults indicate that they desire to belong to mentoring communities. Parks describes a mentoring community as a safe and welcoming environment in which young adults can explore a new imagining and dialogue about ideas with not just their mentor but in a community context.\textsuperscript{240} For young adults, belonging to a mentoring community allows them to interact with a variety of people and it is also about addressing the diversity in their membership. As one young woman pointed out, “people come in and people go out and they all serve different ways in my life and my faith development.”\textsuperscript{241} Different people have met different needs on her faith journey. Participating in a mentoring community allows young adults to connect with people of like mind and also those who may challenge, but people who are open to dialoguing with them about matters of faith.

\textbf{5.10.2 Ministry Response}

Mentoring programs are flourishing throughout society today in organizations, schools and businesses. Some corporations have even set-up websites where they match newly skilled workers with

\textsuperscript{239}Sondra Higgins Matthaei, Faith-mentoring in the Classroom. \textit{Religious Education} 86 no 4 (Fall) 1991, 540-549.  
\textsuperscript{240}Sharon Daloz Parks, \textit{Big Questions, Worthy Dreams}: 174.  
\textsuperscript{241}See Chapter 4. 85.
established professionals in an attempt to assist new workers to enter the workforce.\textsuperscript{242} Likewise, young Catholic adults are also looking to connect with older, more seasoned Catholics who have words of wisdom to offer. Within a faith community setting, whatever form that takes, i.e., parish, university, worship group, etc., young adults could be invited to name what they are looking for, to actually put into words what assistance or guidance they are seeking from this community. The community could then invite others to voice what they think they have to offer and a mentoring relationship is born. Religious communities do an excellent job of inviting young adults to partner with a religious and walk with them, but young adults are looking to broaden the tent, as it were, and have these mentoring arrangements available to all young adults, not just ones who are considering a priestly or religious vocation.

It would be important that potential mentors be aware of the reality of young adults today, the societal stresses, the expectations; in other words, that an agreement be struck to facilities these meetings. As with any mentoring agreements today, steps must be taken to ensure the safety of all involved in this endeavor. Many groups have the practice of meeting for coffee after liturgy and that could be extended to a time for mentors to connect. Young adults are astute and capable of making their own arrangements which will happen or not. The point is that it needs to start somewhere and what better place than where people are gathered. This is happening in some areas but the need to continue to spread the word is very important as emphasized by the young adults in this study. Becoming mentors and mentoring communities is a concrete way of responding to the call of evangelization within our own faith communities.

\textsuperscript{242}Two examples are: www.challengefactory.ca; provides individuals and companies with innovative talent and career programs targeting new graduates, mid-career professionals and Boomers seeking Legacy Careers. And, www.thementoringpartnership.com; the mentoring Partnership matching immigrants with established professionals.
5.10.3 Models of Mentoring

Faith mentoring is not something that was invented in our lifetime as models of it appear throughout history. As young adults step forward looking for faith mentors today, what better place to look for guidance than to our own Sacred Scriptures. In these narratives of our faith history, we find models of mentoring that can be used to assist in the ministry of mentoring. The following two scripture stories, the call of Samuel and the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth provide positive intergenerational models of mentoring that can be applied to ministry with young adults today.

The Call of Samuel (Samuel 3:1-21)

Samuel was young and unfamiliar with the experience of God; he was serving under the guidance of Eli when he received a personal call from God. Samuel’s response is to run to Eli and say, “Here I am: you called me,” but Eli sends him away saying that he did not call him. As this continues to happen, Eli recognizes the hand of God at work and tells Samuel to say, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” Through Eli’s assistance Samuel is able to hear and personally experience God at work in his life. When Samuel does hear his call, he realizes that this call will bring hardship and pain to his mentor Eli and, therefore, does not want to respond, but Eli, sensing this, prompts him to act “Do not hide it from me.” When Samuel does share what God has said to him, Eli responds by making his own proclamation of faith in God and thus affirms Samuel’s call: “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

Eli acts as a mentor for Samuel guiding him to an experience of God, when Samuel comes saying “Here I am” Eli does not get upset or irritated at him telling him not to bother him again, so Samuel feels welcome and safe and keeps coming back until he hears God’s call. This is very similar to young adults in today’s church; they are not sure what they are responding to but they want to come and check it out. A very important part of being a faith mentor is being experienced as a safe and welcoming person, someone with whom young adults can respond. If Eli had told Samuel to go way and stop bothering him, perhaps the call of God would have been impeded. We need to ask ourselves, how many of our young adults today feel unwelcome or feel that they are a bother.
Both Eli and Samuel are aware that the message Samuel brings is not an easy one. It will have a huge impact on Eli’s life and Samuel is uncomfortable speaking, not wanting to cause hardship. Is this not true of young adults today? Their presence and voice in faith communities can be experienced both as a source of invigoration and as a source of upheaval and change as they bring both new and old ideas of faith. This can be a welcome source of new life for some, while for others it may bring unwanted reminders of the past with the reintroduction of “old devotions” and ideas from which they have moved. But, like Samuel, young adults today are also trying to respond to their call from God. In the face of this newness, this change and disturbance, Eli, like any good mentor, professes his faith in God and says this is of God, let it be done. And like Eli, mentors and mentoring communities are called to walk with these young adults and thereby facilitate their encounter with God.

The Visitation (Luke 1:39-49)

Mary’s interaction with Elizabeth serves as another model of intergenerational mentoring. Mary, who has already heard her call from God, now sets out to respond to that call. She is a young woman who is not likely to be welcomed by many in her community as she is pregnant outside of marriage. But she has a deep desire to serve and thus she sets out in haste to her cousin Elizabeth whom she knows can relate to her and will understand her. As a mentor, Elizabeth welcomes and affirms Mary, saying “Blessed are you” and shares with Mary how their encounter has moved her and filled her with the Spirit of God. In the midst of this warm welcoming embrace and sharing of experiences of God Mary is filled with the self-confidence of being accepted and loved, is empowered to proclaim the glory of God.

Elizabeth first “heard Mary’s greeting” and then responded. Elizabeth did not meet Mary at the door and say “I know what you are going to say and this is what you need to do.” She waited for Mary to speak first. This is what young adults today are seeking, a mentor who will listen to what they are saying, to truly hear the greeting they bring to the community. Do we listen to our young adults today? Can we hear the unique greetings that they bring to the church or have we already decided what they are going to
Like Mary, being listened to and welcomed gives young adults a sense of being empowered and provides them with the courage to go forward.

Elizabeth, like a good mentor, blesses Mary and also affirms her faith in God “Blessed is she who has believed.” It is so important for young people to be told that they are also faith filled and the blessing of God is upon them. Too often young adults are told just the opposite; they are told or it is implied that they are not faithful enough which translates into not good enough. Elizabeth not only affirms Mary’s goodness but questions “Why am I so favored.” She recognizes the gift of Mary’s presence in her life. Do our young adults know that they are a gift to the church? To their faith community? Are they told that they bring life to the church and to the members of their faith community? They seek mentors who will help them to recognize their own goodness and to celebrate the gift that their faith brings to the church.

Catholic young adults are asking for the kind of companioning reflected in these stories of faith. They too seek authentic people and communities of faith to welcome them, to affirm them and to bless them. They have a deep awareness of their call to participate in the mission of the church and they want to interact with people who will help them respond to that call. They too want to feel the Spirit of God leap for joy within them.

5.10.4 Catholic Young Adults are seeking Acceptance of Diversity and Inclusion

The young adults in this study, as part of the post Vatican II generations, are very aware that their experience of church is different from that of their parents and grandparents and that tensions exist. These tensions most often surface in the categorizing of young adults into liberal or conservative camps, and putting their practice of faith under a microscope. However, these tensions happen not just between Catholic young adults and Catholics of older generations, but they also exist within cohorts of young adults and their circles of friends. Regardless of where the divisions originate, young adults very clearly voice their fatigue with being labeled liberal and conservative and desire to be allowed to be themselves, i.e., young Catholic adults.

243 See Chapter 1, Rausch.
This generation of young Catholics is perhaps more scrutinized than young Catholics in past
generations because they are choosing their spiritual practices rather than having them imposed upon
them.244 Because some choose practices that are seen to be more “traditional,” they are labeled as
conservative or orthodox. However, as can be seen in the results of this study, they choose these practices
not necessarily as an indicator of orthodoxy but as sincere and authentic ways of encountering God. They
are seeking silence, intimacy and time to reflect on their lives. For these young adults the practices they
opt for are not experienced as a duty but as a gift. They step away from their fragmented and rapidly
paced lives to find quiet and solitude in the presence of God.

The same can be said for young adults who lean more toward active involvement in social justice
issues. They are often labeled as being more liberal and not as devoted as their counterparts in the
conservative camp. These young adults do not see themselves as outrightly rejecting piety or the
magisterium; they simply name their priorities as having more of an outward focus. They have their own
faith practices that they have named as walking in nature, meditative exercise, music, etc. These are
practices that lead them to a deeper encounter with God. Embracing social justice does not necessarily
mean that they are unorthodox or that they do not attend church, participate in the sacraments or their
faith community. They simply have other ways of expressing their religiosity. Catholic young adults are
clearly stating that they are diverse and the ways in which they choose to express their faith does not
necessarily reflect their religiosity or their thinking.

Young adults are also saying that they are not all the same, and that needs to be acknowledged
and respected. They are also expressing a desire for dialogue and an opportunity to learn from each other.
This is shown not only in their desire for mentors but in their call for more common projects with a
common vision and focus. This clearly surfaced around discussions on Catholic identity and the influence
of the church. As previously noted, many participants of the study had experiences of one or more World
Youth Day events and this was a time of community building for them. A large part of these experiences

244 See Chapter 2, Carroll.
was of being gathered together with so many other Catholics, but it was also the messages that they heard from St. John Paul II, messages that they heard from each other, message of hope and messages of love.

At the 2002 World Youth day in Toronto, the Pope expressed his belief in and support of young adults and they chanted “The Pope is Young! The Pope is Young!” In this experience of solidarity all labels disappeared and they were more alike than different. The Pope was young like them, he was not a young conservative or a young liberal; he was simply a young Catholic. Those who took part in this event felt that they moved to a common ground and a deep appreciation of being Catholic together in a new way: “We’re Catholic in our parish, we’re Catholic in this city, we’re Catholic in this country, we’re Catholic in this world in a way that young people hadn’t been able to see before.”

Others had participated in Catholic young adult gatherings that were not as large as World Youth Day such as conferences and rallies, and reported finding them also to be life-giving and a positive experience of being Catholic. Catholic young adults are diverse but they also value their Catholic identity and their time together with other Catholic young adults. They voice this as a helpful way not only to get to know each other but also as a way to develop more appreciation for each other and to work together as church.

Catholic young adults today have a strong sense of their vocational call to be the people of God as reflected in the documents of Vatican II. They believe that they have a role to play in the church and see themselves as the church of today, not the church of the future. They want to be included in the building of their faith communities. They want to bring their gifts and talents to the church but many are hesitant as they are not sure how to do this. They see themselves as evangelizers and bridge builders.

5.10.5 Ministry Response

Young adults are making clear statements about how they see themselves and what they need. They are versed in their faith tradition, its teachings and doctrines and they claim the right to say what

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245 Lafontaine, Conversion Discernment Mission, 32.
246 See Chapter 4, 95.
they believe and to question without being labeled. They are not exclusive and are more interested in
dialogue than division. They want to play an active role in the church and believe that working on
common issues is the way to move. This is a clear indicator to all in ministry with young adults today that
they are ready to take ownership of their faith. They have gifts and they want to share them in their faith
community.

When parishes and worship communities already have an established pattern of operating they
often neglect to call forth young members to new ministries. Hence, the same people end up serving in
many capacities. Providing opportunities for dialogue and openness to new approaches can allow young
adults to bring forward their gifts and ideas to share with the community. This is part of the call of the
New Evangelization, to continue to gently invite Catholics to participation in the life of the church. This
includes letting young adults know that they are welcomed and that their input is valued. They may be
sitting there wanting to take part but taking their time to build up the courage to step forward. We cannot
give up on them. We need to keep inviting all young adults to join the community of faith.

5.10.6 Model of Diversity and Inclusion

When Jesus called the disciples, he did not choose twelve people who were the same or even
similar. Jesus moved around to different locations and chose very different people to become his
followers. He chose those people who were willing to listen to his word and who responded freely. He did
not require that they know all the traditions, practices and rules of Judaism, only that they were willing to
follow him (Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9).

Jesus continues to call followers today and Catholic young adults want to listen and to follow.
Like the first disciples, they are diverse and bring multiple talents and traits and they are not all the same.
They are asking to be trusted with the sharing of the word, of the tradition. Like the first disciples they
may not understand everything at once and they may doubt and they may even fall asleep, but they are
here and are determined to be a part of the story. And Jesus, as a mentor, is gentle and patient with them,
encouraging them to keep trying to move forward, inviting them to “come and see.”
Mentors and mentoring communities are called to model Jesus’ trust of young adults and to assist them to be disciples. Jesus saw firsthand that the people he was calling had very busy and active lives and, yet, he had the courage to call them. Likewise, mentors need to be aware of the stresses faced by young adults today but still have the courage to call them forward, to challenge them to become alert to their surroundings and to walk with them in faith.

5.11 Future Research

The young adults in this study point to an experience of confusion and uncertainty around their understanding of moral decision making, moral norms and the call to love all as Christ did. The implication that arose from this confusion was “that taking a moral stand or making a moral judgement is an act devoid of love.” It would be important for future research to take a closer look at the source of this confusion and specifically at the understanding of conscience, morality and the call to Christian love, i.e., what does it mean to love as a Christian? Are all choices good? Do our actions affect others? Does Jesus ever correct someone’s behavior or attitude?

5.12 Concluding Remarks

The boy in the book, The Little Prince, states: “Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations over and over again.” In many ways, like the grown-ups referred to in the story, as church we fail to see the creativity and new life that young adults bring to our faith communities. Where we may see death and the end of an era, they can see new possibilities and a new approach; but they too can tire of trying to deliver that message to deaf ears. We are called to trust that these young adults of faith enhance the vision of the church: “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19).

As a result of this study I have a deeper appreciation and respect for the diversity of young adults in the Roman Catholic Church. Encounters with these young adults have opened my eyes to the dangers

of labeling and categorizing young adults based on their choice of practice and worship. This study underlines for me the importance of starting from a standpoint of inclusion rather than exclusion, in other words, truly adopting the standpoint of Jesus. Sometimes as Catholics we hear that we are defined more by what we do not stand for rather than what we do stand for, and I believe that mentality has trickled into our relationships with each other in our Catholic communities.

Instead of starting by excluding those whom we believe do not belong or do not fit our idea of a true Catholic, we should begin by taking a stance of inclusion of all who come to seek God, of all who long to encounter God in others, of all who want to participate in the mission of the church. How much more joyful we would be as church. The young catholic adults in this study “get that.” They value diversity and the chance to experience God through others. They are open to dialogue and long to share their story with others. Yes, this study is positive in tone and for me this is a sign of great hope. These young people love God and they love their faith. They choose to be Catholic; they choose to practice in ways that make this manifest. They want to offer their service to God and to others. This is good news and we need to celebrate that. “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”248 The same can be said for “young adults.”

248 NSRV Matthew 19:14
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Appendix 1: Thesis Proposal

Roman Catholic Young Adults Faith Tradition and Religious Identity: a Canadian Perspective

A DMin Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the DMin Committee
Toronto School of Theology

June 23, 2014

Maureen Baldwin, CND
5.6.1 Background and Context of Applied Research

As a teacher and guidance counsellor, I have always been interested in working with youth and young adults. As a member of a Catholic religious congregation of women, my interest in working with young people expanded beyond the classroom walls as I also worked for many years in ministry with both youth and young adults, on the parish level, the diocesan level and the national level in the Roman Catholic Church in Canada.

My work is primarily in Vocation Ministry within my religious congregation and the Catholic Church. In this ministry I connect with young adults who are exploring their vocation options and provide them with resources and possible directions they might explore. I am also frequently called upon to work with groups of young adults in retreat settings, workshops and worship rally settings as well as to participate in and lead sessions for those who minister to young adults. Working in this context provides me with direct access and opportunity to interact with a diverse group of Catholic young adults from across the country.

Aside from working directly with young adults in various capacities, this ministry also involves working with members of my own congregation and other religious congregations to create and nurture a culture of vocation in the Catholic Church. This is a culture in which each and every Christian is free to discern how he or she will respond to a baptismal call to service, holiness and community; a culture in which all states of Christian life are honored, respected and valued as an integral part of the Christian community. A large part of fostering a vocation culture is working to remove barriers or mindsets that elevate one vocation over another and can cause division and rivalry. In this ministry the goal is to be companions journeying together, to work to support and encourage each other as we each strive to be ambassadors of Christ in and for the world. The participants for my study will be drawn from contacts I have established in this ministry, most notably from among the participants in Faithconnections, a young adult ministry operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

249 This is drawn from a mission statement that I composed on Vocation Culture for NAVFD (National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors) during my time as Executive Director.(2008-2012)
5.6.2 Statement of Research Problem

One of the most common questions I receive working in vocation ministry is why the growing trend toward the more traditional and pious practices among young adults in our church today. And indeed, I personally have experienced this growing movement more and more as I work with young catholic adults across the country. There appears to be a deep desire for these practices and rituals among some young adults while others are drawn to attitudes and behaviors that seem to be in line with a more secular approach to living daily life. This is reflected in the research, such as, the work by Dean R. Hoge et al. who found that while adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Virgin Mary scored high on a list of Catholic essentials among young Catholic adults many do not see the Catholic Church and its teaching on authority as essential in their lives. Likewise, Christian Smith and his colleagues have found that young Catholics were individualistic in their attitude toward religious beliefs and the authority of the church and very selective in what parts of their tradition they decide to believe and to practice.

Looking at the current trends unfolding among our young Catholic adults is a critical area in which to delve and explore for those of us in ministry with them. It is my hope that the findings of this research will offer insight into ways to expand the dialogue around faith practices among our young Catholic adults and uncover further areas of research.

Some psychologists put the age of young adulthood as early as 17 years of age while others believe it does not begin until approximately 22 years of age. However, most psychologists and sociologists peg the beginning of adulthood at 18 years of age. One problem that develops in trying to pin down this age range is the diversity and inconsistent use of the categories of youth, maturity and middle age used by

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250 Dean R. Hoge, William G. Dinges, Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, Juan L. Gonzales, Jr. “Who are today’s Young Adult Catholics?” HORIZON (Fall 2001), 35
251 Christian Smith and Kyle Longest, Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of and Gone from the Church. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2014, 6
researchers. However, the phrase most consistently used in research today is emerging adulthood and it refers to 18-29-year olds.

Choosing to stay in line with research but with a slight deviation, I prefer to use the term young adults to describe the group that I am focusing on and to set the age range between 18 and 35 years of age. This keeps me in sync with research trends and allows me to also tap into the wealth of research literature produced regarding this stage of life.

I am interested in exploring the spiritual practices of young adults aged 18-35 within the Roman Catholic Church. I hope to learn what they are saying about their faith lives, their relationship with God, and to discover if traditional Catholic practices do play a role in their everyday lives and their sense of religious identity. My thesis question is:

What are Roman Catholic Young Adults in Canada saying about faith tradition and religious identity?

Some of the broader questions that spring from this are: what is their understanding of religious identity? Is a Catholic identity important to them? What informs their daily living? What do they know about Catholic teachings? Is the authority of the Catholic Church important to them? Who/What influences their decisions? I will also explore my theory that there is a polarity among young Catholic young adults who want to adhere to a more pious approach to faith and those who opt for the more secular approach namely individualism and relativism.

5.6.3 The Theological Framework and Assumptions Involved in the Study

Recognizing the diversity of young Catholic adults today and the need for a relational model of young adults’ ministry are the key themes operative in this study. These themes rest upon the teachings of Saint Paul on the gifts of the spirit and on the work of theologians Karl Rahner and Michael Downey on the importance God’s gift of Kenosis, God’s self-emptying love, in a life of ministry.

253 Ibid., 128.
255 1Corinthinas 12: 1-11, NRSV
Saint Paul’s image of “many gifts but the same spirit” and the kenotic approach to ministry are at the heart my own theology of ministry. To be truly attentive to and appreciative of the diversity of all, keeping openness to giving as well as receiving, is what I strive for with in my daily encounters. Downey purposes that in nurturing a greater understanding of the importance in God’s gift in kenosis we foster an approach to ministry where we go “with empty hands, willing to receive the gift on offer in the other,” with “a willingness to listen” with “a greater measure of tolerance,” with “a profound respect for those who are different from ourselves” having “a hefty measure of confidence” and “a spirit of humility.”

I believe that it is in these encounters with others that we draw closer to God and move toward a deeper understanding of God’s love as Rahner says: “There is no love for God that is not, in itself, already a love for neighbor; and a love for God only comes to its own identity through its fulfillment in a love for neighbor”; so, as we meet each other, we in turn draw closer to God. This moving toward others and desire for a deeper encounter of God appears to be in line with the thinking of young adults with research showing that today’s young adults place a great deal of emphasis and importance on relationships and friendships. My assumption is that young Catholic adults are gifted and are looking for avenues to use their gifts for others and, in turn, forge a relationship with God.

From a historical perspective I will look at the changes that occurred during and since the Second Vatican Council which have an influence on the lives of young Catholic adults today. Catholics were encouraged to become much more active in the Church than they had been prior to the council in order to help with its mission in the world“…the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life.” This call to involvement and responsibility was foreign to many pre-Vatican II Catholics but to the young adults involved in this study, all of whom are post Vatican II Catholics, this involvement and personal

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responsibility is what they have always known. My assumption is that the different history and experiences of Church have been and continue to be a source of generational tension within the Church community and among its members.

Through the lens of anthropology, sociology and psychology I will explore some of the more prominent cultural trends impacting young Catholic adults. The pressures faced by young adults in our world today are greater than in past generations. 260 In this postmodern culture change is constant and transitioning has become a way of life. The workplace has become so self-sufficient, mobile and technosuave that it is constantly up-grading, downsizing and changing at such a frantic pace that, as theologian Gregory Baum aptly indicates, with the onset of this technological boom we may never see full employment again.261 There is a grave uncertainty about the future that faces young Catholic adults today.

In his research sociologist Christian Smith names individualism and relativism as two trends greatly impacting the lives of young adults. He holds that individualism can be problematic especially when young adults are left on their own to deal with very difficult issues. 262 They often end up turning to other young adults who also have limited life experience which may not be in the best interest of the young adults. The Church is not opposed to individualism but is cautious about it as it sees it directly linked to relativism which is of greater concern to the church as reflected in the statement by Pope Benedict XVI:

The dictatorship of relativism is confronting the world. It does not recognize anything as absolute and leaves as the ultimate measure only the measure of each one and his desires. "Adult' is not a faith that follows the waves in fashion and the latest novelty. Adult and mature is a faith that gives us the measure to discern between what is true and what is false, between deceit and truth. 263

260 James Penner, Rachael Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Désorcy and Rick Heimstra, Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church. (A Foundational Research Document Commissioned by the EFC (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada)Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, 2013),6.
Obviously, the growth of relativism is not something the Catholic church is happy with and for good reason; according to the research of Reginald Bibby which found that the majority of the young adults he surveyed based their moral views on how they feel at the time (43%) or on a subjective, personal decision (7%) for around 20%, the views of the parents, friends, and others are important while only 10% say that religion is the primary basis for their moral decisions, slightly below the number who say they have no basis for their moral views. This certainly does not paint a rosy picture for the role of religion and religious authority.

Like all young adults today, Catholic young adults cannot help but be influenced by the trends previously mentioned and one wonders what impact these trends have on their faith development. Drawing on the work by James Fowler and Peter Feldmeier I will look more closely at the religious identify of young Catholic adults today. My assumptions are that young Catholic adults are just as affected by the cultural trends of change, technology, individualism and relativism as all young adults today. I assume that their decision making processes are based more on personal choice than Church teachings and that their religious identity is dictated by personal choice and relationships.

5.6.4 The Ministry-in-Action Component

My ministry in action will consist of a triad of a questionnaire, face-to face interviews, and a focus group. The Estimated time line for all three segments of the study to occur is from September 15, 2014 through December 15th 2014. The young adults involved in all three parts of the study will be chosen from a non-random sample of young adults aged 18-35 years of age, who have been baptized Roman Catholic and whose names will be provided by the Faithconnections group and other young adult ministry connections. Every attempt will be made to achieve a balance between participants who are:

- Male/Female
- Student/Working
- Post-Secondary Education/High School

150 Online questionnaires will be distributed and collected over a one month period to participants in various locations of Western, Central and Eastern Canada.

The results of the questionnaire will be tabulated and analyzed.

The feedback from the questionnaires will help to focus questions for both the interviews and the focus group session.

10 face-to-face interviews one hour in length and will be conducted following the completion of the questionnaire. Interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and coded.

A Focus group comprised of 5-10 young adults will be the last phase of the data collection process. The session will be two hours in length and will be held in the Toronto region. I will serve as moderator for the group and will have a co-moderator present during the session. The focus group will be audio recorded, transcribed and coded.

5.6.5 Qualitative Research Methodology Operative

The research methodology I have chosen is Case Study. According to John Creswell “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bound system (a case) or multiple bound systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.”265 Since my research focus is on young Catholic adults and what they are thinking and saying about their faith tradition and their religious identity I am choosing to zero in on this as a particular case in which some common values, beliefs, behaviors and language exist. Based on this approach the results will, no doubt, yield themes and experiences that are common among Catholics in particular.

The data gathering method I plan to use for this study is methodology triangulation using Individual Interviews, Focus Group and Questionnaire. Individual interviews will allow me to connect with participants one-on-one and conduct more in-depth interviews. A Focus group, or group interview as it is sometimes called, gives me the opportunity to witness the group dynamic at work. In a focus group “The

participants …are selected in such a way that they exhibit a high degree of homogeneity with respect to either background, behaviour or both.” In this study, the participants will all be baptized Catholic young adults in the same age range of 18-35 years of age. Groups for the most part, tend to have more interaction, dialogue and energy. If one person is struggling usually another person will chime in to assist him/her, whereas in a one-on-one interview this would most likely lead to periods of silence and no doubt, anxiety for the person being interviewed.

A Focus group also gives me as the moderator and my co-moderator, the opportunity to observe non-verbal cues within the group and to witness firsthand how each person communicates within the group setting when responding to questions. This may help to determine which questions are difficult or cause discomforts for group members. Although it may be true that being in a group lowers the level of intimate sharing that can occur in a one-on-one meeting, it may also allow participants to share something intimate under the cloak of anonymity. In other words, a participant may share a story stating that it is about a friend or family member but not them. This gives them anonymity and, yet, the story most likely will be about something in his or her own life. It certainly would be easier to do this in a group setting than in a one-on-one interview. The group provides them with a safety net as the focus is not on one individual all the time.

The Use of a questionnaire allows me to reach a larger sample group and decreases the limitations of the study. I will also use a journal in which to log my personal observations and my field notes.

Using data triangulation in this study allows me to cross verify information and hopefully increase its validity. Beginning with a questionnaire, moving to individual interviews and concluding with a focus group provides input from a variety of sources on the same topic and allows common themes and inconsistencies to be recognized.

5.6.6. Ethics Review

266 http://www.fao.org/docrep/W3241E/w3241e05.htm#TopOfPage,(accessed November 2013)
5.6.7 Risks and Limitations

Some of the risks I foresee with this study are having young adults follow through with volunteering and participating. I also see a risk associated with having someone not return for the second focus group session. There is the risk of personality clashes and differences of opinion expressed in the focus group setting, especially given the topic of faith tradition and practices.

A limitation I foresee in this study is the scope of the study given that the focus group will be based in Toronto; therefore, the participants will be residents from this area and the majority of the one-on-one interviews will be from residents in the Ontario region as well. This may be offset somewhat by the participation of students from other parts of Canada who are presently residing in Ontario. Also, the sample for the study is limited due to its non-random nature; the need for the young adults to be baptized Catholics will automatically exclude some young adults from participating and thus also limits the size of the sample for the study.

5.6.8 Contributions of the Study

Thomas Rausch says that “…many younger Catholics are quite unfamiliar with their religious tradition…the Scriptures are a mystery to them, they know little of the history or doctrine of their church, and few would be able to tell the stories of the saints.”267 While I will not begin to dream for one minute that my study will reverse this trend, I do believe that it will pique the interest of at least a few of the participants in the study to explore their own faith tradition. I believe that the study will give me a more informed view of where young Catholic adults are today with regard to the Church. While I see this study as being an asset to people working with young Catholic adults, it will be helpful to all people who are involved in young adult ministry as it provides some insights into how young adults are thinking about faith, relationship with Jesus, religious authority, pious practices, moral decision making and justice. All of these areas are central issues addressed in young adults’ ministry today. In many ways this study can serve as a starting point for more research and further study on one or all of the areas touched upon.

267 Thomas P. Rausch, Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press), Xi.
APPENDIX 2: Ethics Approval Letter

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 30619
September 18, 2014

Dr. Joseph Schner Sr. Caroline Maureen Baldwin
REGIS COLLEGE REGIS COLLEGE

Dear Dr. Schner and Sr. Caroline Maureen Baldwin,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "Roman Catholic young adults, faith tradition and religious identity: A Canadian perspective"

ETHICS APPROVAL Original Approval Date: September 18, 2014
Expiry Date: September 17, 2015
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB's delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273 Fax: +1 416 946-5763 ethics.review@utoronto.ca http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/
APPENDIX 3: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in a study exploring what young Catholic adults aged 18-35 years of age are saying about their faith tradition and religious identity. The study is being conducted as part of a Toronto School of Theology Doctor of Ministry Project at the University of Toronto.

The study consists of three components: 1) a written questionnaire 2) a one-on-one interview (one hour in length) and 3) a two hour Focus group session. You can indicate on the attached information form in which part(s) you are willing to take part. All components of the study will be conducted solely by me, Maureen Baldwin; however, I will have a co-moderate with me for the focus group for technical assistance. The interviews and the focus group session will be audio recorded.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to stop participation at any time. There will be no financial compensation.

Information provided during this study will be kept completely confidential. Please see the attached consent form for a more detailed explanation of how information will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the following information and consent form and return them to:

Maureen Baldwin at caroline.baldwin@mail.utoronto.ca

If you have any questions about the study please contact me at caroline.baldwin@mail.utoronto.ca or call me at (416) 469-6756 or the project supervisor Dr. Joseph Schner, SJ, at joseph.schner@utoronto.ca or (416) 922-5474 ext. 222.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Maureen Baldwin, CND
Participant Information

Name: (optional)____________________________________DOB: ___________________

Email: ________________________________________ Phone: ______________________

Province or Location of residence: ______________________________________________

Province or Location of Birth (if different from above):______________________________

Gender: _________________________  Ethnicity: _________________________________

Are you a Baptized Roman Catholic?  Yes      No

Are you a Baptized Christian?  Yes    No

Do you consider yourself a Practicing Catholic? Yes      No

Do you work? Yes                    Part-time              Full-time

No

Are you a student: Yes            Part-time Full-time

Community College   Trades Training

University Year/Level: __________

I am willing to participate in: (Please check one or more)

1)  Questionnaire

2)  Interview

3)  Focus Group
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides information about the study. The person giving you this form will also describe the study and answer any questions that you may have. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not you want to take part. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Title of Research Study: Roman Catholic Young Adults Faith Tradition and Religious Identity: a Canadian Perspective

Researcher: Maureen Baldwin, CND,
877 Broadview Ave.
Toronto, ON M4K2P9
416-469-6756
caroline.baldwin@mail.utoronto.ca

Purpose of this Study:
The purpose of the study is to look at what Roman Catholic young adults in Canada aged 18-35 years of age are saying about their faith tradition and their religious identity. The study will focus specifically on what role faith, prayer, religious authority, pious practices, Church teachings, moral decision making, justice and action have in the everyday lives of young Roman Catholic adults in Canada.

What you will be asked to do if you participate in this research study:
This study consists of three components: 1) a questionnaire, 2) one-on-one interviews one hour in length and 3) A Focus group session two hours in length. Your time commitment will depend on which component(s) you choose. All components of the study will be conducted solely by me, Maureen Baldwin; however, I will have a co-moderator with me for the focus
group for technical assistance. The session for both the focus group and interviews will be audio recorded.

**Research Benefits:**

Your contribution to this study is invaluable as it aids in providing insight into what Roman Catholic young adults in Canada are saying and thinking about faith and religious identity. These insights will help to expand the dialogue within the Catholic community and allow the voice of young adults to be heard with greater clarity. All participants of this research are volunteers and there will be no monetary compensation.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time.

**Confidentiality:**

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence. Written notes and recorded observations will be taken by the researcher and the sessions will be audio recorded. All data collected will be transcribed and coded by the researcher so that no personally identifying information is visible on them and they will be stored in a secure location accessed only by the researcher. The data will be heard or viewed only for research purposes and all data collected will be erased and destroyed upon completion of the study. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions about the Research:**

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Maureen Baldwin either by telephone at (416) 469-6756, or by e-mail caroline.baldwin@mail.utoronto.ca or the project supervisor Dr. Joseph Schner, SJ at joseph.schner@utoronto.ca or (416) 922-5474 ext. 222. This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.
Legal Rights and Signatures:

I ____________________________, consent to participate in *Roman Catholic Young Adults, Faith Tradition and Religious Identity a Canadian Perspective* conducted by Maureen Baldwin. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Participant

Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Researcher
APPENDIX 5: Focus Group Questions

All participants will be reminded of:

- The Purpose of the Research
- Why they were chosen
- The Length of the Session
- That the session is being audio recorded.

General Focus Questions

1) Talk about what it means for you to be Roman Catholic.

2) If you say you are a practicing Catholic what does that look like?

3) Reactions to what has been shared?

4) Who are the people that have an influence in your life? Why?

5) Do you consider yourself to be religious, spiritual or both? Why?

6) How do you deal with decision making?

7) Do the teachings of Jesus play a role in your life? Why or why not?

8) Do you think you have an obligation to help others who are in need?

9) How do you define social justice? Is it important?

10) Do you feel that you belong in the Church today? Do you have a purpose?

11) Do you feel you have role in the Roman Catholic Church today?

12) Where do you find hope for the future?
APPENDIX 6: Interview Procedures

All respondents will be reminded of:

- The Purpose of the Research
- Why they were chosen
- The Length of the Interview
- The interview is being audio recorded.

Interviewing

The researcher will have a list of 6 topics which are related to the core research interests of the study rather. A selection of questions from both the focus group and questionnaire will be introduced if and where appropriate. The topics for this study are:

- Personal Faith of young Roman Catholic adults
- Their relationship to Jesus
- Influence of Church teachings
- Moral development and decision making
- Importance of traditional pious practices
- Social Responsibility

Participants will be invited to talk about each topic as it is introduced. The researcher will record response responses while also using an observation checklist. Once the interview is complete, the researcher will take some time to do a written and recorded summary of the interview while it is still fresh in memory. This will aid with the transcribing at a later date.
# APPENDIX 7: Interview Observation Notes

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**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

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APPENDIX 8: Questionnaire

*1. Age
*2. Gender
3. Please indicate province or location of residence
4. Are you a Canadian Citizen?
   □ Yes
   □ No
5. Please choose one of the following:
   □ Single
   □ Married
   □ Divorced
   □ Common Law
   □ Vowed Religious
   □ Ordained
6. Please choose from the following those that apply to you
   □ Full-time Student
   □ Part-time Student
   □ Working Full-time
   □ Working Part-time
   Other (please specify)

*7. Are you a baptised Roman Catholic?
   □ Yes
   □ No
*8. Were you baptised Roman Catholic at birth or later?
   □ At Birth
   □ Later
   Later (please specify)

9. Do you believe in God?
   □ Yes, I believe in God
   □ No, I do not believe in God
10. Please indicate how you would best describe your beliefs about God.
    (Please check all choices that apply)
    □ I believe in the God of the Bible
    □ God is loving and compassionate
    □ God sits in judgment
    □ God is creation
    □ God is love
    □ God is in all things
11. Do you consider yourself to be a practicing Roman Catholic?
12. Were (are) your Parent(s) and Grandparent Practicing Roman Catholics?

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<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Very Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Grandmother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Grandfather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternal Grandfather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Were you educated in Roman Catholic institutions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (K-5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (6-8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (9-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Did you receive Roman Catholic religious instruction?
(Please check all choices that apply)

- Yes, in my home
- Yes, in my school
- Yes, in my parish
- No, not in my home
- No, not in my school
- No, not in my parish
- Never
- Other (please specify)

15. How often do you attend Roman Catholic mass?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Special Occasions (Christmas, Easter, Weddings, Funerals)
- Never

16. How often do you participate in church services with other faith denominations?
□ Daily
□ Weekly
□ Monthly
□ Occasionally
□ Never

Comment:

17. Please indicate your familiarity with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on the topics listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>topic</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dignity of the Human Person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctity of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for Creation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity of work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option for the Poor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call to Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Please check choices you believe are sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church.

□ Prayer
□ Reconciliation
□ Love
□ Eucharist
□ Marriage
□ Justice
□ Holy Orders
□ Baptism
□ Confirmation
□ Anointing of the Sick

19. Please indicate the level of influence the following have on your decision-making process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>topic</th>
<th>Very little influence</th>
<th>Somewhat influential</th>
<th>Influential</th>
<th>Very influential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs of Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs of Grandparents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs of Siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs of Work/study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachings of Jesus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachings of the Roman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Ethnic Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Please indicate how important you believe the following roles are in the life of the Roman Catholic Church of today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishops</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laity</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deacons</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theologians</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionaries</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. How important is prayer to you?
- □ Very important
- □ Somewhat important
- □ Not very important

22. How often do you pray in private?
- □ Daily
- □ Several times a week
- □ Monthly
- □ Occasionally
- □ Not often
- □ Never

23. How often do you pray with family, friends or others?
- □ Daily
- □ Weekly
- □ Monthly
- □ Occasionally
- □ Not often
- □ Never

24. Is sitting in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament (the body of Christ) important to you?
- □ Very
- □ Yes
- □ Somewhat
- □ Not at all
- □ Not sure
25. How often do you pray the rosary?
☑ Daily ○ Weekly ○ Monthly ○ Occasionally ○ Not often ○ Never

26. Is fasting on special religious occasions important to you?
☑ Yes ○ Somewhat ○ Not at all

27. Do you believe that you have personally experienced the presence of God in your life?
☑ Yes ○ No

28. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?
☑ Yes ○ No ○ Somewhat

29. What does being a spiritual person mean to you?

30. Do you have any spiritual practices that are meaningful for you?

31. How important is religion to you?
☑ Very important ○ Somewhat important ○ Not very important ○ Not important at all

32. “The church does not exist alongside or apart from the world; the church is part of the world, and its mission is to serve the whole human family in order to make the human race’s history more human”

 Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Disagree

Comment:

33. Do you believe that dialogue between Roman Catholics and people of other faith traditions is important?
34. How comfortable are you with letting others outside your circle of close friends and family know that you are Roman Catholic?
□ Very
□ Somewhat
□ Not at all
□ Not sure

35. “Action for justice is a requirement of our faith.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment:

36. How important is it for you to be active and involved in your faith tradition?
□ Very important
□ Somewhat important
□ Not very important
□ Not important at all

37. Are you presently involved in any volunteer groups?
□ Yes
□ No

Comment:

38. Do you think you have an obligation to help others who are in need?
□ Yes
□ No

39. Which of the following options would you normally choose to take part in? (Please check all that apply)
□ Prayer Circle for Peace
□ Social Justice Rally
□ Fasting for World Hunger
□ Pro-Life March
□ Water Awareness Campaign
□ Serving at a Soup Kitchen or Food Bank
Other (please specify):

40. Please rate the following topics according to level of importance to you.
Very important  Somewhat  Important  Not very important

Honesty □ □ □ □
Trustworthiness □ □ □ □
Patience □ □ □ □
Forgiveness □ □ □ □
Faith □ □ □ □
Personal integrity □ □ □ □
Relationship with parents □ □ □ □
Friendship □ □ □ □
Concern for others □ □ □ □
Other (please specify)

41. Do you believe that there are definitely moral rights and wrongs in life?
□ Yes
□ No

42. It has been said that everything is relative and morality should be based on personal choices made by individuals and cultures. Do you agree or disagree?
□ Yes, I fully agree
□ Yes, I somewhat agree
□ No, I do not agree
□ Comment:

43. Do the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church influence your beliefs on what is morally right and wrong?
□ Yes
□ Somewhat
□ No
□ Comment:

44. Has your view of what is right and what is wrong changed in the past 3 years?
□ Yes
□ No
□ Somewhat
Comment (please specify)

45. How often do you participate in the sacrament of reconciliation?
□ Daily
□ Weekly
□ Monthly
□ Occasionally
□ Not often
□ Never
46. Do you feel that you belong in the Roman Catholic Church today?
□ Yes
□ Somewhat
□ No
Comment:

47. Do you believe that you have an important role to play in the Roman Catholic Church today?
□ Yes
□ Somewhat
□ No

48. Please rate the following issues according to level of importance for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church Tradition</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Ethics</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Piety</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care and Protection</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the Earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49. How important to you is your identity as a Roman Catholic?
□ Very important
□ Somewhat important
□ Not very important
□ Not important at all
Other (please specify):

50. Please rate the following according to the level of overall influence in your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Source</th>
<th>Very influential</th>
<th>Somewhat influential</th>
<th>Not very influential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Ministry Worker</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
51. Have you ever considered becoming a priest or joining a vowed religious community?
☐ Yes
☐ No
Comment:

52. Please indicate how you believe the Catholic Church rates in its response to the following issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Could do better</th>
<th>Not good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs of the Poor</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of Children &amp;</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of Minorities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of Women</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for Creation</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Justice</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming People</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of Young Adults</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

53. Pope Francis encourages the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by the joy of the gospel. Do you find the Roman Catholic Church joyful?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat
Comment:

54. Are you happy to be Roman Catholic?
Yes
No
Comment: